



Realist Constructivism

Rethinking International Relations Theory

Realism and constructivism, two key contemporary theoretical approaches to the study of international relations, are commonly taught as mutually exclusive ways of understanding the subject. *Realist Constructivism* explores the common ground between the two, and demonstrates that, rather than being in simple opposition, they have areas of both tension and overlap. There is indeed space to engage in a realist constructivism. But at the same time, there are important distinctions between them, and there remains a need for a constructivism that is not realist, and a realism that is not constructivist. Samuel Barkin argues more broadly for a different way of thinking about theories of international relations, that focuses on the corresponding elements within various approaches rather than on a small set of mutually exclusive paradigms. *Realist Constructivism* provides an interesting new way for scholars and students to think about international relations theory.

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Acknowledgements

About a decade ago, I began to get frustrated with the common assumption that the relationship between constructivism and realism was one of mutual opposition, and that there was little ground for a useful conversation between the two. It struck me that the two approaches are based on assumptions that are orthogonal to, rather than contradictory of, each other. Furthermore, it struck me that a conversation between the two could serve as a useful model for examining the relationships among approaches to international relations theory understood as concepts rather than as paradigms. I tried out these ideas on my graduate students, along with my colleagues, and they recommended that I write up this set of ideas. I began with an article-length manuscript making the first stage of the argument, that realism and constructivism are not incompatible.

Early signs that this argument would find an audience were not promising. The manuscript was rejected by five journals. Most of the reviews suggested that the argument just wasn't interesting, that nobody would read it. A few of the reviews took great umbrage at the argument, either because it suggested that realism should be watered down with constructivism, or because it suggested that constructivism might be sullied by realism. Eventually (in 2003) the manuscript found a home at *International Studies Review*, and I was pleasantly surprised to find a community with which it resonated. Many other scholars, it turns out, had been thinking along similar lines, and many of these scholars have been both helpful and supportive in the process of writing this book.

The idea of writing the book began to develop in a workshop on realism and constructivism organized by Patrick Jackson and Daniel Nexon, held at Georgetown University in 2005. Patrick and Dan had organized a forum on realist constructivism the previous year, also in *International Studies Review*, with contributions from Janice Bially Mattern, Richard Ned Lebow, and Jennifer Sterling-Folker, as well

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Portions of the text of this book have appeared previously in two articles. Parts of Chapters 6 and 8 appear as "Realism, Prediction, and Foreign Policy" in *Foreign Policy Analysis* 5: 3 (July 2009), and parts of "Realist Constructivism," originally published in *International Studies Review* 5: 3 (September 2003, pp. 325–342), are scattered throughout the book.