

## ***The Role of Culture in International Relations Theories***

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***Abstract:*** *the study of culture in international relations theories takes a wide range of complex issues, which without enough perception about these issues, certainly our understanding about the role of culture in international relations theories will be incomplete. Because in real world the study of international affairs is best understood as traditional competition between traditional mainstream theories like realism and liberalism, some special concepts like culture has been neglected, but after that when we reach to middle way and sub- theories of international relations we can see that the considering importance of culture has been growing and this concept has now become a permanent feature of these legged theories and discourse international relations arena. This paper tries to introduce culture as an important concept in mainstream, middle way and sub-theories of international relations.*

*After studying about the subject, the authors reached to this conclusion that, despite being ignored in traditional theories, culture has extensive role in all international relations theories and only with considering the political, security and economical issues, we won't be able to understand the realities of political events in field of international relations, So we need other concepts like 'culture' to be able to analyze the political international issues. This paper has been prepared with descriptive-analytical method, and library- documents and World Wide Web have been used.*

***Key words:*** *Culture, Concept, International Relations, Theory*

### ***Introduction***

*Culture is Important for human beings, but the use of it as an analytical tool could be difficult .The main challenge about the culture is that, Culture is a complex concept. Sociologists for the term of*

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*'Culture' have mentioned about five hundred meanings, but yet we can't bring a full explanation about the concept of culture.*

*Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behavior acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievements of human groups, including their embodiment in artifacts. The essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e. historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values. Culture systems may, on the one hand, be considered as products of action, on the other, as conditional elements of future action (Adler 1997: 14). Culture is considered the full range of learned human behavior patterns (Human Culture). Over time, cultures have clashed and created better, stable cultures. Cultures are always adapting to the situations and issues it is presented with. Through various levels, culture can take on different meanings and contexts in areas such as biology, arts, mathematics, etc (Matthes 2010: 1).*

*Culture is a notoriously difficult term to define. In 1952, the American anthropologists, Kroeber and Kluckhohn, critically reviewed concepts and definitions of culture, and compiled a list of 164 different definitions (Spencer-Oatey 2012: 1). Apte (1994), writing in the ten-volume Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics, summarized the problem as follows: 'Despite a century of efforts to define culture adequately, there was in the early 1990s no agreement among anthropologists regarding its nature (Apte 1994: 2000-2010).*

*When we want to study a Special concept in international relations, wide range of theories should be studied from Realism and Liberalism to Constructivism, English School, Critical Approaches and the others. It is obvious that when we want to study some special concepts in international theories like 'government', without any problem we can notice their effects and study them, but some complicated concepts like 'Culture' -which is an important concept in international theories and affairs- is difficult to define easily.*

*'Culture' is difficult to define but an easily understood and important concept in international affairs. At the basic level culture is 'the human made part of the environment' which can be communicated, and which provides the patterns, meanings and knowledge of human activity socially and in relation to the world (Hudson 1997: 2-4).*

*mainstream International theories like: Realism, Liberalism, Neo-liberalism, neo-liberalism are useful tools to understand the concepts like power, security, state and etc, but if we want to study the inter-subjective concepts like 'Culture', lagged theories of international relations like Constructivism, English School, Critical theory, Structuralism, Post-modernism and the other recent theories are more suitable.*

*In studying about the concept of culture in international relations we should note that, whether culture matters in the construction of international relations theories. Mainstream American international relations theories often claim to be universal, but in fact they are rooted in American culture, practices, and problems. That is why International Relations is called "an American social science," as Professor Stanley Hoffmann has pointed out (Hoffman, 1995: 215). If we agree that social theory is heavily dependent upon the history, experience, and practice of people, we need to recognize that culture matters in theoretical innovation and evolution. Theory requires a certain degree of universality, as the rational choice theory has demonstrated, but any social theory starts locally from the everyday practice of the people of a cultural community. In the study of international systems, therefore, culture matters (Yaqing 2013: 69).*

*In recent theories of international relations we can realize that culture is making a comeback as a concept in international relations. And it is not merely through manifestations of chauvinism in nationalist politics; not just states saying 'my culture is better than yours'. The influence of culture in future will be felt in a few layers deeper. It will make an impact through values (Pethiyagoda 2014).*

*In this paper, briefly the authors try to examine the concept of 'culture' in international relations theories. Because each various theories of international relations has its different approach to the concept of 'culture', it make it difficult to analyze and understand easily.*

*The main question of this paper is that, what is the role of culture as a concept in international relations theories?*

*In this article we discuss about the role of culture as a concept in international relations theories in three separated part. In first part we discuss about the Culture in mainstream Theories of International Relation, in the second part we discuss about it in sub-theories of international relations and in third part we talk about culture in middle way theories of international relations and*

at the end we can reach to this answer that culture as an important concept in international relations, has extensive role in all international relations. It is true that this concept and its role has been neglected in mainstream theories, but with detailed studying in mainstream theories of international relations we can see that only with considering the political, security and economical issues, we can't achieve into depth understanding of international relations, So we need other theories in international theories like middle way theories and sub- theories to understand about the role of culture and its importance in international relations theories.

### **Culture and mainstream Theories of International Relations**

In mainstream Theories of International Relations (Realism, Liberalism, Neo- Realism, neo-liberalism and ... , in general as Rationalists in International Theories) due to accepting positivistic point of views and separation of Science from value, believe that Culture is not an important element in international relations theories to be paid attention. They believe that sub- domain of international relations are more related to the concept of culture and non- materialistic elements.

The mainstream of international relations focuses on a principally state-level analysis and knows the structure of International System as the fundamental factor in analysis of International Relations, which is in a state of anarchy. Most researchers of International Relations believe that anarchy under the influence of environment of bottlenecks and ruling circumstances can be created. Hence in studies that revolves around the International anarchy, recognition of the ruling political culture on international system as the basic pillar of the anarchy seems to be necessary (Hamshahri Diplomatic 2004).

Generally, International Relations theories can be considered as an arena for cultural operation which in that, theorists within a particular approach try to make myths about the categories of international politics. For example in Realism, while we explain international behavioral pattern according to anarchism, we create conflict and fear of security dilemma, which can explain a player's behavior within anarchy and at the end, lead to special cultural behavior. This cultural behavior is the basis of lack of security, distrust to others, self- interest and reduction of co operations in international relations. As well as, from the perspective of Liberalism, formation of international community through overcoming to the aspects of anarchy and international policy change from the state of conflict to cooperation, create another type of cultural behavior in international relations which is on base of cooperation. In other words, the structure of international system has tried to make a special culture and prescribes a special norm to the players. In this process sociability of fear, conflict and excessive unrest remains as the main features of international policy (Ghavam 2005: 298). Neo- realist theorists in their studies in this field believe that international relations cultural normative environment has negative and positive effects on system components. Foreign perceptions and behaviors of the states are heavily influenced by normative space dominate the international system (Hamshahri Diplomatic 2004). Understanding that normative conditions are important to analyze the player's relations in international system environment.

It is important to know that Constructivism, however, is increasingly becoming mainstream (Burchill et al 2005: 209-216). But we will study the concept of culture in Constructivism separately in another part of this paper in theories of middle way and as we studied the role of culture in mainstream theories in this paper, we thought about theories like: Realism, Liberalism, Neo- liberalism, neo-liberalism.

### **Culture and sub- Theories of International Relations**

#### **Culture and Marxism theory**

One of the central concerns of contemporary cultural studies is power. Cultural studies take its cue to the critique of power from Marxist theory. Marxist views on power and social formations have influenced radically as a direction to public discourses on cultural and social theories. Though the disintegration of USSR<sup>3</sup> and Eastern European communist nations, the liberalization of Chinese and Vietnamese economies, the influence of radical Islam are often noted as the demise of Marxist ideals,

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<sup>3</sup> - Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

*Marxian propositions continue to impact the theoretical understanding of cultural privilege, oppression, social setting and social formations in contemporary culture. The emergence of cultural studies in the latter part of the 20th century influenced the variety of approaches to the study of society and culture. Marxian theorists like Georg Lukacs, Antonio Gramsci, Ernst Bloch, Walter Benjamin Adorno, Althusser, Frederic Jameson and Terry Eagleton employed Marxian theory to investigate varied cultural forms and its interconnection to economy and history (Prayer Elmo Raj 2014: 89).*

*The Marxian approach that highlights the study of the interconnection between culture, economics and politics within determinate historical context eventually originated from capitalism. Capitalism is systemic and connote to the production through human labor where labor power is commoditized and exchanged for value (other commodities). Capitalism, to stay alive, has to depend on “the value of the commodities which the laborer receives for labor power has to be less than the value of labor power itself, even though these commodities are produced by labor power” (Valentine, 2006, 55).*

*The distinction between labor value and commodity value is a surplus that associates profit and extra capital advanced in the production of commodities. Built on disparity, capitalism is ethically arranged where opposite classes are obtained from their interconnection to production: a) bourgeoisie who experience the advantages b) the proletariat who experience deprivation. To place the two classes in opposition creates noteworthy political and economical dimensions that contribute to the understanding of culture in a society. Post-Marxists, though, do not directly emphasize on and delineate culture as a form of social life, they agree on the manifold ways of power relations that comprise culture that is politically and economically determined through oppositions, contestations and connections of authority. However culture assumes a non figurative theoretical value through these writers that is methodical and categorized social production of meaning and value. The self-configurative role of culture from politics and economy as part of capitalism carries the notion regarding the culture that is formed by politics and economy through culture. One may not be able to eliminate culture out of the economic and the political because culture is consequential and intersected not withstanding in diverse ways (Prayer Elmo Raj 2014: 90).*

*Many different versions of cultural studies have emerged in the past decades. While during its dramatic period of global expansion in the 1980s and 1990s, cultural studies were often identified with the approach to culture and society developed by the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in Birmingham, England, their sociological, materialist, and political approaches to culture had predecessors in a number of currents of cultural Marxism. Many 20th century Marxian theorists ranging from Georg Lukacs, Antonio Gramsci, Ernst Bloch, Walter Benjamin, and T.W. Adorno to Fredric Jameson and Terry Eagleton employed the Marxian theory to analyze cultural forms in relation to their production, their imbrications with society and history, and their impact and influences on audiences and social life. Traditions of cultural Marxism are thus important to the trajectory of cultural studies and to understanding its various types and forms in the present age (Kellner 2013: 1).*

*Marx and Engels rarely wrote in much detail on the cultural phenomena that they tended to mention in passing. The economic base of society for Marx and Engels consisted of the forces and relations of production in which culture and ideology are constructed to help secure the dominance of ruling social groups. In general, for a Marxian approach, cultural forms always emerge in specific historical situations, serving particular socio-economic interests and carrying out important social functions. For Marx and Engels, the cultural ideas of an epoch serve the interests of the ruling class, providing ideologies that legitimate class domination (Kellner 2013: 1-2).*

*Many later cultural Marxists although tended to ascribe more autonomy and import to culture than in classical Marxism. While Marx’s writings abound with literary reference and figures, he never developed sustained models of cultural analysis. Instead, Marx focused his intellectual and political energies on analyzing the capitalist mode of production, current economic developments and political struggles, and vicissitudes of the world market and modern societies now theorized as “globalization” and “modernity”(Kellner 2013: 1-2).*

#### **Culture and Critical Theory<sup>4</sup>**

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<sup>4</sup> - So- Called Frankfurt School

'Critical Theory' names the so-called Frankfurt School – the tradition associated with the Institute of Social Research was founded in Frankfurt in 1924. According to Critical Theory, the point of philosophy is that it can contribute to a critical and emancipator social theory. The specification of that idea depends upon which Critical Theory is at issue; Critical Theory is an extended and somewhat diverse tradition. Its first generation included Adorno, Max Horkheimer and Herbert Marcuse. Most of the members of this generation had Jewish backgrounds and for that reason and because the Institute was Marxist, the first generation fled the Nazis. The Institute re-opened in Frankfurt in 1950. Within the second generation, the most prominent figures are Jürgen Habermas and Albrecht Wellmer. Within the third, Axel Honneth is the best known. There is a fourth generation too. Moreover, there were stages or phases within the first generation. Following Dubiel (1985), we may distinguish, within that generation: (i) an initial stage (1924 to around 1930) in which the school was more traditionally Marxist than it was subsequently; (ii) a 'materialist' stage (1930–1937); (iii) a stage (1937–1940) that began with the adoption of the label 'Critical Theory'; and (iv) the 'critique of instrumental reason' (1940–1945). The treatment of first generation Critical Theory that follows confines itself to iii and iv (Joll 2015: 180).

Critical theory in international relations is a diverse set of schools of thought in international relations that have criticized the theoretical, meta-theoretical and/or political status quo, both in international relations theory and in international politics more broadly- from positivist as well as post positivist positions. Positivist critiques include Marxist and neo- Marxist approaches and certain strands of social constructivism. Post positivist critiques include poststructuralist, postcolonial, "critical" constructivist, critical theory (in the strict sense used by the Frankfurt school), neo- Gramscian, most Feminist, and some English- school approaches, as well as non-Weberian historical sociology (Hobden and Hobson 2002: 142).

The endeavor of critical theory is to endorse self-reflexive examinations of the experiences we have and the ways in which we make sense of ourselves, our cultures, and the world (Patrasco, Wani 2015: 389).

Critical theory wants to answer to this question that, How Capitalism wants to reproduce itself through cultural issue? This theory believes that modern capitalism has been able to overcome many contradictions and crises when it was facing with them. One of the issues that facilitated this process is the culture industry that meets the false requirement and represses actual requirements. The orientation of critical theory is toward the cultural level and what is called the realities of modern capitalist society. With this meaning that the central dominance of the modern world transferred from economy to cultural territory. Critical school believes on cultural repression in modern society. They believe that this dominance is done with cultural elements than economic elements.

Return to normative ethics in international relations is considered to be the main characteristics of critical theory (Brown 1992: 196). Reducing the global inequalities, establishing justice in the world, respecting to diversities and differences are from the considering points of critical theorists in international development facilities and at the same time paying attention to cultural positions of people -and to this note that their interests and objectives are defined in a social form- is very important (Linklater 1982: 8).

This issue that we have cultural diversities, how we should have hope to change the status quo and after that in order to replace a new order, how we can achieve to public moral principles which are accepted by all people, is important for critical theorists (Moshirzadeh 2014: 239).

From the perspective of critical theory, dialogue as a tool in different levels especially at the inter cultural level, can lead to a new understanding of global politics. Gramsci in this field believes that in discussing about the changes in international relations, this issue finds cultural dimension too. Gramsci sees the comprehensive transformation of social reality through a "mutual culture" (Rupert 1993: 79).

### **Culture and Middle way theories of International Relations**

#### **Culture and Constructivism**

constructivism is a "social theory of international politics" that emphasizes the social construction of world affairs as opposed to the claim of (neo)realists that international politics is shaped by the rational-choice behaviour/decisions of egoist actors who pursue their interests by making utilitarian

calculations to maximize their benefits and minimize their losses, hence the materiality of international structures (Wendt 1994: 385).

In the Constructivism, the variables of interest like military power, trade relations, international institutions, or domestic preferences are not important because they are objective facts about the world, but rather because they have certain social meanings. This meaning is constructed from a complex and specific mix of history, ideas, norms, and beliefs which scholars must understand if they are to explain State behavior (Wendt 1995: 71-81).

Culture as an important concept in constructivism is the newest fad sweeping the literature on international relations, security studies and international economies. A throng of recent essays and books point to culture as the basic force impelling nation-states, other institutions and individuals to act organize themselves as they do. Many of these writing argue that culture's important is growing (Mazarr 1996: 177).

Explaining the role and place of culture in international relations is very important. Especially, proposing the recent theories in international relations has led to strengthening the role of culture as a basis for analyzing international issues. While, classical thinkers and scholars of international relations have emphasized on the political, security and economic areas to explain the factors affecting the international issues, some of them have found that achieving the depth of international relations is possible only with considering these areas. This group of thinkers seeks the answers of their questions within their culture and cultural issues and decided to pay a special attention to the cultural issues in addition to adoption of major political, security and economic factors, and study this important dimension of social life in international relations. These thinkers see the culture as an important phenomenon that is hidden in the perspective of classical thinkers. Their main criticism is to the previous theories that have not paid attention to the role of culture at the international relations. These scholars for explaining the international issues with considering the culture beside the political, security and economical issues led to emergence of two ideas. Some people construed culture as the area of conflict and the foundation of tensions in the international relations area and somebody in contrast to the first group believe that culture is the area of dialogue, interaction and integration in the field of international relations. Thus, it appears that the place of Constructivism theory is unique (Jansiz&FasihiMoghaddamLakani, 2015: 22-23).

Constructivism is a metatheoretical model in social science and an in-depth analysis of issues of ontology and epistemology that its followers can be located in the middle of the two main parts, i.e., realism and liberalism in terms of metatheoretical model concepts in the mid-range of naturalists/positivists on the one hand and poststructuralists on the other hand and in the substantive issues of International Relations (Moshirzadeh, 2011: 323). This approach uses the constructed and changing nature of identity, opportunity and possibility of change in the international system (Mansbach, 2002: 1-5) and by challenging the assumptions of rational ontology, offers an approach based on principles and different assumptions of the original currents and tries to delineate how factors such as culture, religion, ethnicity, gender, race and nationalism affect the foreign policy through an "Approach to Identity Politics" (DehqaniFiroozabadi, 2009: 43).

Constructivists for analyzing foreign policy of the countries and investigating the materialization of their interests in the international system, instead of focusing on the goals the governments are pursuing in the international system, try to investigate the definition that each state offers about its identity to specify the goals and interests they are following in the international system (Kubalkova, 2001: 115). Because in Constructivists' idea "identity" is a set of beliefs about "self", "others" and the interactions between them (Fearon&Wendt, 2005: 64) and is strongly influenced by culture and plays a decisive role in determining the interests of a country, Pouliot knows, Constructivism possessing a certain way of reasoning that is based on the meta-theoretical commitments and assumptions like the possibility of recognition despite its construction, the coincided importance of material and immaterial realities and the emphasis on the construction of social reality and the existence of interactive formative relationship between knowledge and social reality (Pouliot, 2007: 361). In fact, ignoring the impact of culture and identity as a social phenomenon and an important factor in determining the interests and foreign policy of countries is one of the most important constructivists' critics to the mainstream theories (Lapid, 2001: 15).

It should be noted that Constructivism theorists are divided into several types based on the level of analysis, methods and strategies. Ted Hopf, divides the non-essential current or critical views of

*International Relations at the two categories of extreme Constructivists and conventional Constructivists (Hopf, 1998: 171). While, conventional Constructivists are divided to three categories of "systemic", "unit level" and "holistic" in terms of analysis level. Alexander Wendt as the most important systemic Constructivist, knows this level of analysis enjoying a social nature and believes that mental vision structure of the international system is based on a common understanding that have a fundamental role in shaping the identity and subsequently delineating the interests of states (Wendt, 1999: 385). Peter Katzeneshtein emphasizes on the internal factors of developing the identity of the government (Smith, 2001: 235). He believes that culture, shaping and arranging are crucial in the definition of "self", "other", interests, and orientations and behavior of foreign policy of a state in the international area (Katzeneshtein, 1998: 28).*

*In fact, it is an originally "cultural" theory of international politics explained by different "cultures of anarchy" constructed by states themselves, which challenges the "ontological atomism" and "epistemological positivism" both Neorealism and Neoliberalism as traditional theories of international relations share in principle (Griffiths 1999: 200). As a social theory, constructivism contests materialism by hypothesizing the structures of human association as "primarily cultural rather than material phenomena," and rationalism by arguing for their function as not only behavior-regulating but also identity- and interest-constructing, though "material forces," it admits, "still matter," and "people," it acknowledges, "are still intentional actors." What it strives to illuminate, however, is that the meanings of these forces and intentionalities of these actors "depend largely on the shared ideas in which they are embedded, and as such culture is a condition of possibility for power and interest explanations (Went 1999: 193)."*

### **Culture and English school**

*The English School theory in international relations came out of the post World War II era, where many writers working in Britain began looking for alternatives to the realist and liberalist viewpoint of international relations. Thus, the early thinkers aimed to promote a new way of thinking "that viewed international society as a middle way between realist accounts of systemic logics and revolutionist accounts that plotted the downfall of the state system as a whole" (Dunne, 2011: 4). The English School maintains that there is a 'society of states' at the international level, despite the condition of anarchy (Buzan 2004: 112).*

*In English school many scholars like F. S. C. Northrop, Adda Bozeman, Hedley Bull, Michael Don élan and the others has studied the concept of culture as an important issue in international relations. They have paid attention to cultural differences and have studied international system as a special kind of "political society" with the name of "international community" (Walker 1990: 7). Although the international system is considered beyond national system which is based on common identity in defined territory borders, but includes norms, rules, unwritten rules, legal procedures and in fact diplomatic and trade cultures which in practical is acceptable to all who are operating in international environment. Studding about the analysis's about the nature of international relationships, connections and human right and its impacts on the formation of foreign policy shows that culture -with its different concepts- has permanent presence in this analysis (Salimi 1378: 59).*

*It can be said that English school by replying on immaterial and dialogic aspects of international relations, emphasize on the role of culture, rules and norms and paying attention to normative dimension of international political life and consequently with paying attention to existing facilities to transform relations -in order to built a fairer international political life- tries to make a middle way in metatheoretical issues that along with other middle way theories can provide a proper context for theoretical and research studies in international relations field.*

*For a long time The English school members in international relations were paying attention to cultural diversities in international policy arena and we can say that post ahead of postmodernism, they have noticed about that (Burchill et al 2005: 158).*

### **Conclusion**

*In this paper we clarified the importance of culture as a concept in international relations theories and provided a systematic review about the concept of culture, pursued by different scholars in international relations theories. During the discussions presented in this paper we discussed about the role of culture as a concept in international relations theories in three separated part. In first part*

*we studied about the Culture in mainstream Theories of International Relation, in the second part we studied this concept in sub- theories of international relations and in third part we talked about culture in middle way theories of international relations. As the main question of this paper is about the role of culture as a concept in international relations theories, at the end we can reach to this answer that, despite being ignored in traditional theories, culture as an important concept in international relations, has important role in all international relations especially in lagged and recent theories and only with considering the political, security and economical issues, we won't be able to understand the realities of political events in field of international relations, So we need other concepts like 'culture' to be able to analyze the political international issues.*

*We should note that, the concept of culture is one of the most complex and controversial concepts not only in international relations, but also in the other branches of political sciences and until now we haven't had any comprehensive definition about the concept of culture to be acceptable to all scholars, so if we want to have complete and accurate knowledge about this concept in international relations theories, we should consider all the aspects of culture and respect to all cultural norms and values in field of international relations.*

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