

# Post-9/11 Afghanistan: An Alternative Critical-Theoretical Perspective

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DEEPSHIKHA SHAHI, MAR 26 2017

**This is an excerpt from *Understanding Post-9/11 Afghanistan: A Critical Insight into Huntington's Civilizational Approach*. An E-IR Open Access Book by Deepshikha Shahi.**

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The theoretical superiority of Critical International Theory (CIT) over the clash of civilizations thesis can be confirmed by employing CIT to provide an alternative and comparatively more accurate portrayal of post-9/11 Afghanistan. The insights offered by the dual paradigms of CIT – namely, 'production' and 'communication' as developed by Robert W. Cox and Andrew Linklater respectively – can be utilised for capturing the complex dynamics of post-9/11 Afghan politics. Cox's production paradigm can throw light on the historical process of the hegemonisation of Afghan society. Linklater's communication paradigm can identify the historical moments of rupture or distortion in dialogue between 'the Islamists' and 'the West' on the one hand and between different ethnic groups of Afghanistan on the other. The combined application of both the paradigms constituting the overarching framework of CIT can reveal the linkage between hegemonic shifts and dialogic tensions in Afghan politics. By testing the assertions of CIT against the practical evidence drawn from post-9/11 Afghanistan, this chapter aims at unfolding the genealogy of the current Afghan crisis, thereby providing an alternative understanding that takes into account the temporal and spatial dimensions of social reality. The alternative understanding constructs the post-9/11 Afghan scenario not as an instance of clash of civilizations, but as a clash of hegemonic aspirations.

The objective of the chapter is not exhausted by offering an alternative understanding. On the basis of the alternative understanding gained from the application of CIT, the chapter goes further to design a preliminary agenda for transforming the post-9/11 Afghan crisis. In this endeavour, the production paradigm facilitates an assessment of the actual and potential role of contemporary counter-hegemonic forces active in Afghanistan. The communication paradigm shows some directions to approximate, if not establish, the 'ideal speech community' which in turn might prove helpful in strengthening the counter-hegemonic forces. The chapter concludes that the shifting of perspective from 'civilizational' to 'critical' not only presents a finer vision of the post-9/11 Afghan crisis but also suggests a way out of it. The chapter is divided into three sections. The first section activates Cox's production paradigm to demonstrate the hegemonic shifts in Afghan politics. The second section operationalises Linklater's communication paradigm to trace the linkage of these hegemonic shifts with the dialogic tensions in Afghan society. Finally, the third section sets out to recommend critical solutions to so-called 'civilizational' problems in post-9/11 Afghanistan.

### Marking the Hegemonic Shifts

Robert W. Cox firmly rejects the label 'Marxist' and claims to merely apply to the study of international relations ideas derived from a selective reading of Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks* – of which the most important is the concept of 'hegemony'.<sup>[1]</sup> Hegemony implies the art of providing 'intellectual and moral leadership'<sup>[2]</sup> through a peculiar combination of 'coercion' and 'consent'. The exceeding coercive force and shrinking consensual basis are viewed as symptoms of decline in hegemony. Cox writes: 'The more the military force has to be increased and the more it is

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actually employed, the less the world order rests on consent and the less it is hegemonic'.<sup>[3]</sup> For analysing the coercive and consensual mechanisms of hegemony, Cox enumerates three spheres of activities: social relations of production, forms of state and world orders.

The *social relations of production* cover the production and reproduction of knowledge and of the social relations, morals, and institutions that are prerequisites to the production of physical goods.<sup>[4]</sup> This broader understanding of production ensures that social forces are not reduced to the economic substratum. The 'non-class' dimensions of peace and ecology are to be given a crucial space in social realities shaped through the production process. The *forms of state* rest on underlying configurations of forces rooted in civil society.<sup>[5]</sup> Different forms of state are expressions of particular 'historical blocs' that emerge from the way in which leading social forces within a specific national context establish dominance<sup>[6]</sup> over contending social forces, thereby establishing an organic link between political and civil society.<sup>[7]</sup> The integration of diverse social forces constituting the historical bloc brings about not only a unison of economic and political aims, but also of intellectual and moral dispositions. The *world orders* originate from the historical blocs that initially consolidate themselves at the national level but later spread outward on a world scale through the international expansion of a particular mode of social relations of production. Within each sphere of activity, the three elements reciprocally combine to constitute a hegemonic order: ideas (inter-subjective meanings as well as collective images of world order), material capabilities, and institutions claiming universality. A hegemonic world order therefore is the product of a universal society and civilization<sup>[8]</sup> that successfully forms an international historical bloc of social forces that in turn is premised upon the global 'reception' of a dominant form of knowledge.

Since the 'social forces'<sup>[9]</sup> are the most elementary and influential factors in shaping hegemony, the rise of contending social forces aiming at replacing the dominant form of knowledge and the related social relations of production, may generate mutually reinforcing transformations in the forms of state and world order, thereby heralding a counter-hegemonic order. The idea of a counter-hegemonic struggle – advancing alternatives to the dominant form of knowledge – has contributed to the belief that knowledge is a social construct that serves to legitimise (or delegitimise) hegemonic social structures. Cox writes:

Hegemony consists in the formation of a coalition of top-down forces activated by a common consciousness in which those at the bottom are able to participate. Counter-hegemony arises when bottom-up forces achieve a common consciousness that is clearly distinct from that of hegemonic power. So, a strategy of structural transformation may be seen as a project for the formation of counter-hegemony.<sup>[10]</sup>

The 'war of attack' can only succeed with a prior 'war of position' in the form of struggle over ideas and beliefs. Thus, the production of an alternative knowledge-base is essential for forming counter-hegemony.

However, the task of forming counter-hegemony becomes particularly challenging due to complex mediations in the regular consensual and coercive mechanisms of hegemony. Gramsci warns:

Between consent and force stands corruption/fraud (which is characteristic of certain situations when it is hard to exercise the hegemonic function, and when the use of force is too risky). This consists in procuring the demoralisation and paralysis of the antagonist (or antagonists) by buying its leaders – either covertly, or, in case of imminent danger, openly – in order to sow disarray and confusion in its ranks.<sup>[11]</sup>

Cox puts these clandestine and corrupt political practices under the label 'the covert world', which includes intelligence agencies, organised crime and the drug trade, money-laundering banks, the arms trade, and terrorist organisations.<sup>[12]</sup> Cox includes terrorist organisations committed to destroying the existing order amongst the set of forces that have the consequence of maintaining the status quo because at times the terrorist organisations act in cooperation, as well as in conflict, with them.

Though the confusion created by these secret and fraudulent activities weakens the counter-hegemonic drive, it is the '*contradictory consciousness*' that compels the bottom-up forces to demonstrate their autonomous opposition to hegemony, regardless of the barriers created by their own conformist attitude that stems from their urge to fulfil

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immediate necessities.<sup>[13]</sup> The contradictory consciousness motivates bottom-up forces to work to bring an end to the temporary coalition of diverse hegemonic social forces. However, the bottom-up forces operate within the boundaries of 'historical necessity' or the limits set by the dialectics of a given social structure. As Marx pointed in *The Eighteenth Brumaire* – 'Men make their own history but not in the circumstances of their own choosing'<sup>[14]</sup> – the social structure both constrains and constitutes social action. Nevertheless, social action can have a transformative impact upon its constraining structure. The exercise of counter-hegemonic agency by bottom-up forces can ultimately lead to the transformation of the hegemonic structure.<sup>[15]</sup> The domain of politics is all about forming and countering hegemony.

The Coxian vision of politics as a (counter) hegemonic struggle can serve as a meaningful tool to decode the political developments in post-9/11 Afghanistan. For activating the Coxian theoretical scheme in order to mark the hegemonic shifts in post-9/11 Afghan politics, one needs to raise two questions: First, how did specific historical moments in national and global politics (structure) and collective human responses to them (agency) encourage temporary coalitions of diverse hegemonic social forces in Afghanistan? Second, how did the inherent contradictions in these hegemonic coalitions emerge, thereby historically transforming Afghan politics from one hegemonic phase to another? Since the post-9/11 Afghan scenario is largely a culmination of political events that began with the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in the late 1970s, it is essential to situate the above-mentioned questions against that historical backdrop.

The Soviet intervention in Afghanistan had a destabilising impact on both national (Afghan) politics and global politics. Its atheistic orientation threatened the hegemony of Islamists at the national level and its communist commitment generated insecurity for US hegemony at the global level. The national response to the presence of Soviet troops in Afghanistan was more or less reactionary. The anti-secular Islamic forces strongly reacted against the 'infidelity' of the Soviet-backed Leftist government of Afghanistan. Claude Bruderlein writes:

In the face of the Soviet invasion, both the rural population and sectors of disenchanted urban technocrats rallied around the call for jihad or a religious war, similar to those which had been evoked in response to earlier colonial invasions...Secularism was portrayed as the hidden goal of the Leftist intellectuals in power. The emancipation of women, used by the Communist authorities as a key objective of social reforms, was particularly perceived as an occupation ideology. In many rural areas, the emancipated Afghan women were referred to as 'the Russians'. In response to this, a new group of Islamists emerged who resented the reformist agenda of the Left which was seen as a foreign inspiration.<sup>[16]</sup>

These Islamists gave birth to the Mujahideen movement which mobilised the rural and urban Afghan social forces against the secular and foreign-controlled Leftist government of Afghanistan.

The Soviet presence not only jolted the national political climate of Afghanistan, but also proved to be an alarming development in global politics, especially in the suspicious political atmosphere unleashed by the Cold War. The US viewed the Soviet invasion as an expansionist gesture of communism which could adversely affect the prospect for a world order based on capitalist hegemony. In its attempt to counter the Soviet influence in Afghanistan, the US began to support the Islamists, or the Mujahideen, who had already been organising themselves against the Soviet-backed Leftist regime. This was a historical moment characterised by the temporary coalition of two diverse hegemonic social forces in Afghanistan: First, the Mujahideen made up of seven distinct political organisations mostly dominated by ethnic Pashtuns who had hegemonised Afghanistan since its inception as a modern nation-state in 1747; second, the Americans who had hegemonised the world since the end of the Second World War in 1945. The coalition of these national and global hegemonic forces prevailed during the Cold War when both pursued the common anti-Soviet strategy, albeit for different reasons – the Mujahideen for their anti-infidel stand and the Americans for their anti-communist orientation.

Contradictions in this hegemonic coalition appeared when Soviet forces were withdrawn from Afghanistan and the Cold War came to an end. Since the national and global hegemonic forces no longer shared the common objective of ousting the Soviet troops, their respective hegemonic strategies no longer coalesced. While the collapse of the Soviet Union reduced the importance of Afghanistan as a venue for furthering US hegemonic goals, it deprived the

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Mujahideen of their common enemy. In the absence of a common enemy, the Pashtun-dominated political organisations of the Mujahideen became separated, thereby causing a split in the national hegemony of Pashtuns. In the words of Amin Saikal:

While the multiplicity of organizations during the war against the Soviets enabled the Pashtuns to receive more than their fair share of foreign military and financial aid, it also promoted rivalry, suspicion, and frequently violent clashes between them. This intra-Pashtun conflict prevented the leaders of Pashtun-dominated organizations to take a united political stand during the chaotic downfall of the communist regime.<sup>[17]</sup>

The split in national hegemony created space for several fragmented counter-hegemonic struggles wherein different non-Pashtun ethnic groups began to make separate efforts to challenge the traditional Pashtun hegemony in Afghan politics. Dilip Hiro writes:

With the common enemy finally gone for good, long-standing rivalries between four major ethnic groups re-emerged. Having enjoyed autonomy, stemming from access to large quantities of weapons and money, in their decade-long struggle against the Leftist regime, the non-Pashtun minorities were not prepared to let the Pashtun hegemony, stretching back to 1747, re-assert itself. With Kabul now controlled by Tajik, Uzbek and Hazara fighters, and with the Defense Ministry run by Massoud [a Tajik], the ethnic minorities were in a strong position to frustrate Pashtuns' attempt to become the ruling group – as was the intent of Hizb-e-Islami's Hikmatyar.<sup>[18]</sup>

While the ethnic rivalry for establishing national hegemony in Afghanistan remained inconclusive, the US distanced itself from Afghanistan's domestic affairs and relished its unchallenged global hegemony after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The lack of unity between non-Pashtun ethnic minorities prevented them from effectively challenging the Pashtun hegemony in Afghanistan. The fragmented nature of anti-Pashtun counter-hegemonic struggle can be attributed to the absence of an alternative knowledge-base which could potentially bind the non-Pashtuns together in new social relations of production. While the non-Pashtuns failed to provide an agenda for generating an alternative knowledge-base and the corresponding social relations of production, the Pashtuns, now reorganised under the aegis of the Taliban and al-Qaida, evoked 'Sharia' as the alternative source of knowledge. The Taliban and al-Qaida began to run madrassas that focused on the teaching of a strictly puritanical Islam based on the orthodox and medievalist interpretations of the Deobandi and Wahhabi Islamic schools. Claiming to be informed by the religious maxims of Islam, the Taliban and al-Qaida called for establishing peace through restoring pre-modern social relations.

On 28 September 1996, a day after the Taliban came to power, Radio Shariat – the renamed Radio Kabul – broadcast the following decrees in accordance with Sharia:

Any person with firearm must deposit it at a military post or the nearest mosque. Girls and women are not allowed to work outside home. All women who have to leave their homes must be accompanied by a *mahrim* (male blood relative). Public transport will be segregated, with separate buses for men and women. Men must grow beards and wear a turban or white beret. Suits and ties are forbidden...Women and girls must wear the burqa.<sup>[19]</sup>

The decrees issued in the following days prohibited women from visiting a male doctor or a male tailor. A young woman must not converse with a young man. Muslim families were forbidden to take photos or make videos. They could not listen to music. No merchant could sell alcohol or women's clothes.

Apart from introducing changes in the social sphere, the Taliban also brought about a drastic transformation in the Afghan economy. The localised predatory warlordism of the pre-Taliban era was replaced with a weak kind of rentier state power based on a criminalised open economy. Commenting on the transformed social relations of production during Taliban rule, Barnett R. Rubin writes:

The replacement of the khan-dominated subsistence and local-trade economy by a warlord-dominated commercial agriculture tied to long-distance contraband provided the newly armed elite [the Taliban] with the opportunity to

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mobilise resources to exercise power directly, as it never did before.<sup>[20]</sup>

The new social relations of production promoted by the Taliban and al-Qaida were in many ways an attempt to move backwards in history. The Taliban and al-Qaida believed that turning the clock backwards would not only lift Afghanistan from the abyss of civil war but also combat the anti-Islamic forces operating at the global level, thereby paving the way for global Islamic hegemony. Amin Saikal writes:

Initially, the Taliban leaders announced that their desire was to bring peace to Afghanistan by disposing of all Mujahideen factions. But as the militia's territorial control expanded, its political-ideological agenda made it explicit that their ultimate goal was to transform Afghanistan into a pure Islamic Emirate as a prelude to achieving wider regional objectives.<sup>[21]</sup>

The wider objectives included waging jihad for liberating Muslim lands from the control of infidels and uniting all Muslims within a single community or 'ummah'. The Afghans chose to accept the alternative offered by the Taliban and al-Qaida, even if it meant reaffirming the Pashtun hegemony in Afghan politics, in their desperation to come out of the difficult situations created by civil war. Whereas, the US provided humanitarian assistance to the Taliban regime as its policy towards Afghanistan had shifted back to its more traditional posture of benign neglect.<sup>[22]</sup> The US State Department spokesman, Glyn Davies, said there was 'nothing objectionable' about the domestic policies pursued by the Taliban.<sup>[23]</sup> While the domestic policies of the Taliban did not pose any direct threat to US hegemony in global politics, its increasingly aggressive and ambitious foreign policy certainly did.

The US ambassador Michael Sheehan stated:

The Taliban provides safe haven for Osama bin Laden and his network. Because of the room, which the Taliban gives him to operate, bin Laden has created a truly transnational terrorist enterprise, drawing on recruits from across Asia, Africa, and Europe, as well as the Middle East. The Taliban has also given logistic support to members of other terrorist organizations, such as the Egyptian Islamic Jihad, the Algerian Armed Islamic Group, Kashmiri separatists, and a number of militant organizations from Central Asia...The ability of groups [such as al-Qaida] to plan and carry out terrorist attacks with impunity brings us to the final causal factor in the shift of terrorism to South Asia – the Taliban's refusal to crackdown on terrorists...(the) threat posed by bin Laden illustrates the challenges we face as non-state terrorism becomes more prevalent.<sup>[24]</sup>

The US, that initially had no objection to the rise of Pashtun hegemony under the leadership of the Taliban and al-Qaida, gradually became critical of it as its violent tendencies were no longer restricted to the frontiers of Afghanistan, but had started affecting the global peace.

The terrorist attacks of 9/11 added fuel to this long-standing anguish of the US and the declaration of war on terror in Afghanistan was its explosive consequence. This was a unique historical juncture that witnessed a direct confrontation between the same national and global hegemonic forces that had once formed a temporary coalition in Afghanistan. Now their hegemonic aspirations clashed with each other. In this clash of hegemonic aspirations, the US and the Taliban/al-Qaida produced their own versions of the dominant form of knowledge. Within the US, sources propagated the clash of civilizations doctrine to breed support for the government's global war on terror, while the Taliban/al-Qaida disseminated a similar Jihadist ideology to generate consent for their ideal of ummah. Huntington's clash of civilizations thesis has been hotly debated and al-Qaida's *Knights Under the Prophet's Banner* and *Military Studies in the Jihad against the Tyrants* have been widely read and religiously followed. Though these hegemonic discourses continue to grasp the psyche of a large section of people across the globe, their gradually weakening influence becomes apparent in the increasing use of force by both the US and the Taliban/al-Qaida.

Between the growing coercive force and diminishing consensual basis of these hegemonic aspirants lie the fraudulent ties between the US-led coalition force, the Karzai government, and the Taliban warlords.<sup>[25]</sup> The deep-rooted corruption in post-9/11 Afghan politics has not only created confusion but has also generated apathy in Afghan civil society. Though there are some progressive elements – political organisations like RAWA (Revolutionary Association of Women of Afghanistan) and Afghanistan Solidarity Party, the NGOs like the Humanitarian Assistance

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for Women and Children of Afghanistan (HAWCA) and Afghanistan Child Education and Care Organization (AFCECO) – that are working to curb on political corruption and uplift the status of the Afghans, their uncoordinated and at times hidden efforts are barely organised around a supporting alternative knowledge-base or social relations of production. These efforts are therefore hardly sufficient to take the shape of any effective counter-hegemonic struggle. For estimating the future potential of these progressive elements in transforming the post-9/11 Afghan crisis, it is important to know whether the Afghan speech community has been historically open to, and accommodative of, the excluded progressive voices, and whether the dialogic tensions produced by the constructive expression of these voices have been successful in strengthening the counter-hegemonic struggle in Afghanistan.

## Locating the Dialogic Tensions

Ernest Laclau and Chantal Mouffe note that 'the material reproduction of society is part of the *discursive* totalities which determine the meaning of the most sublime forms of political and intellectual life (an activity which is central to retaining hegemony)'.<sup>[26]</sup> If discursion is important for retaining hegemony, it is equally crucial for countering hegemony. The formation of counter-hegemony is largely a discursive and dialogic exercise which involves demands from bottom-up forces for inclusive deliberation, rational argument, inter-subjective agreement and bargained compromise. Andrew Linklater seeks to make clear that dialogue and consent replace domination and force as the central causal mechanisms in international relations.<sup>[27]</sup> He explains how the critical-theoretical enterprise continues to evolve beyond the production paradigm to a commitment to dialogic communities that are sensitive about all forms of inclusion and exclusion – domestic, transnational, and international.<sup>[28]</sup>

Describing the features of an 'authentic' dialogic exercise, Habermas writes:

The procedures essential to authentic dialogue include the convention that no person and no moral position can be excluded from dialogue in advance, there is no priori certainty about who will learn from whom and when all are willing to engage in a process of reciprocal critique as a result...What guides participants is a commitment to be moved simply by the force of the better argument'.<sup>[29]</sup> Inspired by this Habermasian discourse ethics, Linklater argues that an authentic dialogue aims at 'removing the modes of exclusion which obstruct the goal – which may never be realised – of global arrangements which rest upon the consent of each and every member of the human race'.<sup>[30]</sup>

Linklater stresses the need to yoke the 'defence of dialogue' to a critique of asymmetries of wealth and power.<sup>[31]</sup> He believes that an authentic dialogic exercise can help to criticise the existing hegemonic structure, highlight its inherent contradictions, and formulate an alternative consensus. The 'common consciousness' aroused from this alternative consensus can eventually lead to the collapse of hegemony and the formation of counter-hegemony.<sup>[32]</sup> Linklater states:

Dialogue is not confined to maximizing consensus within the normative parameters which dominant groups take for granted. One of its key purposes is to widen social parameters by making it possible for individuals to expand the realm of admissible disagreements which political communities have most often suppressed in the name of the totalizing project... What moral progress refers to is the widening of the circle of those who have rights to participate in dialogue and the commitment that norms cannot be regarded as universally valid unless they have, or could command, the consent of all those who stand to be affected by them.<sup>[33]</sup>

Linklater notes that overlooking and silencing the actors affected by a decision perpetuates hegemony. He laments that the contemporary international political order has a 'tenuous existence and precarious legitimacy'<sup>[34]</sup> because decisions are taken without considering their likely effects on systematically excluded groups. In order to rectify this injustice, the states which have contested various forms of exclusion within their boundaries must start questioning exclusion in international affairs. A 'good international citizenship' is about assisting the weak and vulnerable communities<sup>[35]</sup> by attempting to include their hitherto suppressed voices in the prevalent counter-hegemonic discourse. The questioning of exclusionary practices is integral to the counter-hegemonic struggle.

A successful counter-hegemonic struggle not only questions exclusion but also demands a sound 'consensual legitimacy'. In order to generate consensual legitimacy, Linklater suggests that the world community's members

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should develop and identify their shared views through deliberation. Linklater calls for the formation of an 'ideal speech community' which can serve as a mechanism of transformation and legitimisation in a post-Westphalian global political order.<sup>[36]</sup> The ideal speech community endorses the practice of an open dialogue not only between fellow citizens but, more radically, between all members of the human species.<sup>[37]</sup> Linklater writes:

Critical theory judges social arrangements by their capacity to embrace open dialogue with all others and envisages new forms of political community which break with unjustified exclusion...Critical theory envisages the use of unconstrained discourse to determine the moral significance of national boundaries and to examine the post-sovereign forms of political life.<sup>[38]</sup>

Linklater does not present these views as a mere idealist caprice. He is aware that conducting an unconstrained discourse cannot be the panacea for all ills. He, however, appreciates the process of arriving at an 'understanding' (which may not culminate in a moral consensus) as a significant starting point in achieving the 'praxeological'<sup>[39]</sup> goals of CIT. The shared understandings obtained through an authentic global dialogue can underpin 'non-arbitrary' norms and policies which in turn might prove instrumental in practically resolving highly contested disputes amongst advocates of various normative orders.

Linklater's idea of global dialogue defends a strong cosmopolitan moral orientation coupled with radical institutional innovations. However, his idea of cosmopolitanism is not synonymous with solidarism or unity achieved through homogenisation. Cautioning against the evil of unilateralism masquerading as solidarism, Linklater writes: 'Where a requisite consensus fails to emerge, solidarists-at-heart should be resigned, perhaps temporarily, to take on a pluralist stance'.<sup>[40]</sup> Linklater's vision of cosmopolitanism calls for a 'genuine solidarism' that encourages the achievement of consensual legitimacy through contestation of plural viewpoints. The emancipatory effect of genuine solidarism permits CIT to contribute to the next stage of international relations theory.<sup>[41]</sup> The next stage envisaged by Linklater's theoretical enterprise revolves around three realms: normative, sociological and praxeological. The *normative realm* diagnoses the non-arbitrary principles that can be used to criticise the existing hegemony and to imagine a counter-hegemonic order. The *sociological realm* traces the historical development of these non-arbitrary principles in the society of states. The *praxeological realm* points out the accumulated 'moral capital'<sup>[42]</sup> that can be exploited for establishing new forms of political communities.

The supplementation of Linklater's three realms with the Coxian analysis can offer an interesting way of revealing the unexplored nexus between hegemonic shifts and dialogic tensions in post-9/11 Afghanistan. For understanding the hegemonic shifts in terms of dialogic tensions in post-9/11 Afghan politics, one needs to pose the following questions: First, on what normative grounds (non-arbitrary principles?) did the hegemonic discourses in post-9/11 Afghan history systematically include or exclude specific voices? Second, have the hitherto excluded voices been able to generate a 'moral capital' that could constitute the basis of a genuine counter-hegemonic struggle? These questions can be examined in the context of two clearly identifiable phases of Pashtun hegemony in recent Afghan history: The first hegemonic phase appeared when the Pashtun-dominated Mujahideen joined hands to fight against the Soviets. The second hegemonic phase emerged when the Pashtuns, reorganised under the Taliban, and al-Qaida came together to fight against the Americans.

During the first hegemonic phase, the hegemonic discourse produced by the Mujahideen promoted two norms: pro-Islam and anti-foreign.<sup>[43]</sup> The Afghans, who had always been fiercely religious and independent,<sup>[44]</sup> supported these norms. The norms especially provided relief to those Afghans who felt betrayed by the reformism and secularism of the leaders of Soviet-backed People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA). When the then President Taraki declared: 'We want to clean Islam in Afghanistan of the ballast and dirt of bad traditions, superstition and erroneous belief',<sup>[45]</sup> the overwhelming majority of Afghan society turned against the PDPA regime. The statement of Taraki was considered as an attack on the traditional Afghan way of life. Louis Dupree reported:

[The Afghans held that] the PDPA policies violated practically every Afghan cultural norm, and strayed far beyond the allowable bounds of deviance in the social, economic, and political institutions. It appeared that they systematically planned to alienate every segment of the Afghan people.<sup>[46]</sup>

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The Mujahideen, who raised their voice against the anti-Islamism of the Soviet-backed PDPA regime, quickly captured the grievance of almost all segments of Afghan people. The Afghans immediately responded to the 'fatwa' (a religious opinion concerning Islamic Law) issued by the Mujahideen leader Sheikh Abdullah Azzam – *Defense of the Muslim Lands, the First Obligation after Faith* – wherein it was stated that both the Afghan and Palestinian struggles were jihads in which killing occupiers of one's land (no matter what their faith) was 'fard ayn' (a personal obligation) for all Muslims. Azzam declared:

The Islamists have been the first to take control of the battles in Afghanistan. Those who lead the jihad in Afghanistan are the sons of the Islamic movement, the Ulama and Hafiz of Qur'an... While, in Palestine the [Islamic] leadership has been appropriated by a variety of people, of them *sincere Muslims*, communists, nationalists and modernists Muslims...the situation in Afghanistan is still in the hands of the Mujahideen. They continue to refuse help from any kafir country...There are more than 3000 kilometres of open border in Afghanistan and regions of tribes not under political influence. This forms a protective shield for Mujahideen.<sup>[47]</sup>

A close reading of this fatwa reveals that the Mujahideen discourse was exclusionary in two ways: First, though it intended to include all the Muslims, it preferred the 'sincere Muslims' who were not modernists and not under any other non-Islamic political influence. Second, it rejected the possibility of an open dialogue with non-Muslims as they were considered as kafirs. 'Jihad and the rifle alone...No negotiations, No conferences and *No dialogue*', was the slogan given by Azzam.<sup>[48]</sup> The repercussions of this exclusionary attitude became visible at two levels. At the national level, the Muslim sentiment present in the Mujahideen discourse temporarily mobilised all the ethnic groups of Afghanistan against the Soviets, but its 'selective' Islamic preference resulted in the formation of a loose Islamic Alliance which soon collapsed after the withdrawal of the Soviet troops from Afghanistan.

At the global level, the principle of non-engagement with non-Muslims was not translated into actual practice by the Mujahideen. Despite the closed nature of the Mujahideen discourse, the Mujahideen movement sought external support not just from Islamic states such as Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan, but also from the US which was supposed to be treated as a kafir country as per the standards of the Mujahideen. In fact, the Mujahideen sought to set one hegemonic aspirant against the other at the global level in order to retain the Islamic hegemony at the national level. However, the gap between the verbal declarations and practical strategy of the Mujahideen proved disastrous. The ethnic rivalry for receiving military and financial aid from diverse external sources caused feuding not only amongst the Pashtun-dominated organisations of the Mujahideen, but also amongst the various Afghan ethnicities. This rivalry ultimately led to the fall of Pashtun hegemony and caused a civil war in Afghanistan.

After four years of bloody civil war, the Pashtuns began to reclaim their lost hegemonic status by launching the Taliban movement in a close alliance with al-Qaida. In this second phase of Pashtun hegemony, the hegemonic discourse generated by the Taliban/al-Qaida endorsed two norms: pro-martyrdom and anti-America. Though these norms reiterated the age-old sympathy for Islam and hatred for foreigners, the thrust this time was much more extreme and specific. The discourse directed the Afghans not only to kill but also to die in the name of Islam; and this killing and dying had the objective of destroying a single country – America. A similar sentiment was expressed by the Taliban leader, Mullah Omar, who stated:

The current situation in Afghanistan is related to a bigger cause...that is the destruction of America...This is not a matter of weapons. We are hopeful for God's help. The real matter is the extinction of America. And, God willing, it [America] will fall to the ground...We will not accept a government of wrong-doers. We prefer death than to be a part of an evil government.<sup>[49]</sup>

The call for the destruction of America was combined with a guarantee of peace. The Afghans, who were fed up with the prolonged civil war, longed for peace and the Taliban/al-Qaida discourse held the promise to grant exactly the that – via jihad against America. It was suggested that the jihad was bound to deliver peace, if not in this life, then in the afterlife. Assuring peace to the would-be martyrs in the fight against America, Osama bin Laden said: 'In our religion, there is a special place in the hereafter for those who participate in jihad'.<sup>[50]</sup> The road to peace went through jihad which essentially demanded blood, not words. Bin Laden made his intention clear to the Americans: 'Just like you kill us, we will kill you'<sup>[51]</sup>... There is *no dialogue* except with weapons'.<sup>[52]</sup>



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The Taliban/al-Qaida discourse clearly indicated a rupture in the dialogic possibilities between the Islamists and the Americans. This rupture meant the exclusion of Americans from the Afghan dialogic community. However, the Americans were not the sole category to be excluded. The emphasis on the hardened Islamic identity and the hatred for the 'kufr' in Taliban/al-Qaida discourse signalled an exclusionary intent that went beyond the Americans. At the global level, the Taliban and al-Qaida tended to exclude the voices of those secular Muslims who lived in the West. Aijaz Ahmad pointed out that the 'great number of secular individuals of Muslim extractions within Western countries who do not adopt Islamic identity [as per the dictates of the Islamists like the Taliban] ... get sidelined and occluded'.<sup>[53]</sup> At the national level, the Taliban/al-Qaida demonstrated exclusionary tendencies towards the Shia Hazaras. Maulawi Mohammed Hanif, a Taliban commander, announced to a crowd of 300 people summoned to a mosque that the policy of the Taliban was to 'exterminate' the Hazaras. Mullah Manon Niazi, the Taliban governor of Mazar-e-Sharif, made speeches at mosques and on radio inciting hatred of Hazaras. He said: 'Wherever you go we will catch you. If you go up, we will pull you down by your feet; if you hide below we will pull you up by your hair'.<sup>[54]</sup>

The excesses committed during the Taliban regime attracted criticism from all corners of the world. Despite the growing worldwide criticism, the Taliban/al-Qaida continued to spread destruction and to push their hegemonic discourse. Proudly taking responsibility for the terrorist attacks of 9/11, the al-Qaida leader, Osama bin Laden, commented:

As I was looking at those towers that were destroyed in Lebanon, it occurred to me that we have to punish the transgressor with the same, and that we had to destroy the towers in America, so that they taste what we tasted and they stop killing our women and children.<sup>[55]</sup>

When bin Laden's pride in killing Americans was not shared by many religious leaders in Islamic societies and his terrorist acts were condemned as being un-Islamic,<sup>[56]</sup> he attempted to soften his tone:

I have already said that I am not involved in the 11 September attacks in the United States. As a Muslim, I try my best to avoid telling a lie. Neither I had any knowledge of these attacks nor do I consider the killing of innocent women, children, and other humans as an appreciable act. Islam strictly forbids causing harm to innocent women, children, and other people. Such a practice is forbidden even in the course of a battle...I have already said that we are against the American system, not against its people, whereas in these attacks, the common American people have been killed.<sup>[57]</sup>

After 9/11, though, bin Laden asserted that he was against the 'American system' and not against the 'American people', in the late 1990s he had fully supported the idea of killing American civilians. While speaking to ABC News in 1998, he stated: 'In today's wars, there are no morals. We do not have to differentiate between military or civilian. As far as we are concerned, they [Americans] are *all* targets'.<sup>[58]</sup> However, his statements made in response to this event clearly contradicted his previous utterances, thereby disseminating distorted meanings in the Afghan dialogic community.

The dialogic distortions created by the Taliban/al-Qaida seriously undermined their consensual legitimacy. The sudden undermining of consensual legitimacy resulted in greatly weakening their hegemony. Consequently, post-9/11 Afghan politics totally discarded the voice of the Taliban and took notice of only those anti-Taliban voices that had organised themselves under the aegis of the US-backed Northern Alliance. However, after the passage of more than a decade since 9/11, the leaders of the Northern Alliance seem to have shifted their attitude towards the Taliban.

The remarkable distancing of the Northern Alliance from the Taliban/al-Qaida, which guided the initial years of post-9/11 Afghan politics, has been replaced with the rise of a twofold trend in recent times: First, there has been a renewal in the ties between the Northern Alliance and the Taliban. US President Barack Obama encouraged the Northern Alliance to develop a certain closeness with the Taliban. He stated: 'We will support efforts by the [Northern Alliance] Afghan government to open the door to those Taliban who abandon violence and respect the human rights and their fellow citizens'.<sup>[59]</sup> Such Taliban have been labelled as 'good Taliban'. The discourse on distinguishing between 'good Taliban' and 'bad Taliban' aims at peeling off the reconcilable Taliban leaders from the irreconcilable

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ones<sup>[60]</sup>. The recent willingness of the American and Afghan officials to drop the names of 'good Taliban' from the UN blacklist of terrorists<sup>[61]</sup> further testifies to the growing intimacy between the Northern Alliance and the Taliban. Second, there has been a growing gulf in relations between the Taliban and al-Qaida. The Taliban publicly distanced itself from al-Qaida by releasing a statement that they would provide a 'legal guarantee' that they would not intervene in foreign countries if international troops withdraw from Afghanistan.<sup>[62]</sup> This statement caused a flurry of dissent from al-Qaida-linked militants, who posted sharply critical statements on several Islamic-extremist web sites. The latter declared a global jihad and rejected any collaboration with what were seen to be enemy governments, thereby signalling a parting of the ways with the Taliban.

The confusing shifts in allegiances have had the effect of obscuring the Afghan dialogic space. After witnessing frequent switches in allegiances during decades of war, many Afghans have stopped listening or speaking with confidence. A good number of Afghans are wary of the 'Taliban-appeasing policy' of the US-backed Northern Alliance, but they fear freely voicing their disapproval in the Afghan dialogic community. Though the critical voices of Afghan NGOs, INGOs, inter-governmental organisations, academic institutions, and donor governments have made an impressive entry in the Afghan dialogic community, they fail to generate a unified discourse. In the absence of a unified discourse, the anti-hegemonic moral capital remains under-exploited. The anti-hegemonic moral capital has been partially channelled by scattered critical voices, thereby creating a necessary but insufficient condition for forming an effective counter-hegemonic struggle. Post-9/11 Afghanistan stands at a crossroads marked by complex interactions between feeble hegemonic, as well as counter-hegemonic, social forces. The insights drawn from the dual paradigms of CIT can shed some light on its probable future direction.

## The Way Ahead: Towards a Critical Solution to the 'Civilizational' Problem

The alternative vision derived from the vantage point of CIT deconstructs the image of post-9/11 Afghanistan as a venue for clashing civilizations. Rather than being a case of civilizational clash, the post-9/11 Afghan scenario gets transformed into a classic instance of clashing hegemonic aspirations. Any exit from this troubling state of affairs requires the organisation of an effective counter-hegemonic struggle against both the national Pashtun hegemony and the global US hegemony. According to the lessons drawn from the dual paradigms of CIT, a significant step in this direction could be taken by accomplishing two tasks: First, designing an *alternative knowledge-base* that not only forms a critique of the prevailing hegemonic forces, but also organises the critical forces along *alternative social relations of production*. Second, creating an *all-inclusive speech community* that not only weaves the existing critical voices into a unified counter-hegemonic discourse but also puts forth the demand for inclusion of hitherto excluded voices – the voices of secular Muslims, Afghan women, non-Pashtun ethnicities (especially the Hazara), and the remaining progressive elements of Afghan civil society. Since the ideal speech community calls for an open dialogue not only between fellow citizens but also between all members of the human species, especially those who stand to be affected by the collective decisions taken through an open dialogue, the dialogic community in Afghanistan must include the voices of the non-Afghan stakeholders. However, the inclusion of non-Afghan voices by no means implies the imposition of foreign decisions on Afghan politics. The objective of forming an all-inclusive speech community is to enhance the 'rational' and 'consensual' components of those collective decisions that are to guide the future course of Afghan politics.

What could be the source of an alternative knowledge-base in Afghanistan? And how could it serve as a stepping stone in creating an all-inclusive Afghan speech community? Since the Quran – the founding document and scripture of Islam – has historically commanded the deepest influence and widest appeal in Afghanistan, it should be evoked in the process of formulating an alternative knowledge-base. However, the Quranic traits of the alternative knowledge-base must challenge the obscurantist interpretation of Islam propagated by orthodox Pashtuns and popularised by the US media. This can be done by presenting the Quran as a broad philosophical tradition rather than a narrow religious doctrine. Shabbir Akhtar writes:

An important intellectual deficit in the modern house of Islam is the lack of a living philosophical culture that could influence its narrow religious outlook...The Quranic hermeneutics should not simply be a close domestic attention to the text aimed solely at extracting what is useful to believers...the Quran is intended to be revelation addressed to humankind, not merely a fixed body of laws and morals...Muslims should be alert to inter-faith reservations about their

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scripture...Without the spiritual introspection that philosophical insight brings, religion is no more than ritual...Muslim civilization would be enriched by the revival of a certain type of philosophy which could supplement the Quran's ancient religious and spiritual confidences.<sup>[63]</sup>

The critical social forces of Afghanistan must revive the philosophical underpinnings of the Quran while designing an alternative knowledge-base.

The adherence to such an Islamic philosophy would not only provide a check on the hubris of religious power, but also lay the foundation for an all-inclusive Afghan dialogic community. The philosophical approach to Quran would advocate 'inter-faith' discussions on Islam, thereby also creating ample space for a passionate dialogue between followers of religious, spiritual, and secular Islamic traditions. An open dialogue between various Islamic and non-Islamic voices would differently inform the common consciousness of the Afghans. The common consciousness raised by the cross-fertilisation of varied Islamic interpretations would transcend that concept of Islamism which sees it as an exclusivist and totalising ideology, thereby promoting a 'post-Islamic'<sup>[64]</sup> current that would espouse inclusion and pluralism. According to Asef Bayat, 'post-Islamism is not anti-Islamic or secular; a post-Islamist movement dearly upholds religion but also highlights citizens' rights. It aspires to 'a pious society within a democratic state'<sup>[65]</sup> in which all Muslims and non-Muslims could enjoy access to certain basic rights.

As opposed to the Islamism that has been 'the political language not just of the marginalised but particularly of high-achieving middle classes who saw their dream of social equity and justice betrayed by the failure of both capitalist modernity and socialist utopia'<sup>[66]</sup>, the post-Islamic ideology would develop itself as the language of those Muslims and non-Muslims who have been the victims of Islamic fundamentalism. The inward-looking orientation of post-Islamic ideology would not only highlight the deficits of capitalism and socialism but also expose the loopholes of Islamic orthodoxy. Discussing the failure of Islamic movements in uplifting economic conditions, Gilbert Achcar writes:

All these [Islamic] movements are clothed in religion but they have their source in economic causes; and yet, even when they are victorious, they allow the old economic conditions to persist untouched. So the old situation remains unchanged and the collision [between different Islamic forces as well as between Islamic and non-Islamic forces] recurs periodically.<sup>[67]</sup>

The periodic recurrence of collisions generates a criminalised war economy like the one that exists in post-9/11 Afghanistan. The criminalised war economy has left the power holders as unaccountable to most Afghan people as they were under previous regimes. Most of the population are left to fend for themselves, in conditions of greater security, but without a development agenda. The post-Islamic ideology must learn from these past mistakes and call for the establishment of alternative social relations of production that are capable of undercutting the recurrent pattern of war economy and disbursing the reconstruction aid in such a way that builds reciprocity between state and civil society.

Who are the potential propagators of post-Islamism in today's Afghanistan? And how could post-Islamism help them in producing a unified counter-hegemonic discourse and in establishing the alternative social relations of production? The propagators of post-Islamism could be those Afghans who are disillusioned by the corrupt political practices of both the Taliban and the US-backed Northern Alliance. Many Afghans initially viewed the Northern alliance as an alternative to the Taliban, but now they stand betrayed in the light of the growing closeness between these two organisations. Daud Razmak, the leader of the Afghan Solidarity Party, states that he never contested the elections in post-9/11 Afghanistan because he believed that the Northern Alliance would rectify the wrongs done during the Taliban regime. He therefore supported the Northern Alliance government from the outside.

However, his beliefs were proved wrong and now his party aims at securing the independence of Afghanistan, not only from foreigners, but also from the mafias working inside and outside the Northern Alliance regime. Maduda (name changed), an activist associated with RAWA, identifies the Northern Alliance, Taliban, and foreign forces as three enemies of the Afghans. She discloses that the present parliamentarians are the former Mujahideen involved in a variety of criminal activities. She criticises the secret ties between the US-backed Afghan government and the

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Afghan opium cultivators which constitute the basis of the criminalised war economy. Bulqis Roshan, a Senator from Farah province, comments that the people in power in Afghanistan are the former criminals. Earlier they used to commit direct crimes against the Afghans and now with foreign support they indirectly harass the Afghans. These criminals divided the Afghans who were otherwise always united against foreigners.

Najla Ayubi, the Director of Asia Foundation in Kabul, condemns the Taliban for killing the Afghans and not the ISAF officials. Saifuddin Saihoon, a Professor at Kabul University, criticises the excessive dependence of the Afghan government as well as Afghan civil society on foreign funds. He ridicules the Afghan government for being 'injected against' the criticisms coming from the Afghan people. Abdul Latif Rasif, a judge at the Kabul Court, opines that 70 percent of the people of Afghanistan are against the Karzai government. He feels that the political strategy of the Karzai government is not very clear. The Karzai government forces itself on the judiciary in order to cover its corrupt political practices. The widespread political corruption is adversely affecting the activities of Afghan civil society. He says that the lawyers and judges of Afghanistan are organising themselves against the politically corrupt Karzai regime. Wahid Paikan, a BBC journalist in Kabul, holds that the people in Afghanistan might not be educated but they are experienced as they have long been attending the 'war university'. They do not see any progress and continue to live an insecure life. They are guided by an anti-Karzai sentiment and they want the foreign forces to leave.

Though diverse social forces in Afghanistan are critical of the corrupt political practices, their critical voices are not well organised. Andeisha Farid, the Director of AFCECO, an NGO that works for the welfare of the children of Afghanistan, points out that Afghan civil society has become a playground of many NGOs funded by foreign donors, not all of them are free from corruption. Even the corrupt government officials are running their own NGOs (the daughter of warlord Rashid Khan runs an NGO for women's empowerment in Herat.). Farid concludes that there is no unified civil society movement in Afghanistan.<sup>[68]</sup> Post-Islamism could potentially act as a philosophical adhesive for binding the fragmented critical voices of the Afghan dialogic community, thereby contributing towards the formation of a unified civil society movement backed by a unified counter-hegemonic discourse. The unified counter-hegemonic discourse could more effectively mobilise those critical social forces which are either apathetically silent or systematically excluded.

Post-Islamism presents a viable philosophical basis for an alternative knowledge-base in Afghan politics. However, its potential to foster an alternative Afghan economy seems weak at least in the short-run. Given the complex and constantly shifting power nexus between various hegemonic forces in post-9/11 Afghanistan, the building of alternative social relations of production appears to be a herculean task. Nonetheless, a preliminary post-Islamic agenda for achieving this goal could draw inspiration from Michael Lowy's idea of 'elective affinity'. Lowy evoked the term 'elective affinity' to explain the Christian liberation theology that allowed Christianity to turn into the institutionalised ideology of communistic utopianism in Latin America.<sup>[69]</sup> Guided by the Latin American experiment of elective affinity, the critical social forces in post-9/11 Afghanistan must strive to construct a post-Islamic liberation theology that could permit Islam to breed such governmental institutions that could redress the grievances of the poor Afghans and genuinely work for transforming their miserable conditions of existence.

Contrasting the differential strategies adopted by the Islamists and the Christian liberation theologians, Asef Bayat writes:

While Islamists aimed to Islamise their society, polity and economy, liberation theologians never intended to Christianise their society or states, but rather to change society from the vantage point of the deprived. Liberation theology, then, had much in common with humanist, democratic, and popular movements in Latin America, including labour unions, peasant leagues, student groups and guerrilla movements, with whom it organised campaigns, strikes, demonstrations, land occupation and development work.<sup>[70]</sup>

While the narrow religious outlook of Islamists in Afghanistan made them more interested in Islamising the Afghans and less interested in uplifting the backward economy of Afghanistan, the broad philosophical orientation of post-Islamists can help them in prioritising their goals in accordance with the needs of poor Afghans. Unlike the case of Latin America, Afghan civil society has not attained a higher level of cohesion and lacks well organised popular movements. However, the post-Islamists could make a beginning towards the establishment of pro-poor social

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relations of production by blending the tenets of Islam with the demands for banning opium cultivation, prohibiting the drugs and arms trade, developing crop-substitution mechanisms, finding alternative means of livelihood for opium farmers, devising alternative sources of income for landless labour, women, and returning refugees,<sup>[71]</sup> tracing alternative ways of financing Afghan state activities, decentralising the governance structures and incorporating the opinions of local shuras (councils) in the official process of planning and service provision, thereby placing poor Afghans at the centre of the production and re-production process. The marriage of post-Islamic ideology with pro-poor social relations of production in Afghanistan might appear to be a distant dream. However, the political agenda for realising this distant dream would not be incompatible with Quranic maxims. The ideas of struggle, charity, and emancipation are already enmeshed in the Quran which states:

And what will explain to you what the steep path is? It is the freeing of a slave from bondage, or the giving of food in a day of famine to an orphan relative, or to a needy in distress. Then will he be of those who believe, enjoin fortitude and encourage kindness and compassion.<sup>[72]</sup>

The humanistic re-interpretation of Quranic verses by the post-Islamic counter-hegemonic forces in Afghanistan would not only aid in the transformation of the post-9/11 Afghan crisis, but would also vindicate Islam against its distortion and demonisation by both Muslim and non-Muslim hegemonic aspirants in the contemporary world.

## Notes

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[13] Cox claims that the globalisation of production is producing a three-part social hierarchy. The first level includes those people who are integrated into the global economy in a privileged manner. The second level is composed of

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those people who serve the global economy in a subordinate way. The third level comprises those people who are excluded from the global economy and are either permanently unemployed or underemployed. While the first level is doing quite well and the second level is expanding most rapidly, it is the third level that poses a potential threat to the globalisation order. See Cox, 2001, op.cit, p. 48.

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[65] See Bayat, Asef 2011 'The Post-Islamist Revolutions', *Foreign Affairs*, available at <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/67812/asef-bayat/the-post-islamist-revolutions>

[66] Bayat, 2008, op.cit, p.41.

[67] Achcar, Gilbert 2008 'Religion and Politics Today from a Marxian Perspective', *Socialist Register*, pp.70-71.

[68] The opinions of Razmak, Maduda, Roshan, Ayubi, Saihoon, Rasif, Paikan and Farid were expressed in a series of interviews conducted by the author during her visit to Kabul in July, 2011.



# Post-9/11 Afghanistan: An Alternative Critical-Theoretical Perspective

Written by Deepshikha Shahi

[69] Lowy, Michael 1996 *The War of Gods: Religion and Politics in Latin America*, Verso. The concept of 'elective affinity' was initially applied by Max Weber to suggest a selective relationship between 'ideas' and 'interests'. See Howe, Richard Herbert 1978 'Max Weber's Elective Affinities: Sociology within the Bounds of Pure Reason', *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 84, No.2 available at <http://www.jstor.org/pss/2777853>

[70] Bayat, 2008, op.cit, p. 48.

[71] Siddharth Dev Burman, a UN bureaucrat posted in Kabul, pointed out in an interview with the author that contemporary Afghan society had no middle class as the Afghans belonging to the upper middle class have settled in Western countries while the Afghans belonging to the lower middle class have become refugees in Pakistan in the aftermath of the post-9/11 war on terror in Afghanistan.

[72] Quran, Chapter 90, Verses 12-17 available at [http://www.religioustolerance.org/isl\\_qura.htm](http://www.religioustolerance.org/isl_qura.htm)

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