

entirely, the authors run the risk that their otherwise important argument against a single, hegemonic logic of inquiry within the social sciences might, despite itself, reproduce its own “worst of times” version of hegemony. (Indeed, it is worth noting that the value and understanding of causality within the interpretive tradition remains actively contested. For two recent discussions, see Peregrine Schwartz-Shea and Dvora Yanow, *Interpretive Research Design: Concepts and Processes* [2012], especially pp. 49–54, and Patrick Thaddeus Jackson, *The Conduct of Inquiry in International Relations: Philosophy of Science and Its Implications for the Study of World Politics* [2011]).

The pluralistic multiculturalism advocated by Goertz and Mahoney is thus an uneasy one. Not only does it leave unresolved fundamental tensions between the two traditions they do describe (the distinction between 10,000 votes and 224 votes cannot, at day’s end, be settled by politically correct pleas that we all just get along), it also leaves unmapped the key portions of the terrain that constitute contemporary social science. The shifting and contested borderlands of this uneasy pluralism are exactly where scholars seeking to expand on the authors’ impressive book should take up their own cartographic instruments in order to carry this important effort forward.

**Threat Talk: The Comparative Politics of Internet Addiction.** By Mary Manjikan. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012. 200p. \$89.96.  
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— Jose Marichal, *California Lutheran University*

In her book, Mary Manjikan provides a useful analysis of the multiple ways in which the Internet as a social phenomenon can be framed by states and societies, and in particular the varying ways in which the idea of “Internet addiction” can be understood within different cultural and institutional contexts.

*Threat Talk* compares views on Internet addiction in China, Russia, Taiwan, the United States, and Europe. Manjikan forwards the constructivist view that the Internet is a neutral technology and the purpose and value of this technology is socially and politically constructed. She argues that nation-states have two main competing discourses that govern public understanding of Internet and related technologies. One discourse she characterizes as *threat talk*. This view of the Internet emphasizes the technology as an external danger to the moral, economic, and physical/mental health of a society. A competing discourse sees the Internet through the lens of *opportunity*, or the economic and social advantages inherent in mastering the technology.

The discourse on the Internet that predominates within a culture has important policy implications. Manjikan focuses much of her book on the effects of adopting a *threat* view of the Internet. Threat talk, she argues, is a

discourse of oppression designed “to delimit the scope of usages which were to be accepted as normal and safe” (p. 8). She argues that China (and, to a lesser extent, Russia) has adopted a threat talk discourse of Internet addiction “to help create a set of domestic norms regarding the need for control, restriction and policing of the Internet” (p. 9). In contrast, discussions of Internet addiction in the United States and Europe are more balanced between threat and opportunity.

In Chapter 2, Manjikan draws upon the literature on *antipsychology*, notably the work of Thomas Szasz, to argue for Internet addiction as a socially constructed mental illness. She examines the research done on Internet addiction in China and finds the Chinese government behind much of the funding for its production. She references Ulrich Beck’s concept of the *risk society* to highlight how the Chinese state uses threat talk to construct the Internet as a source of societal ills that distracts users from examining other aspects of Chinese social and political life that might be in need of reform.

Manjikan is careful to note that there are varying grades of Internet addiction threat talk. In particular, she discusses two different disease paradigms for Internet addiction with different implications for public policy. One paradigm is a *universal harm* stance whereby the lure of the threat is too strong for users to resist. This paradigm is akin to an epidemic that requires swift and strong state action and assumes that the users themselves will be incapable of resisting the danger. A second paradigm of threat is the *differential access* model whereby the emphasis is on the users and their ability to resist the threat. In this paradigm, the state identifies users whose usage needs to be restricted (e.g., children in schools) and places blame on individuals for not being able to resist the threat.

The author finds both types of talk present in Chinese society and highlights how they connect to a stream of Internet addiction measures taken by the government in recent years, including a limit on the construction of new Internet cafes, a requirement that online game players register with the state, limits on violence in online game content, and requirements that online game manufacturers provide parents with resources to help their “Internet addicted” child. These measures are legitimated by the government’s construction of Internet addiction as a *securitizing disease* that must be prevented from spreading.

Later in the book, Manjikan draws skillfully on medical sociology literature to situate Internet addiction within a long line of cultural threats throughout history. In this section, she reinforces the idea of Internet addiction as deviant and the addicted in need of *normalization*. I found particularly useful the section where she highlights the different metaphors used to make unwanted Internet use deviant. She discusses the ways in which the Chinese government has sought to portray the Internet as *kidnapper*, as *foreign invader* (via what she calls the *plague doctrine*),

and as a gateway to illicit behavior (or what she titled a “journey to a dark place”). She later connects this construction of Internet addiction with efforts to *normalize behavior* through, and emphasis on, the development of “net hygiene” intended to prevent the user from becoming addicted.

In the least effective section of the book, Manjikan examines elements within the Chinese context to explain the appeal of a threat talk discourse for the Internet. She highlights differences between Chinese and Western views on medicine and culture and concludes that because there is less of an emphasis on individual autonomy, discourses that view the Internet as threat are much more salient in Chinese society. This chapter, while informative, muddles the main argument that “threat talk” is a deliberate, statist attempt at social control.

One of the great strengths of the book is how Manjikan draws broadly from a number of literatures, including the philosophy of technology, critical psychology, medical sociology, antipsychiatry, critical psychiatry, and biosecurity. The interdisciplinary nature of this work allows her to cast a wide net in helping the reader understand Internet addiction as a culturally dependent phenomenon. This is an effective counter to universalistic, techno-utopian views of the Internet forwarded by the U.S. State Department, think tanks, and leading universities, among others.

My main criticism of the book is twofold. First, there is an overemphasis on constructivism. I am generally sympathetic with Manjikan’s view of Internet addiction as socially constructed, but disagree with her that the Internet as a technology is entirely neutral. The Internet, in its ability to present an ever-streaming flow of novelty to users, does have a universal impact on our neurochemistry. A 2012 German study from the University of Bonn compared the genetic makeup of Internet addicted users to nonaddicted users and found that the addicted were more likely to carry a mutation of the *CHRNA4* gene similar to those with nicotine addiction. This early work on the identification of biological markers for Internet addiction does not refute the socially constructed nature of the disease, but it does speak to caution when asserting that the Internet’s impact is entirely socially constructed.

Second, there seem to be two competing hypotheses in this work. One is a realpolitik assessment of how states use threat talk to advance policy ends. The other is a postmodern cultural analysis of the ways that different cultures conceive of the Internet. At times, Manjikan seems to make a top-down institutionalist argument that China has embraced this threat view of the Internet for instrumental reasons. She argues that there is political value to constructing the Internet as an external threat to national security and global competitiveness. At other times, it seems that threat talk discourse is culturally embedded in Chinese society and not driven intentionally by state actors (particularly in the last chapter). Despite this criticism,

Manjikan has produced a valuable contribution to our understanding of a relatively new phenomenon.

### Political Competition, Partisanship and Policy

**Making in Latin American Public Utilities.** By María Victoria Murillo. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009. 312p. \$92.00 cloth, \$28.99 paper.  
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— Jordi Díez, *University of Guelph*

Latin America’s resumption of democratic rule in the 1990s was greeted by many political scientists with a great deal of deterministic pessimism. Despite the fact that the region was for the first time since its independence governed by democratically elected presidents (with the notorious exception of authoritarian Cuba), numerous political scientists seemed unable to allow that Latin America had entered a new phase of its political development. Steeped in neo-Marxist explanations of politics, which dominated the study of Latin American politics in earlier decades, many observers appeared convinced that the various social forces that had shaped Latin America’s political evolution in the past—international capitalist interests, compliant domestic elites, and authoritarian *personalismo*—would continue to drive political processes. Such an attitude has underpinned numerous analyses of policymaking over the last two decades in general, and has guided explanations of the adoption of market-friendly economic policies, or what critical observers generally label “neo-liberalism,” in particular.

The two main stories, as commonly told, have been that the dismantling of state-led economic models during the 1980s and 1990s resulted from either the imposition of economic liberalism by international financial institutions or the ability of U.S.-trained technocrats to convince domestic elites to push for economic liberalization, thus insulating themselves from democratic demands. These narratives have tended to ignore the influence that citizens’ preferences, demands, and, ultimately, votes have on public policymaking in democratic contexts: as if electors did not matter. That citizens in the three keenest economic liberalizers (Argentina, Mexico, and Peru) returned “neoliberal” governments to power in the mid-1990s through elections does not mean that electoral considerations were not at play and that these governments did not receive a majority of votes.

María Victoria Murillo’s masterful and important study, *Political Competition, Partisanship and Policymaking in Latin American Utilities*, is an especially welcome addition to the debate on economic policy reform in Latin America. In her nuanced analysis, Murillo challenges dominant narratives on economic reform and demonstrates that partisan preferences and electoral competition do indeed matter. She studies the privatization of two public utilities, telecommunications and electricity, to argue that “beneath