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COLLEGE OF LAW, GOVERNMENT AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES INTERNATIONAL RELATION GFPP 2063 INDIVIDUAL ASSIGNMENT PREPARED BY: NAME: NUR AMIRA SYUHADA BT AHMAD SOBRI PREPARED FOR: DR KNOCK TAPIWA ZENGENI Question 2: Critically discuss the main ideas of the constructivist approach to international relations Preface In our daily life, we are interconnected with each other when we start to communicate. Actors such as people, ideas and interest allow us to establish relationship. Same goes to the international system, the same concept exist when we try to understand international relation. International relation is a part of international system whereby its concern on the relationship among the world’s government involving the state actors and non-state actors. There are many theories used to explain international relation particularly in their own way such as in Realism, Liberalism, Constructivism, Marxism and etc. Thus, this paper ought to discuss and explain constructivism on the main ideas promote by the constructivist in an international relation. I choose this question because of my understanding is more toward the constructivist approach and I believe that constructivist approach is among the critical field of study that we must clearly understand. Thus, I tried to find sources about the approach of constructivism and there are some useful previous studies that I used as my references. Thus, I tried to answer the question by pointing out the definition of constructivist approach as well as the main ideas brought by the approach. Apart from that, i am also highlighting few examples to strengthen my answer Introduction Constructivism or social constructivism can be clearly defines as a social theory or an approach that has been long used in the field of international relation. Though, it is newly recognised and being practiced by certain people. In our international system, constructivist approach seems to play crucial roles in organizing relationship among states. Based on the definition of international system in one book, “ International system is a set of relationship among the world’s states, structured according to certain rules and pattern of interaction". Thus, it is no doubt that constructivist is a part of international system. What are the main ideas brought by constructivist in international relation matter? The key answers are ideas, norms, identity and social interaction. These four terminologies is reflecting constructivism as a social theory and approach in IR. Fundamentally, constructivist approach focused on the element of social rather than materialistic element as such in Realism. Constructivist argues on realism point of view that material is the key element in understanding international relation. According to Yu —Tai Tsai (2009), constructivism never reject material things but also to complement it with the roles of ideas. This idea will complement the material world through shaping human’s behaviour. Therefore, the evolution of international system exist when actors of the international society and politic promotes cooperative relation independently. Constructivist mentioned that, social reality is subjective whereby actor’s behaviour creates collective meaning in an international system. Indirectly, the behaviour of actors leads to the creation of norms and identity that shape foreign policy. Unlike realism and liberalism, constructivism isn’t just a social theory but more likely an approach in understanding international relation. This is because; social constructivism to some scholar is a lesson about norms, identity and interaction as a real situation that can provide us with useful knowledge for us to not only understand international relation but to also understand the formation of foreign policy in the eyes of constructivist. Let us consider the following examples that can help us in understanding the main ideas brought by constructivist approach. Gun Story Imagine that there is a gun in your hand. Basically, the image of the gun is negative. When society sees you holding a gun, their first impression is that you are going to kill someone since the gun is the key to kill someone. However, constructivist views this differently; gun is nothing much than just a gun but the most important is who possesses the gun. This is because, the idea of killing is coming from the person who is having the gun and not the gun for sure. If he or she decided not to shoot, nothing will happen and no one will be killed. Related this example with constructivist concept of idea, in an international relation, idea is very important to shape the behaviour of actors. This is another example of constructivist idea of identity in international relation. In 1992, United State of America sent troops to Somalia. Somalia is a country with minimal strategic and economic importance to US. During that period, Somalia jump into civil war involving the political crisis and African drought that affected its population. Mass starvation occurred when its threaten one fourth of the population. US see this in the perspective of humanity and the idea of helping Somalia emerged after huge coverage by the CNN. Media such as CNN took active interest to attract world attention by picturing Somalian hunger. They illustrated and displayed the image of flies and children with diseases such as malnutrition and etc. Unconsciously, media has created such ideas for US to pursue their national interest in providing such aids to Somalia. Thus, according to constructivist, media plays strong influence in spreading ideas that can helps state in strengthening their international relations with others. Based on the example above, constructivist believes that social and material is complementing each other in international system. This is because, according to Alexander Wendt(1994), constructivist approach also stressed on international structure that consists of social relationship and material capabilities that will absolutely influence the identity and interest of a nation. Thus, constructivism is an interesting subject to be discussed rather than realism or liberalism. Conclusion In our international system, it is no doubt that the social interaction exist long time before. Thus, constructivist approach point out that identity and national interest was constructed through social interaction. In Malaysia for example, foreign policy toward Vietnam in Rohignya Ethnic issue was based on shared identity. Constructivist view this as Majority of Malaysian are Muslim and the identity of Islam shared by the minority ethnic (Rohignya) in Vietnam as Muslim as well. Thus Malaysia feel that it is their responsibi lity to helps their Muslim society and to implement their foreign policy as well. As a result, Malaysia took this opportunity by voicing out their opinion that Vietnam government should acknowledge this minority ethnic group as part of their population. As stated in a book on international relation study, State identities are complex and it change through time through the process of socialization (Joshua S. G. & Jon C. P., 2012: p. 97). Therefore, the process of socialization was briefly discussed by the constructivist in their school of thought. Again, According to Kennetz Waltz, the international systems are ordered based on the principle of its members’ sovereign equality and it is therefore decentralized and anarchic. To sum up, constructivist approach brings the idea of social interaction as a core element in shaping our international system and this can be supported by several opinions of theorist. Max Weber for example emphasized that, “ the social world (i. e. the world of human interaction) is fundamentally different from the natural world of physical phenomena". Plus, he conclude that “ subjective understanding is the specific characteristic of sociological knowledge" (as cited in Jackson, 2006, p. 164). Hence, constructivist approach rely on such perception that shared understanding as well as shared knowledge of each other’s behaviour is very important for human being to create meaning to them. In fact, constructivism tell us that the international system is constituted by ideas and not material. 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