

‘IDENTITY’ PROBLEMATIQUE IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS THEORY

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MUSTAFA GÜRBÜZ

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To Aydın Ateş,



I certify that I have read this thesis and have found that it is fully adequate, in scope and in quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of IR in International Relations.



Assist. Prof. Dr. Serdar Güner
Supervisor

I certify that I have read this thesis and have found that it is fully adequate, in scope and in quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of IR in International Relations



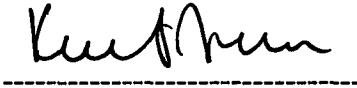
Assist. Prof. Dr. Pınar Bilgin
Examining Committee Member

I certify that I have read this thesis and have found that it is fully adequate, in scope and in quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of IR in International Relations



Assist. Prof. Dr. Ömer Faruk Gençkaya
Examining Committee Member

Approval of the Institute of Economics and Social Sciences



Prof. Dr. Kürşat Aydoğan
Director

ABSTRACT

**‘IDENTITY’ PROBLEMATIQUE
IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS THEORY**

Mustafa Gürbüz

M.A, Department of International Relations
Supervisor: Assist. Prof. Dr. Serdar Güner
July, 2004

This study aims to provide an assessment of ‘identity’ conceptualizations in International Relations theory generally, and in constructivism particularly. The underlying argument is that ‘identity’ takes different meanings and refers to divergent categorical realms in the IR theory literature. The notion of ‘identity’ has been taken in different senses among constructivists as well. Ironically, the same term, *identity*, is employed sometimes to defend two opposing views in the discipline of IR. Therefore, ‘identity’ is an ambiguous term in constructivism and in IR theory. Moreover, ‘identity’ is a vague term even in the literature of conventional constructivists, who are most frequent users of the term in the field. Although the conventional constructivists produce the same notion of ‘identity’ among themselves, their works suffer from the problem of ‘obscurity’ and ‘vagueness’. Thus, ‘identity’ among conventional constructivists is not ambiguous, because they refer to the same category. Yet, the term is left unexplained and vague. All these intellectual failures in the studies of ‘identity’ are troublesome for some IR theorists but fatal for constructivist scholars. Therefore, this work offers an alternative way to conceptualize identity by bringing in ‘identification’ theory and the Jürgen Habermas’ approaches. While identification theory can eliminate the ‘ambiguity’ problem in identity studies in the field, Habermasian theorizing may help to study ‘identity’ in constructivism in an analytically clear respect.

Keywords: Identity, Constructivism, Conventional Constructivism, Critical Constructivism, Identification theory, Legitimation Crisis.

ÖZET

ULUSLARARASI İLİŞKİLER KURAMINDA “KİMLİK” SORUNSALI

Mustafa Gürbüz

Yüksek Lisans, Uluslararası İlişkiler Bölümü
Tez Yöneticisi: Assist. Prof. Dr. Serdar Güner

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Bu çalışma genelde Uluslararası İlişkiler kuramında ve özelde inşacı kuramda (konstrüktivizmde) kimlik kavramsallaştırılmasına ilişkin bir değerlendirme sunmayı amaçlamaktadır. Uluslararası İlişkiler kuramı çalışmalarında, ‘kimlik’ olgusu değişik anlamlar almakta ve farklı kategorisel alanlara atıfta bulunmaktadır. ‘Kimlik’ olgusu konstrüktivistler arasında da farklı şekillerde ele alınmaktadır. Çelişkisel olarak, Uluslararası İlişkiler disipliniinde aynı terim (kimlik terimi) bazen birbirine zıt olan görüşleri savunmak için kullanılmaktadır. Yani konstrüktivizm de ve Uluslararası İlişkiler kuramında kullanılan ‘kimlik’ terimi anlamca karmaşıklık arz etmektedir. Buna ek olarak, ‘kimlik’ terimi Uluslararası İlişkiler disipliniinde bu terimi en çok kullanan konstrüktivistler arasında bile anlamca kapalıdır. Konvansiyonel konstrüktivistler kendi aralarında aynı kategorik ‘kimlik’ olgusu oluşturmalarına rağmen çalışmalarında anlaşılmazlık ve kapalı olma problemini yenememişlerdir. Bu durumda konvansiyonel konstrüktivistler arasında ‘kimlik’ olgusu aynı kategorik değere atıfta bulunduğundan anlamca karmaşık değildir; fakat ‘kimlik’ terimi açıklanmamış ve muğlak bırakılmıştır. Kimlik çalışmalarındaki bütün bu entellektüel arızalar Uluslararası İlişkiler teorisyenleri için üzüntü verici iken konstrüktivist uzmanlar için ölümcül kusurlardır. Bu yüzden bu çalışma ‘kimliksel tanımlama kuramına ve Jürgen Habermas’ın yaklaşımlarına dayanarak ‘kimlik’ kavramsallaştırılmasında alternatif bir çerçeve sunmaktadır. ‘Kimliksel tanımlama’ kuramı Uluslararası İlişkiler disipliniinin kimlik çalışmalarındaki anlamca karmaşıklık problemini çözebilir. Habermas’ın kuramı ise konstrüktivizmde ‘kimlik’ kavramının analitik olarak açık bir şekilde çalışılmasını kolaylaştırabilir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kimlik, Konstrüktivizm, Konvansiyonel Konstrüktivizm, Eleştirel Konstrüktivizm, Kimliksel Tanımlama Teorisi, Meşruiyet Krizi.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

One of the old debates in ethnicity literature is still relevant today: Are identities fixed throughout history, or are they mere inventions produced by political struggles? The answer is crucially important, because it has a decisive power on almost all debates related to 'identity'. The primordialist view takes communal identities as given, 'of social existence'. As Geertz (1963: 128) puts it, the fundamentals of these givens are unexplainable and can only be found in the 'non-rational foundations of personality'. Yet, this approach has serious flaws. Why, for example, if identity is essentially intrinsic, the salience of identities and their content vary? On the other hand, the opposite conception of identity claims that identities are highly fluid and are created by policymakers. Stephen Saideman (2002: 187) points out that, however, this argument lacks the explanation of the politicians' choices, and cannot fully comprehend 'why some identities, therefore policies, endure over time despite changes in leadership and in institutions'.

International Relations theorists, consciously or not, are recently involved in this old debate. Their usages of 'identity' remarkably differ from each other. Identity is the *explanans* in some works; it is the *explanandum* in some others (Busekist, 2004: 85). Ironically, the same term is sometimes employed to prove the two opposing views. Thus, 'identity' is an ambiguous concept in International Relations theory. Moreover, constructivist school of thought also lacks the unity in providing the same notion of identity. Constructivists fail to assert a common terminology among them although 'identity' is a crucial concept for their approach. Hence, identity is an ambiguous term in constructivism as well. Yet, conventional constructivists have succeeded to produce a common notion of identity for their own research agenda. Their 'identity' conceptualization is not ambiguous; because they refer to the same concept. However, they fail to provide a clear assessment of the concept. They refer to same category but they understand different meanings because of the obscurity of the concept. Therefore, identity remains as a vague concept for conventional constructivists too.

Being as an 'ambiguous' and a 'vague' concept, identity does not provide great help in the discipline of International Relations. As Astrid Von Busekist (2004: 81) notes recently, identity is a 'portmanteau term that does not possess the status of a concept and that distracts us from the "identity factory" and the political effects of the "identity project"'. This work aims to present, to analyze, and to offer solutions to this fatal problem in IR theory.

1.1 'Identity': Underrepresented Dimension of the Statecraft

Although 'identity' theorizing has been a key concern in social theory, it has, for long, remained undertheorized in International Relations theory.¹ Post-World War II environment paved the way for 'systemic' theorizing in IR. As the dominant approaches, i.e. classical realist models, became increasingly systemic, variations in national identities and interests were not considered to be a matter of debate. Kenneth Waltz's famous formulation of 'reductionism' fastened this development and launched a new orthodoxy by maintaining that state interests can directly be derived from states' relative positions (Waltz, 1979). Therefore, approaches to 'identity' have been regarded as pertaining to domestic politics and are threatened by the sin of reductionism. Rationalist theories employ metaphors to illustrate 'security dilemma', in which anarchy is sufficient to stimulate a conflict notwithstanding differences in actor preferences (Jervis, 1978; Waltz, 1979).

Against this 'rationalist' tendency in IR, constructivist approaches locate the concept of 'identity' at the core of their studies. Constructivism proposes an account of 'the politics of identity' (Hopf, 1998: 192). Constructivists believe that the rationalist usage of 'preferences' and 'behavior' cannot be truly grasped without an understanding of the notion of identity. Identity forms many aspects of the statecraft: state interests, threat perceptions, preferences, actions (Lynch, 2002). Understanding 'how identities are constructed, what norms and practices accompany their

¹ After the 1960's, 'identity' has been the main focus of many social theorists from various disciplines. Among the writers of recent works, we should note Zygmunt Bauman (1992), Pierre Bourdieu (1980), Fernand Braudel (1988-1990), Craig Calhoun (1994), S.N. Eisenstadt and Bernhard Giesen (1995), Anthony Giddens (1991), Jürgen Habermas (1991), David Laitin (1998), Claude Lévi-Strauss (1977), Paul Ricoeur (1992), Amartya Sen (1985), Margaret Somers (1994), Charles Taylor (1992), Charles Tilly (1996), Alexander Wendt (1994), and Harrison White (1992).

reproduction, and how they construct each other' constitutes a major part of the constructivist research program (Hopf, 1998: 192-93).

Constructivist studies have paid a special attention to 'identity' in their works, especially after the 1990s, 'identity' studies has gained a significant momentum in the field. This reality, however, should not imply the solution of 'identity problematic' in the field. Indeed, it is the starting point of identity debate: 'identity' has been employed for various aims in various strategies in the field. The term, *identity*, suffers from two important lacks. First, it is *ambiguous* when it is used to refer to different categorical objects; and, second, it is *vague* when it is defined in obscure terms.

These problems in conceptualizing 'identity' have had significant implications for constructivists. If constructivists cannot provide an intellectual communication on a very important term for their theoretical frameworks, then what is use of 'identity' debate?

1.2 Ambiguity and Vagueness: An Analytical Distinction

Ambiguity and *vagueness* are quite different properties. The analytical distinction between these two is important for this work.

A term is *ambiguous* in a given context 'when it has two distinct meanings and the context does not make clear which one is intended' (Copi, 1961: 92). On the other hand, a term is *vague* when it is in need of clarification. Vagueness appears 'when

there exist “borderline cases” such that a term cannot be determined whether it applies to them or not (Copi, 1961: 92). Since there are two divergent difficulties; the solutions of the problems are also twofold. In order to eliminate ambiguity, we need to show different meanings of the ambiguous terms whereas we can eliminate vagueness ‘by giving a definition of the term’ that ‘will permit a decision as to its applicability in a given situation’ (Copi, 1961: 92).

We should be aware of the fact that implications and required solutions differ in terms of problems we face. The usage of different formulations of ‘identity’ leads to ‘ambiguity’, while the obscure definitions of ‘identity’ cause ‘vagueness’. We could solve the problem of ambiguity by indicating the different meanings of the term. On the other hand, we need clarification of ‘identity’ and insightful demonstration of its applicable limits. Subsequently, two different problems produce one common difficulty for International Relations theorists: verbal disputes on ‘identity’.

1.3 Verbal Disputes and International Relations Theory

Copi (1961: 96) noted that there are three kinds of verbal disputes. The first kind involves a disagreement in belief. It is ‘the obviously genuine variety, in which the parties explicitly and unambiguously disagree’ about a matter of debate. The second kind of disputes is *merely* verbal ones. This kind is related with ambiguity and in fact there is not a real disagreement between the parties. By showing that there are *different* propositions rather than *conflicting* propositions at stake, the dispute can be solved. The third one is ‘an apparently verbal dispute that is really genuine’. The

third kind of dispute is significant for us here, because it characterizes the dispute over 'identity' in the IR theory. 'In this third kind', Copi (1961: 96) asserts:

(T)here is some key word or phrase [here 'identity'- M.G] used in different senses by the disputers, and here lies its resemblance to the second kind. But this third kind differs from the second in that *resolving the ambiguity will not settle or end the dispute*, for a dispute of this third kind reveals and is based on *a genuine disagreement in attitude between the disputers*.²

Identity is not only an ambiguous but also a vague term in the literature of International Relations. Therefore, the dispute cannot be solved by eliminating ambiguity. The strategy should be twofold including the removal of ambiguity and the elimination of vagueness.

1.4 Methodology and Structure of the Work

This work takes the following steps in its methodology to problematize the 'identity' issue in a clear and satisfactory assessment:

1. First, 'identity' conceptualizations in the IR literature will be examined in order to show the *ambiguity* in the field. Although 'identity' is a vague term, it is analytically useful to focus on one problem: *ambiguity*. This work omits at this stage the problem of *vagueness* in each IR theory school. This would require a long discussion, because 'identity' conceptualizations should be examined deeply in each theory in order to show the obscurities.
2. 'Identity' is a key term in constructivism and constructivists use the term very frequently in the field. Therefore, 'identity conceptualizations' in constructivism is important. However, 'identity' is employed ambiguously among constructivists as

² Emphases added.

well. This will be analyzed intensely in order to show the ambiguity among the constructivists in the field. Yet, the problem of vagueness among constructivists will be omitted as it also requires a long discussion.

3. After presenting ambiguity problems, the following question will lead the work: Can conventional constructivists (leading segment of constructivism) provide 'unambiguous' identity conceptualization among themselves? Searching for possible answers will make us to conclude that 'identity' is not an 'ambiguous' term but a 'vague' term among conventional constructivists.
4. Afterward, the second problem, *vagueness*, will be discussed. The target literature here is conventional constructivism that is the most influential constructivist school in the field, as known 'middle ground' constructivism.
5. Finally, the work will search for possible alternative formulations for the two problems. Here, identification theory will be examined. The argument is that identification theory in general can provide solutions for the problem of ambiguity, whereas Habermasian theory of identification can be an insightful source of inspiration for the problem of vagueness in conventional constructivist theory.

The chapter 2 addresses the ambiguity problem of 'identity' in International Relations theory in general, and in constructivism in particular. Chapter 3 focuses on the conventional constructivist literature. The argument here is that identity is not an ambiguous term but a vague term among conventional constructivists. Chapter 4 discusses the implications of the problems presented in previous chapters. The 'identification theory' is the main concern of this chapter in order to produce alternative 'identity' conceptualizations, which are not ambiguous and vague, in the IR theory. The chapter ends with an illustration of the Turkish case of identity

change in order to assess Habermasian identification theory. And finally chapter 5 concludes the dissertation.



CHAPTER II

THE CONCEPT OF IDENTITY IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS THEORY

2.1 Introduction

This chapter describes diverse identity conceptualizations in security studies and presents the 'identity problematique' in the field of International Relations. Although 'identity' is frequently employed in IR literature, it is mostly underspecified. Identity means sometimes too much (in essentialist beliefs) and sometimes too little (in critical views). It refers to different analytical categories and acquires different meanings. Therefore, there is no unity among IR theorists on the meaning and the usage of the concept. Moreover, though they are constructivists who mostly employ 'identity' in the field; there is no unity among them as well. Yet, as being too torn between 'hard' and 'soft' meanings, the concept of identity needs to be reframed for the sake of successful social analysis in the field.

In his recent work, Charles Tilly (1996: 7) notes that identity is a 'blurred and indispensable concept'. IR theorists use the concept for implication of 'we-ness' or 'a fundamental and consequential *sameness* among members of a group or category' (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000: 7).¹ This is probably the most general use of the term. In this usage, however, as Brubaker and Cooper (2000: 7) points out, the line between identity as a category of analysis and as a category of practice 'is often blurred'. The actual problem starts here: identity can be understood objectively as *we-ness in itself* or subjectively as an experienced, felt, or *perceived we-ness*. Is identity 'objective' or 'subjective' group-ness? In this sense, we can categorize three distinct perceptions of the concept: essentialist view, constructivist view, and critical view.

2.2 Essentialist view of Identity

In essentialist belief, identity is the fundamental aspect of 'selfhood'; it is "'located" *in the core of the individual and also in the core of his communal culture*' (Erikson, 1968: 22).² This primordialist view takes communal identities as given, 'of social existence' (Saideman, 2002: 187). As Geertz (1963: 128) puts it, the fundamentals of these givens are unexplainable and can only be found in the 'non-rational foundations of personality'. Essentialists believe that identities exist because of 'history' (see e.g. Gurr, 1993; Horowitz, 1985; Rothschild, 1981; Young, 1976).

Brubaker and Cooper (2000: 10) summarize the essentialist understandings identity as the following four assumptions:

¹ Emphasis in the original.

² Emphases in the original.

1. Identity is something all people have, or ought to have, or are searching for.
2. Identity is something all groups (at least groups of a certain kind- e.g. ethnic, racial, or national) have, or ought to have.
3. Identity is something people (and groups) can have without being aware of it. In this perspective, identity is something to be *discovered*, and something about which one can be *mistaken*.
4. Identity implies strong notions of group boundedness and homogeneity; also a sharp distinctiveness from nonmembers, which indicates a clear boundary between inside and outside, as well.

The essentialist view is typically employed by the realist theory in the field of IR (see e.g. Morgenthau, 1967; Posen, 1993; Evera, 1994). This fact can be related with the realist understanding of the psychology of the human nature in biological terms (e.g. Freud, 1915). Self-centered human beings are tending to create group-bias and this groupings leads to 'emergence' of identity (Druckman, 1994). This *construction* of identity, however, is very different than the *constructivist* perception. As it is explained in Erikson's (1968: 41) terms, 'man's need for a psychosocial identity is anchored in nothing less than his sociogenetic evolution'.

As argued above, if identity is seen as a property of the society, then it is a typical essentialist belief. Like constructivists, essentialists believe in construction of identities; however, unlike them, they consider material aspects (such as sharing the same language, same belief-system, same mythos, etc.) as *natural* sources to have an identity and for a construction of identity. Hans Morgenthau (1967: 484-5) provides a good example for this kind of insight by his view of identity:

National societies are composed of a multiplicity of social groups. Some of these are antagonistic to each other in the sense that their respective claims are mutually exclusive. This pluralism of domestic groupings and conflicts, then, tends to impress upon the participants the relativity of their interests and loyalties and thus to mitigate the clashes of different groups. This pluralism brings about, as it were, an economy *in the intensity of identification*, which must be spread wide in order to give every group and conflict its share... *they partake of the same language, the same customs, the same historic recollections, the same fundamental social and political philosophy, the same national symbols.*³

Obviously, here Morgenthau expects to construct a kind of identity that is a natural outcome, an emergence, something to be discovered. Identity is presented as something all people are searching for. The essentialist approach takes identities as a category of analysis (McSweeney, 1999: 71).

Taking identity as a category of analysis, however, has crucial limitations. First, identities are themselves treated as undifferentiated and 'given' units. Second, they cannot be truly 'fixed' since identities can be made in various degrees such as group-based identities, societal identity, ethnic group identity, national identity.

Criticizing such kind of realist work of Barry Posen, Lapid and Kratochwil (1996: 115) argues that Posen's analysis 'brings to the fore "primordial" (that is, original and unchangeable) loyalties, blithely neglecting both the role of the Yugoslav state in constructing these identities and the cynical rewriting of history that is taking place to fit present political purposes'. Likewise, Bill McSweeney (1999: 71), while providing a constructivist critique of another work (Waever et al., 1993), puts that

³ Emphases added.

‘identity is not a fact of society’; instead, ‘it is a process of negotiation among people and interest groups’.⁴

2.3 Critical view of Identity

Contrary to essentialist beliefs in which identities are considered as a ‘category of analysis’, the critical view treats ‘identities’ as a ‘category of practices’.⁵ Identity is not something to be discovered; it is not an intrinsic quality. Rather, it is ‘multiple, unstable, in flux, contingent, fragmented, constructed, negotiated,’ and so on and so forth (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000: 11). Therefore, this view, as opposed to strong views of identity, takes a weak and flexible conceptualization of identity.

According to critical theorists and postmodern writers, identity should be used to emphasize the unstable, multiple, fragmented, and fluctuating nature of the contemporary ‘self’ (e.g. Hall and Gay, 1996). Influenced by post-structuralist theory, the actual aim of critical constructivists is not to debate over identity and its changing effects, but ‘to surface identities’ and ‘to elaborate on how people come to believe in a single version of naturalized truth’ (Hopf, 1998: 183-4). Therefore, in this approach to identity, ‘deconstruction’ is continuously employed as a strategy for revealing ‘the myths associated with identity formation’ (Hopf, 1998: 184). Thus, critical theory takes the concept of identity as a tool to explain ‘power-knowledge’ relations (Price and Reus-Smit, 1998: 270-73).

⁴ Although scholars of the Copenhagen School such as Ole Waever and Barry Buzan are not essentialists, their accounts of identity are very close to essentialist approaches. They put that ‘(s)ocieties are fundamentally about identity’ and ‘society’ as a platform in which ‘individuals identifying themselves as members of a community’ (Waever et al., 1993: 6, 24).

⁵ For an excellent comparison between the two divergent views, essentialist view and critical view, see McCrone (1998: chapter 2).

The call for 'emancipation' in a postmodern vein is a recent attempt in International Relations theory literature.⁶ David Campbell, one of the leading proponents of this school of thought, (1996b: 164-66), argues that 'identity' cannot be allowed to be fixed or final. It must be critically and continuously *deconstructed* as soon as it attains a meaning. In his study over US foreign policy (1992), Campbell's approach demonstrates how the morals of American domestic 'identity' imposed a certain kind of foreign policy behavior against the perceived communist threat. Campbell (1992: 11) quotes from Judith Butler and states that '(t)he construction of identity is not the deconstruction of politics; rather, it establishes as *political* the very terms through which identity is articulated'.⁷ Therefore, Campbell reveals the implicit 'interest' in the construction of 'communist threat' as the 'other' of the American 'self' (Neumann, 1996: 157-162). In the similar vein, Jutta Weldes (1999) takes U.S national identity as a cultural production of the Cuban Missile Crisis.

Like other postmodern claims on 'identity', Campbell's work presents the concept of identity as a 'narrative structure', as an 'instrument' to gain power, as a 'plea' in which 'othering' strategy takes place (Neumann, 1996: 157). Similarly, some feminist writers argue that the traditional special 'languages' and 'metaphors' not only ignore some identities but also prevent them (Tickner, 1992; Peterson, 1992; Sylvester, 1994). These views, however, revolve the concept to a different direction than it is generally interpreted. As Brubaker and Cooper point out (2000: 8), postmodern or poststructuralist writings have employed identity 'to stress the

⁶ See, for example, Walker (1989), Lapid (1989), Biersteker (1989), Linklater (1990a; 1990b), George and Campbell (1990), Hoffman (1991), George (1994), Campbell (1996a; 1996b). For earlier attempts, see Cox (1986), Walker (1987), Ashley (1987; 1988).

⁷ Emphasis added.

fragmented quality of the contemporary experience of “self”, which is ‘unstably patched together through shards of discourse and contingently “activated” in differing contexts’.⁸

The overemphasis on self/other dichotomy in postmodern approaches leads us to miss what is at stake in conceptualizing ‘identity’. For example, Bill McSweeney (1999: 160) observes that American state identity may have changed over a historical period when American ‘domestic moralism’ was relatively constant and Campbell’s work does not consider this point. He criticizes Campbell for ‘implicitly’ adopting the assumption of Morgenthau: state identities are exogenous from the interactions with the other states. Certainly, as a postmodern scholar, Campbell may not intend to do so. Yet, his assessment of identity lacks the sources of identity change through international interactions (McSweeney, 1999: 161).

Other examples of similar works have been prepared in the discipline by Der Derian (1987; 1991). Although Der Derian differs from Campbell in his approach to identity, his assessment is typically postmodern. He suggests that ‘the entire *business of identity formation* has become *hyperreal* and thus no longer involves human collectives as others, only *simulations* thereof’ (Neumann, 1996: 156).⁹ Here, ‘identity’ is also very differently used than in general terms.

Thus, as Ted Hopf (1998: 185) convincingly asserts, critical theory’s approach toward identity is mainly rooted in assumptions about power. They employ the concept of identity for the sake of presentation of the instances of hierarchy,

⁸ Emphases in the original.

⁹ Emphases added.

subordination, or domination in explicating binary oppositions between the discursive and the non-discursive (Foucault), the text and *hors-texte* (Derrida), and reality and illusion (Žižek).¹⁰ Nevertheless, critical strategy makes 'identity' obscure.

Brubaker and Cooper (2000: 11) state three problems for critical 'weak conceptualizations' of identity. First, qualifiers such as constructed, multiple, fragmented, and so on can become 'mere place-holders' that signal only a stance without conveying a meaning, if they are employed automatically. Certainly, this stance *per se* makes no sense for the definition of identity. Second, if identity is 'sameness' in its simplest term, continuously changed and repudiated usage of identity seems to be useless, even contradictory. Therefore, it is not understandable why weak conceptions of 'identity' are *conceptions of identity*. In this regard, McSweeney (1999: 130) criticizes Campbell's study by arguing that 'there is no reason to suppose that "identity" does more work' than 'solidarity' in the book. Third, weak conceptions of identity are too weak to do useful theoretical work. The insistence upon the characteristics of the term such as multiple, malleable, fluid etc. makes 'identity' so elastic that performing serious analytical work on the concept becomes impossible.

In fact, critical theorists are not concerned by these problems. Since they focus on implicit power relations, domination, and discourse at first, identity conceptualization is not a serious critical theory problematique. Critical theorists have no agenda on identity conceptualization; instead, they all agree that identities

¹⁰ For an excellent analysis on the issue, see Edkins (1999).

are always 'constructed' instruments hiding implicit power interests for someone and for some purpose.¹¹

2.4 Constructivist view of Identity

In *constructivism* of sociological sense, identity is regarded as a product of social and political action. It is used to highlight the *process* and the *interactive* nature of development of the collective understanding. Thus, two characteristics are important for the constructivist view of identity (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000: 8). First, identity is a 'contingent product' of social and political action, and second, it is understood as a ground or basis for further action.

According to constructivists, identity is not something to be discovered but it is continuously constructed. Therefore, identity is regarded as a socially constructed reality that requires an intersubjectively shared set of meanings. Benedict Anderson's 'imagined communities' and Ernest Gellner's 'inventing nations' have long been well-known references in constructivist literature (Anderson, 1991; Gellner, 1983). As Gellner (1964: 168) notes on national identities: 'nationalism is *not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it invents nations where they do not exist— but it does need some pre-existing differentiating marks to work on*'.¹² Thus, in constructivist understanding, as opposed to essentialism, identity is not something people ought to have or search for it. Yet, constructivism does not deny the objective reality of similarity in language, in religion, in culture, in race, and so on. As seen above, Gellner refers to these as 'some pre-existing differentiating marks'. For

¹¹ Here, one may remind Robert Cox's (1986) famous expression of 'critical' theory outlook: 'theory is always *for* someone and *for* some purpose'.

¹² Emphases added.

constructivists, these are necessary for the construction of identity but not sufficient. In addition to brute facts, there are some facts that exist only because we attribute the certain function or meaning to them (Guzzini, 2000: 160). Therefore, it is a theory on the 'social construction of reality' (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). Actually, this is the most important point that differentiates constructivists from essentialists.

As argued above, the concept of identity is not an essence in constructivist understanding. Busekist (2004: 82) puts six qualities for the constructivist usage of the term:

1. Identity is constructed and therefore is dependent on agents that construct it.
2. Identity is a dynamic concept and it is consequently dependent on the social context and the agents.
3. Identity rests on a 'tradition', in which it has a particular legitimacy of its own, and therefore it has a particular relation to history.
4. Identity sustains a close relation to the system of political values in which it takes place.
5. Identity is based on drawing borders producing in-group and out-group biases. Therefore, 'self' finds itself with 'other'.
6. Identity possesses a centre.

In the light of Busekist's assertion, we can observe three important aspects of constructivist perception of the concept: constructed-ness in a continuous process, dependent-ness on temporal and spatial conditions, and necessity for the 'other' -
ness.

2.4.1 Divergent Constructivist Approaches to 'Identity'

Although constructivist view of identity is stated above in a particular manner (in a sociological understanding), constructivist theorizing on identity has been extremely diverse. This variance results from different constructivist approaches. Some scholars see the variation as twofold (Hopf, 1998), as 'conventional constructivists' and 'critical constructivists', while some others add to these a third category, 'interpretative constructivists' (Checkel, 2004). Also, there are scholars who make the distinction as 'modernists' and 'postmodernists' (Price and Reus-Smit, 1998). In addition to these, the literature is so rich that variances of constructivism include 'sociational constructivism' (Cederman and Daase, 2003), 'holistic constructivism'¹³ (Ruggie, 1993; Kosłowski and Kratochwil, 1994), 'systemic constructivism'¹⁴ (Wendt, 1999), and 'sociological constructivism' (Guzzini, 2000).¹⁵ In such a fragmented environment, it is only natural that different concepts of identity coexist. Constructivists sometimes employ 'identity' as constituting two opposing and distinct analytical categories. On one hand, identity is understood in terms of the category of analysis as in the essentialist belief. On the other hand, the concept refers to a category of the analysis as in the critical views. Consequently, the concept of identity becomes 'ambiguous' in constructivism.

There is a unity among constructivists in taking 'identity' as an indicator for the fact that 'action- individual or collective – may be governed by *particularistic self-understandings* rather than by *putatively universal self-interest*' (Brubaker and

¹³ For the term, *holistic constructivism*, see Price and Reus-Smit (1998).

¹⁴ For the term, *systemic constructivism*, see Price and Reus-Smit (1998) and Hopf (forthcoming).

¹⁵ For further characterizations of constructivism, see Adler (1997), Ruggie (1998), and Christiansen et al. (2001). Ruggie, for example, divides into three variants: 'Neo-classical constructivism', 'Postmodernist constructivism', and 'Naturalistic constructivism'.

Cooper, 2000: 6). As Brubaker and Cooper (2000: 7) note, all constructivists agree that social and political actions are strongly shaped by 'position in social space', i.e. identity. This view, however, implies quite different meanings for diverse constructivist approaches. For critical constructivists, for example, 'position in social space' means 'position in a multidimensional space' such as race, gender, ethnicity, religion, which are particularistic categorical attributes. For conventional constructivists, the 'position in social space' refers to a position in a universally conceived social structure (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000: 7). Therefore, critical constructivist scholars take 'identity' as a category of practice, while conventional constructivists regard it as a category of analysis. We can easily claim that critical constructivists tend to have a critical view of identity, while conventional constructivists have sympathy towards essentialist beliefs of identity. To illustrate, consider the following two examples:

Cederman and Daase (2003: 10) observe that conventional constructivists 'leave corporate identities untouched'. They argue that this is directly because of 'an underlying tendency to anthropomorphize collective actors' (2003: 10). Anthropomorphization, however, is basically related with essentialist belief. As a notable figure for conventional constructivism, for example, Alexander Wendt (1999: 21, 215-23) argues that *anthropomorphization* 'is not merely an analytical convenience', but essential to predicting and explaining behavior of the states, 'just as folk psychology is essential to explaining human behavior'.¹⁶ Wendt also puts (1994: 387) that national identities 'may be in part "primordial" and thus inherent in societies' self-conception as distinct groups'. From other writings of Wendt, one can

¹⁶ For a fruitful discussion on *anthropomorphization*, see the forum, 'States are people too?', in the recent issue of *Review of International Studies*, vol: 30, 2004, pp. 269-316.

reach the conclusion that he has not an essentialist view of identity.¹⁷ The expressions above, however, are remarkably related with the essentialist belief. As Neumann (1996: 165) notes, Wendt's strategy *implies that* he treats the self as a 'foundation'.¹⁸

The second example reveals the relation between critical constructivism and critical view of identity. In their convincing work, Price and Reus-Smit (1998) point out that the development of critical international theory in 1990s has been pursued mainly by 'constructivist' scholars. Some of these works are generally considered as 'critical constructivist' studies and employed the critical view of identity by articulating 'the politics of inclusion and exclusion in the modern world' (Price and Reus-Smit, 1998: 285).¹⁹

In addition to conventional and critical constructivist views of identity, there are some constructivists who embrace a sociological constructivist outlook of identity (see e.g. Koslowski and Kratochwil, 1994; McSweeney, 1999; Hopf, 2002). They mostly focus on the process of constant identity reproductions by using interpretative and institutional analysis. They insist on a non-positivist epistemology and emphasize the point that large-scale historical change cannot be explained in terms of several causal factors but it can be grasped through an analysis of conjectures (Guzzini, 2000). Therefore, these scholars pay special attention to temporal and spatial conditions in order to grasp the process. Changing nature of identities is understood in terms of their own contexts. As argued above, in the constructivist

¹⁷ Wendt explicitly rejects the essentialist beliefs in his recent book (1999). See pp. 221-23.

¹⁸ For this line of critique of Wendt, see Cederman and Daase (2003) and Zehfuss (2001: 333).

¹⁹ See examples of such works, Thomson (1994), Weber (1995), Biersteker and Weber (1996), Reus-Smit (1997).

theorizing in sociological sense, identities cannot be taken as either 'given' or 'fixed'. This view suggests that considering identity as a category of analysis is problematic for constructivism as well (McSweeney, 1999: 68-78).

2.4.2 The Core of the 'Identity' Debate among Constructivists

As discussed in the preceding sections, the conceptualizations of identity among constructivists differ fundamentally. Critical view of practical categories of identities is at odds straightforwardly with the conventional view of relatively stable identities. According to Hopf (1998: 182), conventional and critical constructivism share theoretical fundamentals in fact: belief in social construction, intersubjectivity, effects of norms and practices, mutual constitution of actor and structure, and reflexivity of the self and society, etc. They, however, strongly disagree on methodology and epistemology (Jepperson et al., 1996: 67). While scientific development is aimed in the conventional side, it is denied in the critical camp. Therefore, the problem in the 'identity' debate also starts here. Considering sociological constructivist view as well, we can claim that the 'given-ness issue', i.e. the question of whether taking identities as 'given' or not, lies at the core the debate.

For the sake of 'scientific' constructivism, conventional constructivists regard identities to be 'fixed' after a certain period of identity formation (see e.g. Wendt, 1999; Checkel, 2001). The 'fixed' identities are considered as the basis of interests and foreign policy behavior in conventional constructivist works (e.g. Jepperson, Wendt and Katzenstein, 1996). This 'freezing' and 'reifying' strategy in the study of 'identity', however, is mostly condemned in many sociological and critical

constructivist works (Checkel, 2004: 231).²⁰ For instance, Karawan (2002: 167-68) argues that identities are so *elastic* that 'they can actually account for most or all sorts of possible foreign policy outcomes'. As a result, identity may serve as a poor foreign policy predictor.

The 'fixity-fluidity' debate on 'identity' among constructivists produces considerable results. Saideman (2002: 188) argues that

The fluidity of identity is important because it determines the ability of politicians, as well as other factors, to influence identity, and how much identity serves as a constraint. If identity is very fluid, then politicians might be quite powerful, as they might be able to highlight certain identities or certain implications of a particular identity. On the other hand, if identities are fixed, then politicians and everyone else must react to the given. Ultimately, one's view on the fluidity of identity shapes one's stance on identity's impact on policy and on what influences identity. If identities are not completely fixed, we need to consider what influences the relative salience and meaning of each.

The critics also suggest that conventional constructivists produce 'an uneasy amalgam of constructivist language and essentialist argumentation' (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000: 6). They mistakenly mix a constructivist intersubjective theory of knowledge with an individualist theory of action (Guzzini, 2000: 159). This 'eclectic' and 'redundant' strategy to construct the 'minimal foundationalism'²¹, constructivism loses its insights and therefore its challenging power (Guzzini, 2000: 148).

²⁰ To see this tension clearly between the strategies and methods, one should consider the recent volumes of the scholarly journals comparably. Conventional constructivist works are dominant in *International Organization*, edited at Harvard, while sociological, interpretative and critical constructivist studies are mainly published in *Millennium* and *European Journal of International Relations*.

²¹ This term belongs to Hoffmann (1991: 170).

Examples of the condemned 'eclectic' strategy can be found in many conventional constructivist works (e.g. Finnemore, 1996; Katzenstein, 1996; Nau, 2002). In his constructivist works, for instance, Klotz (1995a, 1995b) argues that his constructivist approach is a base for strategic models of behavior; in other words, his approach should be considered as 'a set of prior' theoretical assumptions but not as an alternative.²² In the same vein, Adler and Haas (1992: 369) assert that their constructivist approach of 'epistemic communities' provides the 'pre-requisites for the rational choice theory'.

Similarly, according to Jepperson (1991: 193), the difference between realism and constructivism is based on a matter of degree in social construction. Realism provides a low construction, in which 'units may enter into social relations that influence their behavior' while 'the units themselves are socially pregiven'. Jepperson (1991:193) claim that constructivism offers 'high constructedness', in which 'the social objects under investigation are thought to be complex social products, reflecting context-specific rules and interactions'. Moreover, in his recent work, Barkin (2003) reformulates Jepperson's argumentations and claims the possibility to construct a 'realist constructivism'.

All these examples above reveal the degree of dissent among constructivists. As argued before, most critics of the conventional constructivists contend that attempting a bridge building between constructivism and rationalism is dangerous: 'it risks misrepresenting the social constitutive relationship between intersubjective beliefs, social *identities*, interests and behavior' (Price and Reus-Smit, 1998: 282-

²² Cited in Price and Reus-Smit (1998).

83).²³ Thus, the different ideas on *intersubjectivity* in constructivist sense block the common conceptualization of 'identity'. While conventionals (e.g. Wendt, 1999: Ch. 4) believe that 'common knowledge' as theorized in rational choice can provide enough level of intersubjectivity, critical approaches of constructivism reject this notion.²⁴ As a critical voice, Reus-Smit (1997) suggests that intersubjective values shape conditions of strategic and institutional rationality as well as state identity. Therefore, unlike conventional constructivists, sociological constructivists take 'identity' as a product of institutional facts that can be understood only through 'a social theory of knowledge with an intersubjective theory of meaningful action' instead of using 'an individualist theory' (Guzzini, 2000: 162). Sociological constructivists regard identities as field-specific values (Bourdieu, 1990; Guzzini, 2000). They pay a special attention to their historical and spatial conditions of construction and believe that constructivism is a theory of *process*. Hence, identities cannot be taken as 'fixed' or 'given' (Hopf, 1998: 196).²⁵

2.5 Implications

We see that there is no common notion of identity either among International Relations theorists or among constructivists. The term of identity does not possess the status of a common 'concept'. The term is used to defend directly opposed views too. It can refer *sameness* over time and *enduring* character of persons or to the *fragmented* quality the contemporary understanding of 'self'. Ironically, identity simultaneously refers to *durability* and *change* and it is concurrently caricaturized as

²³ Emphasis added.

²⁴ Wendt also raises the same argument in a special conversation. See Guzzini (2000: 176).

²⁵ This sociological belief is much related to Onuf's assertion that 'constructivism cannot be grounded'. See Onuf (1989).

intrinsic or *context-bound*. It is employed to defend an essential view of a ‘core’ or a ‘foundational selfhood’, while denying the same essentialist argument of the core by stressing on contingency and fluidity in social constructions. Thus, everybody uses ‘identity’ but they do it in their own terms. Then, one could legitimately ask: what is the benefit of using ‘identity’ as a concept? What is the use of employing it? Do we need ‘identity’? As it is seen, the problem lies behind the lack of usage of ‘identity’ as a *common* analytical concept. Every school of thought understands ‘identity’ as how they wish. This would lead us an unproductive ‘verbal disputes’ (Copi, 1961). Even if the all usages of identity are true and legitimate in their own contexts, the problem still remains. Again, the problem is that there is no ‘shared’ conceptualization of the term.

We realize the seriousness of the problem when we notice that even the same school of thought, constructivism, differs on the notion of identity (see figure 1). If, as the main employers of ‘identity’ in the field of International Relations, constructivists are not commonly agree on the concept, then who knows the meaning of ‘identity’ and what is the use of it?

Type	Identity as a category	Ontology	Epistemology	Level of analysis
Sociological Constructivism	Of Practice	Holist	Constitutive (Intersubjectivity)	Systemic and domestic
Systemic Constructivism	Of analysis	Individualist and holist	Causal and Constitutive	Systemic
Conventional Constructivism	Of analysis	Individualist and holist	Causal and Constitutive	Systemic and domestic
Critical Constructivism	Of Practice	Holist	Not concerned	Not concerned

Figure 1

When we think in terms of conventional constructivist understanding, identities provides strong incentives for interests and therefore for foreign policy behavior (Lynch, 2002). Also, undoubtedly, conventional constructivists believe that identity is a constructed object without intrinsic values. Here, a question arises: Can 'identity' *per se* be a cause for further collective action? The essentialists would say 'yes', while the true constructive answer is obviously 'no'. If identity is a 'constructed thing', not an 'essence', then 'identity' *per se* cannot be a real cause for the strategic behavior. The problem here is twofold. First, conventional constructivists reject the notion of 'essentialism' by advocating 'social construction', and second, they *implicitly* regard identities as 'given' entities and therefore sources of collective common action. The word 'implicitly' is important here. Because, in theory, conventional constructivists accept that identity cannot be the ultimate basis; instead, identities and interests are subjectively interrelated in a continuous process (Wendt, 1999: 224-33). Yet, as exemplified in previous sections, there are too many constructivist studies that 'reify' and 'freeze' identities and employ the concept as a basis for the collective strategic behavior (see e.g. Finnemore, 1996; Katzenstein, 1996; Checkel, 2001; Nau, 2002).

The actual problem in conventional constructivism is *not* that identity is studied in a positivist manner (by using causal mechanism) as some postmodern scholars argue (e.g. George, 1994: 15). Rather, the problem is that identity is *treated* as an intrinsic foundation for collective action. Identity can be employed as a category of analysis ('variable') but not as an ultimate 'essence' for further action. That would be purely an essentialist approach. If identity is used in this manner then it contradicts

conventional constructivist view itself. As noted earlier, the essentialist belief of identity is strongly denied in conventional constructivist view. Brubaker and Cooper (2000: 5-6) nicely put a very similar argument as following:

The mere use of a term as a category of practice, to be sure, does not disqualify it as a category of analysis. If it did, the vocabulary of social analysis would be a great deal poorer, and more artificial, than it is. What is problematic is not *that* a particular term is used, but *how* it is used. The problem, as Loïc Wacquant has argued with respect to “race,” lies in the “uncontrolled conflation of social and sociological... (or) folk and analytic understandings.”²⁶ The problem is that “nation,” “race,” and “identity” are used analytically a good deal of the time more or less as they are used in practice, in an implicitly or explicitly reifying manner, in a manner that implies or asserts that “nations,” “races,” and “identities” “exist” and that people “have” a “nationality,” a “race,” an “identity”.²⁷

Similarly, the problem in critical constructivism is *not* that they are wrong to put ‘identity’ too fluid. The problem is that use of identity for defending ‘fluctuating’ and ‘fragmented’ characteristics is unnecessary and provides no great help for our analytical conceptualization (even if the conceptualization is made for the sake of showing power/knowledge relationships or *de-construction* of certain interests). Take the following example.

In his critical constructivist work on US ‘identity’, Campbell (1992) argues that American foreign and security policy is manipulated by a sense of group solidarity through constructions of common enemy images and external threats. Thus, he accepts that a coherent ‘identity’ is an impulse for the security strategy or a collective action. Yet, McSweeney (1999) finds the term of ‘identity’ useless because ‘if we think in terms of societal solidarity instead of “identity”, this conclusion seems

²⁶ Wacquant (1997: 222). In complete form, Wacquant notes: “continual barter between folk and . . . analytical notions, the uncontrolled conflation of social and sociological understandings of ‘race’” is “intrinsic to the category. From its inception, the collective fiction labeled ‘race’ . . . has always mixed science with common sense and traded on the complicity between them” (1997: 222-23). Quoted in Brubaker and Cooper (2000: 39).

²⁷ Emphases in the original.

somewhat commonplace, and it immediately evokes other variables conventionally associated with the solidarity argument and other domestic determinants of enemy images'. The following sentences after this assertion in the work are worth quoting here:

Since there is no reason to suppose that 'identity' does more work in Campbell's study than 'solidarity', there is no reason to exclude the obvious factor of domestic *interests* from playing a causal role in the generation of American solidarity or identity. Foremost among such interests, one must include the complex of military and defence-industrial pressures in relation to the perception of external threat and the demands for increased military expenditure and weaponry to meet it. Studies of the relation between industrial interests and threat perception in the United States, together with Campbell's account of the relation between threat perception and identity formation, leave little doubt- *pace* Wendt as well as Campbell – that interests play a mutually constitutive role with identity (McSweeney, 1999: 130).²⁸

There are other works that share McSweeney's argument that an 'identity' concept *per se* providing no great help. Busekist (2004: 84), for instance, asserts that the term of identity in the usage critical literature 'expresses only imperfectly the extremely diverse modes of political action that are expressed in contemporary conflicts' and 'it says nothing about the properly political legitimacy of these conflicts'. Similarly, Brubaker and Cooper (2000: 34-35) believe that critical strategy of 'qualifying the noun with strings of adjectives- specifying that identity is multiple, fluid, constantly re-negotiated, and so on –' constitutes another problem: 'it points away from a range of possibilities for political action other than those rooted in putatively shared identity'. They persuasively contend for the escaping analytical ambiguity:

People everywhere and always have particular ties, self-understandings, stories, trajectories, histories, predicaments. And these inform the sorts of claims they make. To subsume such pervasive particularity under the flat, undifferentiated rubric of 'identity,' however, does nearly as much violence to its unruly and multifarious forms as would an attempt to subsume it under 'universalist' categories such as, 'interest.' (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000: 34)

²⁸ Emphases in the original.

Therefore, the critical constructivist strategy is not clear: ‘why what is routinely characterized as *multiple, fragmented, and fluid* should be conceptualized’ as ‘identity’, a word that is ‘semantically inseparable from the idea of permanence’ (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000: 6, 9)?²⁹

To sum up, the works of the different constructivist literatures suffer from the same difficulty. We are not concerned with the validity of their particular claims but with the problem generating an analytical obscurity.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter argues that the notion of ‘identity’ in IR theory, and specifically in the constructivist school of thought, does not provide a shared conceptualization. Identity does not refer to the same categories. It is an ambiguous term. Jens Bartelson (1998: 321) perfectly captures this paradoxical problem of ‘identity’ in the field: ‘it is this concept that signifies something given according to the adherents of givenness, something constructed and therefore reconstructible according to constructivists, something contingent therefore deconstructible according to proponents of contingency’. The ambiguity in the study of ‘identity’ leads us to question the productivity of the concept. There is a need for a reformulation of ‘identity’ in analytical terms.

²⁹ Emphases added. Here, Brubaker and Cooper quote from Alberto Melucci who puts that: ‘the word *identity* ... is semantically inseparable from the idea of permanence and is perhaps, for this very reason, ill-suited to the processual analysis for which I am arguing’. See Melucci (1995).

The next chapter asks for the feasibility to develop a common analytical concept of 'identity' in the conventional constructivist literature. Conventional constructivism seems to produce a 'new orthodoxy' in the field and employs frequently the concept of identity. Do conventional constructivists construct a common notion of 'identity'?



CHAPTER III

‘IDENTITY’ PROBLEMATIQUE IN THE ‘MIDDLE GROUND’ CONSTRUCTIVISM

3.1 Introduction

An increasing number of works presents ‘conventional constructivism’ as the ‘middle ground constructivism’ in the IR literature (see Adler, 1997; Wendt, 1999, 2000). The underlying claim is that conventional constructivism constructs a ‘via media’ between the rationalist theories and the postmodern approaches (Wendt, 2000). Thus, it is ‘scientific’ enough to compete with rationalism and ‘reflexive’ enough to challenge postmodernism (Adler, 1997: 331).

The concept of identity is mostly employed by conventional constructivists in the IR literature. ‘Identity’ (with the concept of ‘interest’) is used for indicating explanatory power of the ‘constructivist theory’ of international politics (see e.g. Wendt, 1992, 1995; Jepperson et al., 1996). Many scholars claim that the concept of ‘identity’ lies at the core of the conventional constructivist approach (Hopf, 1998; Zehfuss, 2002).

In this chapter, I will ask the following questions.

1. Can the concept of identity be commonly understood as the same value among conventional constructivists? In other words, do they produce an *unambiguous* concept?
2. Are they successful in conceptualizing identity unproblematically? In other words, do they produce a *clear* (not 'vague') notion?

Ambiguity and vagueness are analytically different values.¹ Chapter II proposes that both IR theorists among themselves and constructivists among themselves do not refer to the same value when they refer to 'identity'. Thus, the concept is ambiguous. This chapter claims that conventional constructivists are successful in producing a common notion of identity among them; however, they fail to assert 'identity' as a *clear* concept. Conventional constructivists refer to the same category, i.e. a category of analysis, in their usage of the term, but they differ in their understanding of the term. Identity is not an *ambiguous* term in conventional constructivism but it is a *vague* concept. There are two reasons for this conceptual obscurity in conventional constructivism. First, identity is only understood in a 'structural' sense, and second, conventional constructivists take 'identity' in terms of a discursive process without ever explaining this process.

3.2 Constructing a Common Notion of 'Identity'

¹ For the difference in detail, see Chapter I.

The incentive to construct of a common conceptualization of 'identity' is much related with the emergence of 'constructivism' as an IR theory. Although 'constructivism' had been introduced to the field by Onuf's work in 1989, it has become widely known by Wendt's influential piece, 'Anarchy is What States Make of It', in 1992. After this work, those scholars who want to conduct their studies in terms of 'constructivist' manner have pursued Wendt's approach mainly and then this 'orthodoxy' called as 'conventional constructivism' in the field (Weaver, 1997: 4). In his work, Wendt (1992) located his approach by beginning with a criticism of the neorealist strategy of taking 'identities' (and 'interests' as well) as 'given'.² He brings in the liberal view of 'complex learning' and the possibility of changes in 'identities' (and interests) (1992: 393). Unlike the 'mainstream', he claims that his theoretical power comes from taking identities (and interests) as 'internal' to international politics rather than 'external' and 'prior' to the process of action. Wendt reaches to the conclusion that differentiation in identities creates a different kind of anarchy types in international politics.

Thus, conventional constructivism emerged as a challenge by claiming to show that change in identities and identity differentiations *matter* in international politics. This point is important to understand the place of identity in conventional constructivist works. Conventional constructivists put that identity differences take place through changing perceptions, motivations, attitudes, roles, and even behaviors.³ The increasing number of conventional constructivist studies contends that a shared 'identity' can be tied to conflict or cooperation (see e.g. Barnett, 1998; Lynch, 1999;

² In this work, Wendt puts the neorealism and neoliberal approaches in the same vein, calling them 'rationalist theories' of the 'mainstream'. See Wendt (1992: 397).

³ For example, Ted Hopf (1998: 193) claims that one should expect 'different patterns of behavior across groups of states with different identities and interests'. For similar arguments see Katzenstein (1996), Lapid and Kratochwil (1996), Telhami and Barnett (2002).

Kaye, 2001). These works claim that ‘identity’ changes produce ‘interest’ changes and changes in the foreign behavior at the end (Banchoff, 1999: 262; Jepperson, Wendt, and Katzenstein, 1996: 53; see figure 2 below).

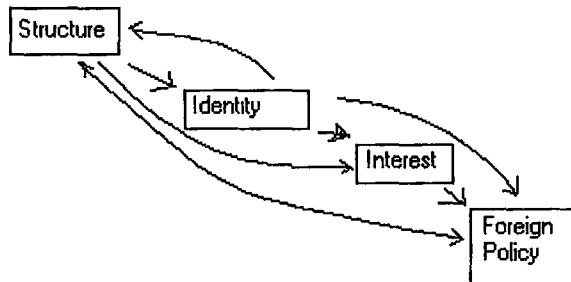


Figure 2

Therefore, the concept of identity is employed in conventional constructivist literature as an urgent concept to challenge ‘mainstream theories’ of International Relations, especially neorealism. Constructivism is distinguished from other theories by its dependence upon the concept of identity (Zehfuss, 2001: 38). In words of Koslowski and Kratochwil (1994: 224), ‘what is important’ is to pin down changing ‘practices arising from new conceptualizations of identity’.

In brief, conventional constructivists use identity in very similar ways. They refer to the same category: the category of analysis, instead of the category of practice. Also, they mostly refer to *state identity*, rather than gender, class, or race identities, in their works.⁵ Therefore, there is not a problem of ambiguity among conventional constructivists. When someone uses ‘identity’, others can understand that ‘identity’

⁴ Cited in Jepperson, Ronald L., Alexander Wendt and Peter J. Katzenstein (1996: 53).

⁵ For example, Ted Hopf notes that there is not any author who assesses gender, class, or race in his analyses in the Peter Katzenstein’s conventional constructivist volume. Hopf puts that this observation underlines ‘how conventional constructivists already bound their a priori theoretical domains according to empirical interest and theoretical priors’. See Hopf (1998: 197).

refers to 'national identities' that produce 'national interests'. Hence, identities are not fluid, multiple, or fluctuating as in critical constructivism.

3.3 The Problem of Vagueness

The lack of ambiguity does not mean that conventional constructivists all grasp the meaning of 'identity' at the same level. This is another problem: the problem of vagueness or obscurity. Since the term of identity is contemplated in an indistinct or an imprecise manner in conventional constructivist studies, the concept is understood differently.

Conventional constructivists leave 'identity' unspecified. Although they are common at referring 'state identity' or 'national identity', their accounts differ remarkably. The problem can be seen by comparing the usages of 'identity' in two recent constructivist works. In his book, *At Home Abroad: Identity and Power in American Foreign Policy*, Henry Nau (2002) takes national identity so strongly related to domestic politics that any change in national political institutions would lead to change in 'national identity' (pp. 222-3, 237, 240). On the other hand, Wendt's recent book (1999), *Social Theory of International Politics*, regards 'national identities' as relatively 'reified' agents in the international system; therefore, any changes in national identities can be assessed by looking at the interactions between the agents only (without a need for considering domestic determinants).⁶ Therefore, the two works differ in their understanding of 'identity' change.

⁶ See chapter 5 and 6 of the book (1999).

In fact, the conceptual obscurity of 'identity' in conventional constructivist works is based upon the different usages of 'corporate' identities. The following lines provide an analysis of the conceptualization of 'corporate identity' in conventional constructivism. Unavoidably, the obscurity in the concept of 'corporate identity' leads to an obscurity in the term of 'identity'.

3.4 'Corporate Identity' Problematique

As a leading figure among conventional constructivists, Wendt (1994) offers four types of identity: corporate, role, type, and collective. According to Wendt (1994: 385), 'corporate identity' (or personal identity) refers to 'intrinsic, self-organizing qualities that constitute actor individuality', while other identities refer to 'social identities', which are 'sets of meanings that an actor attributes to itself while taking the perspective of others'. The debate around 'corporate identity' and 'social identities', however, constitutes an obscurity on the notion of identity in conventional constructivist literature. To see this dimness, one should pay a closer attention to Wendt's analysis.

Wendt's social theory assumes that states are the primary actors in world politics. Even if they are unobservable, they are 'self-organized' and 'real' entities (Wendt, 1999: chapter 5). They also have a 'corporate' identity as a sovereign actor, and therefore, they possess certain essential needs: needs for survival, autonomy, economic well-being and collective self-esteem (Wendt, 1999: 234-36). He asserts that corporate identities 'are constituted by the self-organizing, homeostatic structures that make actors distinct entities' and states are 'actors with certain

essential properties concerns this kind of identity' (1999: 224-25). Wendt believes that the effects of interaction in the system (on the interests and identities of states) can only be seen by recognizing this notion of the state, as a 'pre-social' actor with basic needs. Therefore, the state has a tendency to be egoistic in its relations with others and 'the pull of egoism is likely to be even stronger for states' (Wendt, 1999: 306).

Wendt's referred claim above has been criticized by many conventional and critical constructivists for bringing back in *anthropomorphization* of states in the essentialist belief.⁷ However, Wendt advocates that his claim does not mean that these egoistic identities will always be dominant and that states would never learn to cooperate or to embrace other-regarding behavior. Drawing from symbolic interactionism, Wendt asserts that the process, i.e. *interaction with other states*, can lead actors to redefine themselves.⁸ Then, can we see any change in corporate identities? There is no answer for this question in his analysis. Wendt is obscure on whether these interactions would change 'social identities' only or they would change 'corporate identities' together with social identities. He explains the difference between corporate identities and social identities in chapter 5. Yet, he explains this interaction process in chapter 7, which is titled 'Process and Structural Change', without referring back the debate around 'corporate' and 'role' identities. The title and the including discussions of chapter 7 strongly imply that he refers to *interstate* interactions when

⁷ Wendt explicitly rejects the essentialist beliefs in his book (1999). See pp. 221-23. For further discussions and critiques, see the forum on Wendt's book, *Social Theory of International Politics*, in *Review of International Studies* 26 pp. 131-153 (2000) and the forum on 'States are People too?' in *Review of International Studies* 30 pp. 259-280 (2004). Among these works, see especially, Doty (2000: 138), Kratochwil (2000: 82), Smith (2000: 161). Also, see Palan (2000: 591) and Suganami (2002: 28).

⁸ Wendt's model of interaction is inspired by 'self'- 'other' interactions in 'identification' theories. For self/other interactions, see Mead (1934), Erikson (1968), Habermas (1979), and Turner, et al. (1987).

he talks about the interactions of ego (self) and alter (other).⁹ Also, in this chapter, Wendt primarily discusses the incentives for 'collective identity' formation and clearly refers to 'international system' and 'interactions among states'.¹⁰ Elsewhere, Wendt argues that corporate identities 'provide motivational energy for engaging in action at all and, to that extent, are prior to interaction' (1994: 385). There is almost no doubt that Wendt develops his interactionist analysis to refer interactions between states.

Drawing from Mead's 'I' and 'me' distinction in symbolic interactionism, Wendt distinguishes between the 'corporate' and 'social' identities of the states (Wendt, 1999: 224-230).¹¹ Afterwards, he systematically skips over 'corporate identity' by focusing on the interactions among states in order to assess identity change.¹² Wendt's logic here is evolutionary¹³: pre-social identity (corporate) is used to refer to 'a site or platform for other identities' (1999: 225) which is exogenous to social interactions, and when corporate identities draw into social interaction, then there is

⁹ In the process of interaction, Wendt presupposes that two states designated as 'Ego' and 'Alter', take on certain roles and cast the other in corresponding counter-roles. Depending on the type of behavior exposed, this role-taking and alter-casting paves the way for one of the two results: a reproduction of initially egoistic conceptions of self and other, or a transformation of the shared ideational structure to one that is more collective and other-regarding. According to this model, even if an egoistic picture of international politics continues, this does not prove the rationalist theories; it is only because of the interactive practices that sustain those conceptions of self-regarding behavior (1999: 304-5). For details, see chapter 6 and 7 in the book.

¹⁰ We should add that Wendt mentions that there is a close relationship between 'collective identity' (as a 'social identity') and 'self-other interactions' in the chapter 5 as well.

¹¹ For a critique of Wendt's special usage of Mead's distinction, see Palan (2000: 591-93).

¹² Wendt puts (1994: 388) that: 'I shall limit my focus to factors at the systemic level, even though domestic factors may matter, as well'.

¹³ Wendt uses the term of 'evolution of collective identities' and employs 'cultural selection' rather than 'natural selection'. See (1999: 341). For similar claims on Wendt and evolutionary logic, see Neumann (2004).

no need to talk about them.¹⁴ Wendt (with Fearon, 2002: 63) asserts this strategy in the following lines:

Like rationalists, modern constructivists have been largely content to take as 'exogenously given' that they were dealing with some kind of actor, be it a state, transnational social movement, international organization or whatever. As such, the constructivist concern with identity-formation has typically focused on the construction of variation within a given actor class (type or role identities), rather than explaining how organizational actors come into being in the first place (corporate identities).

Similarly, in another piece, Wendt (1994: 385) justifies his neglect of corporate identities of states by putting that 'a theory of the states system needs no more explain the existence of states than one of society need explain that of people'.

By these claims, Wendt suggests that corporate identities are related to 'identity formation' in the first place or at the beginning; while social identities are related with 'identity re-construction' or 'construction of variation'. Therefore, he recognizes an analytical division between 'identity formation' and 'identity re-construction or re-production' at first. Then, he claims that he intentionally ignores 'identity formation', because he remains at 'system level'. Wendt's analysis suffers from three obscurities:

Vagueness 1: *When corporate identities 'given'?*

Wendt suggests that corporate identities have 'selfish patterns' and also it constitutes a platform for other social identities. Is there any possibility to see a change in

¹⁴ Wendt's evolutionary logic is explicit in his expression of 'first encounter' in social interactions between ego-alter. He puts that actors signals each other with selfish stimulus at 'the first encounter'. See 1999: chapter 7.

‘corporate identities’? The answer should be ‘yes’ in order to see ‘identity change’ in Wendtian terms (from Hobbesian to Lockean, and from Lockean to Kantian); because, as noted above, corporate identity is the platform for other social identities as well. If the answer is yes, the question arises: how does ‘corporate identity’ change while it is ‘prior to interaction’?

Obviously, Wendt takes first ‘corporate identities’ and then ignore them totally for the sake of ‘systemic’ theorizing. Corporate identities are considered in the process of ‘identity construction’ (evolved in domestic scene) and then, when ‘their reproduction is *relatively unproblematic*’ they can be taken as ‘given’ (Wendt, 1999: 340).¹⁵ Yet, this evolutionary logic generates further problems: if we ignore corporate identities, *when* we should take them as ‘given’ in our research? How do we know *a priori* when identities have a *relatively unproblematic* nature? The word, *relatively*, make the approach even more obscure here.¹⁶ If everyone interprets in his/her own sense, how can conventional constructivists produce a common understanding of ‘identity’? Checkel (1998: 346) aptly put forward a very similar question: ‘empirically, how one know *a priori* when a state is likely to be in a period of identity formation, where constructivism is appropriate, as opposed to a time when identities and interests are already fixed’?

Accordingly, there is a danger that conventional constructivists use ‘corporate identities’ for a certain time period and then, whenever they see a ‘relatively unproblematic’ nature, they omit them in their researches. Since there is no certain

¹⁵ Emphasis added. Wendt is aware of his methodological choice is not innocent for a constructivist: thinking of ‘process’. Therefore, he puts that this methodological choice ‘should not become a tacit ontology’ because ‘identities are always in process, always contested, always an accomplishment of practice’ (1999: 340).

¹⁶ For a critique of Wendt’s term, ‘relatively stable’, see Zehfuss (2001: 326).

criterion, they can employ the variable of 'corporate identity' very differently from each other. This constitutes a serious vagueness of the concept.

Moreover, this 'evolutionary' logic leads conventional constructivists to employ further 'eclectic' strategies. They believe that constructivism might be better at explaining 'identity formation', but later, when identities and interests become stable, rationalism can be the right method (Kowert and Legro, 1996: 490-91; Jepperson, Wendt and Katzenstein, 1996: 70). This was formulated in Wendt's (1999: 367) own words as 'rationalism for today and tomorrow, constructivism for the *longue durée*'. Yet, such a position produces vagueness at further levels (Checkel, 1998: 346): *When* do we employ rationalism? *When* do we use constructivism? Who decide these strategies? If everyone decides in his/her own sense, how do conventional constructivists communicate with each other?

Vagueness 2: 'Identity Construction' or 'Identity Reproduction'?

To take 'corporate identity' only in the process of 'identity construction' implies that identity construction in domestic levels is exogenous from systemic effects; because, corporate identities are immune from 'social interactions'. Similarly, Wendt's strategy of asserting 'inter-state interactions' in order to assess 'identity re-production' implies that identity re-production is exogenous from state-society interactions. Both strategies are severely problematic for a constructivist theory (McSweeney, 1999: 128; Hopf, forthcoming). Yet, Wendt employs these strategies for the sake of methodology. Therefore, Wendt's methodological choice of 'systemic' account makes harder to understand 'identity' (as a category of analysis)

in both cases. 'Identity construction' and 'identity re-production' are then left obscure. Wendt also draws inside/outside boundary: there is a construction of identities for a certain time inside without any outside effects; and there is a reproduction of identities at the system level without domestic effects. This strategy of 'freezing of corporate identities', as Pasic (1996: 89) rightly argues, introduces us with 'the imagination of static actors and the stubborn maintenance of tenuous boundaries (state/society, domestic/international) set by the field of international relations'.

Hopf (forthcoming) criticizes Wendt's strategy as the following:

*'(S)ystemic constructivism is incomplete, because a state's identities are generated not only through interaction with other states, but through interaction with its own society. To return to the interwar example. Britain and France found the Soviet Union's weaker power more threatening, a social constructivist would hypothesize, because British and French understandings of themselves as bourgeois liberal capitalist democratic states made the communist Soviet Union's power more dangerous to that self-understanding than the bourgeois, illiberal, state capitalist fascist Germany.'*¹⁷

Similarly, McSweeney (1999: 128) notes that 'it is not only the process of *state interaction with other states*' in the international politics which provides a social learning for identity change; but also 'the domestic process of *state interaction with sub-state actors* which influences sense of commonality brought to bear upon international relations'.¹⁸

As a result, conventional constructivist methodological choice raises several questions: How can we be sure that 'identity construction' has not evolved with

¹⁷ Emphases added.

¹⁸ Emphases in the original. For a similar argumentation see Zehfuss (2001: 335).

‘identity re-production’? Who draws the boundaries here? How can we be sure that what we call ‘identity construction’ is really ‘identity construction’ at domestic level, what we call ‘identity re-production’ is really ‘identity re-production’ at systemic level? These problems constitute divergent approaches in understanding ‘identity’ in conventional constructivism; because, we cannot know *a priori* whether domestic or international structures will be more significant (Koslowski and Kratochwil, 1994: 217).

If, for example, there is ‘subsystem dominance’, then *social interactions* of states are ‘derived primarily by exogenously given domestic rather than systemic factors’ (Krasner, 2000: 131). We cannot, therefore, be sure whether we see ‘identity change’ or ‘identity re-production’. Another example can be inferred from the modernizing world where domestic and international issues cannot be separated from each other. In fact, international and domestic issues became ‘inextricably intertwined’ as in early modern Europe (Ayoob, 2002: 44; see also Korany et al. 1993; Ayoob, 1995). Thus, in modernizing world, the relationship between ‘corporate identity’ of states and their ‘social identities’ (role, type, or collective), in other words, the difference between ‘I’ and ‘me’, is peculiar. The issue has a dynamic dimension in these states: sometimes these identities cannot be separated because they are intertwined concepts.¹⁹

Vagueness 3: How to formulate ‘discourse’ effects on ‘identity’?

¹⁹ Cederman and Daase (2003: 25) puts this problem as the following: ‘In situations characterized by drastic boundary transformations’, ‘it makes little sense to talk about the “domestic” and “international” realms’. For a fruitful discussion, see also Telhami & Barnett (2002).

The third problem is related with the understanding of 'social interaction' process among conventional constructivists. In the process of 'identity construction' or 'identity re-production', discursive effects are presented as crucially important. The effect of discourse, however, is left unexamined and obscure. Consequently, the 'identity' conceptualization is again harmed. If everybody employs 'discourse' in his/her own sense, how do we reach a common sense of 'collective identity' in constructivism?

Wendt argues that social interactions between states affect the 'social identities'. Wendt formulates this as the 'collective identity formation' (1994; 1999, chapter 7). However, as noted earlier, Wendt's strategy leaves unexplained when 'identity construction' ends and when the 'identity re-production' starts. He asserts that when identities are 'relatively stable', they can be considered as 'given' (1999: 21, 340). He continues to warn us: '...we should not forget that what we take to be given is in fact a *process* that has simply been sufficiently stabilized by internal and external structures that it *appears* given' (1999: 340).²⁰

Wendt's concern here is very important for a constructivist theory in general terms. Without regarding processual effects, changing dimensions of 'identity' cannot be examined. The most important element in the process is 'language' and 'discursive practice' (Onuf, 1989).²¹ This claim is accepted by not only critical or sociological constructivists but also conventional constructivists. Wendt recognizes the importance of 'rhetorical practice' (1996: 57) and 'verbal communication' (1999:

²⁰ Emphases in the original.

²¹ The role of language in formation of identities is especially emphasized by critical constructivists. See George and Campbell (1990), Peterson (1992), Campbell (1992), Tickner (1992), Sylvester (1994), Weldes (1996).

346f) and makes a remarkable emphasis on 'discursive effects' in order to construct a 'collective identity' (see chapter 7). Wendt (1999: 343) proposes four master variables for collective identity formation: interdependence, common fate, homogeneity, and self-restraint. He argues that the first three (interdependence, common fate, and homogeneity) are efficient causes of collective identity, while the last one (self-restraint) is permissive cause. What is important to note here is that all three efficient causes are strongly dependent on 'discursive practices'. The functional helps of interdependence, common fate, and homogeneity cannot be grasped without considering the dimension of 'discourse'.²²

Yet, Wendt does not provide an analysis of 'discourse'. His analysis insists on the relationship between 'identity' and 'discourse' but fails to assess the connection. Wendt's inspirations from symbolic interactionism should necessitate a more concrete analysis on 'discursive impact' on 'identity'. As Busekist (2004: 83) points out, in sociological literature, *symbolic interactionism* and *constructivism* analyze the construction of identity 'to a large part brought about by language'.

Zehfuss (2002: 48) points out that, however, *symbolic interactionism* of Wendt turns around physical gestures only. In works of Mead, a leading symbolic interactionist,

²² For *common fate*, for example, Wendt (1999: 352) writes: 'Nevertheless, given the significant hurdles that common fate poses for behavioral approaches to cooperation it is fortunate that human beings rarely communicate through non-verbal behavior alone'. He adds that '(T)he difficulty is manifest in the animal kingdom, where common fate is often not sufficient to induce cooperation. If this barrier can be surmounted, however, then non-verbal cooperative behavior, repeated over and over again, will undermine egoistic identities and internalize the cooperative relationship in collective identities' (1999: 352). Similarly, for *interdependence* Wendt (1999: 346) calls to dismiss 'non-verbal communication' because in 'the real world most human communication takes place discursively'. He continues: 'Unlike pigeons human beings can grasp interdependence symbolically, and on that basis engage in "ideological labor" – talk, discussion, education, myth-making, and so on – to create a shared representation of the interdependence and the "we" that it constitutes, before anyone has made any behavioral decisions at all'. The same things are true for *homogeneity*, which is even cannot 'exist' without 'discursive practices' to construct 'imagined communities' (1999: 355).

language plays an important role in symbolic interactions (Denzin, 1988). Ironically, in Wendtian *social interaction*, actors cannot speak; they only signal each other. When we consider the fact that the actors are about their 'first encounter', *state of nature*, in Wendt's narrative (1999: 328), it is obvious that the actors, ego and alter, do not share a language such as 'aliens landing on earth'. This type of social communication, however, is really problematic for Wendt's stress on 'verbal communication' in constructing 'collective identity'.²³ Without a linguistic context, how does social learning take place? Do physical gestures provide the necessary conditions as Wendt suggest for social learning such as 'internalization of norms', or 'identification with others'? As Jonathan Mercer (1995: 249) nicely captures,

Although 'identification with others' is 'necessary for collective security,' taking the other's perspective requires the extended knowledge of the other. *Perspective taking between strangers is likely to be little more than ethnocentric projection.* With the hope of empathy dashed, the prospects for other-help are dim.²⁴

3.4 Implications

Obscurity on 'identity' leads to divergent meanings of 'identity' among conventional constructivists. The previous section focused around Wendt's conceptualization only; however, the problems in Wendtian analysis are significant for several reasons.

First, Wendt is followed by many conventional constructivists as a leading figure in the field. Therefore, the problems are almost common. Cederman and Daase (2003: 10) observe that the overwhelming majority of constructivists 'leave corporate

²³ Palan finds out similar problems in Wendt's special understanding of 'symbolic interactionism'. See Palan (2000: 591). Also, for Wendt's advocacy of 'verbal communication' with great enthusiasm, see Footnote 22 above.

²⁴ Emphasis added.

identities untouched' because of 'structural' methodology. Therefore, the obscurity on the differentiation of 'corporate identity' and 'social identity' is common. As Hopf (1998: 181) puts, the reason is 'structuralism' in conventional constructivism:

...neorealism and constructivism *share fundamental concerns with the role of structure in world politics*, the effects of anarchy on state behavior, the definition of state interests, the nature of power, and the prospects for change. They disagree fundamentally, however, on each concern. Contra neorealism, constructivism assumes that actors and structures mutually constitute each other; anarchy must be interpreted to have meaning; state interests are part of the process of identity construction; power is both material and discursive; and change in world politics is both possible and difficult.²⁵

Second, like Wendt, almost all conventional constructivists agree on a methodology that seeks 'minimal foundationalism', which provide a 'contingent universalism' and 'a set of conditions under which one can expect to see one identity or another' (Hoffman, 1991: 170; cited in Hopf, 1998: 183). In fact, this form of 'abstract pragmatism' runs through much of conventional constructivist studies (Palan, 2000: 588). Therefore, Wendtian problems on 'process' such as vague relationship between discourse – identity and vague formulations on 'identity construction' and 'identity re-production' are common puzzles for conventional constructivists. Checkel (1998: 342) captures that the obscurity on 'process' can be observed frequently in conventional constructivist literature:

It is ironic that constructivists therefore find themselves in a predicament all too familiar to rational choice scholars: *their ontology has led them to neglect key issues*. The agent-centered approach of rational choice provides a clear perspective on the microfoundations of human behavior, but *much less clarity on how this connects with*

²⁵ Emphasis added. Also, Wendt defines (1994: 385) constructivism as a *structural* theory of the international system. However, he frequently confesses that the domestic processes are typically *far more dense* than international ones (Wendt, 1999: 2, 13, 21, 27, 28, 107, 108).

the broader institutional and social context. The dilemma then is how to get from microfoundations to outcomes.²⁶

Third, Wendt's obscure 'identity' conceptualization shows how the concept of identity is left open to divergent interpretations and how conventional constructivists can evaluate the concept very differently from each other. As argued before, the problem is not 'ambiguity' but 'obscurity'.

The irony here is that constructivists are recognized as defenders of *the power of 'meaning'* in the field of International Relations.²⁷ If they cannot even communicate each other on the meaning of a crucially important concept for them, 'identity', how can we see the power of 'meaning'?

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter argued that conventional constructivists have been successful in producing a shared notion of 'identity' but they have failed to provide a *commonly understood meaning* of the concept. The vagueness of the concept obstructs to grasp the meaning of 'identity'. At the end, communication on the topic is difficult among conventional constructivists as well.

²⁶ Emphases added.

²⁷ Constructivism in its essence has a remarkable emphasis on discursive space and the 'linguistic turn' is one of the important promises of constructivism (Onuf, 1989). As Guzzini (2000: 159) notes, constructivism opposes that 'phenomena can constitute themselves as objects of knowledge independently of discursive practices'. There is no *language-independent* observation: 'what counts as a socially meaningful object or event is *always* the result of an *interpretive construction* of the world out there' (Guzzini, 2000: 159).²⁷

The next chapter concerns with the implications of 'identity problematique' for the International Relations discipline and seeks to possible solutions for the problem by presenting 'identification theory' together with an illustration of Turkish case of identity change.



CHAPTER IV

‘IDENTIFICATION THEORY’: TOWARDS ALTERNATIVE PARADIGMS

4.1 Introduction

In the preceding chapters, we saw that the lack of common identity conceptualization in International Relations theory makes the usage of the concept redundant. The two problems are presented. First, the concept of ‘identity’ is *ambiguous* among IR theorists and specifically among constructivists. Second, the concept remains *vague* among conventional constructivists. What are the implications of these problems? Can we achieve to solve the problems by presenting a new alternative conceptualization? This chapter asks these questions and proposes ‘identification theory’ as the solution to the problematique. The chapter ends with an illustration of Turkish identity change.

4.2 Intellectual Implications

The concept of identity does not provide a great help in theorizing International Relations unless it is unambiguous and clear. This work is not concerned with the relevance of particular claims on 'identity'. Conventional constructivists differ from sociological constructivists as well as essentialists can differ from criticals on the 'identity' notion. Yet, the problem is about the best conceptualization of the term. If IR theorists lack intellectual communication on 'identity', how would their research contribute to the field?

Brubaker and Cooper (2000: 8) ask whether we need 'identity' as a 'heavily burdened, deeply ambiguous term'. Should we give up 'identity' at all? Certainly, we should not. According to them, we should save 'identity' from its 'confusing' and 'contradictory connotations' by providing alternative terms. However, they assert that 'it would be fruitless to look for a *single* substitute' because such a term 'would be as overburdened as "identity"' (2000: 14). Hence, they offer three groups of terms in their work: first, *identification and categorization*; second, *self-understanding and social location*; and third, *commonality, connectedness, groupness*.

This work focuses on 'identification', which is a 'processual' and 'active' term, derived from a verb. The aim here is not to substitute 'identity' with a single term; instead, to figure out possible alternative conceptualizations and paradigms in studying 'identity'.

4.3 'Identification theory': Alternative Conceptualizations

Identification theory is a psychological theory that provides psychological reasons for integration and mobilization. Identification theory holds that:

In order to achieve psychological security, every individual possesses an inherent drive to internalize – to identify with – the behavior, mores and attitudes of significant figures in her/his social environment; i.e. people actively seek identity. Moreover, every human being has an inherent drive to enhance and to protect the identifications he or she has made; i.e. people actively seek to enhance and protect identity (Bloom, 1990: 23).

According to Bloom (1990: 23), identification theory suggests that '*given the same environmental circumstances* there will be a tendency for a group of individuals to make the same identification, to internalize the same identity'.¹ Bloom continues with arguing that '*given the same environmental circumstances*, there will also be a tendency for a group of individuals to act together to protect and to enhance their shared identity' (1990: 23). Subsequently, he claims that '*mass mobilization is possible when the individuals in the mass share the same identification*' (1990: 51).²

There are two significant implications of identification theory: first, 'to evoke a common identification'; and second, 'to possess a monopoly of power in terms of manipulating the symbols of that identity' (Bloom, 1990: 51). Therefore, identification theory makes us to re-think 'identity' in terms of 'identifiers'. Also, *identification theory per se* does not force us to have an essentialist view of identity or critical view of identity: it calls for 'contextualizing of identity'. Brubaker and

¹ Emphasis in the original.

² Emphasis in the original.

Cooper (2000: 14) note that identification ‘invites us to specify the agents that do the identifying’. They continue to assert merits of the term, ‘identification’:

... (I)t does not presuppose that such identifying (even by powerful agents, such as the state) will necessarily result in the internal sameness, the distinctiveness, the bounded group-ness that political entrepreneurs may seek to achieve. *Identification – of oneself and of others – is intrinsic to social life; “identity” in the strong sense is not* (2000: 14).

Again, this work does not aim to substitute ‘identity’ with another term, *identification*. It would be fruitless. Instead, we learn from identification theory: mass mobilizations or foreign policy behaviors are not based on ‘identity’ but they *can be* related to practicing identity or ‘identification’. The term itself should not force us to be ‘essentialist’, ‘constructivist’, or ‘critical’. For example, Freud and Erikson provide an understanding of ‘identification’ in terms of an essentialist belief, while Mead and Habermas took the term in constructivist and critical contexts.³

Then, is ‘identification’ an ambiguous term like ‘identity’ in IR field? Hopefully, it is not. Identification *per se* offers nothing other than the belief that ‘identity’ is held by an ‘identifier’. It draws our attention to the ‘content’ of identity. Identification cannot be used as a variable; it signals a process only. It depends on the context in which it is used. Yet, identification provides a better outlook. As Saideman (2002: 195) argues, ‘communal identity is relevant in foreign policy *not just because of the existence or prominence of the identity* but also because of *its content*’.⁴ Thus, the merit of inspiring from ‘identification’ could be to accomplish a successful

³ For their works on ‘identification’, see Freud (1915), Erikson (1959, 1968), Mead (1934), Habermas (1979).

⁴ Emphasis added.

communication among IR theorists on the notion of 'identity'. Consider the following example.

In their works, David Campbell (1992) and Henry Nau (2002) refer to 'identity' as a 'source' for the U.S. foreign policy behavior. They both mention U.S. national 'identity' and accept that U.S. foreign policy is driven by the impulse for this coherent identity.⁵ However, their referent objects are different categories: in Campbell, identity is taken as a category of practice in critical sense; in Nau, identity refers to a category of analysis in an essentialist sense. In this regard, the scholars do not talk in the same language. Therefore, the term of 'identity' is ambiguous. Moreover, they do not share the common understanding of the meaning of 'identity'. In this sense, the term is vague.

When we come to 'identification', however, we can expect to eliminate ambiguity. For instance, one cannot say that 'U.S. national identification' because it is obviously meaningless and useless. *'Identification' necessitates putting 'identifiers'*. It can be relevant *when it is used in a context*. As noted earlier, 'identification is intrinsic to social life' (2000: 14). Therefore, we learn from 'identification' theory: 'identity' should never be employed without presenting its relevant context. Unfortunately, in International Relations theory, we have dozens of examples to see the usages of 'identity' without any contextual frameworks. 'Identity' is then taken as a basis for interests and foreign policy behavior without any concern. Yet, this strategy produces ambiguity as chapter 2 demonstrates.

⁵ For similar critique of Campbell's work, see McSweeney (1999: 129). For the work of Henry Nau, see Checkel (2004).

Moreover, 'identification' theory in the works of Jurgen Habermas provides a fruitful discussion on 'identity' in the constructivist context. As such 'identification' can eliminate ambiguity in IR theory literature; Habermasian terms of 'identification' can eliminate vagueness among conventional constructivists. The following section presents the Habermasian theory of 'identification'.

4.4 Habermas and 'Context of Identity': 'Identity-Securing Interpretive System'

Habermas argues that 'a dynamic identification mechanism' is centrally important for social sciences in general and his philosophy in particular (Bloom, 1990: 46). He believes that the term of 'identity' is closely related with the legitimating principles in which 'identity' is constructed. According to him, *'it is through the self-reflective symbolism of identity that both the individual and society attempt meaningfully to locate themselves in both their profane (immanent) and cosmic (transcendent) environment'* (Hall, 1999: 41).⁶ This 'self-reflective symbolism of identity' can be accomplished by 'identity-securing interpretive system', which is a system of beliefs about self-identity, collective identity, and social function in a legitimate social order (Habermas, 1975). Habermas claims that 'the match between the identity-securing interpretive system and the realities of social existence' legitimates the structure of any social system (Bloom, 1990: 47). In other words, if there is not 'an appropriate symbolic mediation' (identity-securing interpretive system) between the individual or the group and the social structure', there will be a 'change' of the interpretive

⁶ Emphasis added.

system' or 'a demand for a change in the social structure' (Bloom, 1990: 47-48). Thus, 'if the interests inherent in identification are not met, then the social system is not legitimated' (Bloom, 1990: 48). Habermas (1975) calls this tension in identity-securing interpretive system as 'legitimation crisis'. In his book, *Legitimation Crisis*, Habermas (1975: 4) asserts that 'only when members of a society experience structural alterations as critical for continued existence and feel their social identity threatened can we speak of crisis'. He continues:

Social systems too have identities and can lose them; historians are capable of differentiating between revolutionary changes of a state or the downfall of an empire, and mere structural alterations. In doing so, they refer to the *interpretations that members of a system use in identifying one another as belonging to the same group, and through this group identity assert their own self-identity*. In historiography, a rupture in tradition, *through which the interpretive systems that guarantee identity lose their social integrative power*, serves as an indicator of the collapse of social systems. From this perspective, *a social system has lost its identity as soon as later generations no longer recognize themselves within the once-constitutive tradition*.⁷

Habermas contributes a very useful dimension to identities by introducing 'legitimation crisis' by adding a 'social context' in the picture. As Hall (1999: 42-43) points out, identity-securing interpretive system connects individual identity and a collective identity 'in a context in which meaning is provided to individual identity through its ideological subsumption in a collective'. Therefore, there are combinations of principles that legitimate the collective identity and the social order and these principles are 'institutionally reproduced and transmitted to the individual through his or her socialization into the society that is generated and regulated by this system of beliefs' (Hall, 1999: 43). When this identity-securing interpretive system, which legitimates social order and provides meaning to the collective identity, is challenged, the 'legitimation crisis' occurs. This challenge can be generated by

⁷ Habermas (1975: 4). Cited in Bloom (1990: 48). Emphases added.

varied discontinuities that are either exogenous or endogenous to domestic society. Consequently, one should not distinguish inside/outside in order to evaluate the reality.

What can we learn from 'legitimation crisis' in order to solve the constructivist problem of vagueness on 'identity'? Contributions of Habermas to the problems discussed in chapter 3 can be presented as the following.

1. The Alternative Solutions to Vagueness 1: *When corporate identities 'given'*? and Vagueness 2: 'Identity Construction' or 'Identity Reproduction'?

Conventional constructivist vagueness on 'corporate identity' and 'social identities' can be eliminated by focusing on Habermasian notion of 'identification'. All identities are in a social context and should be evaluated in their own contexts. Therefore, there is no need to add 'evolutionary elements' here. In other words, there is no need of 'corporate identity' as *given*, exogenous to social interactions. Hence, the formulations such as 'identity construction at first encounter' or 'identity reproduction by interstate interactions' is useless. Since 'identity-securing interpretive systems' may have both domestic and international institutional forms; we should not make the problematic separation between 'identity construction at domestic level' and 'identity change at international level'. These institutional forms are 'not fundamental'; they are not 'theoretically or ontologically primitive' or 'enduring'. Fundamental or primitive formulations such as 'corporate identity' or 'inside/outside' differentiation should be avoided.

2. The Alternative Solution to Vagueness 3: How to formulate 'discourse' effects on 'identity'

The idea of 'legitimation crisis' has a potential to present better the effects of the 'process'. It can provide a better analysis on the relationship between 'discourse' and 'identity'. The vagueness on discourse in conventional constructivism can then be eliminated. The notion of 'identity-securing interpretive system' makes us aware that actors *should tend to express* 'their collective identity through institutional forms that are consistent with that identity' (Hall, 1999: 43). Obviously, the expressions of the actors constitute the process of 'identification' held by the actors. The actors (here, *identifiers*) take their action as a 'discourse' and construct the principles of 'identity-securing interpretive system' in terms of their understanding of 'collective identity'. Indeed, we clearly see the close relationship between 'identity', 'interest', and 'discourse' now.

Among constructivists, there are those who are concerned with conceptualization of identity through 'institutionalist approaches' such as Michael Barnett, Marc Lynch and Ted Hopf.⁸ These scholars present a very close notion of identity in lines of Habermasian 'identification'.⁹ Their approaches consider the importance of domestic-international interactions that influence 'identity' and the institutional effects that constructs a special relationship between 'legitimacy' and 'identity'. For example, Lynch (2002: 29) argues that the relationship between identity and interests is built in the *public sphere* and that *the institutional structure of the public sphere*

⁸ See especially Barnett (1993; 2002), Lynch (1999; 2002), Hopf (2002; forthcoming).

⁹ Among International Relations theorists, there are some other scholars who draw on the works of Habermas. Yet, this work concerns 'identification' theory of Habermas only. For 'communicative action' theory of Habermas and its relevance in International Relations, see Linklater (1990b, 1998) and Risse (2000).

forms the potential for change and stability in identity and interests.¹⁰ The merits of 'institutional approaches' on the study of 'identity' are captured by Stephen Saideman (2002: 193) as well:

(T)wo key points about institutions deserve mention. First, institutions may determine which audiences are most important to various actors- who are the constituents? Knowing who politicians care about- those who pose a threat to remove incumbents from power; that is, the selectorate- is a good first step for understanding which identities might matter. Once we know how constituents identify themselves, we can then see how leaders are constrained or how they might face various opportunities. Thus, studying institutions tells us something about the identities in play.

Second, institutions are the products of past political battles, compromises and debates. Consequently, they embody the policy implications of past identity conflicts. Politicians who seek to revise or to reform such institutions must not only battle self-interested partisans- those who directly benefit from the institution- but also those who find their identities challenged...Even after that actor passes from the political scene, the institution influences subsequent politicians, shaping their imagination about what is possible and what is legitimate.

The following section concerns the assessment of Habermasian 'identification' theory by the case of Turkish 'identity' change. From a conventional constructivist perspective, Turkish identity change is understood in terms of interstate interactions. Therefore, westernization of institutions in the late Ottoman period is considered as the product of Ottoman State interactions with the Western powers. Yet, the vagueness remains here as well. Difficult questions quickly arise: When does *corporate identity* of Ottoman State become relatively stable? When does *Ottoman State identity* leave its egoistic conceptions? What is the role of discourse in the construction of a new Turkish identity? If we think in terms of Habermasian identification, however, we have a clearer conceptualization of Ottoman Turkish

¹⁰ For a useful discussion on the relationship between *institutional structures* and *public sphere*, see Calhoun (1992).

'identity'. In the Turkish case, international environment and interstate interactions gathered state-society interaction in the domestic scene.

The aim of the illustration is not to offer an alternative way to study 'identity'. Instead, the claim is that Habermasian approach is better than conventional constructivism to eliminate *vagueness*. It also indicates that Habermasian 'identification' approach can be employed in concrete cases and it does not suffer from theory/practice gap. Thus, Turkish case illustration offers that Habermasian kind of institutional framework may provide a contribution to constructivist understanding of 'identity' change.

4.5 'Identification Theory' in Context: The illustration of Turkish Case

Announcement of the Tanzimat Reforms in 1839 was a landmark case in the process of transforming the Ottoman Empire into a modern state. These reforms started the process of introducing a strictly regulated set of impersonal and universal rules in place of the traditional relations of power. The process was strengthened by the Reform Edict issued in 1856 in which the equality of Muslims and non-Muslims was recognized in such matters as taxation, military service and public employment (Gülalp, 2002: 23). Especially the 1856 reforms signaled the influence of western territorial nationalism on the Ottoman Empire.

Selim Deringil argues that 'dynastic *anciént regime* empires' had no way other than to seek 'additional ideological reinforcement' after the French Revolution (Deringil, 1993: 3). They needed 'to provide a new, or at least a supplementary, "national"

foundation' (Hobsbawm, 1990: 84). 'Official nationalism', as Benedict Anderson has termed, occurred in the Ottoman Empire as 'Ottoman citizenry' during the second part of the nineteenth century (Anderson, 1991). 'The policies of standardization and uniformity' were pursued through education and a special language imposed on the subject peoples like as in other European states (Deringil, 1993: 5). The policy of 'Ottomanism', unification of all the people living in Ottoman territory regardless of their religions and ethnicities, was pursued in the era of Abdulhamid II as well.

Young Ottoman thought appeared in this historical context. On the one hand, it was an Islamist reaction to 1856 Reform Edict, in which non-Muslim subjects were granted certain privileges, while on the other it constituted an embracement of the Tanzimat reforms on the road of modernization. As Şerif Mardin points out, they were reacting to the failure of the Tanzimat reformers to adopt a higher ethical and profound ideology than the idea of efficiency in order to justify their westernized institutionalism (Mardin, 1962: 118). According to Karpas, they tried to fill the gap by offering a justification for the institutional modernization 'in terms of Islamic political tradition and Ottoman principles of government' (Karpas, 1972: 262).

The Young Turk attempt to reconcile religious doctrines and the western modernization project was strongly supported by the policies of Sultan Abdulhamid II. Despite his suspicion of Western imperialism, the Sultan never turned his back to the Tanzimat, and many of the bureaucratic institutions of the modern Turkey were established in his own reign.¹¹ Although he spoke the political language of Islam and despite the fact that his brand of Ottomanism was definitely an integrationist policy

¹¹ Professor Stanford J. Shaw describes the Hamidian period as 'the culmination of the Tanzimat'. See Shaw (1971: 172-272).

based on Islam, as Deringil argues, it was indeed 'an Islam which was becoming less and less ecumenical'; therefore, Abdulhamid's policies mostly 'stemmed from secular considerations aimed at the secular ends of retrenchment and last-ditch defence'. He was 'in fact implementing the concrete policy of a rational secular programme' (Deringil, 1993: 5, 12). Abdulhamid was indeed absolutely against the 'westernization' but not 'modernization'. Under his rule, these two concepts were not identical (Gülalp, 2002: 26).

Abdulhamid's policy of pan-Islamism was not a successful project. Contrary to general belief, this is not because the modernization of the state was incompatible with Islamist ideology. Instead, the 'rational bureaucracy' that resulted by modernization was irreconcilable with the traditional 'patrimonial bureaucracy' of the traditional Ottoman Empire (Mardin, 1990: 213-22). Modernization was at odds with *Sultanism*, not *Islamism*. As Max Weber defines, patrimonial bureaucracy is based on a system in which the arbitrary rules of the higher authorities are institutionalized. This opposes the functional principles and professional norms of the rational bureaucracy, in which the institutions are established and managed accordingly by laws, norms, functional principles and professional concerns (Weber, 1968).

Therefore, the Ottoman state structure after Tanzimat was under the pressure of two divergent forces. The expectations of the modernized institutions were in clash with the traditional settings of the Sultanate. The Empire was embedded in *role conflict*, which occurs 'whenever the actor exists in two different institutions that simultaneously demand that it express contradictory behavior' (Barnett, 1993: 276).

In Habermasian terms, 'identity security interpretive system' does not much longer coexist with the social reality. Since the Ottoman military establishments were the first institutions that were the target of the modernization project, this conflict was experienced at its extreme tones (Alkan, 1992: 7). The following section focuses on this institutional establishment to analyze this conflict profoundly.

4.6 'Legitimation Crisis' in Turkish 'Identification'

According to Habermas, legitimacy is not the exogenous property of the state and the regime but rather 'an endogenous attribute constructed and reconstructed by political and social actions which make a political order worthy to be recognized' (Savvides, 2000: 60). This construction requires a linguistic space with an arcane language, or a special kind of discourse, which Nicholas Onuf (1989) calls 'speech act'. As Habermas suggests, legitimation is not a belief in the legality of the system; it is also 'a general interpretation which supports the system of authority as a whole' (Quoted in Savvides, 2000: 60; Habermas, 1979: 178). When this interpretation is absent, a legitimation crisis is likely to occur. Yet, the crisis itself paves the way to another interpretation, speech act through 'national security discourse', i.e. *securitization* (Buzan et.al., 1998). Thus, *interpretation as 'speech act'* always occurs whether legitimation crisis appears or not. By putting a linguistic space, in a true *constructivist* fashion, Wendtian physical gestures in the process of interactions between states can be replaced by a 'social' explanation.

The traditional strong role of the military in the Ottoman Empire was reinforced by the modernization project. Western types of military institutions were emulated. The

Land Forces were strongly affected by the German military organization and practices, while the Naval Forces were under British influence especially after the introduction of the Second Constitution in 1909 (Alkan, 1992: 9). Despite the efforts of Abdulhamid and some conservative state elites, professionalism in the army had produced a modernization in the form of westernization.

At the end of 1870's, the establishment of War Colleges caused Ottoman military education to enter a state of transition. Starting their military education at their age of 14 or 15, students from different social classes and divergent cultures were gathered into a long training program, usually lasting about 8-12 years. This new type of education facilitated an 'indoctrination process', in which the students were under the strict influence of their constructed identity. In the life of these young students, the military indoctrination that they received replaced the family education by transmitting the western types of norms and cultures. The fact that a significant number of students were from lower class families in the society magnified the effects of this type of education (Akyaz, 2002: 26).

War College students, who in the process of their education were rewarded or punished in accordance with their professional performance and technical capacity, were trained to expect to find a 'rational bureaucracy' after their graduation as well. During the Abdulhamid's reign, moreover, the state policies in the military matters were not merit-based, so this sort of patrimonial bureaucracy disappointed the young officers.

In general, Ottoman officers at that time may be divided into two categories: pupils of the War College ('Harbiye') and men who rose from the ranks. The majority of the officers were in the latter category, and their education was very deficient.¹² The two key merits they had were their unquestioned courage and their strong loyalty to the Sultan. Therefore, while Abdulhamid was establishing the modern institutions, he paradoxically followed an anti-modern type of bureaucracy politics. The officers who had risen from the ranks, *alaylıs*, had enjoyed so many privileges that even their children were benefited from them (Mardin, 1990: 218; Akyaz, 2002: 27). *Alaylı* officers had gained ascendancy over the War College trained officers, known as *mektepli*, just because 'they represented in general the extension of traditional Sultanic authority through promotion in return for absolute loyalty' (Turfan, 2000: 156). Among the *alaylıs*, there were even officers aged 70-80, who seemed to have no intention to retire. This was a real obstacle to the promotion of the young *mektepli* officers. The tension between these two officer groups was therefore unavoidable. Due to such professional concerns as well as their embracement of western secular identity¹³, the antagonism against the Sultan and his authority increased rapidly among the *mektepli* officers.

We have already seen that Abdulhamid's secular usage of Islamism as the engine for the Ottoman type of modernization paralleled the ideas of the Young Ottomans. Yet, Abdulhamid's paradoxical stance, while on one hand having a patrimonial privileged bureaucracy of his own and on the other hand establishing the roots of the rational bureaucracy, led to an erosion of legitimacy in eyes of the Young Ottomans as well.

¹² William Hale points out, in 1894, 85 % of the all officers were from the ranks and 1/3 of them were illiterate. See Hale (1994: 29).

¹³ Among the *mektepli* officers, there was a tendency towards western materialism and atheism. For a detailed analysis, see Alkan (1992: 26-27).

As Mardin asserts, the Young Ottomans believed that Sultan Abdulhamid had perpetrated a crime by suspending the constitution because its proclamation was 'the genesis of which owed something to their propaganda and the substance of which incorporated some of their ideas' (Mardin, 1962: 403). It was this belief, Mardin notes, 'would not have been widely held before the appearance of the Young Ottomans', which 'fed the underground opposition to the sultan between 1878 and 1908' (Mardin, 1962: 403). Thus, the resentment against the Sultan rapidly gained a momentum when even the religious intellectuals started to criticize his policies.¹⁴ This was the 'legitimation crisis' of Abdulhamid's regime.¹⁵

Legitimation crisis weakens the normative principles of the state and makes it vulnerable because the state itself fears that it will lose loyalty to its ideas and institutions (Buzan, 1991: 73). The elite, which represents the political order, engages in a struggle to regain legitimacy or to control the implications of the legitimation crisis. The elite thus becomes 'securitizing actors', i.e. those defining the security threats, and whose primary agenda is 'securitization', the process of defining an issue 'as an existential threat, requiring emergency measures and justifying actions outside the normal bounds of political procedure' (Buzan et. al., 1998: 23-24). The weakness in the legitimacy thus exacerbates the perceptions of threat by the regime, which responds by engaging in a securitization process in order to retrieve that legitimacy. By leading to alienation and discontent, however, this process mostly makes the situation worse and sometimes causes the entire regime to collapse.

¹⁴ By calling the early generation of the Young Ottomans as 'religious intellectuals', I follow Erik Jan Zürcher. He notes that all of the early Young Ottomans were pious. See Zürcher (1983: 19).

¹⁵ Erik J. Zürcher argues that this was a 'moral crisis'. See Zürcher (1983: 30).

In the legitimization crisis of the Abdulhamid's regime, the securitization agenda was primarily held as well. Censorship, the police and an extreme network of spies and informers were activated; so that free discussion of political ideas was suppressed (Zürcher, 1983: 11-12). Various methods were used by the Sultan to impose his control, including the imposition of a stamp tax, the bribing of journalists, the closure of newspapers and the punishment of their editors and writers (Lewis, 1969). The effect of these measures was to 'reduce the newspapers often to something close to mere information bulletins, giving account of official news or "harmless" international events, or else to the form of popular scholarly and scientific magazines' (Kushner, 1977: 14).

Ironically, however, the securitization process exacerbated political tension. For all their impotence and reduced numbers, newspapers and magazines advanced considerably. Since discussion of the internal political situation was banned, newspapers gave much attention to the international scene, and made many translations of foreign publications. Undoubtedly, this influenced the people's desire for becoming westernized (Kushner, 1977: 15). The social discontent forced the elite to redefine themselves. This reformulation process of elites was exactly what constructivists define as 'complex learning'¹⁶, in which 'individuals, when exposed to the prescriptions embodied in norms, adopt new interests' (Checkel, 1999: 88). In 'complex learning', 'internalization' of norms has crucial importance. Because any change in state identity can only be realized by internalization process.¹⁷

¹⁶ The distinction between 'simple' and 'complex' learning is firstly expressed in IR by Joseph Nye. See Nye (1987: 371-402).

¹⁷ For a fruitful discussion over internalization of otherness and identity construction, see Mercer (1995: 229-52).

Thus, Turkish elites have started to pursue their interest by taking a different role that was incompatible with their traditional role. This role-taking behavior, however, had remarkable effects on the perception of the state elites and forced them to internalize the new norms. The reproduction of Turkish 'corporate identity' is achieved through a linguistic discourse based on 'legitimation crisis'. The concept of 'role identity' in Wendtian account, then, is not independent from state corporate identity in Turkish case. There is no outside actor in the picture other than 'westernization route'. Results of this structural force, the role conflict, however, are construed in *domestic context* via spatio-temporal mechanisms, in which *legitimation crisis* and *securitization* occur.

The process of 'elite learning' has produced new social roles for Turks by providing more institutional outcomes. Turkish elites in the 1900's were in a different environment than they were in the 1880's; Westernization of institutions was under way. As Keohane claims, 'institutions may also affect the understandings that leaders of states have of the *roles they should play* and their assumptions about others' motivations and perceived self-interest' (Keohane, 1989: 6).

The process of Turkish elite learning has more sophisticated roots than what is presented here. It may be elaborated in another work but in accordance with the aim of this chapter it suffices to put the domestic variables before 'complex learning processes' take place. Indeed, similar institutional impacts on identity change have a powerful explanatory range in the disappearance of the Soviet Union, which is a

landmark case that cannot be anticipated by mainstream IR theories (Lebow, 1994: 276; Hopf, 2002).¹⁸

4.7 Conclusion

The previous chapters have argued that identity is a heavily burdened term as being ambiguous and vague in the IR literature. The implication of this fact should not be giving up 'identity' debate at all. As Tilly (1996: 7) notes, 'identity' is a 'blurred' concept but we should keep in the mind that it is an 'indispensable' concept as well. Offering closure to study 'identity' is as dangerous as leaving identity ambiguous or vague. Thus, we should come up with possible alternatives.

In searching for feasible alternatives, 'identification theory' can broaden our outlook. Yet, 'identification' *per se* should not be a substitute for the concept of identity. As Stuart Hall (1996: 2) warns us, identification is 'almost as tricky as, though preferable to, 'identity' itself; and certainly no guarantee against the conceptual difficulties which have beset the latter'.¹⁹ Identification theory reminds us to include 'identifiers' into the picture. It calls for focusing on 'social context' where identities play their roles. Then, the contextualization of identity can eliminate ambiguity in identity conceptualizations.

¹⁸ Although the fact that Soviet Union was declining relative to its rivals in 1980s, Brooks and Wohlforth (2000: 14) argue that the 'decline by itself is woefully indeterminate: Retrenchment was not the only way Moscow could have responded'. Moreover, scholars contend that Soviet decline was comparatively mild in the mid-1980s, see Lebow (1994: 266). Therefore, 'new thinking' ideas and 'elites learning' emerged largely independently and had a primary impact on Soviet foreign policies; see Blum (1993: 373-94).

¹⁹ Cited in Brubaker and Cooper (2000: 43).

Moreover, identification theory of Habermas provides a good example of contextualizing identity. Habermas depicts out a constructivist analysis. He puts 'identity' in the context of 'legitimacy'. He offers 'identity-securing interpretive system' in order to demonstrate this contextualization. He uses 'legitimation crisis' to indicate 'identity change'. Indeed, Habermasian notions are processual and active terms. Therefore, his strategy makes his approach less obscure. This strategy can be a source of inspiration for conventional constructivists to eliminate vagueness in their works.



CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION:

The Wealth of Notions

In a discussion with an economist, an anonymous political scientist once put the difference between two fields, economics and political science, as the following: “In economics, you have *The Wealth of Nations*; in political science we have a wealth of notions”.¹ Indeed, ‘identity’ formulations exemplify well the need of a wealth of notions in the field of International Relations.

As argued in this work, identity conceptualizations in the field suffer from two severe problems: ambiguity and vagueness. The term of ‘identity’ is *ambiguous* when it refers to different categories. The term is *vague* when it is presented in obscure definitions. The concept of identity in the field of International Relations obstructs a productive analysis by being ambiguous and vague.

The difficulties of ambiguity and vagueness constitute a fatal failure for constructivists especially for those whose theoretical frameworks pay a special attention to the notion of

¹ Cited in Bueno de Mesquita and Morrow (1999: 72).

identity. Think about it. Identity is a key term for the constructivist usage. Also, constructivism is a theory that is inspired by the 'linguistic turn' in social sciences. Therefore, language is crucially important in constructivism. The irony is that constructivists fail to provide an unambiguous and clear *language* of 'identity'. Constructivists should be the leading scholars in avoiding verbal disputes among International Relations theorists because of their theoretical framework. Paradoxically, they cannot communicate on their one key term: *identity*.

Then, do we need the term, *identity*, really? To discard 'identity' completely does not solve the problem. If people tend to believe that 'they are one' and 'they comprise a bounded, distinctive, solidary group' and that 'their differences do not matter'; then, giving up the notion of identity at all seems not a good strategy (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000: 34). Instead, we may produce dozens of questions: how people come to this belief? What can be implications of this group feeling?..etc. These questions provide a better approach for 'identity problematique' in the field.

Identification theory can help us to 'contextualize' identity. The term of 'identification' is an active term and implies the notion of 'identifiers'. It asserts that identities are meaningful when they are mentioned with identifiers only. Therefore, 'identity' should be employed with in its own context. This strategy is not 'essentialist' or 'critical' *a priori*. Yet, it can help us to eliminate ambiguity.

Habermasian notion of 'identification' is closely relevant with constructivist studies in IR theory. Habermas takes identity in the context of legitimacy. He describes 'identity-securing

interpretive system' as a core of his approach. This contextualization example can be a source of conventional constructivists to eliminate vagueness of 'identity' in their usages.

Identity conceptualizations in International Relations theory should be saved from ambiguity and vagueness. This is what 'the wealth of notions' implies us. In this regard, this work aims to contribute an alternative thinking of 'identity' in the IR theory.



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