

Constructivism and the syrian civil war

[People](#), [Barack Obama](#)



Constructivism is a normative global relations theory that looks for to understand the value of society's actions and theorize its meaning (Adler, 1997, pp. 319-320). According to constructivism, any actor can have xan company in international relations such as states, institutions and individuals and is different to realism and liberalism where instead of the presumption that states are self-centered and logical, it accepts that these actor's interests and rationality are socially built and are constitutive of and by its identity (Bozdaglioglu, 2007, pp.

122-123). The formation of the state's interests is inborn in its identity, whereas realism forms them for survival of the state, and liberalism states they are stemmed from cooperation and interdependence. Interests are not natural or intrinsic (Risse-Kappen, 1995, p. 502).

As it is socially 'built', a state can then be deconstructed and changed when all interests, identities and presumptions have actually been recognised. These interests, such as law, guidelines, standards and institutions are instilled in the system of international relations and are basic for instating change.

Constructivism is the finest theory for comprehending the occasions in Syria because it reveals how social identities and an actors' interests and preferences are socially constructed and can prompt conflict. Due to the numerous groups motivated in this conflict numerous social identities exist which are incompatible. Ultimately, the Syrian Civil War is an identity dispute with each identity including their own beliefs that each discover special. As identities and interests are constitutive, the interests of a group function as a

propellant for social action (Bozdaglioglu, 2007, pp. 131-132). For that reason these constructed interests motivate the social identities of the groups and require to be redefined in order for trust to be developed. A social identity can be defined as a socially built set of meanings that one credits to oneself (Bozdaglioglu, 2007, p. 132). It is developed predominately through the political options and the actor's interactions, assumptions, analysis and cumulative meanings and serves a core function in the Syrian dispute (Adler, 1997, p. 324).

The presence of multiple different social identities with numerous beliefs in the Syrian conflict is incompatible and result in societal ' friction'. Al-Assad's regime does not represent the general public, in the sense that it favours the Shia minority and suppresses all other identities (Vallely, 2014). This is a conflict of cultural identity where all groups hold different interests in which each find exclusive. Constructivism is the only theory in which acknowledges this identity crisis between the parties involved in the Syrian civil war. Trust and peace need to be fortified and in order to do so a common identity needs to be worked towards and founded by all reasonable parties. As President Barack Obama states in relation to Syria: " Peace can be achieved by allowing opposing parties to freely express and discuss their respective opinions which would ideally result in peaceful resolutions based on views held in common by these parties" (Obama, 2013) To do so, the structure of norms in which develops behaviour and interests must be deconstructed and changed (Checkel, 1998, p. 328).

An actor's behaviour is complex to understand as identities are not fixed and known, and therefore it cannot be deduced from the character that is assumed a state represents (Palan, 2004, p. 14). Looking through a constructivist lens, norms are collective understandings that motivate actors and therefore effect the identity and interest (Checkel, 1998, pp. 327-328). A dominant conflict in which sparked and fuels the Syrian civil war is that of the sectarian tension between the Sunni and Shia branches of Islam (Hinnebusch, 2008, pp. 263-265). Deeply embedded in the Syrian civil war is that of a religious uproar between sects (Vallely, 2014). The uprising in Syria consists of sectarian religious overtones in which resulted in a domestic clash between Shia and Sunni sects. With a government predominately Shia and 75% of the population Sunni (United States Central Intelligence Agency, 2014) a domestic clash between Shia government and Sunni population must be resolved in order for a common identity of the state to be formed and trust established.

The al-Assad regime's Shia representation clashes with the general Sunni public and in order for this struggle to be resolved, an impartial and independent government identity must be formed. Constructivism is the only theory in which recognises these relations and its authoritative role in the civil war. It shows how the Sunni-Shia relations are an important sector of the social structure of Syria in which the actions of actors with certain identities and interests are possible (Wendt, 1995). Constructivism distinguishes two core assumptions of realism and liberalism in which allow for a more advanced understanding of the social structure of Syria. Firstly, that institutions and structures only inhibit behaviour of states with fixed

interests and secondly, that the identity of a state is perceived only through physical capabilities (Checkel, 1998). Relaxing these assumptions allows social structures to become important and allows the formation of identities and interests to be defined by more than just behavioural constraints (Checkel, 1998).

This is exemplified by the role religious institutions have in the Syria. As the Shia minority came into power, the protests become stronger and the demonstrations from the Sunni population are seen by the al-Assad regime as terroristic. This lead to a redefining of the parties' identities, conclusively leading to each side identifying the other as terrorists or criminal gangs. The identity and interests of the state are therefore constitutive of and by the other parties and not only through physical capabilities. Social structures such as norms and culture, have a profound effect on agents, being characteristic of each parties' identities and therefore interests (Checkel, 1998).

In conclusion, constructivism is the best theory to explain what is happening in Syria. By analysing the central determinants of state behaviour, identity and interests, the current dissatisfaction of the status quo can be deconstructed and changed to form one common identity. Only social interaction and meaningful dialogue can guide the agents in identifying interests that is shared by the general public. Only when one common identity is defined, will trust and peace, as well as domestic, social and legal norms be established.

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