

# INTRODUCTION TO POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY (INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS THEORIES)

## CONSTRUCTIVISM AND POST- STRUCTURALISM: GLOBALIZATION AND REGIONALISM IN THE POST-COLD WAR WORLD

9th lesson

EFOP-3.6.2-16-2017-00007

**SZÉCHENYI**  2020



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# LEARNING GUIDE

- Lesson length: **11** slides
- Content:
  - Social Constructivism's / Post-structuralism's Approach to IR
  - Constructivism
  - Post-structuralism
  - Globalization and regionalism in the Post-Cold War world
- Recommended minimum duration for review: 50 minutes
- Suggested minimum time for learning: 2 hours
- The learning of the curriculum is aided by a course book and self-assessment questions.
- Recommended minimum duration of this full lesson: 3 hours



# SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIVISM'S / POST-STRUCTURALISM'S APPROACH TO IR

- When it comes to public policy, does the truth matter?
- To a **constructivist**, the answer would be no, because public policy can be shaped to create a particular kind of “truth” depending on the goal of the policy.
- To a **poststructuralist**, the answer would be, it depends on the meaning you assign to this concept of truth? And who has created the meaning of this truth? And who’s version of this truth has been left out?
- Constructivism and post-structuralism vary to a degree in their approach to IR, however, they both provide explanations behind how and why various constructs of various truths take place, and how and why these various truths have the capacity to alter.

## CONSTRUCTIVISM: THE ORIGINS

- Constructivists challenged this presumed understanding of individualism and materialism. Once the Cold War had ended, Constructivism gained momentum and notoriety within IR as scholars worldwide began debating over what would become of the world now that the duopoly of Soviet Russia vs the United States had come to an end.
- Constructivism, in the early stages, was espoused as creating a particularly challenging lens for the world, posing a ton of questions. This led to a great deal of criticism of the theory as it wasn't seen initially as being able to provide anything of real substance.

# CONSTRUCTIVISM: THE ORIGINS

- Constructivism can be seen as somewhere in between Neo-Realism/Neo-Liberalism and Critical Theories, such as Feminism and Marxism.
- Some variation among Constructivists in terms of research methods and approaches, however, they all emphasise the importance of looking to social, rather than material, influences on the international system.
  - [Theory in action](#)

# CONSTRUCTIVISM: KEY CLAIMS

- The International System: Socially constructed depending on how humans think and interact, actors/structures can have their identities shaped, rather than just their human-nature behaviours.
- Anarchy: Not fixed, but fluid, and changing.
- Norms/Identity/Discourse: Vital to Constructivism as meaning is drawn from these based on how humans think and interact. Ideas, cultures and norms are accepted if there is a consensus among people in a society. (Eg. Constructivists support that the identity of a nation defines its policies.)
- History: Highly valuable for creating ideas, cultures and norms.
- Agency: Emphasise the capacity for evolving interaction between actors and structures.

Those in positions of power have a greater chance of influencing the development of ideas, culture and ideas.

# APPLYING CONSTRUCTIVISM

- Donald Trump – U.S President “hopeful” (at the time of recording)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CyIEfG-WbRk>

- How would a Constructivist explain Trump, his followers and his overall rise to power?
- Trump has “tapped” into particular ideas that have been socially constructed.
- We need to be careful before assuming that what is happening in the U.S is only unique to the United States. We can identify the harnessing and conceptualisation of extreme nationalist sentiments worldwide. Something bigger is happening here...
- From a Constructivist perspective, what else can we say about Trump’s rise to power?

**Donald J. Trump**  
April 10 at 3:00am · 🌐

Isn't it a shame that the person who will have by far the most delegates and many millions more votes than anyone else, me, still must fight.

👍 Like    💬 Comment    ➦ Share

👍👤👤 Jan Morgan and 136K others    Top Comments ▾

6,190 shares

Write a comment...

**Glen Williams** The end is nigh for Cruz and his lies! The winner will be Trump as honesty and integrity applies! #Trump2016 usususus 🇺🇸 🇺🇸  
Like · Reply · 👍 4,977 · April 10 at 3:00am  
↳ 860 Replies · 2 hrs

**Tammy Boalo Baker** We love you Donald Trump!! Hang in there!! The fight will be well worth it!! #weneedyoutofightforus!!  
Like · Reply · 👍 3,617 · April 10 at 3:02am  
↳ 206 Replies · 3 hrs

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# POST-STRUCTURALISM: THE ORIGINS

- Became part of IR in the 1980s and was similarly influenced by the Cold War. “Postructuralists held that the key to the cold war lay in the enemy constructions that both East and West promoted.” (see: Hansen, L. 2014, 170 in Baylis et al, 2014)
- Are particularly critical of how nation states conduct foreign policies and how IR theories enable us to examine what nation states do.
- For example: within IR studies, the State is usually the central tenant with which we begin our exploration. Post-structuralism **challenges this**.



# POST-STRUCTURALISM: KEY CLAIMS

- Discourse: Language is vital in order to make any sense of the world. A complex and evolving set of ideas can be presented to us, even through just one word. For example: genocide, asylum seekers vs boat people...
- **EXAMPLE:**
  - Bushfires: There are a number of explanations as to why bushfires happen: environmental, arson, punishment from God because there are homosexuals in the world...these explanations depend upon the discourses available to us.

# POST-STRUCTURALISM: KEY CLAIMS

- Deconstruction: Understanding what something is in relation to something else. For post-structuralism, the meaning that we attach to something has the capacity to change. This is particularly examined through dichotomies. Dichotomies are often expressed in terms of hierarchy, with one term being more superior to the other, depending on the context with which the terms are explored and the meaning given to each term.
- **EXAMPLES:**
  - Citizen vs Refugee
  - West vs East
  - Genocide vs Ethnic-Warfare
  - Horse vs Dog
  - What else???

# POST-STRUCTURALISM: KEY CLAIMS

- Genealogy: 'history of the present'. Starts from the now and looks back.
- EXAMPLES:
  - 'The War on Terror': How is it conceptualised today? Who had/has the power to create this discourse? (Eg. 9/11)
  - What material structures / discourses led to 9/11?
  - What material structures/ discourses have been forgotten or left behind?
  - Black Lives Matter: How is it conceptualised today? Who had/has the power to create this discourse?
  - ...

# POST-STRUCTURALISM: KEY CLAIMS

- Poststructuralists can utilise these previous key concepts as a “lens” to view international relations.
- They avoid generalisations and universalism given that any meaning attached to a piece of knowledge or discourse will depend on the context with which it is coming from. And this meaning should never be presumed to be constant.
- This also applies to notions of foreign policy, cooperation, international law, etc. All of these are created based on knowledge, discourses and power. They are created based on the meaning attached to them.

# GLOBALIZATION AND REGIONALISM IN THE POST-COLD WAR WORLD

- **Now it is up to you to explain:**
  - How constructivists see globalization and regionalism?
  - Where starts globalization and regionalism for a poststructuralist?
- Is regionalism some kind of an idealistic cooperation?  
(Constructivism)
- Can constructivism give political background for globalization?
- Are poststructuralists denying regionalism?
- Does post-structuralism has deterministic approach towards globalization?
- These are tough questions...

## ABOUT THIS LESSON

The images used in the curriculum can be found online and are freely accessible.

The curriculum is for educational purposes only.

Compulsory and recommended literature sources for the given course were used as sources for the lesson.

This teaching material has been made at the University of Szeged, and supported by the European Union by the project nr. EFOP-3.6.2-16-2017-00007, titled Aspects on the development of intelligent, sustainable and inclusive society: social, technological, innovation networks in employment and digital economy. The project has been supported by the European Union, co-financed by the European Social Fund and the budget of Hungary.

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