

SOCIAL THEORY OF INTERNATIONAL POLITICS: THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIVISM IN INTERNATIONAL POLITICS ALEXANDER WENDT

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ABSTRACT: Following the structure of Wendt's book, I will present in this article the main arguments of his social theory, and then explain how Wendt applies them to international politics. This account will render a critique those points to the problems and promises of Wendt's social constructivism. I argue that despite flaws in his constitutive approach, his focus on the domestic-international aspect of agency and its relation to structure (of the state system) renders a significant contribution to international relations (IR) theory. Wendt calls attention to the importance of the social context within which states relate to each other, and introduces an idealist perspective to the interactions of states and the interests derived from this interaction. In his constructivist challenge to IR theory (in particular Waltzian Neorealism), Wendt affirms that the distribution of power and material capabilities are not the center of international politics, and that the individualistic ontology of Neorealism should be replaced by a more holistic approach that emphasizes the way in which ideas shape identities and, consequently, the interests of states.

Key-words: Wendt; State; International Relations.

TEORIA SOCIAL DA POLÍTICA INTERNACIONAL: O IMPACTO DO CONSTRUTIVISMO SOCIAL POLÍTICA INTERNACIONAL DE ALEXANDER WENDT

RESUMO: Seguindo a estrutura do livro de Wendt, vou apresentar neste artigo os principais argumentos de sua teoria social, e, em seguida, explicar como Wendt os aplica para a política internacional. Esta façanha renderá uma crítica desses pontos para os problemas e promessas de construtivismo social de Wendt. Defendo que, apesar de falhas em sua abordagem constitutiva, seu foco no aspecto nacional-internacional de agência e sua relação com a estrutura (do sistema estadual) traz uma contribuição significativa para as relações internacionais (RI) da teoria. Wendt chama a atenção para a importância do contexto social no qual os Estados se relacionam entre si, e introduz uma perspectiva idealista às interações dos Estados e os interesses derivados desta interação. Em seu desafio construtivista da teoria IR (em particular o neo-realismo de Waltzian), Wendt afirma que a distribuição de poder e recursos materiais não são o centro da política internacional, e que a ontologia individualista do neo-realismo deve ser substituída por uma abordagem mais holística, que enfatiza a maneira em que as ideias moldam identidades e, conseqüentemente, os interesses dos estados.

Palavra-chaves: Wendt; Estado; relações internacionais.

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INTRODUCTION

In *Social Theory of International Politics*, Alexander Wendt attempts to provide an alternative explanation to structural realist and Neoliberal institutionalist theories' about the relations between states in the international arena. This gigantesque task is pursued as an attempt to find a middle way (via media) between a radical constructivism and post-modernism that focuses solely on the role of identities, norms, ideas and social relations of states, and purely rationalist account that dismiss the value of ideas in favor of purely materialistic motives in international politics. This work can be seen as an attempt to develop a social constructivist theory that synthesizes the disparate approaches offered until then by taking into account and incorporating some of the criticism that these approaches have generated. It also represents a direct challenge to mainstream international relations (IR) theorizing.

Wendt calls attention to the importance of the social context within which states relate to each other, and introduces an idealist perspective to the interactions of states and the interests derived from this interaction. In his constructivist challenge to IR theory (in particular Waltzian Neorealism), Wendt affirms that the distribution of power and material capabilities are not the center of international politics, and that the individualistic ontology of Neorealism should be replaced by a more holistic approach that emphasizes the way in which ideas shape identities and, consequently, the interests of states.

This ontological approach takes the form of complicated lists of conditions, variables, structures, cultures and types of concepts that the author uses in the construction of his theory, to which the readers need to pay careful attention in order to understand their interconnection. In the first part of the book, Wendt lays out the philosophical foundations of his social theoretic approach that is then used to sustain his social theory of international politics in the second part. As such, it is an effort to present a complete look at social interactions at the international level that seeks to address the criticism that has been raised with respect to Wendt's and other constructivists' previous work. This work can be broadly characterized as an attempt to account for structural change in international politics.

Following the structure of Wendt's book, I will present the main arguments of his social theory, and then explain how Wendt applies them to international politics. This account will render a critique those points to the problems and promises of Wendt's social constructivism. I argue that despite flaws in his constitutive approach, his focus on the domestic-international aspect of agency and its relation to structure (of the state system) renders a significant contribution to IR theory.

WENDT'S ARGUMENTS: ONTOLOGY AND IDEAS

In establishing the structure of international politics, Wendt takes a holist approach and assumes states as the main actors in the international arena mainly because of their capacity to regulate violence. The differences with Ken Waltz' influential work *Theory of International Politics* are established at the outset with a distinct ontological approach to explaining the real world. Wendt wants to transcend the epistemological focus of positivism that merely seeks to explain what we can know about objective reality, and instead focus on exploring the nature of what the states system is made of. The author is interested in issues such as what is happening in the process of states' interactions, or "whether systemic structures are reducible to preexisting agents or have a relatively autonomous life of their own" (WENDT, 1999:36). In this approach, social structures are no less real than material ones, as it is the agreement that social facts (such as marriage) exist that makes it an objectively reality (RUGGIE, 1998).

In laying out his constructivism, Wendt first explains what he sees as social theory's contribution to IR. He proposes a re-conceptualization of the international structure as one determined not primarily by material capabilities of states, but by shared knowledge between states. The author warns that the emphasis on ideas should not render his theory normative because he is taking a scientific approach that espouses not just causal but also constitutive mechanisms in explaining state actions. As such, he does not want merely to find the causation of how ideas (as opposed to power and interests in the mainstream IR approach) can explain state behavior, but how ideas "constitute social situations and the meaning of material forces" (WENDT 1999: 78). Causal explanations tell us how X causes Y, whereby constitutive explanations entail that something in the structure of X has an effect on Y (and vice-versa) because of the relation between X and Y.² The introduction of constitutive theorizing is essential in Wendt's approach because it allows him to construct his social constructivist ontology.

HOLISM, NOT INDIVIDUALISM

As Wendt argues, socialization explains the construction of state identities and interests that is left out of structural realism because of its emphasis on materialism rather than ideas. The beliefs and expectations that states have of each other are derived from the repeated interaction and socialization of states. Because it is based solely on materialistic

² In other words, X is X because of its relation to Y, or teachers are teachers because of their relation to students.

concerns, Waltz' theory cannot satisfactorily explain the fact that a state such as the United States perceives a greater threat from the nuclear warheads of the North Koreans than from Britain's nuclear capabilities. Instead, the way that U.S.-Britain relations have been socialized can explain this anomaly. The international system is not simply constituted by material forces, although these do play a role in state behavior. Material capabilities do have independent effects in allowing or constraining state action, but it is ideas that constitute the international system and give meaning to material forces.³ Thus, it is not "ideas all the way down," but ideas in first place.

In a similar vein to his discussion of idealism, Wendt dichotomizes the causal and the constitutive in the holist approach. Instead of simply focusing on how agents (states) explain structure or vice versa, the author looks at that which constitutes the agents, that is, their identity and interest (WENDT, 1999: 78). The social structure affects states' identities, and states identity affects the social structure. This is contrary to the individualism espoused by Waltz, who pictures the relation between the agents and the structure as separate when he "reifies" structure apart from the unit level. Wendt structural approach includes agent and structure in the same plane, and the interaction of states at the systemic level produces and reproduces the social structure of the international system. Agency and structure are not separate, but instead constitute each other: "[This approach]...is intended to give equal weight to agency and structure. They are mutually constitutive and co-determined....structure exists, has effects, and evolves only because of agents and their practices" (WENDT, 1999: 184-185).

However, as Smith (2000) argues and I expand upon in the second part of this review, Wendt commits an inverted version of the same "reification" that he accuses Waltz of doing. In emphasizing the states' agency, Wendt separates the states' construction before interaction from the identity it presents at interaction in the international system. This renders his constitutive ontological approach faulty at best. Before we get to that point, we need to explore what Wendt means with the notion of shared identity and how it operates in international politics.

³ The distribution and composition of actors' material capabilities, as well as geography and natural resources are brute material forces that "matter" but that only "have the effects they do" because of their interaction with ideas. Wendt cites the example of Germany and Denmark. Although Germany's superior military power over Denmark limits how Denmark can act towards Germany, it does not mean anything if because of their interaction and shared ideas of each other, "neither could contemplate war with the other" (Wendt 1999: 112).

SHARED IDENTITY AND ANARCHY

In the repetitive process of social interaction, states take identities in relation to others. Although anarchy and balance of power considerations are what guides state egoist behavior for Waltz, for Wendt the common identities that are formed in the on-going process of interaction matter because they create “cultures” at the systemic level. Cultures are the shared identities that emerge from interaction⁴. They represent inter-subjective understandings that are a result of common knowledge, or “actors’ beliefs about each other’s rationality, strategies, preferences, and beliefs...that need not be true, just believed to be true” (WENDT, 1999: 159). Shared identities may also result from collective knowledge, or knowledge that is shared by a group about historical phenomena that extends through generations. Some examples are the historical victimization of Serbs by Ottoman Turks, Croatians, and Germans that “facilitated” a collective mobilization of Serbs during the Bosnian conflict (WENDT, 1999: 163).

In this way, the structure of the international system is derived from the different interactions between states, and as such, “anarchy is what states make of it.” For neorealist, anarchy (the fact that there is no authority above the sovereign states) leads to self-help. According to this logic, in the struggle for survival, states learn that they need to balance because they cannot be certain about the intentions of the other power. They are on their own, and can rely only on themselves with little incentive to cooperate. On the other hand, social constructivism embraces the process of interaction and identity formation that results in “relatively predictable” behavior. He explains that: “The fact that agents are constructed by society and that structure is continually in process might seem to suggest that society is infinitely changeable and even highly unstable, especially in comparison to Waltz’ more deterministic argument. Yet if anything the opposite is true, because the dialectical relationship between structure and agency suggests the following hypothesis: *culture is a self-fulfilling prophecy*. Given cause to interact in some situation, actors need to define the situation before they can choose a course of action. These definitions will be based on at least two considerations: their own identities and interests, which reflect beliefs about who they are in such situations; and what they think others will do, which reflect beliefs about their identities and interests” (WENDT, 1999: 187).

Thus, anarchy leads not to a single logic of self-help and interest maximization among states, but instead to different logics that derive from process in social interaction.

⁴ In an interesting preliminary analysis of the relation between identity and threat perception, Rousseau, Miodownik, and Petrone (2001) suggest that the construction of shared identity is similar to individuals’ construction of opinions during survey questions. This means “while on occasion individuals have prefabricated opinions that they simply report to the interviewer, in most cases individuals construct an opinion by retrieving accessible information, using information from prior questions, assessing the context of the current questions, and examining the nature of the interviewer-subject relationship” (Rousseau et al, 2001: 7).

These logics may be peaceful or conflicting, depending on the shared identities. The probability that there may be changing identity and interest is low, but still possible. Mercer explains the novelty in the possibility of change: “The constructivists do not share [the] pessimistic characterization of international politics. Because process determined identities and interests, they believe we should focus on process as a way to transform state interests. While both Neoliberal institutionalists and constructivists accept that international politics lacks a central enforcer of rules, constructivists believe that norms, laws, economic interdependence, technological development, learning and institutions can fundamentally change state interests” (MERCER, 1995: 231).⁵

STATES IN THE INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM

The author only sets the goal of explaining the state in Chapter 5 because that is the point at which he starts to lay out his understanding of the structure of international politics. In developing his constitutive approach, Wendt goes through an elementary construction of the state because it is ontologically before the states’ system (Wendt 1999: 198). A minimalist (and thus universal) definition of the state that applies to all types of states, whether democratic, authoritarian, communist, or of another type, includes all the properties which Wendt sees as essential in a state. The state is thus “an organizational actor embedded in an institutional-legal order that constitutes it with sovereignty and a monopoly on the legitimate use of organized violence over a society in a territory” (Wendt 1999: 213). States have corporate agency because its citizens recognize as a collectivity that the state exists and that it has the capability to absorb and transmit the desires, beliefs, and intentions that have been defined through collective action of its members. The anthropomorphizing of the state is important in two ways. First, it allows us to perceive states as actors with alternative strategies to pursue (division, merger, conquest, interlocking and specialization) based on the nature of their corporate agency (WENDT, 1999: 223). Secondly, it allows us to perceive states as having pre-established identities and interests with which they enter interaction at the external level.

⁵ However, Mercer challenges Wendt’s portrayal of how state identity determined by process tends to lead to other-regarding behavior. By using social identity theorizing, Mercer demonstrates that intergroup behavior is inherently competitive and self-regarding. Wendt mentions in *Social Theory* that Mercer’s criticisms are valid, but that the important thing is that identity can change from the initial position of self-regarding towards other-regarding behavior. This might suggest that Wendt’s concession that states are indeed initially egoists possibly derives from his trying to create a theory that avoids the criticisms spelled out before the writing of his book. In other words, is he trying to construct a social constructivism so encompassing that he adds elements that might not have been initially in his mind, but that he manages to “fit in” in a way that he thinks might strengthen his argument, or at least not damage it? (This is just speculation, as I do not know what his views before Mercer’s writing were like).

An actor's understanding of itself (internal structure of identity) and the way others understand it (external/inter-subjective structure of identity) are equally important in constituting different kinds of identities. Here, role and collective identities are most relevant to Wendt's analysis of the international system.⁶ Role identities can be seen as positions that actors (Self) take in virtue of their relation to others and what the Self thinks the Others' ideas about it are. Collective identity implies the incorporation of the other within the boundary of the Self. The significance of these two kinds of identities will be evident with the discussion of Wendt's three cultures of anarchy and the states' capacity to be other-regarding as opposed to purely self-regarding.

Before turning to the discussion of cultures of anarchy and interests, it is important to acknowledge Wendt's treatment of the corporate nature of the state before interaction in the system. As actors in their first encounter with the states' system, Wendt argues that states have four fundamental interests: physical survival (life), autonomy (liberty), economic gain (maintaining resources) and collective self-esteem (feeling good about itself). Although Wendt concedes that these imply self-interest, he adds that states only show a bias towards these interests, but that the collective identity can and frequently does kick in to overcome this tendency. He cites the European Union as an example, albeit a weak one, of this collective identity in action. Collective identity envisages states transcending the self-interest that realists affirm form the basis of states' nature "out of a sense of obligation, not just because there is something in it for them" (WENDT, 1999: 242). This possibility presents itself in total contradiction to Waltz' conceptualization of states as self-regarding entities in a bleak, anarchic world.

However, he brushes over that which must come prior to interests: the domestic formation of state identity. Merely posing that the institutionalization of collective action facilitates state agency says nothing about the process through which individuals develop the notion or discourse of the state's identity, thus failing to take into account that "nothing happens in society save in virtue of something human beings do or have done."⁷ This is problematic, as Zehfuss (2001) points out in her assessment of Germany and the issue of military involvement abroad after the end of the Cold War. Before laying out the implications of this problem, we will continue along Wendt's systemic argument.

⁶ Corporate and type identities are the other kinds of identities pointed out by Wendt, and although these are important at the domestic level, they do not add to his previous discussion of corporate agency presented above. For a more detailed explanation of all four identities, see Wendt 1999: 224-230.

⁷ Here, Smith (2000: 161) is quoting Colin Wight.

CULTURES OF ANARCHY

The process of interaction of states places them in “structural positions” with regard to security concerns and the use of violence toward each other. The author notes three positions, or cultures of anarchy, that states may take in relation to each other. The most conflictive one is the Hobbesian culture, in which states tend to see each other with war-prone enmity. The implications of this posture are most representative of the realist way to see the world. States seek their own self-interest and act according to self-help, resulting in the general tendencies to have war forthcoming at any time, to have states either balance or be eliminated, and to force nearly all other states to choose a side.

The second culture is Lockean, and consists of rivalry in which there is some recognition of the others’ rights and sovereignty. The tendencies here are to use violence sporadically, thus enabling states to survive and balance power and to remain neutral if so desired. At this stage (and in the next Kantian stage), states have usually internalized certain cultural norms and/or norms of international law that work in its best interest.⁸ Kantian culture represents friendship, non-violence and mutual aid. The tendencies here are pluralistic security communities (where states’ shared knowledge leads them to settle any conflicts by means other than violence) and collective security (mutual aid within a group, protection from outsiders). These three cultures have different degrees of internalization, meaning that states can adhere to the cultures because they are forced to (first degree), because they choose to (second degree), or because they want to (third degree of internalization). The higher one state goes in terms of internalizing a culture, the more durable and embedded the culture is. The interesting point is that structural change, or the “redefinition of who actors are and what they want,” can happen, as explained below. States start out as egoists, but in time learn to identify with others, thus creating the capacity to think pro-socially.

IDENTITY AND CHANGE IN INTERNATIONAL POLITICS

The type of identity will dictate the interests of the actors (what the actors want), “and since identities have varying degrees of cultural content so will interests” (WENDT, 1999: 231). As noted above, social interaction entails that actors base their course of action on their own interests and what they think others will do. Socialization takes the form of role taking implicit in role identity. In this scenario, choosing a behavior involves a four-step

⁸ Wendt gives the example of the U.S. deciding not to invade the Bahamas, although it is military capable of doing so, because of the acceptance of Bahamas sovereignty.

process that involves social learning. Assuming that states have their pre-social interests in mind, in the first “scene,” Ego engages in an action that signals (to Alter) what role it wants to be cast in, at which point Alter interprets Ego’s action (scene two). Alter then responds with its own action (scene three), and to which ego responds (scene four).

Besides social learning, this process of identity formation also involves the reinforcing of identities and interests. This generates expected behavior and trust that, although not 100% certain, permits states to “read each other’s minds, enabling them to trust that others will of their own accord respect their individuality and needs” (WENDT, 1999: 360). The product of social learning is the eventual adoption of the pro-social behavior of the Kantian model. Dispensing the Hobbesian world as outdated, the move from Lockean to Kantian world (rivals to friends) is difficult. However, if certain conditions hold, it is also likely. Wendt argues that certain characteristics of contemporary international politics cause states to favor a Kantian position in terms of security considerations, the most salient of which are interdependence, common fate, homogeneity, and self-restraint. When states have interacted to a point where they can trust others to a point of making the first move (scene one, above), these objective conditions can help the process translate into collective identity. As it goes, “Ego implicitly takes a collective identity, acting as if he cares for Alter, even if this is initially for selfish reasons, and signals to Alter: I expect you to do the same” (WENDT, 1999: 346). Structural change thus occurs because states change identities and interests (WENDT, 1999: 336).

PROBLEMS AND PROMISES OF WENDT’S ARGUMENT

Given that one of Wendt’s central strategies is to go through a careful explanation of what constitutes states and their interactions, and that states are ontologically prior to structure, it seems to me that there is incongruence between what he says about states prior to interaction with what he assumes about states after interaction. In first place, I find it hard to believe that states will create so much trust as he alleges in the Kantian model. As mentioned before, he declares that the European Union is a rather shallow example of the depth that collective identity can acquire. My skepticism lies partly in the fact that there has been no such clear demonstration of the Kantian model that Wendt portrays in contemporary international politics. If we follow Wendt logic in his characterization of collective identity, it is necessary to discount (or at least rethink) existing collective security systems from the Kantian model because we cannot be sure that states are following a norm or shared idea out of a sense of obligation instead of self-interest. Even if we assume that, the Kantian model has been internalized to the second

degree (states follow pro-social norms because it is in their self-interest to do so), what is to guarantee the other state that the model has been internalized at all?⁹ Seen from this perspective, the reading of each other's minds that Wendt proclaims creates trust can actually create very little trust. The argument that change is difficult hinders this discussion further, because it tells us how uncharacteristic it is for a state to internalize a certain culture in first place. Moreover, in the case of interactions between strong and weak states, what is to guarantee that culture will be internalized even at the first degree (coercion)? Wendt discussion of power relations is relegated to a single paragraph in Chapter 7, where he tells us that weaker states will tend to behave according to what the powerful state wants (WENDT, 1999: 331).

More intriguing and contradictory is the fact that Wendt identifies corporate identity as the start of interaction, yet in the end, he does not seem to properly take into account the fundamental interests implicit in corporate identity. A state's fundamental interests before interaction (survival, autonomy, economic well-being and collective self-esteem) are also intrinsic to the state, and as such should not be contingent on what happens in the external world. These are essentially self-regarding interests, even though collective self-esteem may imply that states' necessity to feel good about themselves requires that they think in collective terms. The problem arises with his argument at the end of Chapter 6 that structural changes can only be historically progressive, if there are no exogenous events like an invasion or a revolution. However, if the pre-social interests are taken to be just what Wendt implies that they are, intrinsic to the state, what happens if at one point in a friendly relation something occurs that so infringes upon a state's pre-social interest that profoundly rocks the relation between states? Is a Kantian world so "benign" that this is just not a possibility, and that states magically agree on every issue? Alternatively, is it possible to go back from a friendly to a rival condition after all? These questions must be addressed if the pre-social state is to really count in the equation. What is in my view undeniable is that because of Wendt's discussion of corporate identity and contrary to what he affirms at the end of Chapter Seven, self-interest will never die out, even if not practiced for a long time.

A stronger blow to Wendt's arguments that is related to his overlook of domestic processes is his failure to address the source of identity in the pre-social state. As Zehfuss argues, Wendt's necessity to portray a state's identity as a unitary and circumscribable because instability in identity would throw his theory in disarray obfuscates the more

⁹ This criticism is raised by Copeland (2000). He argues that uncertainty about the others true intentions cannot be avoided because what remains unshared in relations between nations is what matters in cooperation terms, thus facilitating deception. Furthermore, because domestic political changes are always a possibility (Wendt points to revolution as one exogenous force that can affect interaction), states cannot be certain of future intentions. See Dale Copeland, "The Constructivist Challenge to Structural Realism."

complex process of domestic discourse and debate over a state's identity. Referring to the case of Germany after the Cold War, Zehfuss argues that western states' construction of Germany's identity really did generate structural change in line with Wendt's arguments. Germany's constitutional commitment during the Cold War to a non-military identity was based on the premise that they should avoid war and fascism at all costs because of historical events during World War II. However, Zehfuss demonstrates that the identity change portrayed at the interaction level was not as stable as the sole focus on the result (identity change) implies. The analysis suggests that the Gulf War and the Bosnian conflict produced domestic arguments about what German identity meant. The domestic debate centered on whether German identity meant identification with or a rejection of its identity during the Third Reich (and with the German Democratic Republic). However, this problematic identity formation is: "not only invisible through Wendt's framework but in tension with his conceptualization of identity. The illustration suggests that it is impossible to circumscribe 'the identity' the FRG 'has' or to list the characteristics which 'having' an identity entails. Identities depend on concrete articulations. Whether the FRG is thought to be different or like the Third Reich in any given situation is not clear a priori. In Wendt's framework, however, just that identity of both is assumed" (ZEHFUSS, 2001: 336).

Whether we agree or not that Wendt's "not so innocent" exclusion of domestic identity formation renders Wendt's theory invalid, a significant insight is that identities are much more complex than the Ego/Alter story. In the least, it discredits Wendt's constitutive approach. My view is that although identity formation in many cases is complex, in the end it is just the state that acts and makes decisions at the international level. Although domestic input about identity is done through individual discourse, a single identity is displayed to the external world, because it is just one state doing the display. Perhaps the resolution lies in a better characterization of domestic identity formation and the origins of identity, which is what critical constructivists offer, according to Hopf (1998). It may be that more empirical studies can and will take account of this specified identity formation, such as we see in Herman's characterization of the development of New Thinking in post-Cold War Soviet Union.¹⁰

Despite the flaws that I have identified with respect to Wendt's treatment of the corporate identity of states, I think that a major contribution of Wendt's *Social Theory* to IR theory lays precisely in the interrelation between the domestic and the international. Although I argue above that there is only one "actor" making the actual interaction in the international realm, there are numerous individuals, groups, discourses, and institutions

¹⁰ See Robert Herman, "Identity, Norms and National Security: The Soviet Foreign Policy Revolution and the End of the Cold War." In Peter Katzenstein, ed., *The Culture of National Security* (Columbia University Press, 1996): 271-316.

at the domestic level that influence state policy. This can be seen in the numerous empirical works that use constructivist strategies. For instance, Klotz (1995) presents the argument that case of U.S. sanctions against South Africa as being generated as policy partly because of domestic discourse and institutions. Prenzlöw (2001) examines the domestic salience of human rights norms, arguing that the interest and preferences of domestic actors affected by these norms have had a significant impact in U.S. policy choices. In the case of humanitarian interventions, structural realist and regime theories can explain some of the U.S. interventions in countries that represent substantial geopolitical and economic interest, or their non-intervention for the same reasons. However, these theories cannot explain interventions in places where there is no apparent interest, such as Somalia and Haiti (PRENZLOW 2001; FINNEMORE 1996). Constructivism also calls attention to state identity, and this approach is important in assessing the different degrees of adherence to international norms. For instance, even though it has signed on to a series of international human rights instruments that protect the rights of migrants, such as the International Covenant on Political and Social Rights, the U.S. government has structured its policies according to internal forces and attitudes toward immigration. In the process, it rejects external control and pressures on immigration issues, adopting an attitude of exceptionalism that is part of U.S. identity in the international system.

As for the argument that “anarchy is what states make of it,” I think that it presents another crucial dimension of international politics: social interaction. How states relate to each other and what lies behind this social relation matters because it explains difference and change. States are not like-units that act solely based on self-interest. On the other hand, they are not likely to get to the stage where the Self and the Other integrate in such a way that there is no difference between the two realms. However, change is possible through the process of interaction. Shared identity may not be stable enough to create certainty, but it does create a role for ideas that can modify behavior. Wendt’s assertion that change will occur when egoism dies down from lack of practice denies the possibility that change can occur despite the practice of self-interest, just not to the Kantian ideal that he envisages.

CONCLUSION

Wendt's *Social Theory* attempts to present a perspective different from that of Neorealism, one that accounts for the transformations in the international system that cannot be accounted for by Waltz and others. Cooperation (and conflict) has come about not only because of material benefits that can be reaped, but also because states have learned to identify with each other throughout the interactive process. This process has many elements to it, creating different identities, and therefore different interests. A focus on both the domestic aspect of state agency and on the interactive process at the state systems level allows for a reconceptualized understanding of international politics.

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