HACIBEKTAŞOĞLU, ALİ-TORUN, NEVZAT (2025). "Neorealizme Eleştiriler: Alexander Wendt'in İnşaci Modeli". *Karadeniz Araştırmaları*. XXII/87: 1334-1358.

NEOREALİZME ELEŞTİRİLER: ALEXANDER WENDT'İN İNŞACI MODELİ

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ÖZ

Bu makale, Uluslararası İlişkiler alanında Neorealist paradigmaya yöneltilen eleştirileri Alexander Wendt'in sosyal inşacılık modeli üzerinden incelemektedir. Neorealizm, devlet davranışlarını materyal güç dağılımı ve anarşik sistemde hayatta kalma mantığıyla açıklasa da, kimlik ve çıkarların nasıl toplumsal olarak inşa edildiğini göz ardı etmektedir. Wendt'in çerçevesinden hareketle çalışma, uluslararası siyasetin şekillenmesinde normların, kültürün ve öznel ortak anlamların önemini vurgulamaktadır. Analiz, mikro ve makro yapılar arasındaki ayrımı, toplumsal etkileşimlerin nedensel ve kurucu etkilerini ve sistemsel düzenin yeniden üretiminde paylaşılan bilginin rolünü öne çıkarmaktadır. Wendt'in sosyal inşacılığını pozitivist ve post-pozitivist yaklaşımlar arasında bir orta yol olarak konumlandıran makale, bu perspektifin Uluslararası İlişkiler teorisinin açıklayıcı kapasitesini genişlettiğini ortaya koymaktadır. Bulgular, sosyal inşacılığın yalnızca Neorealizmin determinist ontolojisini eleştirmekle kalmayıp aynı zamanda işbirliği, kimlik dönüşümü ve sistemsel değişimi açıklamak için daha dinamik bir çerçeve sunduğunu göstermektedir. Sonuç olarak çalışma, inşacı yaklaşımların materyalist analizle bütünleştirilmesinin çağdaş uluslararası siyasetin daha kapsamlı anlaşılmasına katkı sağladığını ve disiplin içinde hibrit yaklaşımların gelişimine zemin hazırladığını ileri sürmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Sosyal İnşacılık, Neorealizm, Uluslararası İlişkiler

CRITIQUES OF NEOREALISM: ALEXANDER WENDT'S CONSTRUCTIVIST MODEL

ABSTRACT

This article examines Alexander Wendt's social constructivist critique of the Neorealist paradigm in International Relations. While Neorealism explains state behavior through material power distribution and the logic of survival in an anarchic system, it fails to account for how identities and interests are socially constructed. Drawing on Wendt's framework, the study highlights the importance of norms, culture, and intersubjective meanings in shaping international politics. The analysis emphasizes the distinction between micro- and macro-structures, the causal and constitutive effects of social interactions, and the role of shared knowledge in the reproduction of systemic order. By situating Wendt's constructivism as a middle ground between positivist and post-positivist approaches, the article shows how this perspective expands the explanatory capacity of International Relations theory. The findings suggest that constructivism not only critiques the deterministic ontology of Neorealism but also offers a more dynamic framework for explaining cooperation, identity transformation, and systemic change. In conclusion, the study argues that integrating constructivist insights with materialist analysis provides a more comprehensive understanding of contemporary international politics and contributes to the development of hybrid approaches in the discipline.

Keywords: Social Constructivism, Neorealism, International Relations

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Araştırma Makalesi
Makale Gönderim Tarihi: 12.02.2025
Yayına Kabul Tarihi: 22.09.2025

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Introduction

In the field of International Relations, various paradigms have been developed to explain the interactions between states and other international actors. Neorealism explains state behavior primarily through the structural characteristics of the international system, emphasizing the struggle for survival in an anarchic environment. However, this approach falls short in accounting for how states' identities and interests are formed. In contrast, social constructivist theory highlights that international politics is shaped not only by the distribution of material power but also by shared norms, collective identities, and social interactions. Within this framework, Alexander Wendt's constructivist model offers a significant critique of Neorealism by arguing that state identities and interests are socially constructed through intersubjective processes, thereby demonstrating that the international structure cannot be reduced to material factors alone. By challenging Neorealism's individualist and materialist ontology, Wendt underscores the dynamic and transformative nature of international politics. Accordingly, this article examines the core assumptions of the Neorealist paradigm and evaluates Wendt's constructivist critique, with particular attention to how it redefines the formation of identities and interests in the interstate system and addresses the structural limitations of Neorealism.

1. From Constructivism to Social Constructivism

Social constructivist theory moves beyond the philosophical inquiries of International Relations scholars seeking to understand global politics and instead focuses on the ontology of international life. Although ontology is not a concept that International Relations scholars frequently deliberate on, it remains a crucial subject even for students of the discipline who adopt empirical thinking as their primary method. Scholars in International Relations, when explaining the functioning of the international system, must ask ontological questions regarding its formation and structure by establishing metaphysical connections (Wendt, 2012, p. 449). It appears impossible for individuals to access anything related to the world without observation. The nature of these observations and the theories that inform them are rooted in the underlying ideas that shape people's perceptions. When dealing with phenomena in the realm of international relations, the inability to observe certain aspects necessitates reliance on ontological assumptions— problems that arise from conditioning our perceptions through our preconceived ideas— which in turn influence our thoughts and theories concerning existence and being.

The Social Constructivist approach, which challenges Neorealism's problematic materialist and individualist ontology in international politics, seeks to provide a better understanding by viewing the existing system from an idealist and holistic perspective (Wendt, 2012, p. 449). The primary focus of Social Constructivism is not foreign policy but rather international politics. Before determining the analytical level of Social Constructivism and its position between individualism, holism, materialism, and idealism, it is essential to clarify its connection to and distinctions from constructivism. This, in turn, will help establish its place among the four sociological perspectives on international politics.

In academic studies aimed at understanding international politics, which are based on social theories such as postmodernist and feminist approaches, there is a common acceptance of two fundamental principles of constructivism (the theory of construction). The first principle states that the structure of a community created by people is determined primarily by shared ideas produced by the community, rather than by material forces. This principle represents an

"idealistic" perspective, and its foundation is more social than in the opposing "materialist" approaches proposed by different theories, which do not emphasize the same social aspect. The second principle suggests that the identity and interests of actors with specific goals are shaped and constructed not by their environment or nature but by the shared ideas that have been established and accepted. According to this principle, constructivism is a holistic or structural approach, as it opposes the reductionist method of transforming individuals into isolated entities and emphasizes that social structures can potentially access the powers that reside within them. Therefore, constructivism can be seen as a kind of "structural idealism" (Onuf, 2012, p. 49).

When looking at academic studies prior to the first use of constructivism by Nicholas Onuf in 1989, it can be observed that there were many different forms that were not yet labeled as constructivism. In the 1980s and 1990s, John Ruggie, Friedrich Kratochwill, and Richard Ashley, who shared the view that Neorealism and Neoliberalism were insufficiently socialized, contributed to the development of constructivist International Relations theory. Despite differences among them, their collective ideas formed the foundation of constructivism. These constructivist movements, while containing fundamental distinctions, also include the Social Constructivist approach, where Alexander Wendt advocates for one of the different forms of constructivism, using it to theorize the international system. "The version of constructivism advocated by Alexander Wendt is a moderate type based on structuralism and symbolic interactionist sociology" (Wendt, 2012, p. 16). The philosophical foundations of constructivism, proposed by Nicholas Onuf, have been further developed and established by Alexander Wendt, one of the most debated figures since the early 1990s, who grounded his thoughts on constructivism and presented the Social Constructivist theory as a framework for understanding international politics.

When examining the rich literary history that can be considered constructivist thought, constructivism is traced back to Grotius according to Wendt (Arı et al., 2011, p. 54). Grotius, along with Kant and Hegel, formed the foundational constructivist worldview that underpins classical theories of international politics. This constructivist perspective dominated International Relations between the two World Wars, even though it was dismissed as "idealism" (Wendt, 2012, p. 16). The end of the Cold War is thought to have caught international political scholars, whose teachings and assumptions were well-established, off guard. Mainstream International Relations theories, in their simplest form, struggled to explain the end of the Cold War or, more generally, the systemic changes in the world's international political stage (Lebow, 1995, p. 23). Many who focused their research and analysis on these difficulties argued that the challenges and issues in the explanations arose from the materialist and individualistic orientations of the International Relations discipline. They suggested that a more holistic international politics, concerned with the formation of ideas rather than individualistic orientations, would better capture the systemic changes. As a result, the emerging constructivist approach in International Relations was initially slow to develop an empirical research program (Keohane, 1988, p. 379) and continued to encourage a broad yet weak empirical accumulation with its epistemological and concrete variations (Wendt, 2012, p. 19). However, in the post-Cold War period, the quality and depth of experimental work and practices have increased significantly, and this trend seems likely to continue. The increasing empirical studies shedding light on the concrete issues of world politics are seen as a crucial factor for the success of constructivist thought in International Relations.

Alexander Wendt, using constructivist studies as a support point, addresses all the issues encountered in international politics on two levels: "The first is the level of fundamental or second-order questions about what is happening there and how we can explain or understand it— that is, ontology, epistemology, and method— as opposed to the level of concrete, field-specific or first-order questions" (Wendt, 2012, p. 19). Second-order questions are those of social theory that encompass the roles of ideas and material power in social life, the nature of human agency, and the relationship with the social structures it engages with. It was Nicholas Onuf, who first introduced the concept of constructivism, pointing out that constructivism is a method of studying social relations, and in this sense, it builds a system of propositions by referring to a certain concept, making it applicable to every field of social research (Onuf, 1998, p. 58). Such questions, involving ontological and epistemological inquiries into the social realm, can be asked not only in the field of international politics but within any framework of human relationships. In particular, those concerned with international politics, who cannot physically observe the state and international life, should avoid making assumptions about what is happening in international life, how these things are related, or at least what ought to be, without asking such questions. Failing to do so would make it more difficult to reach any conclusions.

The data resulting from international politics, not directly addressing the senses that shape perceptions, are discussed within the framework of political theories, ontology, and epistemology, based on what theorists are encountering. For example, neorealists view the structure of the international system from a materialist approach, seeing it as the distribution of material capabilities possessed by actors. Similarly, neoliberals perceive the existing structure as an institutional superstructure added to the abilities of actors and their material foundation. Constructivists, on the other hand, reject a one-sided material emphasis and, due to their idealist ontology, see the international structure as the distribution of ideas. According to Jackson (2007, p. 162), scholars of international politics should focus on the shared understanding that forms between the actors on the stage and the factors that guide or influence the thoughts and beliefs of the actors in the international system. "In the long run, empirical research will show us which conceptualization is the best, but the observation of the unobservable is always theory-laden, and there is a natural gap between theory and reality" (Wendt, 2012, p. 20).

Constructivism divides into different types, but there is no common consensus regarding these types. Jeffery T. Checkel (2004, p. 230) divides the constructivist approach into three categories: traditional, interpretive, and critical/radical. Alexander Wendt (2012, p. 18), classifies the increasingly important constructivist approach of the pre-Cold War period into three main currents: the Modernist current, highlighted by John Roggie and Friedrich Kratochwil; the Postmodernist current, associated with Richard Ashley and Bob Walker; and the Feminist current, represented by Spike Peterson and Ann Tickner. Although the differences among those working in the field of constructivism, which has faced differentiation and increased empirical accumulation yet remains relatively weak, are noticeable, they seem to share criticisms of Neorealism and Neoliberalism for not giving due attention to the socially constructed nature of actors in international politics. Based on these common criticisms, two main claims are put forward by constructivists. First, the fundamental structures of international politics are more social than material, and these structures shape the identities, personalities, and interests of the actors (Kaya, 2008, p. 101).

The end of the Cold War is thought to have caught political theorists, whose fundamental assumptions were solid, off guard in their attempts to explain systemic change. Social theorists, who believe that the meaninglessness of mainstream International Relations theories' assumptions about how and in what direction the future of the Cold War would shape arose from their materialist and individualistic tendencies, have argued that the formation of ideas and/or holistic international politics would highlight hypotheses that could yield better results for disciplines. Constructivists, through their efforts to understand and interpret international politics in the 1990s and the post-Cold War period, appear to have made significant contributions to the empirical accumulation of constructivism. During this development process, debates were held about whether constructivism is a theory, and the idea that it is more of an approach than a theory has become more widely accepted and expressed. With the fall of the Iron Curtain, the constructivist approach became more appealing than the materialist one, which had less influence in the analysis of international relations (Ateş, 2008, p. 221).

Constructivism is not an international politics theory (Wendt, 2012, p. 22). As can be understood from this view put forward by Alexander Wendt, constructivist approaches, while directing scholars of international politics to examine the social factors in the development of actors, do not provide information on which actors should be addressed at the level of analysis. Since the time of Nicholas Onuf, constructivist approaches, despite differences among them, have reached a certain level through various works by international politics scholars that establish the philosophical and sociological foundations of constructivism. Following this process, Alexander Wendt played a significant role in bringing constructivism to the forefront in the discipline of International Relations, aiming to develop a theory.

2. Social Constructivist Approach and the States' Systemic Project

When examining scholars with constructivist thought, it is stated that individuals' behaviors are a process shaped by society, the environment, and the outside world, and this process is valid within the societies that people form and the states encompassing these societies. However, while constructivist approaches establish a level of analysis regarding how actors are socially constructed, they do not provide any information on who these actors will be or where they are constructed. The Social Constructivist approach, on the other hand, takes states as the unit of analysis. In the Social Constructivist approach, where the behaviors of states are attempted to be explained, the level of analysis is either the characteristics of foreign policy decision-makers or the international system. Kenneth Waltz, who was the first to systematically examine the states' systemic project through scientific classification, created Neorealism, which is a theory that shapes and restricts Alexander Wendt's thoughts on international politics. These restrictions suggest that the Social Constructivist approach proposes a theory that critiques the states' systemic project of Neorealism.

2.1. State Centrism

The control of violence in social life and the authority that governs it play a crucial role in shaping social relations. Without such control, individuals would be unable to cooperate in areas such as trade or human rights, as the constant threat of force would undermine trust. Within a Social Constructivist framework, the organization and regulation of violence are central to political order. Since the state is the political authority that monopolizes the legitimate use of

organized violence, it becomes the key unit of analysis for understanding how violence is managed at both domestic and international levels (Wendt, 2012, p. 24). Accordingly, states, as the dominant actors in the modern international system, are viewed as responsible for defining and controlling violence in the global arena, often framing their actions in terms of national interests, rationality, and responsibility.

States often live within or under the influence of systems created by other independent states, without being isolated from each other. "In the modern state system, states recognize each other's sovereignty rights, and thus the state-centric project seeks to reproduce not only their own identities but also the identity of the system to which they belong" (Wendt, 2012, p. 22). Unlike foreign policy theories that attempt to explain the behavior of a single state, international politics theories seek to explain state behavior patterns at the level of the state's system. Alexander Wendt, while analyzing the structure and effects of the state's system with Social Constructivism, is concerned with international politics, like Kenneth Waltz. While criticizing Neorealism and Neoliberalism for not acknowledging how the international system shapes the identities and interests of states, Wendt states that the primary aim of Social Constructivism is not to explain the identities and interests of states, but rather the international system. According to Waltz, a theory is called systemic when it emphasizes the causal power and effects of the international system's structure in explaining state behavior. Reductionist theories of state behavior, on the other hand, emphasize the psychology of decision-makers and domestic political factors.

Social Constructivism, like Neorealism, is a systemic theory, but it approaches international politics by moving beyond the reductionist tendencies of Neorealism. Wendt emphasizes interstate interactions and the relationship between states and the broader social-cultural structure of the international system, while largely disregarding domestic politics (Alakuş et al., 2015, p. 137). Although this move allows him to highlight the structural dynamics of identity and interest formation, it also exposes a weakness: by overlooking domestic factors, Wendt risks underestimating how internal political, economic, and cultural dynamics shape states' external behavior. In this sense, while Social Constructivism builds upon Neorealism's systemic foundations and shares some of its core assumptions, it simultaneously challenges key claims of Waltz. Yet critics argue that Wendt's theory, despite its innovative contribution, may remain overly abstract and insufficiently attentive to the material and domestic dimensions of international politics. Thus, rather than fully embracing Wendt's framework, a more critical stance suggests that Social Constructivism both complements and falls short of replacing Neorealism in explaining the complexities of global relations.

2.2. Social Constructivist Critique of Neorealism

Although Social Constructivism draws inspiration from Neorealist propositions, it fundamentally criticizes Neorealism from three different perspectives by summarizing its three key characteristics. The first of these characteristics is that despite its structuralist approach, Neorealism is inherently "individualistic." Kenneth Waltz compares states, as political actors, to companies with economic goals and likens the realm of international politics to a market in which states compete. "International political systems, like economic markets, are essentially individualistic; they emerge spontaneously and unintentionally" (Waltz, 2015, p. 91). The Social Constructivist critique of Neorealism's "individualistic" nature argues that Neorealism "fails to

explain structural changes such as the end of the Cold War and the emergence of peace among democratic states" (Wendt, 2012, p. 34).

According to Alexander Wendt, the second characteristic of Neorealism is its "materialist" nature. Kenneth Waltz's conceptualization of this aspect is criticized by Wendt, who argues that Neorealism defines the structure of the international system based on the distribution of material capabilities under anarchy. The final characteristic that Wendt attributes to Neorealism is its view of interstate interaction as falling within the domain of individualistic (reductionist) theorization rather than systemic theory. Neorealism's claim that interaction can only be explained through anarchy and structural change, while neglecting it within systemic theory, is criticized by Wendt (2012, p. 37), who states that "the problem in today's state systemic project lies in the Neorealist conceptualization of structure and structural theory."

Unlike Neorealism, Social Constructivism asserts an "idealist" perspective, arguing that the international system is not defined by materialist features but rather by a structure in which knowledge is distributed and ideas are shared as a social phenomenon. According to Social Constructivist Theory, the character of international politics is shaped by states' social structures, which influence their material power and interests, as well as their perceptions and expectations of one another. The behaviors, identities, and interests of states are constructed by the international system. In essence, Social Constructivism posits that international politics serves as the arena where states' identities, interests, and behaviors are either potentially or constructed.

3. Different Forms of Structural International Relations Theory

The systemic theories of international politics conceptualize the structure of international relations in different ways. Social theories attempt to explain different conceptualizations of structure in terms of the material or social dimensions of structures and their relationships with actors. Alexander Wendt argues that every discussion on structure involves different combinations derived from the four sociologies of structure (materialist, idealist, individualist, and holistic), such as materialist-individualist or idealist-holistic (Wendt, 2012, p. 40). Through this structuring of the concept of structure, the diagnoses derived from analyses of the ontology of structure can be positioned, and relevant inferences can be made.

3.1. Fundamental Conceptualizations of Structure

Social theorists generally distinguish between two perspectives on the determinants of social life: materialist and idealist. Within the field of International Relations, the majority of theories tend to adopt a materialist outlook, with Neorealism standing out as a clear example. This approach highlights the distribution of material capabilities—particularly military strength and economic capacity—as the primary drivers of state behavior (Arı et al., 2011). In materialist thought, factors such as human nature, geography, natural resources, and the forces of production and destruction are emphasized, while the role of non-material elements and ideas is acknowledged but treated as secondary.

According to the idealist claim, material forces are subordinate to ideas and only become meaningful when they are directed toward a specific purpose by their users or actors. For idealists, the primary concern is the structure and nature of social thought. This structure of

thought not only shapes identities and interests but also provides common solutions to problems among actors. From an idealist perspective, the essence of society is constituted by ideas rather than material forces, and these ideas, if deemed necessary by the structure, may use the material forces they consider secondary to generate threats. In this regard, the contrast between materialists and idealists becomes evident: while materialists privilege causal relationships, effects, and questions, idealists prioritize constitutive ones (Wendt, 2012, p. 43).

The relationship between agents and structures is also a subject of debate, much like the discussion between materialists and idealists. Emanuel Adler (1997, p. 320) states that the agent-structure problem has become a kind of industry in International Relations. Individualism and holism (structuralism) are the two fundamental responses to the relationship between agents and structures. Both conceptualizations acknowledge that structures play an explanatory role, but they disagree on the ontological status of structures and the depth of their effects (Wendt, 2012, p. 44). Individualism involves a form of reductionism, accepting that scientific assessments of social analyses can be reduced to the unique characteristics or interactions of independently existing individuals. Holism, in contrast, argues that the effects of social structures cannot be reduced to pre-existing actors without any reference to other elements, and it maintains that these effects play a significant role in shaping actors. In short, individualism presents a bottom-up perspective toward structure, whereas holism conceptualizes social life in a top-down manner—similar to how a singer cannot exist without the industry they belong to and the audience that follows them. In International Relations, individualists assume that international systemic structures have no constitutive effect on states and that identities and interests are given. Holists, on the other hand, focus on the role of the international system in shaping state identity and constructing states.

3.2. The Position of International Theories on Structure

Classical Realism adopts a materialist perspective, arguing that state interests are not constructed by the international system (Morgenthau, 1946, p. 61). Neorealism develops this materialist view more explicitly. It emphasizes the structure of the international system and claims that this structure influences and regulates state behavior. However, similar to individualist thought, it assumes that states' identities are not constructed by the system itself (Waltz, 1959, p. 56).

Liberalism, by contrast, is an individualistic theory that highlights the importance of domestic politics in shaping state identity and interests. In opposition to materialist thought regarding structure, it advances an idealist view by referring to the social structure of the system (Bach, 1982, p. 189). Neoliberalism also explains the international structure through an individualistic approach. Yet it cannot be considered a strictly idealist theory, since it focuses on expectations and gives less weight to power and interests than materialist perspectives.

The most fundamental challenge to the materialist–individualist and holistic debate comes from alternative approaches such as the English School, Postmodernism, and Feminist International Relations. These perspectives emphasize that the international structure emerges from shared knowledge, which in turn shapes not only state behavior but also state identity and interests (Wendt, 2012, p. 51). Unlike materialist theories, they adopt an idealist and holistic orientation by interpreting the international system through common norms, linking state iden-

tity to global culture, and, in the case of feminist theory, highlighting the role of gendered structures in the construction of international politics. Social Constructivism shares with these approaches a holistic concern for structure, yet it avoids purely utopian forms of idealism. Wendt, for example, defines his position as epistemologically positivist but ontologically post-positivist (Büyüktanır, 2013, p. 5). More recent scholarship has expanded these debates. For instance, Onuf (2013) and Adler (2019) revisit constructivism's ontological foundations, while Tickner and Sjoberg (2020) advance feminist critiques of state-centric approaches. In addition, contemporary journal articles increasingly address how constructivist, postcolonial, and feminist insights intersect in explaining power relations, norms, and identity formation in international politics.

4. The Construction of a Middle Ground Between Positivism and Post-positivism

The field of International Relations is currently polarized between the positions of positivism and post-positivism. The divide between positivist epistemology, which claims that science is the only tool for reaching facts, and post-positivist epistemology, which argues that the sole gateway to reality is not social science, has sparked debates. The Social Constructivist approach seeks to build "middle ground" between these two polarized positions. Alexander Wendt, with the question of how an idealist and holistic ontology, while maintaining a commitment to science or, more broadly, positivism, can be embraced, attempts to construct the middle path that forms the foundation of Social Constructivism.

Realism treats states and the state system as real structures, suggesting that the nature of these structures can be better understood through science. This position assumes that scientific theories refer to a reality that exists independently of human perception. In this sense, Realism places ontology (the reality of structures) before epistemology (the possibility of knowing them).

Post-positivist approaches challenge this assumption. They reject the idea that states and the international system are fixed and objectively knowable structures, instead arguing that these are socially constructed and contingent. For example, while one can easily observe a fire truck moving toward a fire, the state or the international system cannot be conceptualized in the same way, since they consist of complex societies, practices, and institutions that are not directly visible.

This contrast reveals an important tension. Realists emphasize the existence of structures, while post-positivists emphasize the limits of knowing them. Yet critics of post-positivism point out that by denying ontological claims, it risks reducing International Relations to interpretive narratives with limited explanatory power. Conversely, defenders argue that Realism's assumption of objective structures overlooks how power, ideas, and discourse shape the very reality it claims to explain. Thus, the debate is not merely about method but about the very nature of international politics itself.

A second and more radical critique of realism comes from the postmodernist perspective, which argues that while entities may be observable, it is impossible to know whether they truly exist, and that observable reality is shaped by the effects of discourse. Although empiricists and postmodernists are at different poles with respect to rejecting the realist claim that the reality of the international structure can be known, they can come together when considering epistemological concerns. The Social Constructivist approach, by adopting realist thought, opposes

these anti-realist critiques, arguing that International Relations theory can analyze the deeper structure of international reality. Scientific realism, which assumes that reality exists independently of humans and can be discovered through science, is rooted in the positive philosophy of science (Wendt, 2012, p. 72).

4.1. Scientific Realism

Scientific realism defends the view that knowledge about reality is possible even when that reality is not directly observable. It rejects the idea that developments in the international system depend only on what is known or believed. As Davitt (1991, p. 43) illustrates, "Our experiences do not pretend that cats exist, cats do exist. The observable world does not pretend that atoms exist, atoms do exist." By asserting the existence of entities such as atoms—despite their unobservability—scientific realism upholds the claim that "the world is what it is," whether observable or not. On this basis, it becomes possible to conceptualize states or the state system as real and knowable.

In contrast, positivist and post-positivist approaches oppose this stance on epistemological grounds, particularly regarding unobservable or metaphysical structures. They argue that what exists in the world is grounded in human perception. Musgrave (1988, p. 245) criticizes this perspective as a form of human-centered ontology, rooted in the limitations of human capabilities.

One of the final claims made about realism concerns its philosophical approach to the success of science. Realism argues that science enables humans to manipulate the world and that this success is not a miracle. Through scientific progress, the environment can be directed in ways that were previously impossible, despite human limitations, across historical processes (Musgrave, 1988, p. 249). For instance, the reason humans today can live in taller buildings compared to the past is that they have accumulated more knowledge about the world and developed the capacity to connect previously separate pieces of knowledge.

Anti-realists, by contrast, view the success of science as a miraculous phenomenon. Drawing on a Darwinian analogy, they claim that only successful theories survive in a competitive intellectual environment. Yet, as Musgrave (1988, p. 242) emphasizes, explaining why unsuccessful theories disappear is not the same as explaining why a particular scientific theory is successful in the first place. In this debate, Alexander Wendt (2012, p. 92) sides with the realist argument, stressing that anti-realists fail to account for the very notion of success. This position is significant for the framework of this study, since Wendt's adoption of scientific realism underpins his constructivist claim that international structures, though socially constructed, can still be studied scientifically. By linking realism's defense of scientific success to his own theory, Wendt provides the epistemological foundation for applying constructivist insights within a systematic analysis of international relations.

4.2. The Problem of Social Kinds

When comparing the success of social sciences to natural sciences, it is understood that natural sciences are more effective in guiding human interaction with the world than social sciences, which are considered to have achieved fewer solid successes. Since social scientists believe that theories in social sciences, such as "rational choice theory" and "balance of power

theory," which could be considered successful, have not yet completed their maturation processes, it appears difficult to claim the success of science in guiding the world from the perspective of social sciences. Along with the problem of social sciences achieving fewer scientific successes compared to natural sciences, the "social kinds" encompassing all the objects of social scientific research do not support the realist proposition that the world exists independently of humans. Realism's approach to natural science is based on a materialist ontology, whereas the nature of social kinds seems to involve an idealist or nominalist ontology (Wendt, 2012, p. 94). "The fact that social kinds are based on ideas, unlike natural kinds, has led post-positivists to argue that society, unlike nature, cannot function mechanically, and instead, we should seek an interpretive understanding based on the subjective interpretations of actors and the social rules that constitute them" (Taylor, 1971, p. 25). As seen here, many realists with materialist views believe that realism is not suitable for the social sciences.

Alexander Wendt, while discussing how a realist constructivism might contain contradictions and how social science could be a difficult example for realism, suggests that the differences between natural and social kinds do not fundamentally oppose a realist social science perspective. Despite differences between natural kinds, such as humans, trees, and atoms, and social kinds, such as families, states, and banks, it is understood that natural kinds—like the proposition "if humans did not exist, chefs would not exist"—have a high level of determinism over social kinds. The material-based tendencies of humans to refer to things with signs, like "this" or "that," are the most significant reason for the existence of social kinds (Harre, 1988, p. 309). However, unlike social kinds, natural kinds are entirely self-regulating. It does not seem possible to demonstrate that the unique characteristics of any living kind are related to the relationships with another kind or definitions made by humans. Just as the characteristics that make a squirrel a squirrel are not related to the social relationships and definitions that squirrels have, the self-regulating qualities of squirrels, in other words, the uniqueness of their characteristics, lead to resistance against the denial of their existence or misrepresentations. This resistance can also be observed in social kind like states. The ability to control and manage a piece of land by a specific group constitutes the most fundamental element in that region being recognized by others as a state (Wendt, 2012, p. 100). The ability of a community to form statehood by managing its capabilities and resources can create a barrier against those who would deny or reject its existence.

At the same time, the governing abilities of states can be explained not only by their internal structures but also by their relations with other states. The recognition of a state's legal sovereignty can grant new abilities and opportunities to the state that it could not achieve on its own. The resistance of Palestine, a social kind that strives to express itself as a state, to the denial of its existence through its governing abilities, is not enough for its continued existence as a state; it can only be made possible by other states recognizing its sovereignty. However, while states, as actors, are dependent on recognizing each other at least to a certain extent, they also resist one another.

It is true that the ontology of social kinds and the social life created by these social kinds is a suitable area of study for scientific reality. The social constructivist approach also considers social science as privileged epistemologically, viewing it as a privileged discourse that provides knowledge to humanity. In the epistemological debate that arises between positivist and post-positivist positions, Alexander Wendt declares his stance in favor of positivists, stating that the

social constructivist approach tries to build a middle path between the two camps. Wendt (2012, p. 119), suggesting that epistemological issues are relatively uninteresting, proposes that the main debate should take place in an ontological context regarding what the international world is actually made of. Taking the side of post-positivists who argue that social life is entirely made up of ideas, Wendt notes that scientific realism plays an important role in finding a middle path between positivist epistemology and post-positivist ontology. It is argued that the epistemological concerns of empiricists, who doubt that unobservable entities can be known, and postmodernists, who are uncertain whether we can know reality itself, can be overcome with realist thought, and by directing researchers' attention to ontology, realism can disperse these concerns (Shapiro, 1992, p. 197). From this perspective, the social constructivist approach also accepts realism as a prerequisite in its discussions. The significance of this debate is that it determines the extent to which Constructivism can be regarded as a scientific approach in International Relations. By positioning itself between positivist epistemology and post-positivist ontology, Constructivism gains the ability to respond to the empirical requirements of positivist science while also addressing the ontological critiques of post-positivist theories. In this way, the framework not only enhances the credibility of Constructivism as a theory but also strengthens its capacity to explain how international realities both are socially constructed and scientifically knowable.

5. Power and Interest

Theories developed to understand the phenomena emerging after World War II have been shaped around the concepts of power and national interest in the context of international politics. When power is mentioned— such as from a realist perspective— it is often referenced in terms of military capabilities; interest is defined as the desire for power, security, or wealth, which is to be held and not shared. International institutions and structures, alongside power and interest—though with different prioritization—are considered to have explanatory qualities in analyzing international disputes by both Neoliberals and Neorealists (Arı, 2010, p. 256).

In addition to material elements such as "power," "interest," and "international institutions," it is now observed that an abstract element, "ideas," has been integrated (Wendt, 2012, p. 124). In post-Cold War theoretical frameworks of international politics, discourse, ideology, identity, culture, and ideas have gained prominence. Particularly, Constructivist approaches emphasize the role of ideas in the formation and emergence of the social world, without dismissing the importance of material elements (Küçük, 2009, p. 777). Furthermore, the ongoing debate between "materialism," which prioritizes "power" and "interest," and "idealism," which refers to the importance of "ideas," continues. The materialist hypothesis suggests that the content of all "cultural" and "intellectual" formations—like the contribution to the explanation of "power" and "interest" can be explained by the characteristics of crude material forces, while the idealist hypothesis asserts that "power" and "interest" are formed by "ideas."

The Social Constructivist approach focuses on the idea that material elements such as "power" and "interest" are created by or influenced by "ideas," a topic that is rarely addressed in mainstream International Relations studies. The main thesis centers around the idea that the "meaning of power" and the "content of interests" are largely a function of ideas. Alexander Wendt specifically argues that external interests are significantly shaped by ideas, although he acknowledges that crude material forces have some influence on the formation of power and interests. The Social Constructivist approach does not claim that everything is entirely made up

of ideas, but it argues that the distribution of ideas is one of the most fundamental factors in international politics. Wendt suggests that Kenneth Waltz's materialist structural theory, which identifies "anarchy" and "distribution of material capabilities" as its defining elements, relies on implicit assumptions regarding the distribution of interests, which are largely shaped by ideas (Wendt, 2012, p. 128).

5.1. The Relationship Between Power and Interest and the Formation of Power

One of the key features of realism is the proposition that international politics is shaped by power relations (Keohane, 1986, p. 158). This is not just a realist claim, as neoliberals and Marxists also believe that power is an important factor. In realism, the idea that power is constituted by raw material force is a materialist thought, while in idealism, power is created by thoughts and cultural characteristics (Wendt, 2012, p. 71). According to Waltz, the pioneer of neorealism, the distribution of material capabilities is one of the most important variables in conceptualizing the international system, which exhibits an anarchic structure devoid of hierarchical relations that are present in domestic political systems. Waltz (1979, p. 97) points out that states are similar units that perform functions such as internal order and external defense, focusing on the distribution of military and economic power and how these may lead to changes in the international structure. This approach shows that neorealism is clear about its materialism. In conceptualizing the international material structure, Waltz, who rejects social definitions and considers material capabilities as an important variable, focuses on the number of superpowers and measurable military and economic capabilities as the most important factors (Küçük, 2009, p. 778).

Kenneth Waltz diverges from a central assumption of Classical Realism, which holds that the primary goal of states is to maximize power. Instead, he argues that the foremost objective of states is security (Waltz, 1979, p. 75). In his view, states are self-interested actors whose behavior is indirectly shaped by the international structure. One of his key hypotheses concerns how states perceive each other's power: rather than seeking absolute gains, states focus on relative advantages and tend to balance against one another (Waltz, 1979, p. 102).

Unlike Classical Realists, who portray states as inherently aggressive and opportunistic (Morgenthau, 1946, p. 190), Waltz characterizes them as defensive and cautious. In Neorealism, states operate in an anarchic but largely stable system, where most actors respect each other's property rights and prefer to preserve what they already possess. In such an environment, even weaker states can endure, resulting in a relatively low "mortality rate" among states (Waltz, 1979, p. 137). Yet when revisionist powers attempt to alter the rules rather than balance within them, anarchy becomes less stable. This contrast highlights that the nature of anarchy is not fixed but depends on how states choose to act (Moravcsik, 1997, p. 513).

Alexander Wendt argues that explanatory studies within the framework of Neorealism generally seem to be based on anarchy and the distribution of material capabilities, but upon delving deeper into the theory, a large part of it is derived from the distribution of interests, which are shaped by ideas. Neorealists, in fact, consider the distribution of interests as an important systemic phenomenon and claim that it can be deduced from "anarchy" and "distribution of material capabilities." Furthermore, they suggest that there is no need for an independent analysis of interests. According to Wendt (2012, p. 142), what states want is constructed based on assumptions derived from the worst-case scenarios regarding the distribution of

power. When considering contemporary states, unlike the scenarios derived from the distribution of power, they have interacted with each other for hundreds of years, accumulating substantial information about each other's interests, and have reached a level where they can make fundamental distinctions regarding whether they are revisionist or status quo states. This is because, according to Wendt (2012, p. 144), history matters, and since history partly relies on what others' interests truly are, the distribution of interests should play an independent role in constructing meaning related to anarchy and the distribution of power.

In the Social Constructivist approach, Alexander Wendt does not create a competition between "power" and "interests," nor does he claim that the effects of "power" are caused by "interests." Criticizing the materialist perspective that treat "coarse material forces" as the primary factor in international politics, he also resists Constructivist tendencies to downplay power altogether. Wendt contends that material forces shape the range of possible outcomes, but their significance depends on how they interact with ideas. As he explains, “It is not material forces that drive social evolution, but our purposes, fears, and hopes. We desire material forces for these purposes. One way to see this truth is to add the distribution of interests to Waltz's theory” (Wendt, 2012, p. 149). From this perspective, ideas shape interests, and interests, in turn, provide meaning to power. Thus, when International Relations scholars explain state behavior in terms of interests, they are ultimately grounding their analysis in a foundation of ideas.

Recent debates, however, suggest that Wendt’s framework may not fully capture the complexity of power–idea relations. Scholars such as Checkel (2005) and Finnemore and Sikkink (2020) argue that norms and ideas can not only shape but also transform material interests over time, particularly through transnational networks and norm cascades. Others, like Hopf (2017), emphasize that Wendt’s approach risks underestimating the role of domestic political contexts and competing discourses in shaping how states interpret power. These critiques highlight that constructivist theory is still evolving, and that the interaction of power, ideas, and interests should be understood as historically contingent rather than fixed.

5.2. The Formation of Interests by Ideas

Most International Relations scholars agree with the proposition that states act in accordance with the interests they perceive. "Interests" are not only seen as a "Realist" variable, but different theories also assign significance to how interests are formed. The Social Constructivist approach does not reject the relationship between interests and the actions of state actors, but emphasizes that how interests are formed is also important. Wendt, highlighting the importance of the distribution of interests in the understanding of power, suggests that only a small part of what constitutes interests is material. "The material power that constitutes interests is human nature, while the rest is intellectual, consisting of common ideas or schemes and negotiations created by culture" (Wendt, 2012, p. 151). This proposition, which implies that only a small portion of interests can be explained by materialism, underscores the importance of idealism in explaining a large part of interests.

Mainstream International Relations scholars who examine the relationship between thoughts and interests can be seen to adopt rational choice theory as a general framework. Alexander Wendt also discusses the traditional rationalist perspective on the relationship between interests and thoughts and offers an alternative to it. Many of the disagreements that arise in International Relations studies are rooted in differing theories about human nature and

national interest (Smith, 1983, p. 164). Despite significant disagreements between Classical Realists, Neorealists, and Neoliberals, all parties seem to accept the most important rationalist proposition: "desire (national interest) causes states to act in certain ways" (Wendt, 2012, p. 155).

The Social Constructivist approach argues that the content of interests, which shape the understanding of power, is created by thoughts. However, in the theorization reached by Alexander Wendt, the claim is not made that thoughts are more important than power and interests. On the contrary, it is accepted that power and interests are always important and decisive. The Social Constructivist claim here is that the effects of power and interests are made possible through the thoughts that produce them (Wendt, 2012, p. 175).

In other words, in international politics, the distribution of interest- whose content is largely shaped by ideas- plays a central role in how power is understood (Goldstein et al., 2013, p.13) The key claim is that the impact of both power and interest can only be revealed through the ideas that bring them into being, and thus any explanation of power and interest ultimately rests on the existence of ideas.

In contrast to materialism, idealist social theories argue that cultural phenomena shaping ideas are as objective and coercive as material capabilities (Wendt, 2012, p. 177). From this perspective, the real world cannot be reduced solely to material forces. The Social Constructivist approach does not deny the significance of material capacities, yet it emphasizes that their meaning depends on the interpretations actors attach to them. As Wendt (2012, p. 178) notes, how agents perceive the world is crucial for explaining their behavior, and they exercise a degree of choice in defining their identities and preferences.

This idealist orientation distinguishes Constructivism from materialist accounts of structure. By expanding its framework, Constructivism acknowledges that social structures exert independent effects beyond the sum of individual interactions, thereby incorporating elements of holism or structuralism. In this sense, social structures shape common discourses, disseminate and normalize shared ideas, and influence the construction of identities and interests in ways that cannot be explained by material forces alone.

6. International Structure, Agency, and Culture

It is understood that the Social Constructivist approach uses a holistic (structuralist) language with an idealist perspective, referencing thoughts in order to counter the materialist claims made in structural studies. This holistic approach is manifested in the proposition that structures have effects that cannot be reduced to the agents that constitute them. According to Alexander Wendt, the structure of a social system will include three elements: material conditions, interests, and ideas. "Without ideas, there are no interests; without interests, there are no meaningful material conditions; without material conditions, there is no reality" (Wendt, 2012, p. 179). While there is a materialist and idealist presupposition about the content of social structures, idealists and materialists differ in their views on the relative weight of these elements. Materialists generally privilege the material conditions they claim are formed by interests, while idealists emphasize the ideas that they argue largely determine interests. The intellectual aspect of social structure is viewed by Barry Barnes (1988, p. 117) as a "distribution of knowledge," and in parallel, Alexander Wendt narrows the broad category of ideas to

"knowledge," using the term "knowledge" in a sociological context based on the belief that an actor considers to be true (Wendt, 2012, p. 180).

Knowledge derived from internal sources can take the form of "special knowledge" that a state possesses and other actors lack. Such knowledge is an important element of foreign policy, as it enables the state to interpret international situations and define its interests. At the same time, knowledge can also be "shared knowledge," generated through interaction with other states.

When actors act in ways that take the behavior of others into account, they create a social structure based on shared understandings (Weber, 2012, p. 95). Wherever this type of shared knowledge exists, "culture" can be said to exist as well (D'Andrade, 1984, p. 88). Culture may manifest in diverse forms such as norms, rules, institutions, ideologies, or organizations (Wendt, 2012, p. 182). The significance of culture, however, remains contested, particularly in debates between constructivist and rationalist approaches (Keohane, 1988, p. 385).

Type of Knowledge	Definition	Implications	Relation to Culture
Special Knowledge	Knowledge a state possesses that other actors do not. Derived from internal sources.	Enables the state to interpret international situations, define and apply its interests.	Not directly culture, but shapes state-specific foreign policy strategies.
Shared Knowledge	Knowledge created through interaction among states.	Leads actors to consider the behaviors of others when making policies. Creates a basis for common understanding.	Wherever shared knowledge exists, *culture* emerges.

Table 1: Types of Knowledge in International Relations[1]

The discussions about "culture" in International Relations are closely linked to disagreements between holistic and individualistic approaches to structure. Individualists argue that structure can be reduced to the attributes of actors and the interactions among them, whereas holists contend that structure possesses emergent qualities that cannot be explained solely by reference to its constituent parts (Wendt, 2012, p. 184). The Social Constructivist approach introduces a distinction between the "micro" and "macro" levels of structure and argues that structures exert both causal and constitutive effects. In this sense, constructivism highlights that structures shape not only the behavior of actors but also their identities and interests.

However, this position raises several debates. Critics argue that Wendt's attempt to combine causal and constitutive effects risks blurring the line between materialist explanations and interpretive ones, making the theory less precise. Others note that by adopting a structural per-

[1] Note: This table is derived from Weber (2012), D'Andrade (1984), and Wendth (2012), but the distinction between "special" and "shared" knowledge is the authors analytical construction.

spective similar to Waltz while simultaneously criticizing him, Wendt leaves unresolved the extent to which constructivism truly breaks from Neorealism. For some scholars, this tension weakens the explanatory clarity of constructivism; for others, it illustrates the theory's strength in bridging rationalist and reflectivist approaches. Thus, the debate is not only about whether structures matter, but also about how they matter and to what degree constructivism provides a coherent alternative to existing structural theories.

6.1. International Structure

Kenneth Waltz divides theories of world politics into two analytical levels: the state level and the international system level. Theories at the state level, which he calls reductionist or unit-level theories, explain outcomes by focusing on the characteristics of states or the interactions among them. In contrast, systemic or structural theories explain outcomes by referring to the structure of the system itself. Waltz (1979, p. 18) argues that what makes a theory reductionist is its emphasis on state-level properties.

Alexander Wendt accepts Waltz's conceptual distinction but challenges his conclusion. Waltz stresses the autonomy of structure, acknowledging interactions but disregarding the effects produced by each element of the system (Buzan et al., 1993, p. 49). For Waltz, the international system has only one level of structure—anarchy. This anarchy depends on the characteristics and interactions of states, yet once established, it operates independently of them (Wendt, 2012, p. 187).

The key problem here is that Waltz formulates structure as if it were separate from the actors who continuously create and reproduce it through their practices. This raises questions about how sensitive systemic effects actually are to variations in state characteristics and interactions. In contrast, Social Constructivism highlights "micro" structures, which reflect the world from the perspective of actors. Waltz's "macro" structures, on the other hand, describe the system as a whole—a distinction that Wendt accepts but reframes. For Wendt, "micro" and "macro" are not about size or numbers of actors but rather about the alignment of analysis with the individualism–holism debate.

6.1.1. Micro Structure

When purposive actors make choices while considering each other, they engage in interaction. This interaction, referred to as the microstructure, consists of relations among states without reference to their internal characteristics. For example, the negotiations and rivalries of the countries bordering the Caspian Sea regarding the use of this sea are part of the microstructure. Outcomes of such interactions are explained within this framework.

Macro-level structures are produced and reproduced through these micro-level practices. In this sense, the larger international order is dependent on the cumulative effect of actor-level interactions. Wendt (2012, p. 203) notes that the knowledge actors generate about each other in the course of interaction—shaped by their beliefs, strategies, and preferences—need not be objectively correct. What matters is that such intersubjective understandings guide behavior.

This dynamic can be seen in the case of Turkey and Pakistan. Turkey's perception of Pakistan as a brotherly ally is not a universal truth shared by all states but a product of bilateral interaction. Such perceptions illustrate how micro-level processes continually update and reinforce the relationships that sustain international politics.

6.1.2. Macro Structure

Waltz (1979, p. 74) argues that international politics cannot be explained solely by the qualities and interactions of states. He points to two additional systemic tendencies that must be considered: the balance of power and the tendency of states to become similar units. Both derive from the logic of anarchy. This level of analysis corresponds to the macro structure, which captures the overall nature of the international system and focuses on how it is shaped. Unlike unit-level explanations, macro-structural theories approach the system as a whole rather than the behavior of individual actors (Wendt, 2012, p. 194).

Macro structures emerge from the cumulative processes of micro-level interactions, but they take on their own dynamics once established. One manifestation of this is what Wendt (2012, p. 206) calls collective knowledge—shared understandings that develop over time and create system-wide patterns from individual actions. Such knowledge does not necessarily eliminate disagreement; rather, it provides the framework within which states act. For example, there is broad international recognition of Kosovo, which reflects a collective acceptance at the systemic level, yet Serbia's refusal to recognize Kosovo demonstrates how actors can resist dominant patterns while still operating within the same structural context.

6.2. The Effects of the International Structure

Alexander Wendt suggests that a structure can have two types of effects: "causal" and "constitutive". Kenneth Waltz (1979, p. 99), on the other hand, discusses how scholars in International Relations almost always use the language of interaction based on causality to explain the agent-structure relationship. While Wendt acknowledges that this association is correct, he argues that it is insufficient for analyzing the effects of structure. It becomes clear, considering the differences in social processes, that "norms" with regulatory and constitutive effects, which can emerge from different structures and the social processes they give rise to, cannot be accepted in the international structure in the same way. Anthony Giddens (1979, p. 66) states that norms are norms, but in the context of the balance of causal and constitutive effects of structure, these norms can vary.

It can be argued that norms can have effects on the international structure, just as culture itself contains both causal and constitutive effects. These effects can be applied not only to the behavior of agents but also to their identities and interests. Rationalists focus solely on the causal effects on agents' behavior, while they do not identify the causal and constitutive effects on identities and interests—elements that constructivists emphasize—as an important level for analysis. The debate here—between individualists and holists—is not about whether culture constructs agents, but rather about the relationship between this construction process and its causal and constitutive effects. Alexander Wendt (2012, p. 211) suggests that individuals, from the outset, prevent the constitutive effects of culture. Wendt, who first addresses the causal and then the constitutive effects of culture, particularly highlights the causal and constitutive effects on identities and interests.

6.2.1. Causal Effects

Any causal relationship can only arise between entities that exist independently of each other. For culture to interact with agents, it must therefore possess dimensions that are not reducible to agents or their characteristics. Culture is carried out by agents, yet agents emerge as entities that regulate themselves independently of culture and of one another.

The process that constitutes agents can be explained by referring to the qualities of individuals who exist independently and to their interactions. This reflects the individualist view of reality and simultaneously constrains the claims of holistic approaches. In an individualist framework, individuals—and by extension the culture they carry—can play only a causal role, not a constitutive one (Wendt, 2012, p. 201).

Rationalists, by contrast, pay little attention to culture, identity, and interests. They treat these features as fixed and focus mainly on observable behavior (Stigler et al., 1977, p. 78). While this approach accepts interests, identity, and culture dogmatically as given, it does not necessarily deny that these qualities are socially constructed. Rather, identities and interests emerge from the broader social structure that shapes and constrains individual interactions.

This interaction also affects the qualities of actors within a causal framework. Actors learn their identities and interests in part through the way others treat them (Wendt, 2012, p. 217). For instance, an actor comes to behave as an enemy when its fundamental rights to life and liberty are denied by others.

6.2.2. Constitutive Effects

In addition to the causal effects that culture has, its constitutive effects can also be discussed. Can agents exist independently of each other? In fact, this proposition challenges the individualistic approach, which asserts that agents can exist independently of each other. In international politics, states are approached as purposive entities. In Giddens' (1979, p. 34) theory of structuration, it is assumed that agents are largely formed by their relationships with each other, and the purpose of the state is to direct it toward a specific situation. At the core of the state's purpose are desires and beliefs. The main topic of debate here is the formation of desires and beliefs. How are actors' thoughts about the world formed? Individualists argue that the content of these thoughts exists in the minds of individuals. Margaret Gilbert summarizes this by saying, "According to individualism, thought logically precedes society" (Fellows, 1991, p. 101). In contrast, holists claim that the content of certain mental states cannot be explained solely by reason; they argue that irrational factors also shape thoughts. According to Philip Pettit, "Thinking is not only causally but also logically dependent on social relations" (Thomas, 2016, p. 303). Additionally, as Richard Shweder points out, people think through culture (Derné, 1993, p. 1482). For example, when leaders who claim that Turkey has no place in Europe, drawing from Christianity, make such statements, the reason behind this is not Turkey itself but the result of an othering process shaped by the culture of the leaders.

Alexander Wendt seeks to construct a middle ground between individualist and holistic approaches to the effects of culture. He argues that thoughts, reason, and memory hold explanatory value independent of external factors. In this sense, he defends the individualist intuition that culture exerts causal effects on agents (Wendt, 2012, p. 225).

At the same time, Wendt maintains a moderated form of holism. While individualism assumes that all identities, interests, and behaviors derive meaning solely from personal beliefs, holism stresses that culture itself constitutes the identities and interests of actors. In Wendt's words, "nothing in an actor's mind, or related to them, even the actor's behavior, logically or conceptually presupposes other actors or culture" (Wendt, 2012, p. 225).

The distinction here is between causal and constitutive effects. The individualist view allows culture to influence agents but keeps identities and interests essentially personal. The holistic view, by contrast, argues that without culture, actors cannot fully acquire identities or engage in certain behaviors. Wendt's attempt at synthesis shows that culture is neither reducible to individual beliefs nor wholly independent of them, but instead operates in a space between causality and constitution.

6.2.3. Culture

It seems impossible to have detailed knowledge about actors and their desires in international politics. However, if the boundaries of the rules of the structure to which they belong or with which they interact can be outlined, it will become easier to explain and/or even predict the behavior patterns of actors. "Structure, as an objective social phenomenon, constrains and enables action in systemic ways, and thus should create distinct patterns of behavior, opposing the actors" (Wendt, 2012, p. 233). This situation is more difficult from the perspective of Neorealism, as Neorealism has a materialist approach, focusing only on the material conditions of the structure, and this framework does not allow for a full explanation of the structure. However, an analytical approach that incorporates common ideas within the structure, in addition to material conditions, would be more successful in providing explanations about the structure. The structure is dependent both on agents and actors, and the social process created by these elements. This dependency is both constitutive and causal.

The source of knowledge produced by international structures is rooted in the culture of the actors, nourished by their beliefs and desires. Culture functions as a kind of repertoire that states draw upon when interpreting situations and pursuing their interests (Swidler, 1986, p. 273). For instance, diplomatic protocol—such as the order of precedence among heads of state or the rituals surrounding treaty signings—illustrates how shared understandings create predictable patterns of behavior. These cultural practices are not merely symbolic; they shape expectations and guide conduct in ways that can both constrain and enable state action. As Wendt (2012, p. 237) notes, beliefs and practices reinforce one another over time, producing durable norms within the international system.

While few scholars would deny that the international system contains significant cultural elements, debates persist over how decisive these elements are compared to material conditions. Realists argue that power and interests ultimately prevail, while constructivists highlight that cultural norms and shared practices often determine how power and interests are defined in the first place. This tension lies at the heart of evaluating the significance of international culture.

In conclusion, this section has shown that culture not only reflects but also structures international relations, shaping both the expectations and actions of states. This analysis contributes to the article's main argument by underscoring how constructivism offers a broader

explanatory framework than materialist approaches. Building on this discussion, the next section will examine how these cultural dynamics interact with institutional structures, further demonstrating the link between ideas, norms, and systemic outcomes.

Conclusion

This study has examined the limits of Neorealism in explaining the behavior of states and the formation of identities and interests, and it has analyzed how Alexander Wendt's constructivist model addresses these shortcomings. The analysis highlighted several key dimensions—such as the distinction between micro- and macro-structures, the role of culture as shared knowledge, and the causal versus constitutive effects of norms—that illustrate how international politics cannot be understood solely through material power and survival struggles.

Wendt's most significant contribution lies in demonstrating that states are not only rational actors but also social entities whose identities and interests are continuously reproduced through interaction. By introducing concepts such as the social construction of anarchy and the importance of intersubjective meanings, Wendt expands the boundaries of structural analysis. This provides a new lens that complements rather than entirely replaces materialist explanations, showing that systemic outcomes result from the dynamic interplay between material capacities and shared ideas.

In terms of research problem, this study shows that Neorealism's deterministic ontology cannot fully account for cooperation, change, and identity transformation in international relations. Constructivism, by contrast, provides a more flexible framework that links power and interest to the broader social and cultural contexts in which they acquire meaning. Thus, the findings underline that a comprehensive theory of international politics must integrate both material and ideational dimensions.

Prospectively, the interaction between micro-level processes of identity formation and macro-level structures of systemic order offers a promising area for further research. For instance, studying how recognition practices (e.g., sovereignty, diplomatic protocol, or alliance rituals) reproduce international culture can shed light on the durability and transformation of global norms. This points to a more concrete future research agenda that combines constructivist insights with the analysis of power relations, offering a multidimensional perspective on global politics.

In conclusion, the main academic contribution of this study is to show that Wendt's constructivism provides not only a critique of Neorealism but also a new perspective for International Relations theory. By foregrounding the constitutive role of ideas while recognizing the enduring relevance of material power, it offers a more dynamic, reconstructive, and comprehensive approach to the study of international politics.

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

This study examines the critiques brought by Alexander Wendt's social constructivist model against the Neorealist paradigm and evaluates its broader implications for international relations theory. Neorealism, with its emphasis on the anarchic structure of the international system, explains state behavior primarily through the distribution of material power and the struggle for survival. While powerful in explaining balance-of-power politics, Neorealism fails to sufficiently account for how state identities and interests are formed and transformed over time.

Wendt's constructivism introduces a different ontological and epistemological foundation by asserting that international politics is not only shaped by material capabilities but also by norms, ideas, and shared meanings. He critiques Neorealism's individualistic and materialist ontology, arguing that states are not static entities with fixed interests but social actors whose identities and preferences emerge through interaction. This perspective highlights that state behavior is not determined solely by material forces but also by intersubjective understandings that evolve historically and culturally.

One of Wendt's significant contributions is the distinction between micro-structures and macro-structures. Micro-structures capture interaction patterns among states, while macro-structures represent systemic outcomes produced and reproduced by these interactions. By emphasizing that systemic structures are contingent on intersubjective knowledge rather than merely material capabilities, Wendt challenges Waltz's assumption of structural autonomy. This perspective demonstrates that anarchy itself is socially constructed and can take on different forms—whether competitive or cooperative—depending on how states perceive and treat one another.

The role of culture further illustrates this argument. Constructivism contends that shared norms, institutions, and practices—such as diplomatic protocols, recognition of sovereignty, or alliance rituals—generate patterns of behavior that cannot be reduced to material calculations. Culture, in this sense, has both causal and constitutive effects: it shapes state conduct while simultaneously defining the very identities and interests that guide this conduct. The example of recognition practices, such as Kosovo's contested statehood or Turkey's alliance with Pakistan, underscores how intersubjective understandings influence international politics beyond material power distributions.

From an epistemological standpoint, Wendt positions constructivism as a middle ground between positivist and post-positivist approaches. He accepts scientific realism to argue that international relations can be studied scientifically, but he also incorporates post-positivist insights to stress that ideas and meanings play constitutive roles in shaping social reality. This dual stance provides constructivism with methodological flexibility but also exposes it to critiques regarding empirical testing and the measurement of normative change.

Critics of Wendt highlight two main weaknesses. First, constructivism's emphasis on ideas is sometimes seen as underestimating the enduring influence of material power and security imperatives. Second, methodological challenges remain in systematically capturing how

norms and identities change. Nonetheless, Wendt's model has broadened the theoretical horizons of the discipline by demonstrating that cooperation, transformation, and identity formation cannot be explained by materialist paradigms alone.

In conclusion, Wendt's social constructivist model offers a comprehensive framework that integrates ideational and material dimensions of international politics. By addressing Neorealism's reductionist and deterministic shortcomings, it provides a more dynamic account of how states' identities and interests evolve. The main academic contribution of this study is to show that constructivism not only critiques Neorealism but also proposes a new way of theorizing the international system through social interaction, cultural practices, and intersubjective meanings. Future research should explore hybrid approaches that combine constructivist insights with materialist analysis, particularly in areas such as security institutions, global governance, and recognition practices. This line of inquiry promises to generate a richer and more multidimensional understanding of contemporary international politics.