

Critical International Theory: A Comparative Advantage Framework

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DEEPSHIKHA SHAHI, APR 7 2017

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Huntington's clash of civilizations thesis is marked by obvious limits. However, the task of highlighting flaws in Huntington's thesis is not as significant and desirable as discovering an alternative theoretical framework that is more meritorious in terms of its capability to comprehend social reality. For judging the relative merits of two or more substantive theories making competing claims about social reality, Rosenberg evokes Ian Craib's three criteria.^[1] First, the theory must be based on mutually *consistent* propositions. Second, the theory must be measured against *evidence*. Third, the theory must specify in *more detail* the causal processes at work and the situations in which the causal mechanisms come into operation. With respect to Craib's criteria, Critical International Theory (CIT) appears to be promising.

CIT combines two main sets of influences. First, the 'production paradigm' shaped by the work of Antonio Gramsci and introduced into IR by Robert W. Cox. Second, the 'communication paradigm', developed by the Frankfurt School (Habermas, Horkheimer and Adorno) and applied to IR by Andrew Linklater. Though both paradigms share a common ancestry in the Hegelian-Marxist tradition and Kantian tradition of critical philosophy, the Gramscian production paradigm focuses more on economic 'base', whereas the Frankfurtian communication paradigm concentrates more on the ideological 'superstructure'. CIT is often, then, viewed not as an integral whole, but as an amalgam of two distinct paradigms concerning two distinct concepts and processes. The production paradigm tends to focus on the concept of work, and struggles over redistribution. The communication paradigm is concerned with the concept of interaction and identity struggles. Critics argue that neither paradigm is adequate for the task of understanding the problematic of the other.^[2] They hold that the *work-interaction divide* is the fundamental problem of CIT.

However, this chapter tries its best to counter this charge. It sets out to forge a strong link between the twin paradigms of CIT. Furthermore, the chapter attempts to find out the points of congruence between CIT and the humanistic-existential model of psychology that constituted the basis of the psychological critique of Huntington's thesis. Ultimately, the chapter aims at establishing CIT as a more commendable theoretical framework than Huntington's clash of civilizations thesis. The chapter is divided into three sections. The first section constructs CIT as a single overarching framework. The second section traces the overlap between the assertions of CIT and the discernments obtained from the humanistic-existential model of psychology. The third section demonstrates the relative strengths of CIT against the weaknesses of the clash of civilizations thesis. The objective of the chapter is to evaluate the conformity of CIT with the two criteria specified by Craib, namely, ensuring internal consistency and providing sufficiently detailed explanation of causal mechanisms. The remaining criterion of measuring the CIT against evidence will be taken up in the next chapter.

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The Overarching Framework of CIT: Bridging the Gap

Do we have a singular framework of CIT or are there two distinct paradigms labouring under the label 'critical international theory'? Richard Wyn Jones's probe into this issue led to the conclusion that rather than understanding CIT as a particular approach, it is more appropriate to view it as a constellation of distinctive approaches all seeking to illuminate a central theme – that of *emancipation*.^[3] Jones' conclusion presents a fragmented picture of CIT, but assures us that its constitutive paradigms are united, at least in terms of attaining the final objective of emancipation. In fact, the common emancipatory objective emanates from a common broad intellectual project wherein the themes of *hegemony*, *reason* and *transcendence* play a central role.^[4] Though the usage of these themes in seemingly distinct paradigms resists reduction to a common denominator, essential core or generative first principle, the themes are, nonetheless, linked in significant ways.^[5]

The hegemonic elements of the production paradigm tend to owe their existence to the virtual speech community of the communication paradigm. Cox explains that *hegemony* derives from the ways of doing and thinking of the dominant strata of the dominant state or states insofar as these ways of doing and thinking have acquired the *acquiescence* of the dominant social strata of other states. The dominant social strata fuse together to compose the hegemonic historic bloc (intellectual and moral bloc). The social practices and the ideologies that *legitimise* the hegemonic historic bloc constitute the formation of a hegemonic order.^[6]

The central significance of manufacturing acquiescence and legitimacy in the formation of a hegemonic order makes it difficult to situate its existence entirely within the confines of the production paradigm. The *reason* backing the process of manufacturing acquiescence and legitimacy is largely shaped and contested within the boundaries of the communication paradigm. *The Theory of Communicative Action* (1981/85), in which Habermas engaged with Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, argued that the 'instrumental reason' that necessarily governed the realms of money and power could and should be held in check by a 'communicative reason' welling up from the life-world beyond them, in which action was oriented not to material success but to mutual understanding.^[7]

While Cox's understanding of 'production' extends to incorporate ideas, inter-subjective meanings, norms, institutions and social practices within which material goods are produced, Linklater emphasises the extra-material consequences of material dominance by asserting that the material difference in power hinders a genuinely inclusive communication, thereby contributing to the perpetuation of the structures of material dominance. The hegemonic elements of the production paradigm enjoy a greater say in the virtual speech community of the communication paradigm. The exclusion and suppression of the voices of the hegemonised in the communication paradigm are crucial for the survival of the hegemonic elements of the production paradigm. Linklater's realisation that intellectual projects have important moral implications for the national and international distribution of wealth and power, and his call for an inclusive participatory process enabling deliberation about publicly presented arguments and evidence in order to put a curb to the seemingly perpetual structures of material dominance,^[8] testify to the *dialectically* interwoven character of the twin paradigms of CIT. The communication paradigm can be simultaneously exploited for pushing, as well as blocking, the ascent of the hegemonic elements of the production paradigm.

The principal battleground over which the struggle for hegemony is now occurring moves beyond the traditional Westphalian states-system.^[9] While Linklater draws on Habermasian discourse ethics to *transcend* the logic of the state system, Cox borrows from Gramscian hegemonic and counter-hegemonic discourse to assert that the essential entities of the international system are not just states but also state-society complexes. Acknowledging the role of sub- and trans-state political and economic forces in conditioning the possibilities of international politics,^[10] Linklater examines how states can transcend the divisive pursuit of national security by creating an international order, and transform a minimal order between states into a cosmopolitan *community of humankind*.^[11] He claims that there have been some conceptions of post-national citizenship that envisage new forms of political community in which state powers are shared with higher and lower authorities and where traditional national loyalties yield to both local and cosmopolitan attachments.^[12]

In a similar vein, Cox calls for the need to reconstitute the political authorities at local, national, and global levels and to decipher the 'nebuleuse' of *global economy*.^[13] Cox's depiction of global economy as a nebuleuse conjures up an

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image of a cloud in which there is no centre of power. Multiple state and non-state actors play together to share power in complex ways. Though economic power is becoming more concentrated in the world's major transnational corporations, states remain the cornerstones of global politics. Cox opines that states become more effectively accountable to a nebulous personified as global economy and they are constrained to mystify this external accountability in the eyes and ears of their own publics through the new vocabulary of globalisation.^[14] Cox visualises the global economy as embedded in global civil society. For him, the global civil society is the emerging international structure of political authority – the 'internationalising of the state', to be the counterpart to the 'internationalising of production' – which has at its heart the central governmental agencies of the most important industrialised and industrialising economies, together with key multilateral agencies.

Cox's engagement with global economy and global civil society naturally leads to the operationalisation of Gramscian conceptual categories (historic bloc, hegemony, and the like) at the international level. However, critics hold that the internationalisation of Gramscian conceptual categories by Cox indicates his poor understanding of the historical meaning of Gramsci's work. Randall D. Germain and Michael Kenny stress the paradox that Gramsci, above all a theorist who grappled with the discourses and realities of 'statism' in the early twentieth century, is inappropriately used by Cox to theorise not only the existence of a global civil society *disembedded* from the nation-state, but also a form of hegemony reliant on *transnational* social forces.^[15] The problems highlighted by Germain and Kenny are twofold. First, they hold that Gramsci's concepts cannot be meaningfully internationalised because Gramsci was occupied with statism and his idea of civil society was essentially bounded by the parameters of state. Second, they think that Cox's view of global civil society cannot be decoded through Gramsci's method because global civil society is disconnected with the nation-state, whereas Gramsci's method was essentially statist.

An in-depth reading of the writings of CIT suggests that neither Gramsci's idea of civil society strictly coincided with state borders, nor Cox's vision of global civil society, is completely detached from nation-states. Commenting on Gramsci's idea of civil society, Craig Murphy wrote:

It is the political space and collective institutions in which and through which individuals form political identities...It is the realm of voluntary associations, of the norms and practices which make them possible, and of the collective identities they form, the realm where *I* becomes *we*.^[16]

In an increasingly globalised world, the political space and institutions that shape collective political identities, as well as the norms and practices that guide them, are essentially 'global' in character and are no longer determined exclusively by nation-states. Therefore, Gramsci's idea of civil society cannot be meaningfully and wholly conceived in the contemporary world until and unless it is dragged beyond the traditional limits of 'statism'. In other words, one has to situate the Gramscian notion of civil society in the arena that transcends state borders in order to make sense of it in the contemporary context. However, crossing the traditional limits of statism does not imply abandoning nation-states. While Cox goes beyond statism in conceptualising a global civil society or an 'internationalised state', he does not lose touch with the nation-state altogether. The global civil society, according to him, is inclusive of nation-states, along with other actors like transnational corporations and multilateral agencies. Though Cox admits that global civil society or the internationalised state lacks an explicit political or authority structure, he asserts that it has a specific *modus operandi* that must be the target for continuing analysis.^[17] Cox's global civil society has a striking resemblance with Linklater's community of mankind, as both reflect a cosmopolitan outlook.

Like Cox and Linklater, the 'globality' of human social relations as the largest constitutive framework of all contemporary relations has been highlighted by Martin Shaw and William I. Robinson. According to Shaw, in the 'global' epoch, state relations have ceased to be 'national' and 'international' in the historical sense. They have begun to coalesce around a core of *world state institutions*, a progression towards a global state which represents the institutional expressions of state relations along global lines'.^[18] Similarly, Robinson visualises the emergence of a multi-layered and multi-centred *transnational state apparatus* that functionally interconnects an array of supranational, regional, and national organisations. He believes that the nation-state as a functional component of the transnational state apparatus is not withering away, but is an active agent of global capital.^[19] However, Alexander Anievas points out the theoretical vulnerability of Shaw and Robinson.^[20] Anievas argues that Shaw's 'globality' fails to demonstrate the effect of global economic processes on the nation-state and on the relations

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between state managers and capitalists, whereas Robinson's 'transnational state apparatus' entertains a flawed presumption that there is no non-identity of interests between capitalists and state managers. Contrary to the assertions of Robinson, Anievas suggests that global capital is not a homogeneous, but a heterogeneous, category. The problems pointed out by Anievas in the works of Shaw and Robinson are absent in the theoretical framework offered by Cox.

Acknowledging the interdependence of state activities and economic processes, Cox wrote:

The ideas and material conditions are always bound together, mutually influencing one another, and not reducible one to the other...the juxtaposition and reciprocal relationships of the political, ethical and ideological spheres of activity avoid reductionism.^[21]

He further asserted:

Three categories of forces interact in a structure: material capabilities, ideas and institutions. No one way determinism need be assumed among the three; the relationship can be assumed to be reciprocal.^[22]

The enmeshing of the political and economic processes in Cox's theoretical framework provides ample scope for understanding the mutually conflictive and cooperative relationship between capitalists and state managers. While admitting the clash within global capital, Cox stated:

I don't think of transnational capitalist class as a kind of conspiratorial, unified group, and nor do they, because their whole thesis is that the initiative of the individual organisations and groups is what drives globalization, not some overall strategy... In other words, they want to organise the world in such a way that the conditions for globalization will go on, but the process itself is not something that is masterminded from the top.^[23]

As opposed to Alex Callinicos, who borrows Vivek Chibber's term 'soft-functionalism' to explain the existence of the state-system in terms of the needs of capital,^[24] Cox demonstrates a flexible attitude by giving importance to both geopolitics and global economics, without assigning greater weight to either. The flexibility of Cox has been labelled by John M. Hobson as 'collapsed base-structuralism', wherein no causal hierarchy is specified while determining the contribution of economic base and ideological superstructure in shaping the world order. Hobson criticises Cox for being inconsistent in his attempt to mix and match his commitment to 'collapsed base structuralism' with his adherence to the 'relative autonomy approach'.

While the idea of 'collapsed base structuralism' refuses to grant primary importance either to state or to economy, the 'relative autonomy' approach grants more autonomy to the state in shaping economic affairs. Cox's simultaneous commitment to both is ontologically problematic for Hobson.^[25] However, Hobson's problem derives from his failure to grasp the nuances of Cox's theoretical strategy, wherein 'synchronic' moments of analysis are combined with the 'diachronic' moments. While the synchronic moments create room for a greater role of the state in regulating economic affairs in the short run, the diachronic moment refuses to assign more importance either to state or to economy while acknowledging the contribution of both. Thus, Hobson's criticism is addressed when one views the possible emergence of the relative autonomy of the state as a short-lived moment in the overall approach of collapsed base-structuralism.

The constructivist vision of hegemony, reason, and transcendence, nurtured by both paradigms of CIT, reveals their common methodological base. The base is firmly rooted in post-positivism as it undertakes a dynamic view of ontology, unlike the hypostatized picture offered by positivism. Cox's understanding of ideas as an inherent part of reality enables him to declare that theory is always for someone and some purpose.^[26] Cox's declaration finds echo in Linklater's rejection of the notion that there can be such a thing as a politically neutral analysis of political reality.^[27] Their shared scepticism towards deterministic and ahistorical theories allows them to critically analyse the process of theorising itself and to entail a more empowering self-understanding in which humans are actively self-constitutive in the process of consciously reconstructing their internal relations with society and nature.^[28] Their profound trust in the potentialities of human agency and their sensitivity towards the vulnerabilities of the structural impediments blend

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well with the insights of the humanistic-existential model of psychology.

CIT and the Humanistic-Existential Model: Mapping the Overlap

The ontology, or the set of shared meanings, that come to define reality is perceived by the humanistic-existential model of psychology as a mental construct shaped by two mutually contradictory forces. The first is the free *agency* of humans that assigns meaning to a seemingly meaningless world. The second is the *structure* of existence that conditions the free agency and influences the process of meaning-making. The interplay of agency and structure characterises the collective understanding of ontology at different historical junctures. Such an approach to ontology finds resonance in CIT. Cox writes that ontologies are the parameters of our existence.^[29] Endorsing Vico's view, he argues that reality is constructed by human minds which in turn are shaped by the complex of social relations. Linklater admits that the capacities of human minds are linked inextricably with the forms of life in which they are involved.^[30] The modifications of human minds are identical with human history and therefore ontologies are not arbitrary constructions, but the specifications of the common sense of an epoch.^[31]

Four lessons can be drawn from this common line of thinking that underpins CIT and the humanistic-existential model of psychology. First, the ontology is constructed *collectively*, not individually. Second, the ontology exists in *plurality*, not singularity. Third, the process of establishing a dominant ontology^[32] is marked by *contestation*, not unanimity. Fourth, the dominant ontology is *dynamic*, not static.

Sterling-Folker holds that meaning making is not an individual or random activity.^[33] The inter-subjective or collective level of ontological selection transcends individual choice. The collective human responses to material conditions of existence constitute ontology. Once the ontology is constituted, it is reproduced even if we do not approve of it. Cox writes, 'Knowing them (ontologies) to be there means knowing that other people will act as though they are there.'^[34]

However, there are variations in the conditions of existence and in the collective human responses to them. Consequently, what emerges is not a single ontology but plural ontologies. Linklater writes,

Humanity is revealed in the various, if not infinite, human expressions which could be discerned only through observation of what men have unfolded in their diverse cultural contexts. No single culture could manifest the totality of human possibilities.^[35]

The 'limited totalities', as Cox calls them, do not incorporate everything, but rather represent a particular sphere of human activity in its historically located totality.

The constitutive factors of the limited totalities or ontologies originate from diverse conditions of existence and compete with each other to acquire the status of the dominant ontology at a particular historical conjuncture. The ontology that succeeds in effectively manipulating the *contradictory consciousness* to win acquiescence and legitimacy becomes the dominant ontology. The dominant ontology may acquire a degree of autonomy, take on its own life, and serve as an agent of change. As Cox puts it, to qualify as ontology, it has to show the interactive properties of a system – albeit an open system in which the homeostatic mechanisms that maintain closure can be disrupted by forces that open the way for change.^[36]

Thus, no dominant ontology lasts forever. The dominant ontology and its corresponding historical structure present a simplified representation of a complex reality and an expression of tendencies, limited in their applicability in time and space, rather than fully realised developments.^[37] The clash of rival collective images provides evidence of the potential for alternative paths of development and raises questions as to the possible material and institutional basis for the emergence of an alternative structure.^[38] The *diachronic* nature of ontology which is essentially characterised by a tussle between structure (understood as ways of understanding the world as it is) and agency (conceived as the forces that change structures), means there is a propelling force that grants ontology a dynamic status.

This understanding of ontology as a collective, pluralised, contested, and dynamic enterprise enables CIT to enjoy a comparative advantage over Huntington's clash of civilizations thesis. It allows CIT not only to expose the

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inadequacies, deceptions and hypocrisies of Huntington's thesis, but also emerges as a more consistent and comprehensive alternative theoretical framework.

CIT and the Clash of Civilizations Thesis: Tracing the Comparative Edge

The comparative edge of CIT against the clash of civilizations thesis can be traced to its superior methodological base. In contrast to the post-positivist tilt of CIT, the positivist methodology of Huntington mistakenly treats ontology not as a dynamic construct but as a static entity which is essentially deterministic, ahistorical and immobile. Therefore, for Huntington, the dominant ontology that supports the notion of a prospective clash of civilizations is not an outcome of the *time and space sensitive* contestation between diverse collective human responses to varied conditions of existence but a temporally and spatially neutral observation that must be passively accepted. The recognition that temporality and spatiality have varied across periods and cultures, the realisation that they have been socially constructed and mentally experienced in different ways, and those different ways have been highly consequential for the constitution of social orders (social realities) – all of this has been well and long established.^[39] Yet, Huntington turns a blind eye to the temporal and spatial dimensions while commenting on the social reality. In other words, the historically and geographically determined causal mechanisms underlying the dominant ontology of civilizational clash remain undiagnosed by Huntington.

This technical mistake accounts for a serious ethical failure. In the process of taking the dominant ontology of civilizational clash as granted, Huntington ends up *reinforcing* a conflictive world order rather than explaining it. What presents itself initially as the *explanandum* – the world order fraught with a civilizational clash as the developing outcome of some historical process (i.e. the end of the ideological clash associated with the Cold War) – is progressively transformed into the *explanans* as it is the civilizational clash which now explains the changing character of the world order and informs the foreign policy orientation of the states that wish to survive within it. The chances of surpassing this hellish state of affairs are totally circumscribed by Huntington.

Was the mistaken treatment of ontology by Huntington accidental or intentional? While responding to this pertinent question, CIT would certainly argue that Huntington's mistake was intentional as theories were always meant for serving particular purposes. Critics who do not subscribe to CIT consider Huntington's mistake as accidental and therefore begin with finding fault in the epistemology (realist, orientalist and elitist) and/or methodology (monolithic, inconsistent and reductionist/essentialist) of the clash of civilizations thesis, rather than attacking its unethical premise (purposeful and self-fulfilling orientation). CIT would uncover the hidden purposeful designs of Huntington and his supporters and argue that the acceptance of his thesis is at least partly an outcome of personal motivations. However, the achievements of CIT would not be restricted to pinpointing the technical and ethical deficits of Huntington's thesis. CIT would bank upon its post-positivist orientation to overcome the methodological deficiencies of Huntington's thesis and carve out an alternative that is technically efficient and ethically sound.

The technical efficiency and ethical soundness of CIT germinate from its flexible theoretical tool that ensures two facilities. First, it combines the moments of 'synchronic' and 'diachronic' analysis to provide a time and space sensitive explanation of the social reality. The moment of synchronic analysis critically evaluates the coherence of a social order within its own terms, thereby engaging with the temporally and spatially abstracted aspects of the social reality. The moment of diachronic analysis identifies the contradictions and conflicts in a social order and speculates on the nature and extent of structural change that is feasible, thereby placing the variables of time and space at the centre of the social reality.

The unique combination of the synchronic and diachronic moments of analysis has ethical implications. While the synchronic analysis has status-quo tendencies as it intends to correct the problems of the existing social order while retaining its base, the addition of the diachronic analysis to it allows for a normative choice in favour of a social and political order different from the prevailing order.^[40] The synchronic analysis can be utilised for searching the scope of improving the existing social order in the short run whereas the diachronic analysis can pave the way for a gradual movement towards an alternative social order in the long run. As such, CIT proves useful not only in grasping the evolution of an ever-changing social order but also in *influencing* and *channelling* the process of social change.^[41]

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Moreover, CIT's move towards a new social order is not motivated by the idea of serving narrow self-interests but a broad humane interest in enlightenment and emancipation.^[42] Contrary to the immutability associated with Huntington's thesis, CIT puts forward an emancipatory claim that affirms the human capacity to learn from harmful experiences.^[43] The emancipatory claim of CIT is both constitutive and prescriptive. Linklater writes,

This is partly a constitutive claim; to follow such a path is to become civil. But as with any constitutive claims, it is also a prescriptive one; it suggests a path that the agents [of change] need to follow to form a more civil social environment.^[44]

CIT intends to move on to a new social order wherein it is possible to free ourselves from the problematic social structures that cause war, human rights violations, racism, poverty, and so on.^[45] By relentlessly focusing on the question of emancipation and by questioning what this might mean in terms of the theory and practice of world politics, CIT successfully crosses the Huntingtonian limits to a desirable social transformation that may be instrumental in building a peaceful world order.

Second, unlike Huntington's thesis, CIT does not convert the explanan into explanandum and therefore is free from the guilt of what Rosenberg calls 'empty circularity'.^[46] For Huntington, the post-Cold War world is the explanandum (i.e. the phenomena that needs to be explained in terms of an outcome of some reason) and the notion of civilizational clash is the explanan (i.e. the reason that is used for explaining the phenomena). Since Huntington does not delve deeper into the causal mechanisms that activate the notion of civilizational clash (explanan), it becomes a baseless assertion. Huntington uses this baseless assertion to explain the conflictive character of the post-Cold War world (explanandum). Since the reason of civilizational clash also becomes its outcome, that is the post-Cold War world fraught with civilizational tensions, Huntington's thesis falls into the trap of empty circularity. In order to avoid the empty circularity, Rosenberg recommends that the explanation must fall back on some more basic social theory which could clarify as to why the phenomenon which is being explained became such a distinctive and salient feature of the contemporary world. In the context of Huntington's thesis, CIT can serve as the more basic social theory which can explain why the phenomenon of 'civilizational clash' gained momentum in the present era. The production paradigm can throw light on the disguised political and economic factors working behind what appears as the 'civilizational conflict', while the communication paradigm can reveal the concealed impact of the distortions in the civilizational dialogue on the aggravation of the so-called 'civilizational tensions'.

On the basis of the insights drawn from this theoretical tool, CIT can take a step further in the direction of formulating a *practical agenda* for socio-political transformation and emancipation. Richard Wyn Jones stresses the practical intent of CIT by stating that its willingness to face up to reality simultaneously includes a commitment to its transformation and a belief that such a transformation is feasible. Following Marx, critical theorists seek to understand the world in order to change it.^[47] They use different metaphors to express their thrust for practical change. Goodin calls it 'constitutional design' while Turner calls it 'social engineering'.^[48] It is 'evolutionary guidance' for Banathy, 'system steering' for Luhmann and 'collective character planning' for Elster.^[49] All the critical theorists attempt to identify the sources of potentially far-reaching change so that human subjects can grasp the possibility of alternative paths of historical development which can be explored through collective political action.^[50]

In seeking to identify and promote the potential sites for change, the production paradigm encourages counter-hegemonic political and social movements while the communication paradigm focuses on unrestrained and undistorted discourse. The production paradigm raises a voice against the adverse effects of the globalisation of relations of production on the distribution of the world's wealth. Cox argues that the *Global Perestroika* (i.e. globalisation) that penetrates the totality of structures constituting the present world order can be effectively countered by a challenge at several levels, by a Gramscian 'war of position' of probably a long duration.^[51] While drawing a rough sketch of the principles required for initiating such a war of position, he writes:

The movement presupposes the rediscovery of social solidarity and of confidence in a potential for sustained collective creativity, inspired by a commitment to social equity, to reciprocal recognition of cultural and civilizational differences, to biospheric survival, and to non-violent methods of dealing with conflict. The supreme challenge is to build a counter-hegemonic formation that would embody these principles; and this task implies as a first step the

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working out of an ontology that focuses attention on the key elements in this struggle.^[52]

The task of framing an ontology that is conducive to Cox's principles of counter-hegemonic movement can be concretised by approximating, if not establishing, Linklater's 'ideal speech community' which ensures the inclusive participation of all the hitherto suppressed voices in the collective process of ontology framing. The inputs from the counter-hegemonic forces in the collective process of ontology framing would involve the unpacking or pulling apart of meanings embedded or implicitly assumed in the dominant texts, whether these texts are public statements by policymakers or the writings of other IR scholars.^[53] By pulling apart meaning-making it is possible not only to reveal the knowledge-producing power structures underneath,^[54] but to produce alternative knowledge-producing structures backed by the counter-hegemonic consensus. The alternative knowledge-producing structures can provide a sustained boost to the counter-hegemonic movement in the long run.

Though Marc Lynch believes that a focus on communication can act as a possible site for foundational knowledge-claims and the practical achievement of emancipation,^[55] Stephen Leonard has rightly observed that forging a link between social theory and political practice is no mean task.^[56] The task becomes all the more complicated because it involves uniquely difficult and essentially epistemological issues of 'rationality'. Though the 'ideal speech condition' emits a hope that the collective outcomes would be determined not by the considerations of power, social identities, or cultural distortions but by the supreme force of rationality, the notion of rationality remains both theoretically and practically problematic. Alexander Wendt writes, 'If the present is complex and the future radically uncertain, then it is not clear what rationality even means, let alone what rational choices should be'.^[57] However, Wendt's statement is indicative of the fact that our choices are *rationally* determined and our rationality is *temporally* contingent. As such, the theoretical issue of conceptualising rationality and the related practical challenge of making rational choices become open to contestation by the collectivities that are the peculiar 'products' as well as 'producers' of their own time. It is CIT that sets the stage for such a contestation, not the clash of civilizations thesis which, in its quest for maintaining the status-quo, deliberately refuses to speak to this problem.

The outcome of the contestation of rationality facilitated by CIT might seem inconclusive in the short run, but its pursuance as an ongoing project in the long run guarantees a safeguard against the silent acceptance of an 'uncontested irrationality' masquerading as what appears as rationality. After all, the idea of contesting (ir)rationality is rational for all as it promises to unleash an emancipatory effect. The American poet, A. R. Ammons, endorses a similar view when he quotes: 'Definition, rationality, and structure are ways of seeing, but they become prisons when they blank out other ways of seeing'.^[58] The basic attraction of CIT over and above the clash of civilizations thesis lies in its propensity to break free from those prisons.

It is true that the theoretical superiority of CIT cannot be established merely at the methodological level. Craib is right in his opinion that the testing of theory against evidence is crucial. The lack of evidence in support of a theory renders its methodological edge inconsequential. Moreover, the potential of a methodologically superior theory can be fully tapped only when it helps to see what is glaringly evident but deliberately overlooked. The meeting of theoretical methodology with practical evidence is immensely decisive for the agenda of emancipation.

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[2] Ibid, p.17.

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