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Jordan: State Interests and Public Spheres: The International Politics of Jordan's Identity

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JORDAN

State Interests and Public Spheres: The International Politics of Jordan's Identity, by Marc Lynch. New York: Columbia University Press, 1999. xii + 270 pages. Notes to p. 317. Index to p. 327. \$49.50 cloth; \$18.50 paper.

Reviewed by Curtis R. Ryan

Within the field of international relations theory, constructivism is the latest theoretical challenger to the more established Neorealist and Neoliberal schools of thought. But while constructivism remains a legitimate and important research program, much of the work now filling conference agendas seems to have the words "constructivism" or "identity" in the title, but without any real connection to the constructivist enterprise. Marc Lynch's book, *State Interests and Public Spheres*, is a welcome exception to this broader trend, and a theoretically and empirically rich application of constructivist theory to Middle East politics and to international relations and foreign policy more broadly. The book will be of interest to two audiences, which may therefore tend to read the book in different ways. International relations scholars will find it to be an important contribution to the growing constructivist trend, easily in line with the best work of scholars such as Michael Barnett, Peter Katzenstein, Thomas Risse, and Alexander Wendt. Students of Middle East politics will find that the book provides a challenging spin on Arabism and socio-political norms in the Arab state system, with a detailed account of Jordanian policy shifts on critical issues from West Bank disengagement to peace with Israel.

As a challenger to rationalist approaches to understanding political behavior, constructivism cuts against the Neorealist/Neoliberal divide that has dominated international relations debates for the last several decades. But as a still-emerging theoretical approach, and perhaps eventually as a paradigm, constructivism actually refers to a broad and diverse body of work. Lynch, an assistant professor of political science at Williams College, draws deeply on the influence and work of social theorist Jürgen Habermas. Lynch's purpose in the book is twofold: to test constructivist and rationalist approaches to international relations, and to reinterpret Jordanian politics and policy. While one can certainly disagree with some of the author's conclusions or interpretations, he nonetheless succeeds admirably in his goals. In doing so, he moves well beyond interpretations that view Jordanian behavior on the world stage as the result of the whims of King Husayn (1953-99) or of King `Abdullah II (since 1999).

In his analysis of Jordanian policy, Lynch uses as his point of departure a rejection of Neorealist assumptions that state interests are fixed, objective, and externally determined by a state's power position within the international system. For Lynch and other constructivists, state identity itself is a variable. Accordingly, state identity is subject to public contestation which can then change that identity, and in turn alter state interests and ultimately state policy. Identity, in short, is a critical and socially constructed variable that must be understood in order to grasp the implications for shifting state interests and behavior. That contestation, then, takes place on multiple levels and forums, including within domestic state-society relations, transnational relations, and international state-state relations. Lynch's main focus, therefore, is the "public sphere"-that is, the public space in which political actors debate, contest, and effectively negotiate norms, identities, and interests in a public discourse. Lynch argues that a domestic public sphere has emerged and expanded in Jordan since the political liberalization process that began in the late 1980s. The public discourse about Jordanian interests and identity has transformed that identity, yielding major shifts in policy that vary in their stability, depending on the extent of domestic consensus achieved. Disengagement from the West Bank, for example, is now grounded in a solid consensus, while no such consensus exists within Jordanian society for the unpopular peace treaty with Israel, hampering regime attempts at "normalization." Interestingly, Lynch also argues that Jordan's shift away from Iraq in the mid- and late 1990s was not grounded in a true change in identity and interests. Therefore, he expects the dealignment to be fleeting (pp. 253-54) and has, after the publication of his book, been proven right in that expectation.

Throughout the book, Lynch seems to be challenging Neorealism most severely, and provides a convincing case for the limitations of that framework. Much of the work of other "rationalist" approaches, however, such as Liberal international theory, actually agrees with some constructivist premises, including that interests are not just exogenously determined and that they can be both domestically generated and the subject of contestation. Granted, constructivist approaches locate this contestation in a much more sophisticated and nuanced way in a broader public sphere. But here, in short, we may have the very foundation for the synthesis that Lynch is looking for. Liberal and constructivist international theories, it seems, can meet on the importance of domestic politics, political economy, interdependent and transnational links between states, and variable and contested interests. And, throughout the book, Lynch makes clear his goal of promoting debate and ultimately synthesis between rationalist and constructivist approaches, arguing in particular that public sphere theory can be the source of that synthesis.

Lynch is mainly interested in specific hypothesis testing and theory development. Thus, rather than attacking Neorealism or Neoliberalism as straw arguments, he posits, instead, explicit

hypotheses from these paradigms and examines them against constructivist expectations and empirical evidence of Jordanian politics and policy. He challenges explanations of international behavior based on balancing against external threats, providing for economic support ("rentseeking"), or maintaining regime survival ("omnibalancing") (pp. 28-30). Lynch examines each of these types of explanations against constructivist expectations across a series of specific cases, including Jordan's disengagement from the West Bank (chapter three), its Gulf War stance (chapter five), its peace treaty with Israel (chapter six), and its realignment away from Iraq (chapter eight). Further, he explores changes in Jordanian-Palestinian relations and Jordan's sense of identity domestically (chapter four) and regionally (chapter seven).

In his analysis, Lynch draws on extensive field research, interviews, and Arabic source material. The depth of research for this book is simply superb, and the text of the empirical chapters demonstrates this while still flowing smoothly and cogently. Even for those uninterested in the details of contending international relations theories, this book comprises a wealth of detail (chapters three through eight) on debates in the Jordanian press, political parties, and professional associations over Jordan's identity, its policies, and its future. For the empirical detail alone, this book should be required reading for all students of Jordanian politics. And for those who are, in fact, interested in the great debates of international relations theory, this book provides a challenging assessment of the advantages and limitations of rationalist theories, while making a very strong case for the utility of constructivist approaches to understanding the international behavior of states and particularly for the focus on communication and the public sphere in reshaping state identities, interests, and policies.

Footnote

4. A total of 363,703 landowners were affected by the phase two and three of the land reform law. This figure is based on the Iranian Ministry of Agriculture, *Simay-e Malekiat Arazi-e Iran* (Tehran, 1992) pp. 55-57 (in Persian).

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