The Constructivist Approach Towards Foreign Policy Analysis
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ABSTRACT
Every academic discipline has a ground that refers to the abstraction of the fundamental level at which phenomena subject to the discipline of study take place. This study is to explore the ground of foreign policy analysis (FPA) as the subfield of international relations (IR) discipline, upon which it explores how constructivist scholars establish their approach to that study. This study argues that: first, state policy makers create the social world within which they conduct foreign policy in interaction with other states. Foreign policy, therefore, is an instrument for building bridges amongst states. Second, states deal with social construction that shapes national identity. The construction of identity substantially informs what defined as the national interest. Dual process of articulation and interpellation is of central importance in understanding the construction of identity and the national interest in foreign policy. Through this process visions of the foreign policy behavior including definition of one own state, other states, and their positions have been created.

Key Words: FPA, International Relations, constructive approach, social construction, national identity.

It is prevalent that every academic discipline has a ground. A ground refers to the abstraction of the fundamental level at which phenomena subject to the discipline of study take place (Hudson, 2005:1). The ground of physics is now that of matter and antimatter particles. Economists can frequently utilize firms and households as their ground of studies. It is upon such grounds they construct, modify, and even discard concepts and theories. Sometimes just the knowledge of the ground exists frees the researchers from having to anchor their work in it, and permits the heights of abstraction to be obtained in a greater proportion. Physicists are able to research problems connected with the black-hole phenomenon, and economists could talk of trends in global markets without having to start new research by going over their respective ground of discipline.

The above illustration inspires this study to explore the ground of foreign policy analysis (FPA) as the subfield of international relations (IR) discipline, upon which it explores how constructivist scholars establish their approach to that study. The ground of IR is all that happens amongst states and across states boundaries, which is caused by human decision makers acting singly or in groups (Sorensen & Jackson, 2007). With regard to human actions, the ground of IR is part of the ground of social sciences in general. The comprehension of the way in which people perceive and respond to their world dynamics, and how they shape and are shaped by the world around them, is central to the ground of social sciences (Hudson, 2005:1-2).

The ground of FPA is, however, more specific than that of IR or social sciences. As mentioned by Christopher Hill (2003:3) foreign policy is a set of official external relations conducted by an independent actor (usually a state) in international relations. The term official is the key point for this ground that allows the inclusion of all actions and outputs of the state government and its agents, while keeping on maintaining parsimony in respect to the vast number of transactions international actors carry out. The ground of FPA lies in the set of official

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relations because otherwise one can envisage every cross national boundary action as foreign policy. In light of such a ground, this study intends to explore how constructivists contribute to the FPA research program.

The argument is that constructivism is relevant to FPA research because decision makers create their own world in which they perform a particular foreign policy. To paraphrase from Alexander Wendt (1992), foreign policy is what decision makers make of it. One can find out the same premise in many post cold war foreign policy literature. In clarifying this argument, this study: first, briefly outlines the context within which constructivism has arrived in FPA to provide an alternative perspective to realism/neo-realism and liberalism/neo-liberalism perspectives of International Relations; second, presents an overview of some basic assumptions of social constructivism (in shorthand: constructivism), which reconfigure assumptions of the mainstream IR theory (IRT)²; and third, explains how constructivists develop an approach towards an understanding of the relationship between state identity and foreign policy behavior. This explication is founded in an extrapolation of the work of Doty (1993), Weldes (1996), Messari (2001), and Baumann (2002).

The Arrival of Constructivism in FPA

At the beginning of the study of IR in 1920s when it separated from the discipline of Political Science, IR scholars were engaged in enterprises attempting to describe and explain dramatic events such as international war and peace (Roskin, 1990 in Kubalkova, 2001). These events reflected a complex mechanism and multilayered process, comprising objectives states pursue in their interactions with each other, and the means states use to materialize their objectives. Political elite who relied much on the diplomats, trade negotiators, and military officials drive their states’ foreign relations. In Kubalkova’s words (2001:17–8) the study of states’ foreign relations, therefore, encompasses complicated communications amongst governments and their agents, plus their perceptions and misperceptions, world views, images of other countries, and personal dispositions of everyone involved.

In 1950s, however, a split occurred within the discipline of IR. The discipline was divided into two subfields with distinct theoretical interests: FPA on the one side, and IRT on the other. Although still related to the aforementioned focus of IR discipline, FPA looked for the answer of the question why states undertake a particular foreign policy, through exploring what is happening inside the states. IRT, meanwhile, focused attention to interstates relations as a system, and subsequently learned about the influence of that system on states behavior. One embarked on the parts to the whole, the other from the whole to the parts (Kubalkova, 2001:15). To this day, according to Margot Light (1994:93), this separation continues to exist, FPA and IRT are intellectually dissociated, and to some extent their positions are contrary to each other.

The split was originated in the scientific revolution plagued social sciences in 1950s, with its impact on the study of IR emerged as the debate of traditionalism versus behaviorism/scientism (Kubalkova, 2001:17–8). Unlike traditionalism which was pretty much philosophical, scientism represented a large commitment to a careful empirical investigation, entailing data collection, models formulation either statistical or mathematical in nature, and verification procedure of the models. The collaboration between IRT and scientism resulted in a theoretical project emphasizing on system-level explanations of states behavior that can be read through neo-realism, neo-liberalism, neo-Marxism literature - at the expense of examinations of the more micro level of explanation such as individual and group influences (Hudson, 2002:2).

² Realism/neo-realism and liberalism/neo-liberalism are considered as two mainstream theoretical perspectives of the study of International Relations. The so called neo-realism and neo-liberalism are of more recent theoretical developments of realism and liberalism respectively. The former shares with the latter some basic assumptions of the nature of international politics (for more information of this see Sorensen & Jackson 2007).
FPA scholars, however, chose a different theoretical enterprise. They maintained human decision makers as the primary unit of analysis. Thus the core of FPA -IRT divide was that what need not be studied, and consequently each ceded what it did not learn to the other.

During the development of the scientific FPA in 1960-80s, scholars had generated a multitude of systematic (but not systemic) framework of analysis, well known as the comparative study of foreign policy (CFP). Most of them believed CFP has strengthened the generalizing power of foreign policy research. On the other hand, others argue that CFP has relatively ignored the descriptive richness of studies paying attention to particular governments, significant decisions, and complexity of domestic politics. In other words, some FPA scholars in favor of the more modest or ‘middle range’ theory design, with special reference to a single country, highlighting the domestic sources of its foreign policy (Jensen, 1982; Clarke & White, 1989; Light, 1994). CFP, middle range theory, and domestic sources of foreign policy then became the three main approaches.

In the years FPA flourished in the name of scientific behaviorism, IRT, particularly neo-realism had succeeded in developing an account of the systemic explanations of states action. One of the most celebrated moments was in 1979 when Kenneth Waltz published his seminal book theory of international politics. Waltz’s systemic effort was to create a general theory of international relations departing from the concept of structure (Hobson, 2000: 19-30). Waltz’s theory propped up the abstraction of the system within which states are regarded as billiard balls on a billiard table, excluding all idiosyncratic factors of foreign policy making from considerations. By this time, the concept of state as a ‘black box’ began to take hold. Neo-realists claimed able to delineate and estimate states behavior only by examining the impacts of external forces on them without an inquiry into the ‘black box’ domestic politics or leaders’ psychology (Hudson, 2002: 2).

Such an artificial contradiction between FPA and IRT leads to a paradox for FPA itself. On the one side of the coin, it is an asset, and it is a weakness on the other. It is the strength because FPA is not affected by the rise and fall of certain paradigms within IR discipline. Moreover, it is not necessary for FPA scholars to engage with a particular mainstream paradigm for their research. They could flexibly work in an interdisciplinary project with other fields external to IR discipline. The weakness is, however, in a sense that despite its evident potential IR theorists have never recognized the status for FPA in the IR field, and hence they have never considered FPA as seriously as its thematic issues ought to be the case (Houghton, 2007: 27).

Many are convinced that this reflects a testing time for FPA at issue whether this area of study would remain to be an important interest of IR, or it would just become an addendum or footnotes to IR.

What Houghton sees as a weakness is merely imagined than real. Some encouraging efforts have given a signal that FPA continues to attract IR theorists. A survey to some theoretical topics of IR textbooks can inform students about how interesting FPA is for IR theorists. Paul Viotti and Mark Kauppi (1999:199-225) incorporate the discussion of foreign policy into the Liberalism Chapter of their textbook. Viotti and Kauppi link up foreign policy issues with the interdependence theory. At other times, K. J. Holsti (1995), Charles Kegley Jr and Eugene Wittkopt (2004:61-91) combine FPA with structural realism or neo-realism. These enterprises show the ways in which IR theorists try to pedagogically connect FPA to the ongoing theoretical debate in IRT.

Nevertheless, it does not make sense that the connection of FPA with neo-liberalism and neo-realism are made due to a pedagogical reason without any strong logical relations between them. As David Houghton (2007:26) argues that the scheme of the interdependence theory is all states will definitely act in similar ways directed by the changes of the structure they posit, otherwise the choice of such a systemic level of explanation has not made sense. It is difficult as well for FPA students to suggest that the similarity of states action towards an interdependent
system is a foreseen reality. For these reasons, one cannot easily combine FPA and neo-liberalism.

Equally, a combination of FPA and neo-realism is more problematic. As Brian Ripley has displayed in his articulation of the crux of FPA research program, it counters neo -realism points at almost every turn (Houghton, 2007:26). Neo-realists assume states as the primary actors of international politics, for FPA scholars they are for eign policy makers. For neo-realists states act on the basis of a rational calculation of self interest, while for FPA scholars policy makers make decisions based on their definition of external situations. To neo -realists’ mind, foreign policy is the never ending pursuance of a self help interest for security in an anarchical world, but FPA scholars view foreign policy is a problem solving mechanism. Power is the main currency of foreign policy action for neo-realists, whereas for FPA scholars it is information. The anarchical structure of world politics in neo-realism determines states behavior, yet FPA considers this anarchical structure just as an arena of states interaction. Finally, neo -realists strongly prescribe a rational adaptation policy to the anarchical structure, but FPA scholars favor a compensation of misperceptions and organizational pathologies.

The disconnection is then being the catalyst to the search for an alternative to neo-liberalism and neo-realism. Moreover, the dramatic end of the cold war with its unpredictable processes has undermined the belief in the systemic level of explanations. This is mainly due to the inability of neo-realists and neo-liberals to predict the robust impacts of the cold war end on world politics. Although systemic theorists argue against this critique by delineating that the constraints to system stability, states system, and power can rationalize the end of the cold war, they have failed to discern an important variable, that is, ideational factor (Sullivan, 2002). It was a crisis in IRT. Constructivist therefore comes to offer a solution, especially with their ideational and discursive points of view. Constructivists show that ideational factors could alter policy makers’ perceptions of power and systemic structure (Wendt, 1992). As constructivists agree with states are still the main player of world politics, the IR theoretical configuration becomes power, states, systemic structures, and ideas (Sullivan, 2002).

The arrival of an ideational factor in IRT has paved the way for constructivists to closely engage with FPA. A focus on the ideational factor such as inter-subjectivity and the construction of meanings – opposite to supposedly material factors is evident to be the trend of post cold war FPA, albeit at the outset it lacked of emphasis on social factors compared to the nowadays constructivist FPA studies (Katzenstein, 1996; Hopf, 2002). Nonetheless, it is important to note that an approach is not invariably constructivist when it embraces ideas as the factor in foreign policy. The work of Judith Godlstein and Robert Keohane (1993) Ideas and foreign policy: beliefs, institutional and political change is an example of an agenda of power and justice, for which it is intended to contest with the constructivists’ ideational factor. Goldstein and Keohane work within the international society perspective, posing a contending conclusion with constructivists, arguing that idea-based foreign policy studies have not been of a significant contribution to the well developed material based ones.

In strengthening the position of constructivism in FPA, Wendt (1999:3) comes out with a notion that constructivists’ assumption underpins the phenomenological tradition of FPA. Arguing by referring to the phenomenal book entitled foreign policy decision making coauthored by Snyder, Bruck and Sapin (which was published in 1954 and the revised edition in 2002), Wendt attempts to show the salience of constructivism for the work of Snyder, Bruck and Sapin, and further FPA studies. According to Wendt, Snyder, Bruck and Sapin argue that ideas constitute national interests – which are not given - as the motives of foreign policy actions. This insight contradicts the assumption of neo-realists and neo-liberals.

The core idea of Snyder, Bruck and Sapin’s work (2002) is their emphasis on the process of defining situations that determine foreign policy decisions. In formulating a better account for a specific foreign policy, according to Snyder, Bruck and Sapin, it is worthwhile discovering how policy makers perceive their operating environment, how particular situations are structured, what
values and norms are applicable to certain kinds of issue, what problems are selected for attention, and how past experience influences on their responses. Houghton (2007) notices that the work of Snyder, Bruck and Sapin is the welcome to the arrival of constructivism in FPA. He notes that such process of defining situations by policy makers are the evidence in point. This is to say that, by paraphrasing from Nicholas Onuf (1989), the world of their making directs foreign policy behavior.

Constructivists see within the split between FPA and IRT there is another problem that requires a solution. By virtue FPA focus was on policy makers as agent, it lacked of structural aspects to approach to foreign policy. Mean while, IRT were already established in developing structural and systemic approaches. Thus, constructivist scholars such as Martha Finnemore (1996) seeks to bridge the gap by constituting agent and structure. Some constructivist scholars have developed understandings about the constitutive agent-structure analysis in issues like states’ compliance with norms in international politics (Klotz & Lynch, 2007).

This study, however, does not draw on such a way of analyzing normative aspects of interstates relations. Instead it commits to shed much light on the construction and reconstruction of identity and interest in foreign policy. The following discussion starts with teasing some basic assumptions of constructivism out more fully to serve as the context for the approach.

**The Constructivist Assumptions**

This study would suggest that constructivism is not a theory like the balance of power theory of realism or the democratic peace theory of liberalism. Constructivism is an alternative approach according to which some general assumptions about the state of the art of IR are reconfigured. Constructivism, in the broadest sense, expands the scope of IR by embracing actors and factors that realism/neo-realism and liberalism/neo-liberalism do not entail. With regard to actors, even though constructivists stand by the primacy of states, it does not necessarily mean that dynamics in the world politics do not emerge as the result of other actors’ behavior. Constructivists indicate their openness to considering states are not unitary actors. They acknowledge the role of other actors such as states’ agencies, social community, international organizations, think tanks - who under certain circumstances and constraints are able to influence as well as alter international politics (Weber, 2007:98).

In relation to factors, constructivists propose human awareness or consciousness and its place in international politics to be the main theme of IR studies (Sorensen & Jackson, 2007:162). Constructivists adopt the concept of human consciousness from sociology of knowledge as well as other older critical paradigms in IR: postmodernism and Hedley Bull’s anarchical society. For constructivists the concept of human consciousness is the starting point to understanding human behavior (Busse, 1999:44). This is certainly a rejection of the materialistic assumption of neo-realism and neo-liberalism. Neo-realists and neo-liberals, however, stem from a rational actor model in explaining states behavior. They view states as unitary actors, who under international constraints want to maximize their self-defined interests, survival, power, and wealth. The pursuance of such interests is never ending, and the system where states play is also unchangeable accordingly.

Constructivists disagree with such a materialistic point of view, suggesting that states are social actors, whose behavior follows domestic and international rules. From this point of view, the arena of states interaction is also social in nature and more malleable (Busse, 1999:44). Either the domestic or international system is not something ‘out there’ like the solar system.

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3 Finnemore’s study consists of three case studies; states’ acceptance of science policy bureaucracy after 1955; states’ adaptation of rules-governed norms of warfare; and states’ commitment to accept limits to economic sovereignty by allowing redistribution to take priority over production values. The main argument is that international institutions created by states are able to drive states’ policies by teaching the latter that to be modern and civilized adoption of international norms is necessary.
They do not exist on their own. Their existence is the product of an inter-subjective awareness amongst persons who live in that world. Therefore each system is constituted by human ideas not material forces. It is a human invention or creation, not a physically built thing but purely an intellectual and ideational one. People at a particular time and place create a body of thought and a set of norms to organize their world system (Sorensen & Jackson, 2007:162). Humans actively make their world.

An investigation into the lineages of constructivism shows that it is not entirely a new way of thinking. Constructivism has its roots in at least the philosophical ideas of Giambattista Vico, Immanuel Kant, Max Weber (Fierke & Jorgensen, 2001), and Karl Marx (Weber, 2007:97). Vico says that God creates the natural world, while humans make the historical one. History is some kind of an evolving process which is internal to human affairs. Humans make their own history. They produce states as historical constructs, and the states system is artificial accordingly. If humans wish to change it, they can do it, and then create a new one. Kant adds Vico’s idea by stating that humans can gain whatever knowledge about their life, however, their subjectivity will always restrain that knowledge. There is no objective knowledge about humans’ world.

Inter-subjectivity amongst people, according to Max Weber, distinguishes the existence of social world, the world of social interactions with the world of natural phenomena. Understandings about other people actions and the process of giving meanings to them are part of the ways in which humans create their social world. This emphasis has a lot to do with the idealistic nature of constructivism. However, materialism as suggested by Marx is influential as well. To Marx’s mind, humans make their own historical world, but they cannot create it as they want to. They cannot make it under conditions they choose, nonetheless there have been some given and encountered circumstances from the past that pose the limits to the present human ideational creations.

Wendt (1992:73) tries to incorporate Marx’s materialistic point of view into the idealistic insights, although a leaning towards ideas remains eloquent. Wendt conceptualizes social world as a structure consisting of three elements: ideas and beliefs, material resources, and practices. In part, shared ideas, beliefs, expectations, or knowledge amongst people defines the structure under which actors situate the nature of their relationships: whether cooperative or conflictive (Weber, 2005:61). The classic example which can support this claim is the comparison between the security dilemma with the security community. Both are social constructs. The former structure depicts situations at which states hold distrustful assumptions about other states’ intention, and hence they construct their national interest in the name of self help. The latter structure, in contrast, is a form of shared understandings amongst states according to which they trust each other in managing disputes peacefully, and thus war is avoidable. In both structures, the use of military forces is dependent on collective meanings.

Constructivists comprehend ideas as mental constructs held by individuals. The constructs are inter-subjective amongst individuals, and they share them widely, otherwise the ideas will not matter. Ideas represent a set of distinctive values, principles and attitudes which provide some directions for policy. There are four types of ideas that matter in international relations: ideology, normative belief, causal belief, and policy prescription (Tannenwald, 2005:15-6). An ideology is a systematic doctrine which describes social needs and aspirations of a group, class, culture, and/or state. The normative belief implies the standard of behavior relied on values and criteria for distinguishing, for instance, right from wrong and just from unjust. The causal belief, however, is similar to a rational guideline for action according to which actors must calculate the cost and benefit of their actions. And finally policy prescriptions are concerned with what policy makers should do in dealing with policy issues. These prescriptions are usually programmatic and strategic in notion.

How one can understand that ideas matter in shaping structures of international relations. This study addresses this puzzle by referring to Cynthia Weber’s concept of the myth function in
international relations theory (2005:2–6). A theory of international relations is a collection of stories about the world of international relations. In order to be true, a theory must base on a particular IR myth. Weber defines an IR myth as part of the stories about the world where international politics takes place, usually taking a slogan form through which a certain theory claims its truth. IR scholars are familiar with myths such as anarchy is a permissive cause of conflicts for neo-realists or the existence of an interdependent international society for neo-liberals. Since such myths are taken for granted, all theories founded upon them are apparently true.

The IR myth function, according to Weber (2005:2), is to transform what is particular and ideational of a story into something that is universal and completely empirical. In other words, an IR myth naturalizes meanings, brings some salient contexts, and eventually creates facts which are out of interpretation. An example of this process is clear in the way in which Wendt analyses the construction of a truth about the nature of anarchy, that is anarchy has no logic but is what states make of it (1992). This could be the third myth about the nature of international politics after the aforementioned neo-realists’ and neo-liberals’ myths. Most importantly is how Wendt uses the myth of anarchy is what states make of it to tell constructivism readers that constructivism is true. To this end, it is worthwhile summarizing Wendt’s writings, including Anarchy is What States Make of It (1992), Collective Identity Formation and the International State (1994), Constructing International Politics (1995), and Social Theory of International Politics (1999).

The core of what many call as Wendtian constructivism is an objection to neo-realists’ argument that there is the logic of anarchy, according to which self-help as an unalterable institution is situated in an anarchical system of international politics. Wendt (1992; 1995) begins with arguing that since the early introduction of this logic by Kenneth Waltz in Man, the State and War (1954), and followed by Theory of International Politics (1979), neo-realists were inconsistent with their own levels of explanation of states behavior. Initially, Waltz (1954 in Weber, 2005) explicated three images, namely, individual, state, and systemic levels that are the permissive causes of war. However, in the latter book, Waltz emphasized mainly on the systemic level. This remark according to Wendt left a space for another variable, that is, state practices. What Wendt wants is to discover a process by which state practices can explain transformation of the logic of international anarchy – from either conflictive for neo-realists or cooperative for neo-liberals – into what states make of it for constructivists (Weber, 2005:64-8).

In an effort to promote practice and process for the analysis, Wendt combines two structural elements: international anarchy as a structure and an inter-subjectively constituted structure of identity and interest. Wendt argues that when one sees only from one element, so to say international anarchy alone, the outcome will be either conflictive or cooperative structure. On the other hand, if one combines international anarchy with inter-subjectively constituted structure of identity and interest, the outcome will be neither a conflictive nor cooperative, but the structure of what states make of it (Wendt, 1992; 1994).

At this point, Wendt defines identity as ‘a relatively stable role, specific understanding and expectation about the self and the other’ (1994:385). Although Wendt departs from the same point as neo-realists, that is, states are the main actor, Wendt moves away from the assumption that states pursue self-help interest as a consequence of anarchy. States, however, create identity which determines their interest. States construct identity relationally, and therefore their interest is subsequently relative. From identity to interest it ends up with constructing institution. The constructed institution is a stable set or structure of the produced identity and interest. It does not exist ‘out there’ but as part of the actors’ idea about how their social world works.

Wendt’s work implies that there is no a ‘which comes first’ notion identity or interest. All identity, interest, as well as institution is the outcome of an interactive social process amongst state actors, which are mutually constitutive (Weber, 2005:64-5). One may consider that the
institution is already being ‘out there’ because they orient actors’ behavior. Nonetheless, the institution is not pre-given because social interactions amongst actors constitute them. Likewise, neither identity is pre-given. This is the construction through relationships with other identity and collective institutions. With all this in mind, self help is not necessarily the only product elicited by anarchy. An absence of the logic of anarchy as it is the construction of social interaction makes possible changes to the self help institution. In light of Wendt’s idea, states act on the basis of meanings that other states have for them. These meanings are not inherent in the physical world but develop in social interactions (Zehfuss, 2002:35-8).

Furthermore, Wendt (1999:257-99) coins three different cultures of anarchy: Hobbesian, Lockean, and Kantian, which are derived in large from social interaction amongst states. The Hobbesian culture of anarchy dominated international relations prior to the peace of Westphalia in 1648. States perceived other states as enemies. Their behavior was characterized by war of all against all. To ensure survival, states had to eliminate each other. In the Lockean culture of anarchy, however, states did not regard each other as enemies but rivals, and accordingly they did not seek to destroy other states for survival. This culture emerged as the development of the modern state system accorded on the principle of sovereignty. Finally, after the World War II, the culture of international anarchy is Kantian. States tend to make friends with other states, settle conflict peacefully, and be willing to help each other in face of a threat from a third party. From these cultures of anarchy, Wendt indicates that there is an inter-subjectively constructed identity of enemy, rival, and/or friend in the social world of states.

Fundamental to this nature of the social world, the distinction between social and physical world leads to an epistemological disagreement amongst constructivists (Zehfuss, 2002; Klotz & Lynch, 2007). Constructivists react to the proposition that the social world is by product of inter-subjective processes (Houghton, 2007:30). Correspondingly, some constructivists argue that learning about this social world requires an epistemology which is different with what is applied to the study on the natural one. While others still believe in explanatory theory, and the other emphasize constitutive approaches. This contention is akin to what Sorensen and Jackson (2007) mention as a distinction between explanation and understanding in IR epistemology. More broadly, constructivists contest each other in how to apply positivist or post-positivist approaches.

Constructivists such as Wendt and Katzenstein argue for an explanatory and positivist approaches, even though they avoid a claim that scientific research must discover timeless regularities ‘out there’. They tend to produce partial, contingent on time and place conclusions. Other more critical constructivists, Onuf and Kratochwil argue against an application of positivist epistemology to constructivist research. Their position is related to the subjective aspects of constructivism which is not compatible with the positivist character of natural science for example the insight of free value in research. Onuf and Kratochwil propose interpretative approaches in place of explanatory and positivist approaches (Houghton, 2007:30).

The strong notion of post-positivist epistemology is clear in the argument constructivists hold, that is, ‘theory as practice’ (Jim George, 1994). Theorists, the persons who tell stories about social world, are part of the reality they are trying to describe and explain, and they are not external to it. This notion has a consequence that people can change their behavior in accordance with a publication of a new theory. When a theory arrives in a public domain, it becomes a kind of a commonsense folklore. Alternatively, theorists can take their theory into policy makings arena, and apply it. Therefore, a theory is not a merely instrument to describe, explain and predict social phenomena, but also a potential means to change them.

Houghton (2007:28-9) exemplifies with the implementation of the democratic peace theory in some states’ foreign policy. If states perceive each other as having a tendency towards peacefulness, they can substantially reduce the significance of the security dilemma structure in their interactions. They subsequently can remove the major obstacle to stable security by trusting each other. States behave on behalf of this trust have created a peaceful order through their
interactions. A presumption that each other act towards peacefulness directs to a theory as practice, and at the same time the reality of the democratic peace is being constructed.

Finally, constructivists stress on the importance of identity in international relations. Paul Kowert (2001:268-9). Identity as agent relates to the way people claim for themselves and confer on the other. The academic interest in identity politics has growth in the field of international politics since 1990s. One reason behind this was that identity politics was more challenging and difficult to explain, particularly by using the mainstream theories of neo-realism or neo-liberalism. In fact big events in world politics such as the world war II and the cold war have generated a dualist rhetoric which sharply reified differences of personal ideology and national purposes to well-defined categories for instance democratic vs. authoritarian. After the cold war ended identity becomes less certain, distinguishing self and other in many different social levels is one example of the trend. Thus identity is getting more challenging to this day.

Constructivists associate identity with ideas (Houghton, 2007:29-30). Material forces themselves have no intrinsic meaning. People with their ideas socially construct meanings for their world. The possession of nuclear weapons by France and Great Britain has a significant different meaning for policy makers in Washington, DC than the possession of such weapons by China, Russia, and Iran. Materially their nuclear weapons are probably identical. However, British weapons are not dangerous in the eyes of many Americans due to identity as a friend American has created for British, whereas due to other identity given to Iran, Iranian weapons are considered as harmful. This example gives rise to a memorable and frequently mentioned constructivist slogan: identity matter.

Constructing Identity and Interest in Foreign Policy

This study argues that: first, state policy makers create the social world within which they conduct foreign policy in interaction with other states. Foreign policy, therefore, is an instrument for building bridges amongst states. Second, states deal with social construction that shapes national identity. The construction of identity substantially informs what defined as the national interest. This argument to some extent is contrary to Nizar Messari’s argument (2001:227), in particular with the latter’s rejection of the insight regarding the function of foreign policy which is to build bridges amongst states.

To clarify the above positions, this study juxtaposes three distinct approaches: the cognitive decision making approach, the social performance approach, and the discursive practices approach. The juxtaposition purports not to provide causal explanations for, and then to assess which of the approaches is the best to approach problems of this study. Rather, it is mainly to capture some ontological and epistemological issues that are expected to bring up salience for understanding the constructivist approach towards FPA.

Roxanne Lynn Doty (1993:299-300) notices that the cognitive decision making approach which is originated in psychology, stresses on the importance of cognitive aspects of individuals involved in the formulation of foreign policy. This approach makes problematic the construction of subjective environment of individuals as the primary topic, and in doing so, it pays attention to how individual actors involving in the making of foreign policy perceive and represent their social world (Snyder, Bruck and Sapin, 2002). The cognitive decision making approach suggests that the objective reality is not the locus of meaning creation, and thus is not the key element for a suitable framework for analyzing foreign policy behavior and practices. Instead, individuals are the source of that enterprise.

Such a suggestion, however, opens up the further scrutiny to three important issues that Snyder and his colleagues do not explicitly address. First, in terms of perceptions toward the

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4 The central point of Messari’s post-structural argument is a rejection of the notion that foreign policy builds bridges amongst the preexisting entities called as states. The claim stresses on the fact that states deal with differences therefore foreign policy is an instrument to develop national political identity.
environment, foreign policy makers must be situated in a particular social order. The problem here is related to what kinds of social order construction the environment is. Second, privileging subjective perceptions renders an epistemological issue on which one can discern through the suggestion by this approach to ignore the real or objective world outside of individuals’ cognition. Third, individuals themselves as central to analysis may be problematic. Moving towards the construction of reality that is not necessarily a product of particular individuals indicates a possibility that the subject is probably a social collectivity. One indicator in the literature is the construction of shared images. At this point, the agent of foreign policy could be a group, a bureaucracy, or the state itself which is considered as unitary actors (Doty, 1993:300).

To respond to such three ontological and epistemological issues within the cognitive decision making framework is almost impossible because it could destabilize the ground on which scholars develop this approach, primarily its focus on the individual subjects. For this reason, in significant ways, one can explore in the postpositivist literature for another framework of analysis beyond the cognitive decision making approach. The alternative could be the social performance approach which argues against the predisposition to identify the cognitive processes solely with individuals (Doty, 1993:300). This approach suggests that cognitive processes are not inner and private but public and collective, and social cognitions are of importance in part for analyses thereafter.

The social performance approach believes that there is a large degree of understandings present in social practices which in turn manifest in social scripts that policy makers follow in. Doty (1993:301) exhibits that analysis of statement making could help explicate the way in which the scripts are produced by revealing social templates that generate overall structures. Socially competent people, according to this view, manifest their cognitive resources into shared template structures. This approach actually tries to shift the focus of FPA to an inextricable link between individuals and their social contexts. Both cognitively and culturally mediated meanings have a distinctly social dimension. This approach is an effort to address the problem of subjects by recognizing the mutually constitutive relations between individuals and their social order.

Moreover, the social performance approach shows a broader understanding about what is foreign policy making. What policy makers are doing in a particular situation goes beyond merely choosing policy actions from some available options. They are, however, performing as well in accordance with a social script which is part of a wider social order. By and large, they are involved in the reproduction of the social order. Consequently, foreign policy is a practice that derives a social order as well as one through which produces and reproduces individual and collective subjects. Most importantly, to Doty’s mind (1993:300), the significance this approach places on statement making calls for attention to language and signifies other practices in the more general sense.

It must be noted, however, that the cognitive decision making approach also pays attention to statement making. Scholars working within this approach often use documents as data and then the implicit language is referential. Language is transparent in which it reflects actors’ perceptions, motivations, and belief system. Language merely gives names to meanings that actors have possessed, and they are not themselves constitutive of the meanings. Nevertheless, statement making for the social performance approach is inter subjectively productive, including shared interpretations of members of society, and in turn, reproduction of the society (Doty, 1993:300). In a nutshell, the difference between the two approaches is the former mentioned approach analyzes statement making textually, while the latter accords on social contexts.

The social performance approach has an important implication for the way in which language becomes part of foreign policy analysis. The understanding that language can be productive is made possible by the existence of preformed social templates. Doty (1993:300 -1) is convinced that language is not autonomous in this term. What the approach calls as signifier – words and images – must refer back to shared social templates. This is contradictory to the notion
of the discursive practices approach, arguing that representations in the form of a discourse have an irreducible force in dealing with social structures and/or cognitive attributes of the actors. The discursive practices approach emphasizes on the sociolinguistic construction of reality by certain actors, which are known as discourses.

A discourse produces a discursive space such as concepts, categories, models, analogies, and metaphors that can construct certain meanings. The production and reproduction of discourses, subjectivity, and social contexts are dissoluble. This is because discourses construct subjects and positions of which the subjects vis-à-vis one and the other (Doty, 1993:302-3).

According to George (1994), the term discourse has a variety of meanings. They range from the simple ‘speech’, conversation, and to the complex philosophical concepts of Jurgen Habermas and Michel Foucault. Foucault’s idea regarding the distinction between discourse and discursive, hegemonic and suppressed discourses has influenced IRT literature. However, this study tends to refer to a simpler conception of discourse, for instance, by quoting to Reiner Baumann’s definition that a discourse is ‘talk and text in context’ (2002:6). A discourse is construction of reality stemming in large from human minds, while language is merely the representations of the prevailing world.

An example for such a way of defining a discourse is by a state’s discourse on multilateralism, it means that there is a set of expressions through which the state refers to multilateral cooperation and integration into a multilateral organization. In this discourse there may be a hegemonic and suppressed discourses. Nonetheless, this is of course not a really necessary circumstance. Baumann (2002:6) points out that the discourse is the product of processes that use and combine certain terms. Analyzing a discourse is not the analysis of mere talk which stands contrary to analysis of actual behavior. The idea is that behavior takes place in social contexts, which consist of communications, a discourse being one of its essential elements, and thus as Nicholas Onuf (2001) puts it ‘saying is doing’. A discourse is behavior. The separation of speech and action in foreign policy would then be misleading. Indeed, in foreign policy either partially or entirely, speech and action are integrated.

Another idea of Baumann’s concept of discourse (2002:6) is that the discourse analysis, which is inseparable with the use of the term action, must highlight the social context within which the analyzed discourse exists. This emphasis is actually the same as what the social performance approach says. It is important to do on account of the ability of a discourse to have effects beyond the text. In association with the context, Baumann (2002:6-7) differentiates between the macro and micro context of the text. The macro context is simply understood as the development of a state international milieu to which policy makers respond with speech and action. While for the micro context, it is date, place, position of the speakers, and institutional setting of the speech and action.

As a result, in epistemological terms, the discursive practices approach does not recommend a creation of rigid explanatory model. First, because the notion that foreign policy discourse and foreign policy behavior cannot and should not be clearly distinguished. This will pose difficulties in determining independent and dependent variables. About this, Baumann (2002:7-10) strongly suggests a correlation in that discourse informs identity and foreign policy behavior. At the same time, foreign policy behavior and the interaction amongst states that shape identity have an impact on foreign policy discourse. Thus eventually, one can better comprehend the interrelation between discourse and foreign policy by treating them as a complex co determinacy which is not subject to a clear cut variability imposed by explanatory models. Foreign policy decision makers work within a discursive space in which they impose certain meanings on the social world and then construct and reconstruct reality (Shapiro, 1988:100-16).

Doty (1993:303) outlines that the discursive practices approach – which refers to Shapiro’s conclusion - gets at how this reality is created and how it makes possible for various foreign policy practices. The approach addresses a question that is not about why actors make a
particular foreign policy. This type of question is of a secondary concern. The central question is as to how possible policy makers generate a particular decision. This type reflects an interpretive epistemology which centralizes analyses to a discourse which constructs realities. In other words, analyzing foreign policy within this discursive practice’s approach is an activity that calls for attention to the extent to which conditions make policy makers possible to decide and act accordingly.

Applying the discursive practices approach does not only widen one’s understanding regarding what foreign policy making is about, but also providing the basis for an extensive view on the site where foreign policy processes take place. This approach would suggest that foreign policy is neither necessarily restricted to the making of actual decisions nor the temporarily and spatially bounded events. By the same token, who are policy makers are not only confined to prominent decision makers, but can also embrace those who are usually anonymous members of the foreign policy bureaucracy, who are involved in writing numerous memoranda, intelligence reports, and research papers which circulate within policy circles. The discursive practices approach instantiates in these various documents that produce meanings from which actors construct reality.

Moreover, Doty (1993:303-4) notes that foreign policy making extends beyond the government official institutions. In a given society, how well policy makers can fit into the general system of representations will determine public acceptance of the statements of foreign policy. Even though the speech of policy is directed to a very specific issue, it must make sense and fit with what the general publics deem as reality. Hence, the analysis of discourses can entail what foreign policy makers say and write broadly in a large foreign policy context and in their publics generally.

This study differs from Ripley’s ideas about the essence of FPA research in particular with the cause of foreign policy actions. Ripley rejects neo-realist’s assumption that national interests are the motives of foreign policy, and suggests foreign policy actions are the output of a process of defining situations. This study does not contend that such a process precedes the conduct of foreign policy, nevertheless it still tends to share with neo-classic realists, for instance Hans Morgenthau and Henry Kissinger (Jackson & Sorensen 2007:67-71), saying that national interests are of important factors in the making and conduct of foreign policy. States behavior is dependent on what national interests to pursue. The national interest is a universal concept through which one can use to analyze states behavior out of ideological and physical boundaries.

This study acknowledges the importance of the concept of national interest for foreign policy studies due not to its sweeping generalization, but the hitherto significance this concept has for FPA to date. First, through the concept of national interest policy makers will understand about the goal of their and other states’ foreign policy. As such this serves as the basis for states action. Second, the national interest functions as a rhetorical device through which foreign policy decision makers enlist legitimacy of and political support of their actions. Jutta Weldes (1996:276) illustrates by quoting to the statement of the former American’s State Secretary Henry Kissinger ‘….when you ask Americans to die, you must be able to explain it in terms of the national interest….’. By virtue of this paramount importance, it is understandable that the national interest continues to occupy a space in FPA.

Weldes (1996:276-7) argues that prior to conducting diplomacy, foreign relations officials of a state need to engage in the process of interpreting what particular situations their state will deal with and how they must respond to them. This process of interpretation presupposes the discourse shared at least within the circles of foreign policy making actors as well as the publics to whom foreign policy must gain legitimacy. The shared discourse is about

5 These propositions explaining the usage of discourse in FPA is another reconfiguration of neo-realist’s assumptions about the core of FPA research program, could be meant as adding a further point to the previously mentioned reconfigurations by Brian Ripley outlined in this essay.
the national interest. Of the content of the national interest, it is produced in a process of constructing representations through which states officials can comprehend their international context. The understanding about the concept of national interest here is different from what realists generally hold, that is, national interests are pre-given by the geopolitical world. Rather, the national interest is constructed as a meaningful object not inherent to that geopolitical world.

To exemplify Wendt (1992:395) delineates the constructivist notion of the national interest by arguing against the structural realists’ conception that the national interest is deducible of the anarchical condition of international system. Instead, as anarchy is what states make of it, the national interest is also what states make of it. Although Wendt believes in inter-subjectively constructed meanings of states identity and interest, he structurally anthropomorphizes states as unitary actors with a single identity and set of national interests (Wendt, 1992:397). This undoubtedly implies an approval to the neo-realists’ fashion that states are a ‘black box’, with the internal workings of which is not relevant to the construction of identity and the national interest.

Furthermore, according to Weldes, Wendt’s analysis (1992:401) demonstrates the meaning objects and actions have for states, and the states identity as well as national interests, are exerted into the context of interstates interactions. Ostensibly, one cannot only understand the construction of states identity and national interest by exploring what states do in their international relations. Nevertheless, the internal workings of which states foreign policy makers rely on are also influential, particularly at the point of view of the discursive practices approach. The historical, cultural, and political context plays significant roles in producing the states identity and national interest. Thus there must be a combination of international and domestic factors. As Weldes (1996:280) says, foreign policy makers can only approach international politics – the social world where states are interacting – with adequate and elaborate appreciations to it. This appreciation is in large part of something rooted in the meanings produced in their domestic milieu.

In an effort to integrate Wendt’s insight and the discursive practices approach, Weldes’ formulation (1996:281-2) is a nice way. Arguing by drawing on a large array of already available cultural and linguistic resources, foreign policy makers construct representations which provide first an understanding to populate the social world with a variety of subjects, including the self the state in question and the other. The term the other could encompass: other states as well as their policy makers, global non-state actors and social movements, and the domestic publics. The self gives the other an identity which is sometimes precise and certain, or at other times vague and suspicious. The other might be threatening or conversely cordial and peaceful. The created identification of the other varies from one position to its opposite, by which friends or foes are depicted.

Such a way of thinking about the creation of representations indicates a radical constructivist or post-modernist fashion. Richard Devetak (1996) argues about this. In the logic of the construction of representations, states produce a set of distinctions and divisions. This production involve constructing a highly arbitrary distinction, or drawing on a different between ‘inside/the self’ and ‘outside/the other’, within which the former is the stage of peace and order, whereas the latter is the arena of dangers and violence.

Furthermore, according to John M. Hobson (2000:159), foreign policy makers define the existence of the other as being a threat to the self, against which the self is understood as the negation to the other. In constructing the other as threatening the self, a state must ensure unity of itself in respect to the attitude of the domestic societal groups, or otherwise the use of force is made possible to repress dissenting domestic groups in order to adjust their attitude to the original notion of the peaceful and secure self.

Weldes (1996:281-2) exemplifies, in the very orthodox American and her allies representations of the Cold War international politics, the world was populated by a pretty much particular United States’ image, that one could see there was a global leadership role. Following this representation was the other who consisted of aggressive totalitarians, duplicito us
communists, puppets of the kremlin, unstable underdeveloped worlds, recalcitrant democratic leaders, freedom loving allies, uncivilized terrorists, and cordial dictators. Such representations might be endowed with leadership; they might be aggressive and hostile; they might be peaceful; they might be threatening; and they might be potentially although not actually dangerous or simply annoying. American national interests for which Washington directed foreign policy were founded based on these representations of who America and/or the other were.

This post-modernist conceptual intervention is useful for the study in terms of finding out how foreign policy makers perceive other actors in world politics, which in turn leads to how they will act in response to its dynamics. In relation to the creation of the inside or the self, post-modernists offer the way in which foreign policy officials or the state governments obtain foreign policy legitimacy of their publics. This study, however, disagrees with post-modernist notion that the use of force is of course a logical consequence of publics’ dissention to the notion of the inside/self. Such oppression against publics probably is less than it seems. Foreign policy discourses which involve creating representations of the inside and outside world are commonly more communicative in practice, and the repressive process is just an extreme case.

To further understand just how the discursive practices approach explains the construction of identity and the national interest requires an examination in more detail of the politics of representations out of which the national interest is yielded. Weldes (1996:284–8) proposes two analytical dimensions of the social process by which the representations are produced: they are labeled as articulation and interpellation. The concept of articulation refers to the process by which a discourse of identity is constructed out of the extant cultural or linguistic resources. Interpellation, however, refers to a dual process whereby identity and subject positions are constructed and concrete individuals are then hailed into or interpolated by them.

The process of articulation involves establishing chains of connotations amongst different linguistic elements in order to temporarily create fixed meanings. In this way different ideas and terms come to connote one another to be welded into associative chains. Weldes (1996:284) acknowledges that some particular ideas and terms are of course as part of already extant cultural and linguistic resources. They thus already make sense in certain societies’ discourses. During the cold war for instance, Americans were familiar with nouns such as terrorists or puppets of the kremlin; adjective such as totalitarian, expansionary, or defensive; analogies like Munich or Pearl Harbor and metaphors the market or dominos. The process of articulation aims to convert the extant cultural and linguistic resources to be the more contingent and specific contextual representations of the world. The produced representations must be repeatedly articulated in efforts to ensure the discourse to come out as though it is the real picture of the world, according to which the national interest is shaped, and foreign policy action can be oriented.

In the representations of the cold war American foreign policy as an example, Weldes (1996:285–6) notes that the other who was labeled as totalitarian was continuously articulated thus it connoted expansion and aggression. The chains of meaning as a result of this articulation was totalitarianism, that would simultaneously bring with it expansion and aggression. When Washington further articulated this chain with the term such as puppets of the Kremlin and duplicitous international communists, it came out to connote the reality of the international system. The reality of the American national interest was based on these representations. This construction of the national interest included, for instance, national security and regional/international stability resulted in defensive foreign policy emanating containment policies towards global communism.

The discursive practices approach suggests the importance of repeated articulations. This is because events, actions, objects and social relations can be differently construed and represented on account of the nature of discourse that is not fixed in a one-to-one relation to its referent, but it is multi-referential. Hence, to Weldes’ mind (1996:286) this is likely to create different discourses around what supposedly the same social relation.
This by all means raises an important question to constructivists, concretely about the degree of freedom policy makers enjoy in constructing narratives of international politics and the national interest. Unfortunately, there is still no conceptual answer to this question because it conceives an empirical type of inquiry which requires a response grounded on extensive empirical case study analyses.

The articulation of connotative meanings is one part of the process by which policy makers construct inter-subjective identity and interest. The other part of this process involves the interpellation of the subjects. Interpellation means (Weldes, 1996:287-9), first, a specific social identity is constructed following the depiction of social relations. Different representations of the world entail different identities, which in turn carry with them different functions in the world, are located in different power relations and make possible different interests. Second, interpellation subsequently leads to the mapping of subjects’ positions in the constructed world.

The mapping of actors’ position is eloquent in a complex relationship of the self -the other through three different axes of otherness (Messari, 2001:230). First is the axiological axis according to which a value of relationship is expressed such as good or bad and superior or inferior. The second axis is paraxeological which displays an issue of a distancing one or at other times rapprochement. In this axis, one can expect to encounter three attitudes: imposition of the self on the other, submission of the self to the other, or purely indifference. The third axis is epistemic whereby the question to the self is one of acknowledging the other by promoting similarities, or ignoring the other by avoiding the discovery that the other exist. These three axes are interconnected.

Finally thus far this study has tried to exhibit that the dual process of articulation and interpellation is of central importance in understanding the construction of identity and the national interest in foreign policy. Through this process visions of the foreign policy behavior including definition of one own state, other states, and their positions have been created. This representation already entails identities and national interests. The study of constructivist foreign policy mainly refers to these two processes. Hereafter an extensive empirical study is worth to be suggested to make this rather abstract approach more concrete.

Reference


