
State identity and global economic governance: a research note.

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Introduction

This contribution is an exploratory paper to develop the conceptual groundwork for a study on state identity and international economic negotiations. The relevance of identity to the study of world politics is well-established over the last two decades. The emergence of identity in IR was the core the constructivist turn in IR. Remarkably, the turn stopped half way: economy, the traditional domain of international political economy, remained largely unaffected. As a rather broad generalization, one could claim that it is still assumed that identity is relevant to IR, but in IPE the exogenously given interest seems to offer all the explanations one needs. Of course, many exceptions question this simplification such as studies on norms and institutions in IPE. Still, the tendency to focus on interests, rather than on identities.

The subtext of the continuing emphasis on interests in the study of IPE is the existence of a neutral, given framework to determine economic interests. Interests formulated by domestic or transnational interest groups, by domestic constituencies or other, are the result of an neutral or partisan economic calculation. The aim of the interest group's exercise is to realise as much benefit as possible. This paper does not so much question the interest formulation by different groups and their relevance for international economic negotiations. What it attempts, is to put question marks by the assumed “neutral” framework which economic calculations seem to offer. If identity is constitutive of practice, it follows logically that it concerns all practice including such negotiations. It is thus argued that interests, which are formulated

during international economic negotiations, express multiple and conflicting identities. At the same time, such interest formulation (re)produces identity.

But, would the study of identity in international economic negotiations make a difference? Would it improve the understanding of the negotiation dynamics, outcomes and perceived legitimacy and equity of the negotiated outcome? Several examples suggest it would. For instance, the stress on sovereignty in the US political and state culture explains its practice in international trade negotiations. While the US seek to open markets, there is also an emphasis on sovereignty. It leads to an ambivalence towards international agreements geared towards liberalisation which include limitations on that sovereignty (Pigman 1999).

This paper is of exploratory nature. It is a starting point to study identity in international economic negotiations. It is accepted that practice constitutes and is constituted by identity. For international economic negotiations, the emphasis is on state identity for the time being. State identity is the identity of the collectivity state *elite*. As is developed in this paper, this identity is internally contested and is only one among many identities relevant to the study of world politics. This paper also emphasises the relational dimension of identity: identity can exist only in a social context, in interaction with others.

This paper starts with a discussion on identity and world politics. Then, four dimensions of identity which Goff and Dunn (2004) formulated, are discussed. A fifth dimension is added: the relational. Then, the concept of state culture is first placed in a background of plural identities such as diplomatic and political identities. Then Hedetoft's (2003) conceptualization of state culture is critically reviewed. After a summary of the discussion, alleys for future research are laid down.

Identity and world politics

In the 1990s, identity became a key concept in the study of world politics. Wendt made an influential contribution to the spread of the concept. In his *Anarchy is what states make of it* (Wendt 1992) and further publications, identity was applied to states and interactions between them. (Wendt 1994, ; 1999) In 1999, Wendt defined identity as "to have certain ideas about who one is in a given situation" (1999, 170). He further elaborated that identities are not "carved in stone", but can change (1999, 21). Moreover, identity is not only subjective, but has an intersubjective (relational) dimension (1999, 224). It is the intersubjectivity which provides "truth conditions" for identity claims (1999, 177): even if some "Belgian"¹ politicians claim that their state is a superpower, the international community won't confirm such identity

¹ The present political situation, which seems to question the existence of a Belgian political elite as a social collectivity, calls for such inverted commas.

aspirations. According to Wendt, the degree in which an identity depends on subjective or intersubjective definition, varies (1999, 224).

In parallel with Wendt's work on identity, a more critical encounter with identity occurred (Neumann 1996). Here, only Neumann's main tenets are summarised. Identity depends on the creation of a boundary between the Self and Other. This boundary creation is "an active and ongoing part of identity formation" (id., 166). Neumann also concluded that there is no reason to focus on one type of identity in the study of world politics. There is a tendency to emphasis state identity, but there is more than one politically relevant identity (id., 167). Neumann also drew attention to the writer's role: writing on identity can become an unwilling contribution to "othering" (ibid.). He favoured to be instrumental in the understanding of the other in a more constructive way.

With these two authors, some general lines of identity research in the study of world politics surface. Their work is complemented by a rich body of research. Here, only a few cherries are picked. For long, the key concept of security made identity seem redundant in the study of world politics. This changed dramatically with the endeavours of the Copenhagen School. It pushed the research on identity in world politics in the direction ontological security and securitisation.(Huysmans 1998a) By broadening the concept of security to include ontological security, identity was include in security studies (Huysmans 1998a, ; Huysmans 1998b) and further consolidated it in the study of world politics. The ontological security concept was further developed on the basis of Giddens' (1991) *Modernity and Self-Identity* (cf. also Giddens 1984 [1986]). Mitzen (2006a, ; 2006b) was among those who translated this approach to ontological security to the Study of World Politics (Kinnvall 2004, ; Rasmussen 2002, ; Steele 2005). This contribution relies on her work to introduce ontological security and routines.

Ontological security is security of one's identity. It is like physical security "a primary drive in every social actor". The problem of everyday life is that chaos is lurking everywhere. Whatever action one undertakes, there is always some possibility that outcome will deviate from the original intention of the agent. The awareness of such uncertainty would paralyze every agent. In order to cope with it, routines are developed. These are relatively automatic responses whereby the agent does not rationally calculate its course of action, but does as appropriate in given circumstances.(Mitzen 2006a, ; 2006b) It should be noted it does not turn the agent in some kind of robot. The agent maintains a basic understanding, monitors its actions, and adapts these if deemed necessary.(Giddens 1984 [1986]) The routines allow the agent to escape the chaos and maintain a sound understanding of the Self. Ontological security, therefore, enables agency. (Mitzen 2006a, ; 2006b)

In the aforementioned and other literature on identity in the study of world politics, several characteristics are repeated over and over again: identity is neither singular nor constant. It is socially constructed and defines the Self against the Other. Goff and Dunn (2004b) extracted these four dimensions and discussed these in the edited volume as alterity, fluidity, constructedness and multiplicity. With *alterity* (Goff and Dunn 2004a, 237-239; 2004c, 4-5), the boundary creation between Self and Other is repeated: the Self cannot be defined without the Other. Such othering strategies can result in the subordination of the Other as inferior or “on the path to become like the Self”. A strong distinction is established by turning the Other into an enemy (e.g. Kinnvall 2004). Still, Goff and Dunn come to the conclusion that othering strategies do not necessarily have such negative result: they claim that it can contribute to a willingness to learn about the other (2004a, 238). Still, they cannot negate that the production of (state) identity requires these differences and boundaries. Without these differences the Self disappears (Nayak 2006, 45). Knowing the Other is knowing the Self. Hence, “[t]he Other is always inside”. (Nayak 2006, 46; Sarup 1996, 71)

Flockhart (2006) argued that “identities are constructed through a complex constellation of we-groups” (id., 94) This argument is a variation on the *multiplicity* dimension of identity: a single actor has multiple identities. (Goff and Dunn 2004a, 241-242; 2004c, 7-8) These identities are not necessarily coherent, but can result in multiple contradictory Selves (Sarup 1996). Actors can also actively attempt to bridge competing identity aspirations. An example is Neumann’s (2004) contribution to Goff and Dunn’s volume in which he excavates how Putin had attempted to bridge the narratives of nationalists and westernizers in Russia. Notwithstanding this multiplicity and the bridging attempt, the individual agent has a need for a coherent narrative. The tensions between contending identity aspiration do not appear in this narrative on the Self. The awareness of conflicting identities would create uncertainty about the Self or ontological insecurity.

The multiplicity dimension, as presented so far, conflates two multiplicities. A single agent is socialized in several cultures and has plural identities (plural Selves). This has to be distinguished from the internal contestation of identity by different narratives (cf. Putin example).

The attempt to bridge competing identity aspirations in the Putin example suggest that identity is *fluid* (Goff and Dunn 2004a, 239-241; 2004c, 5-6), that identity can change: two competing narratives are combined and result in a new one. But to what extent does identity change? Although it is generally accepted that identity is not “carved in stone”, ontological security reminds one of the need for identity continuity (or at least the subjective feeling of such continuity). Neumann offered one way out of this contradiction. He criticised disciplines and approaches which treated identity as given (1996), but also (2004) differentiated between the changeability of several

layers of structure. A basic layer is the human collective's ideas about itself (2004, 20). *In casu*, the relation between Russia (Self) and the West (Other). These are less subject to change than the image of the "kind" of the Other and the relation between the Self and the Other. (2004, 25)

A last dimension in Goff and Dunn discuss (Goff and Dunn 2004a, 240-241; 2004c, 6-7), is the *constructedness* of identity which they limit to purposive attempts of identity formation. Many examples exist of such endeavours, but the "socially constructed" dimension of identity has the more generally accepted meaning in this paper. As follows from the previous discussion, identity is neither natural or given, but stands in a constitutive relation with the agent's practice.

A fifth dimension, this paper wishes to add to the list by Goff and Dunn², is the *relational* dimension of identity. While an agent enacts and produces her identity in practice, identity does not exist in social isolation. Identity depends on others, not as boundary defining, but as recognizing of one's identity. For instance, the aspiration to be a teacher is only realized if others recognize one as such. The Belgian example mentioned before, emphasised this relational aspect.

So far, individual or collective identity are not differentiated. This paper's main concern is state identity in international economic negotiations. It is assumed that the representatives at these negotiations are members of the state elite. In the case of state (elite), there is a collectivity which shares a identity. It has an internal as well as a relational identity or a corporate and a social identity. Wendt defined corporate identity as "the intrinsic, self-organizing qualities that constitute actor individuality ... For organizations it means their constituent individuals, physical resources, shared beliefs and institutions in virtue of which individuals function as 'we'..." (Wendt 1994, 385). Hence, it enables collective agency. Moreover, corporate identity extends the group over time and space: the collectivity is more than the sum of the individual agents at a given point in time. More in general, the state is composed by individuals and other social structures, but has at the same time characteristics which are not reducible to these component parts (cf. Bhaskar 1979 [1998], 38; Wendt 1999).

In contrast, social identities are "sets of meanings that an actor attributes to itself while taking the perspective of others" (ibid.). It is the group's own image of its role and objectives in a given setting (Cederman and Daase 2003, 7) The relational dimension is most evident in social identity.

According to Wendt, corporate identities are singular and thus oppose multiplicity: they constitute an actor (Wendt 1994, 385). Zehfuss (2001) criticized this approach. In her critique on Wendt's explicit anthropomorphisation of the state, she

² Dunn and Goff also mention the relational aspect, by replace it by alterity in their list of identity dimensions.

undermined his assumed unity of the corporate identity and underlined the need to acknowledge its complexity. Identity is not limited to a question of boundaries between Self and Other, but is continually contested in practice (Zehfuss 2001, 333). Similarly, Cederman and Daase (2003) emphasized the necessity to problematize corporate identity and to approach it as emerging from practice by agents, rather than accepting it as given in practice. In contrast to his conceptualisation of corporate identity, Wendt accepts that social identities are multiple because actors have varying social identities that vary in salience (Wendt 1994, 385). However, the variation is of a different form and does not refer to contesting identity images which account for a continual internal contestation of the (corporate) identity. Rather, it refers to the plural identities of an agent. It is assumed in this paper that the corporate and social identity of a state are continually contested.

A conceptualisation exercise: state identity.

Although the emphasis of this paper is on state identity, it omits the assumption that identity in world politics is always identical to national identity. (cf. Goff and Dunn 2004c, ; Neumann 1996) In this paper, identity of importance to global economic governance is assumed plural: diplomatic, state (not identical to national), political (“national” society), and other particularist/partisan identities. Each is embedded in a specific culture with its shared values, norms and meaning. Identity enables agency in relevant circumstances.

Although state identity it seems to suggest a unified actor and is often used interchangeable with national identity, this paper avoids this. Following Hedetoft (2003), state identity is shared by a specified collectivity, the state elite. Such distinction is also found in several other studies on identity in world politics. Several authors differentiate between society at large (“the people”) and political elite.(Flockhart 2006, ; Marcussen and Zolner 2003) In their study on the Danish EMU referendum of 2000, Marcussen and Zolner draw a distinction between the political culture with egalitarian values shared by the Danish people on the one hand and the “stability-oriented macro-economic policy” and the “sound policy discourse” of the political elite on the other. The political elite was assimilated in these discourses during their interaction with their European counterparts in the 1980s. It was shared by the Danish political, administrative and business elite Whereas Marcussen and Zolner treat the values of the political culture as culture and identity issue, they consider the elite values as causal ideas about the relations between key economic variables (id., 102-103). Hence, the Danish politicians in favour of the EMU had to bridge conflicting identity aspiration: being member of the egalitarian Danish society and the attempt to implement “sound policy”. The attempt to bridge the two

narratives failed as the No-votes substantiate. In a similar vein, other studies on identity are limited to or focused on the state elite. In contrast to the previous case, there can be a conscious attempt to “self-binding” or “character planning”.(Jepperson et al. 1999, 61) Example are the conscious attempt by post-war Germany to become a civilian power. Here, constructedness as defined by Goff and Dunn (conscious attempt by an assignable agent) appears, but it is a special case.

The differentiation between state elite and “people” is only one possible distinction which challenges the conceptualisation of state identity as unitary. Other examples are identities embedded in administrative culture or military culture. Again, each of these cultures seems a unity, but the five dimensions of identity characterize each of them. State identity is only one among several identities which an individual negotiator shares or has to bridge. In international politics in general, a diplomatic culture exists which Wiseman defined as “the accumulated communicative and representational norms, rules and institutions devised to improve relations and avoid war between interacting and mutually recognizing political entities” (2005, 416). More to the point, it tells who the relevant agents are (state representatives) and what the expected practice is. Wiseman selected four norms: the use of force only as last resort, transparency, continuous dialogue, multilateralism and civility (or common courtesies) (2005, 416, 419-425). Being a state representative, means to have internalized these norms. Of course, internalization is no precondition to participate in international negotiations: the norm following can be the result of strategic calculations only.(Checkel 2005) Whatever way, a set of potentially conflicting values and rules appear for the state representative.

As argued above, political culture is another source of competing identities. Here, political culture are the values, meanings and rules shared by a (national) society (discussion on political culture: Almond 1990 [2000], ; Formisano 2000). The related political identity has the same dimensions as mentioned before. Only one supplementary comment is necessary: the (national) society can consist of several social collectivities with competing identities. This paper does not suggest that each (national) society has one, unique political culture. It is only a possibility. Rather, a panacea of particularist cultures exist in each society and crossing borders between societies. Examples are social movement and religions. It offers agents belonging to these collectivities an identity.

For international economic negotiations, a last set of shared values and meanings is of interest: the dominant narrative on economy in such negotiations. There is some reluctance to label this a culture, but it consists of shared values and meanings as well as recommendations for policy making on national or international level. These can correspond or clash with identities.

Hedetoft’s (2003) approach to state culture is presented here with some qualifications:

he presents a fixed and single state identity. Still the distinction between state and political culture is informative. Whereas political culture is shared by the society “at large”, state culture is shared by the state-elite only. It contains narratives, including foundational myths, that generates the Self and its boundaries by othering strategies. Hedetoft develops six dimensions of state culture. A closer look reveals that they actually they represent a mix of dimensions of and domains in which state culture and identity can be studied:

- *structural specificities of the state*. How are powers divided in a state? It does not refer to the constitutional or legal provisions only, but includes the actual practice (Hedetoft 2003). The structural specificities constitute the state as agent and belongs to the corporate identity. It is a dimension of state culture;
- *ritual practices* are opening of parliaments, official holidays, etc. (Hedetoft 2003). Again, it gives the state its specificities and enables its constituent members to distinguishes the Self from the Other. Therefore, it makes up part of the corporate identity. Still, several problems arise. First, it is not easy to draw the boundary between the state identity and the political identity of the state because the latter shares several of these ritual practices with the state elite. Moreover, such ritual practices are at the same time a social act whereby the other is expected to recognize the Self. What is more, ritual practices are at the same time enactments of identity. They are domains in which state identity can be studied;
- *state specific discourses and meanings* are the ways in which the state represents and constructs itself, both to the people and the state-elite it-self (Hedetoft 2003). Again, the boundary between corporate and social identity is blurred;
- *forms of communication* within the state and between state and society (Hedetoft 2003). A similar comment as with previous dimension appears. As with ritual practices, forms of communication also depend on the political culture. Furthermore, communication is a dimension as well as a domain;
- *how actors are socialised in the state culture* and become part of state elite, e.g. through political parties, schools, networks, ... (Hedetoft 2003). Here, the same comments as with ritual practices and forms of communication apply;
- *international and foreign relations*. The international dimension of state culture is relatively isolated from public scrutiny according the Hedetoft. He assumes that the clearest expressions of state culture are found in foreign policy (Hedetoft 2003). With this, he conceptualizes it as a domain in which state culture is to be studied. It is a domain of special interest to this paper.

Hedetoft’s state culture evokes several comments. Here, two positive elements must be mentioned. He offers an insightful distinction between state and political culture. It results in a more complex picture for the study of international economic

negotiations because state and political identity are not neatly divided. Moreover, state elites need to bridge state and political identities if they want to gain support for the negotiated outcome. Second, his dimensions are helpful guides where to look for expressions of state culture. Problematic is the omission of conflicting identities and changes in state identity (esp. Hedetoft 2003, appendix). In addition, Hedetoft's paper offers three messages. First, it brings yet another dimension to two level games: the necessity of bridging several identities. The distinction also highlights potential conflicts between the two identities, as in the case of the Danish EMU referendum. With the Putin example, this paper adds another form of bridging, i.e. between conflicting narratives on the same Self. Second, it proved difficult to draw a strict line between corporate and social identity of the state (elite). Still, the self-organizing qualities of the collective agents and changes therein, contribute to the understanding the stability and change of this identity. An example is the failed attempt by the US to recast the identity and appropriate practice of Germany during the Iraq – Kuwait war. This is only explained by the self-image of the German elite and, in this case, also society at large (Zehfuss 2001). Third, there are good reasons to look at international relations for expressions or rather enactments of state identity.

Multiple collectivities, multiple identities

The above discussion can be summarized as follows:

- Identity is multiple in three ways. First, identity is always contested. Second, an agent has multiple (plural), potentially conflicting self-images, still she constructs a coherent narrative. Third, identity changes over time and space;
- Identity is socially constructed. Therefore, practice is the only instantiation of identity;
- Identity is relational. Internally, image of the Other constitutes the boundary between Self and Other. Moreover, it defines the Self. Externally, identity depends on the practice of others, either to recognise the enacted identity or to refuse such recognition;
- Identity is fluid because it changes continually. Such change can be intended, but change is more encompassing than the instances of purposive change suggest. Still, as Neumann argues, there are several levels of identity, some of which are less changeable than others;
- Identity provides an agent with ontological security;
- In the case of the collective agent "state", the aforementioned dimensions of identity apply to its social identity. Its corporate identity is contested, but not plural.

Consequences for state identity research international economic negotiations

The research question introduced in the beginning was: how does state identity constitute international economic negotiations. This was guided by an interest in an ameliorated understanding of the factors that play a role in international economic negotiations. The starting point was that all practice is constitutive of and constituted by identity. Still, this leads to some additional questions in the context of such negotiations. What is the relation between state identity and the dominant economic narrative in the negotiations? If a state elite considers its economic position the result of historical circumstances, then a free market approach will clash with their beliefs. Another question relates to the other: how do other state elites react on the presentation of the Self. In negotiations on the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPA) with the ACP countries, the EU wanted to present itself as an agent for development, but there seems to be little recognition of this Self-image by third states. A last question relates to the "Other": what is the image of the Other? How is the boundary between Self and Other reproduced in relation to the economy? If a state elite sees the Other as a partner for the creation of wealth, the negotiation dynamic will be different than in the case that the Other is seen as exploiter.

In terms of research, following preliminary set of questions offers a path towards answering the research question and the special points of attention, i.e. the relational dimension of identity and the plural identities.

1. What is the position in the world economy and in relation to the topic of negotiation according to the state identity, how is it expressed during the negotiations, how did others react (recognition or not), did the identity evolve during the negotiations ?
2. What are the conflicting narratives on the economic position and the topic under negotiation? Are there bridging attempts between conflicting narratives? Or, are other narratives silenced? How do others in the negotiations react on the bridging or silencing?
3. Do other identities conflict with the state identity or is there a "we-ness" as defined by Flockhart? For international economic negotiations, three identities seem relevant here: political identity, diplomatic identity and the dominant economic narrative.

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