POST-CONFLICT AFGHANISTAN:
A POST-COLONIAL CRITIQUE

by

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Abstract

This dissertation responds to a growing body of literature that points to a crisis in post-conflict aid interventions. These complex, costly and risky international undertakings have not only failed to produce desirable results, but have left efforts to effectively and successfully restructure post-war states and societies an elusive goal. Focusing on Afghanistan, I offer a postcolonial analysis to unmask and interrogate the underlying knowledge base and institutionalized sets of power relations that govern post-conflict reconstruction and statebuilding interventions in the country. Therefore, this study is preoccupied with not only what we in the west are doing wrong in Afghanistan, but why we are there, how we perceive ourselves and Afghans as well as the way we work and the kinds of relations that are fostered.

This study argues that one can detect the continuity of a colonial worldview in modern statebuilding practices in Afghanistan. As such, interventions primarily rekindle and reassert the west’s own sense of meaning and purpose in the country, ensuring that westerners, and not necessarily Afghans, are the primary beneficiaries of post-conflict interventions and that westerners are never made to feel ‘out of place’ in Afghanistan. Interventions, therefore, construct an outwardly oriented state, responsive to the desires and needs of the international community, rather than being inwardly oriented and responsive to the needs, expectations and lived realities of the majority of Afghans. To substantiate this claim, this dissertation focuses on the concepts of colonial ambivalence and mimicry as well as terra nullius in order to unmask some of the hidden, obscure and implicit assumptions, ideas, values and relations that underpin externally facilitated interventions in Afghanistan.
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CHAPTER ONE

An Overview of Post-Conflict Interventions

Introduction

For over a decade, the international community has invested billions of dollars to assist war-ravaged societies around the world. Post-conflict peacebuilding and reconstruction has become a distinct and specialized area of programming, involving a diverse array of international actors engaged in the ostensible goal of transforming ‘failed’ or ‘collapsed’ states into peaceful, liberal-democracies. Canada’s own peace-building and post-conflict reconstruction programs expanded in the 1990s and currently (post-911) Afghanistan has become Canada’s largest single-country aid recipient. Interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq have earmarked a noticeable shift in the post-war agenda, merging traditional post-war reconstruction priorities within the broader post-9/11 foreign policy framework to combat global terror. Increasingly certain ‘weak’ or ‘failed’ states are now positioned as threats to global peace and security, warranting greater political and military engagements alongside longer-term financial commitments by western donor governments (Schwarz, 2005). This securitization of the post-war agenda further complicates an already complex set of strategies practiced in the post-conflict framework. Internationally-funded post-war efforts such as those in Namibia (1989), Cambodia (1991), Mozambique (1992), Bosnia (1995), Kosovo (1999) and now most recently in Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003), have typically involved a wide range of activities: re-writing constitutions, promoting civil and political rights, developing free-market economies, re-structuring government institutions, promoting an independent civil society; re-building social and physical infrastructures and in some cases administrating over entire territories (Paris, 2004; Ottaway, 2003; MacGinty, 2005). This broad-based international agenda often inextricably linked to discussions around nation/state-building, is rightly described by Roland Paris (2004) as
“the most ambitious and concerted international effort to rehabilitate war-shattered states since the Allied reconstruction of Germany and Japan following World War II” (p. 4).

Less inspiring, however, is the partial success to outright failures of the majority of these interventions over the past decade, whether under UN or US-led auspices. These complex, costly and risky international undertakings have not only failed to produce desirable results, but have left efforts to effectively and successfully restructure post-war states and societies an elusive goal. Iraq and Afghanistan are the most recent additions to the mix of failed interventions that include countries such as Angola, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Somalia and Kosovo. In almost all of these cases, the ostensible goal to rebuild war-shattered countries into strong, well-governed states with vibrant civil societies has not been very successful. This is despite the international community having decades of experience in dozens of countries around the world, with billions of dollars in aid at their disposal and even having unprecedented access into the domestic decision-making bodies of these states (Fukuyama, 2004; Chandler, 2006; Paris, 2004; Paris, 2010). It should come as no surprise that in Afghanistan, even after years of foreign interventions, the country is widely perceived to still be on the cusp of ‘collapse’, with rising insecurity and violence, corruption, political fragmentation, high rates of poverty, slow economic growth and only marginal improvements on key social and health indicators (see Government of Afghanistan (GoA), 2005; Chr. Michelsen Institute (CMI), 2005; Senlis Council, 2006; World Bank, 2005; International Crisis Group, 2012; United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), 2013; Hogg & World Bank, 2013).

Since the early 1990s, concerns have circulated about the dominant post-war blueprint of neo-liberal marketization and liberal democratization guiding post-conflict programming. Critical scholars have linked this dominant model to creating conditions of instability in societies
by exacerbating socio-political tensions, failing to reduce vulnerabilities and quite possibly even increasing the susceptibility of marginalized communities to endure further violence (see Smillie, 2001; Anderson, 1999; Keen, 2005; and Paris, 2004). Researchers have shown how the rapid push for elections in the aftermath of conflict, for example, has had more to do with proving “liberal progress” than nurturing long-term political stability and fostering healthy state-society relations (Chishti-Farhoumand, 2011; Schwarz, 2005). Furthermore, the experiences of Cambodia, Sierra Leone, Rwanda and Mozambique are all emblematic of macro-economic policies that undermined the peace agenda by widening economic and social inequalities and consequently fuelling further intra-state violence (Hendrickson, 2001; Paris, 2004; Costy, 2004; Ali & Matthews, 2004; Keen, 2005; and Andersen, 2000). It is often cited that almost 25% of wars that end in negotiated settlements relapse into violent conflict within five years (Collier et al., 2003; Suhrke & Samset, 2007), and in a major study conducted for the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, only four countries (West Germany, Japan, Grenada and Panama) in an evaluation of sixteen US-led nation-building efforts since 1900 were considered successful for maintaining over ten years of stable government (Montgomery & Rondinelli, 2004).

The entry point to this study is in response to this dismal record of failed interventions in war-affected societies. Focusing on post-conflict Afghanistan, my intention is to critically interrogate what Berger (2006) calls the ‘macro-authoritative’ and ‘monolithic’ state-building apparatus that continues to be implemented by the international community despite the long trail of lofty and even damaging outcomes it leaves behind. Even conservative critics such as Francis Fukuyama (2006) have questioned why lessons that ought to have been already learnt, are not. He observes that the same mistakes in statebuilding seem to be unnecessarily repeated with every new involvement. In a similar vein, Montgomery and Rondinelli (2004) begin their
comprehensive study of peacebuilding in Afghanistan with the acute observation that although international planners *could* have drawn from over 50 years of experience from post-conflict situations, they quite simply *did not* apply this knowledge to Afghanistan. The institutional irreverence and lackadaisical approach to post-conflict interventions is alarming and is evidenced by the research of a number of scholars commenting on the current crisis of reconstruction and peacebuilding in Afghanistan (see, for example, Azarbaijani-Moghaddam, 2007; Montgomery & Rondinelli, 2004; Hill, 2010; Tadjbaksh & Schoiswohl, 2008; Suhrke, 2008; and Abirafeh, 2009). This problematic in Afghanistan, and in post-conflict operations generally, is attributed to a number of concomitant shortcomings raised by scholars such as a deficit of critical theorizing (Hill, 2010; Cornwall & Brook, 2006); flawed methods and principles (Paris, 2004; Barnett, 2006; Rubin & Hamidzada, 2007; Montgomery & Rondinelli, 2004); lack of political will and mixed objectives (Nixon & Ponzio, 2007; Suhrke, 2008; Goodhand & Sedra, 2010); dearth of local or grass-roots legitimacy (Roberts, 2000; MacGuinty, 2008).

This study follows the important contributions of critical scholars such as Mark Duffield (2001, 2007), David Chandler (2006, 2009, 2010), David Roberts (2009, 2011), Michael Pugh (2011, 2012), Oliver Richmond (2011) and Phillip Darby (2009) who have each discussed the mechanisms of western power, regulation and domination over non-western societies under the guise of building peace, security and stability in the aftermath of wars (see, for example, sections 2.5 and 2.6 in this chapter). My approach, much like theirs, intends to interrupt the normative discourse and practice by asking a different set of questions. However, unlike most critical contributions in the field, this study is informed by postcolonial thought, which as Phillip Darby (2009) and Michael Pugh (2011) both acknowledge has been absent from the literature on peacebuilding and statebuilding. By employing postcolonial thought this study intends to engage
in an ‘inward’ analysis of the post-conflict enterprise, by critically exploring the underlying assumptions, ideas, values and relations that underpin the externally-facilitated interventions in Afghanistan. The questions guiding this research include: Are Afghans the intended and primary beneficiaries of post-conflict interventions? What are some of the hidden and implicit ideas and assumptions about Afghans and Afghanistan and how do they play out in the post-conflict context? Do international aid interventions subscribe to an actual or perceived ‘clash’ between Islam, Islamic extremism and western liberalism? Are there competing or contradictory political and economic objectives? What are the silences and occlusions of western interventions? These questions all have significant implications for our understanding and interpretation of what the purpose, limits and possibilities of post-conflict operations actually are vis-à-vis what they are officially, and ostensibly presumed to be. By asking these sets of questions the analytics of post-colonial theory are required to unmask some of the undeclared, obscure and implicit attitudes, assumptions and interactions that characterize the international community’s relationship with Afghanistan which I argue are the least addressed in current scholarship and yet most needed to establish new understandings. The core arguments proposed in this study are outlined later in this chapter. For now, it is sufficient to clarify that this study is preoccupied with not only what we in the west are doing wrong in Afghanistan, but why we are there, how we perceive ourselves and Afghans as well as the way we work and the kinds of relations that are fostered.

This approach departs from the well-established work of academics in this field, who mainly operate from within a ‘nuts and bolts’ approach to address the pressing problems confronting post-conflict interventions. That is to say, the focus primarily has been on improving existing operations in order to manage the most critical gaps and glitches, rather than questioning and interrogating the ideological edifice informing peacebuilding operations. This field is, therefore,
concentrated by studies examining economic and health indicators, the role of civil society and
the media, human rights, justice and reconciliation, social service delivery, security sector
reforms and democratic governance. These contributions have most certainly improved our
overall understanding of the situation in Afghanistan, however, they echo the modernist-
development worldview, which atypically assumes that there is a ‘right-fix’ of mostly technical-
interventionist strategies that merely need to be re-configured, tweaked or more efficiently
implemented (with enough resources and commitment) in order to eventually re-engineer war-
shattered societies into peaceful, healthy “liberal-market democracies” (Paris, 2004; Ali &
Matthews, 2004). By employing a postcolonial analysis this study allows for a critical
investigation of the core power relations that define interventionist strategies as they set out to
correct and ostensibly restore the conditions and circumstances of Other states, Other societies
and cultures. The postcolonial offers a set of analytical tools that aid in identifying and
unmasking the types of colonial and imperial relations that are imbibed in the discursive
practices of ‘reconstruction’, ‘peacebuilding’, and ‘nation building’ strategies, revealing their
subtle links to larger political, cultural and intellectual modes of domination and subordination. I
argue that a post-colonial inquiry is exactly what is missing from existing critical debates and
discussions about post-conflict interventions because it situates the west’s assumptions, attitudes,
ideas and relations as critical and central to the west’s endeavors. That is to say, the subtle and
often implicit ways of the west are just as important to unmask as the policy and programmatic
outcomes of western aid operations.

Furthermore, it should be noted that the implications of this research for global education
and development education are important for several reasons. By applying a postcolonial
framework educators are able to point out and critically explore the continuity of a colonial
worldview as it manifests in relations, representations and outcomes between the west and the non-western world. This would entail deepening an understanding of the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized and detecting this fundamental dynamic or exchange in the present international development context. In doing so, eurocentrism can be unmasked and educators can create a space for contending, competing and alternative (or indigenous) knowledge systems. Furthermore, this study challenges global and development education to prioritize critical self-reflection on western perceptions, attitudes, assumptions and representations of Other societies as a means to promote and facilitate greater accountability and transparency of western aid interventions in the majority world.

This introductory chapter begins with a literature review that overviews the salient themes and underpinnings of post-conflict interventions, followed by a short summary of my discursive framework and my core arguments.
Part 1: Wars and the Politics of Failed States

1.1 Protracted Conflicts and Wars Merging with Peace

An unprecedented expansion of international peacebuilding and reconstruction institutions and interventions emerged in response to heightened concern over the wars and protracted conflicts during the 1990s. From the period 1989 to 2001, a total of 115 armed conflicts were recorded, typically in regions ranked among the poorest in the world (Forman & Patrick, 2000; Harbom & Wallensteen, 2005). Within the same period, approximately 56 conflicts ended, creating tremendous pressure on the international community to assist societies in the aftermath of war (Barakat, 2005). Unlike the beginning of the 20th century whereby 90% of war victims were soldiers, 90% of those killed in the 1990’s were civilians – raising new levels of awareness on the horrific crimes of ethnic cleansing, genocide and rape as an instrument of war (Hoffman & Weiss, 2006; Paris, 2004). During the immediate post-cold war period, between 1989-1999, over 1.5 million people were killed due to armed struggles, and millions more wounded and displaced (Hoffman & Weiss, 2006). Concomitant to the tremendous loss of lives and mass displacement of populations as a result of war, is the large-scale damage and destruction of lives and livelihoods, physical infrastructure, roads, schools, hospitals and a functioning economy (Ball, 2002; Paris, 2004). Armed conflicts unravel billions of dollars of development aid invested in countries over decades, and conflicts are commonly understood as temporary “interruptions” to an ongoing process of development (Berdal & Malone, 2000). Furthermore, much of the literature identifies the wars of the 1990s as distinctly

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1 This is based on data from the Correlates of War (COW) project, whereby armed conflict is recorded based on a minimum of 1000 battle deaths. The other leading group is the Uppsala datasets which qualify armed conflict as 25 battle deaths. From 1989-2001 both datasets reveal the same number of conflicts.
“new”, in so much as roughly 94% of armed conflicts were recorded as internal and internationalized civil wars, as opposed to interstate war\(^2\), giving rise to discussions over the increased role of non-state actors such as warlords, local militias, paramilitary, and criminalized gangs in fuelling conflict, (Le Billon, 2000; Hoffman & Weiss, 2006). Although there is (at least officially) a noted decline in armed conflicts since the year 2000\(^3\), scholarly attention continues to explore the changes, trends and complexities of conflict in the post-cold war period.

In response to the heightened global attention towards wars and conflicts over the past two decades, some of the most significant and historic international achievements to address the atrocities of war emerged to establish a new paradigm and apparatus. The historic Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security was unanimously passed on October 31, 2000 to protect women during conflict and include them in peace negotiations; the ratification of the International Criminal Court (ICC) mandated to prosecute individuals accused of war crimes and crimes against humanity; as well as the creation of over seven separate international tribunals established in the aftermath of war to prosecute individuals accused of war crimes and crimes against humanity (Arzt, 2006). In effect, by all accounts in academic and policy literature, the last two decades of war instigated a paradigmatic shift not only in terms of how wars and conflicts are now understood, but the increased and expansive role of the

\(^2\) According to Hoffman and Weiss (2006), internal conflicts involve a government and an internal opposition group(s) whereas internationalized internal conflict refers to the internal opposition group(s) supported by other states.

\(^3\) According to Harbom and Wallensteen (2005), the aforementioned datasets typically note a decline in the number of wars since the beginning of the 21\(^{st}\) century, but this could possibly be misleading because they tend to reduce the complexities of conflict to simplistic technical prescriptions. As an example, the conflict in Afghanistan after the fall of the Taliban facilitates between an active and non-active war zone. In 2003 Afghanistan was not recorded as a conflict zone because most of the fighting between the US and Al-Qaeda took place in Pakistan’s border region, however, by the next year Afghanistan was listed as an active conflict country (furthermore, the interstate conflict between Iraq and the USA, the UK and Australia officially ended on May 1, 2003 when the US led coalition declared victory over Saddam Hussein’s regime, despite ongoing anti-imperialist campaigns across the country). These fluctuations and capricious typologies between internal, inter-state conflict and non-conflict zones may create limitations in understanding the complexity of regionalized wars and adversely impact scholarly analysis and that policy direction in conflict-affected regions that may need to simultaneously understand the currents of conflict and the multiple layers of state and non-state actors involved.
international community in responding to conflicts and seeking to prevent them (Kumar, 1997; Ali & Matthews, 2004).

In efforts to understand the post-conflict period better, scholars have argued that there is no clear distinction between periods of war and peace (Cooke, 1999; Cockburn & Zarkov, 2002; Adebajo & Sriram, 2001) Often, conflicts formally end due to ceasefires or peace negotiations, however, different kinds of violence and aggression may continue to emerge and transform. In fact, physical violence may still persist in the wake of post-conflict planning and implementation that directly and indirectly subvert the peace agenda through intimidations, threats, sabotage, skirmishes and other barriers that disrupt the ‘formal’ end to conflict (MacGinty, 2005). In this sense, Cooke (1999:84) observes that many communities fluctuate between periods of war and peace, and suggests that it is perhaps more accurate to refer to a continuum between “war and not-war”. Feminists scholars have similarly identified whether it makes sense to even speak of a “post-war moment” as this period typically signifies the continuity of violence against means through other means, highlighting the need to re-conceptualize the conceptual categories of war and peace, especially in post-conflict settings (Cockburn and Zarkov 2002).

This context is more complicated in Afghanistan where the post-conflict space is marked by typical reconstruction and peacebuilding interventions, however, the country is also the site for an intense military operation as part of the war on terror. It is evident that the campaign to weed out terrorism is the defining and primary mission in Afghanistan, establishing the foundation for all subsequent U.S. and foreign aid involvements. Making war while simultaneously building peace is emblematic of the new kind of nation-building (Chishti 2010). Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan and the total war on terror budget overall has surpassed one trillion US dollars by the United States alone. Since 2001, the US Congress
allocated over 90% of its overall budget (which includes aid, reconstruction, including military operations, base security as well as reconstruction and foreign aid funds) to the Department of Defense, compared to only 6% in foreign aid support (Belasco, 2010). That is to say, only 6% of the total funds allocated by the US Congress to the war on terror is earmarked to support peacebuilding and promote the restoration of political governance and economic stability while the overwhelming majority is to fight the war. The US administration has renewed and expanded its counter-terrorism military operations, even spilling into Pakistan in order to prevent the Taliban insurgency and other Islamic extremists from gaining political ground in the country and overthrowing the Karzai government.

Understanding the root causes of conflict, or in the case of Afghanistan, the complexities of an ongoing war is critical for post-conflict reconstruction and its parallel agenda to stabilize the country and institutionalize peace. Afghanistan witnessed the merging of security and post-conflict objectives through the establishment of civil-military units or PRT’s (Provincial Reconstruction Teams). These units, first established by the United States in the three provinces of Gardez, Kunduz, and Bamiyan, changed the face of aid as soldiers fighting the insurgency were also building schools, delivering food aid and implementing various other development projects in mostly rural communities. There are over twenty PRT’s in Afghanistan operated by a number of different US coalition partners, with the US leading with 12 PRT’s in different parts of the country. The first PRT’s were created in 2002 with the objective of helping to extend the authority and presence of the Afghan government across the country. Over the years the mandates of PRT’s have expanded to include supporting local governance and implementing community development. All PRT’s in Afghanistan are under ISAF’s (International Security Assistance Force) operational command, but their structure and mandates vary by country. Much
has been written on the impact of PRTS, the aid community in particular has criticized these civil-military units for blurring the traditional demarcations between military and humanitarian operations and for undermining the credibility and reputation of aid agencies working in communities as neutral actor (Kolhatkar and Ingalls 2006). Recent research has also problematized the political appropriation of aid interventions by insurgent and counter-insurgent forces that have used aid settings to demonstrate ideological victory (Chishti 2011). This study seeks to contribute to the existing literature on the implications of conflict in peacebuilding settings by focusing on the ways in which the international aid community as well as specific western powers either directly or indirectly contribute to exacerbating the conditions of war. Do certain aid policies and post-conflict interventions inadvertently undermine peace? In what ways does the military operation to fight the war on terror in Afghanistan conflict with the agenda for peacebuilding? What are the implications for Afghans as a result of this dual strategy? This study explores these questions as well as the intersections between the existing discursive framing of wars and conflicts and the corresponding role of the international community to address them. These are important to examine because they establish the foundational discourse upon which post-conflict reconstruction and peacebuilding interventions in Afghanistan are imagined and inevitably reified.

1.2 Failed States, Globalization and Global Terrorism

Much of the literature links the causes and impact of conflict directly to the phenomena of “failed” states. State failure is generally linked to conditions of internal state duress that ostensibly create and/or exacerbate widespread social, economic and political disruptions, which may (or in some cases, may not) lead to violence and outright war (Adebajo & Sriram, 2001; Cooper, 2005; Reno, 2000; Rice, 2005). Addressing the root causes of failed states is often
discussed in the context of understanding wars. Rotberg (2003) and Kalevi (1996), for example, assert that weak states are and will continue to be the locales of war, however, although dozens of states are considered to suffer from varying degrees of weakness, von Einsiedel (2005) and others note that only a handful actually slide into total collapse and civil war (see also Ali & Mathew 2004). The seminal work of William Zartman (1995) describes state failure (often used interchangeably with state collapse) as a condition where the domestic political structures in terms of authority, law and security have fallen apart, indicating a need for the state to be reconstituted into some stable form. Increasingly, discussions around state failure have moved beyond the decay of mere political structures, into a growing account of what Lambach (2006) rightly insists is a preoccupation of a state’s weak “performance standards.” That is to say, the typology used to classify states as either weak, fragile or failed is measured vis-à-vis an expansive list of expected state functions that only western democratic states have been able to fulfill (Lambach 2006; Hoffman & Weiss 2006; Brinerhoff & Brinkerhoff, 2002).

On the other hand, William Reno (2000) has popularly positioned the term “shadow” states in reference to the heightened role and presence of powerful non-state actors. In his analysis, corrupt and powerful informal groups dominate “shadow states” by using violence to secure economic and political privilege. Shadow states include Liberia and Sierra Leone whereby official state structures are either corrupt, absent or bypassed entirely, hence enabling the diverse objectives of local and national non-state actors to take advantage and forge political control through market channels, as opposed to working through state institutions. Berdal and Malone (2000) and Le Billon (2005) explore the economic motivations that perpetuate the failed-state syndrome, arguing that war is profitable and money motivates and shapes the behaviors of these non-state actors to influence civil conflict. Berdal and Malone (2000) contend that at the
end of the 1990s conflicts that had arisen in failed states were not classic wars, in so much as it
was about exclusively defeating the enemy, but were “resource wars,” whereby economically
driven interests encouraged groups to willfully prolong wars because they are profitable.

For the most part, internal state weaknesses and structural shortcomings are constructed
as the main culprits behind weak, failed, failing and collapsed states. As Duffield (1999) sharply
notes, academic and policy literature largely blame internal state actors for state failure, however,
these types of parochial state-centric critiques are increasingly being challenged for having
“limited analytical value and policy reference” (Berdal & Malone, 2000a). Of critical
countervailing importance, is the work of various scholars such as Chimni (2000) and Fitzgerald
(1999) among others, who have linked transnational forces, such as macro-economic policies
that contribute to and exacerbate conditions of war and state duress. For Chimni (2000), neo-
liberal globalization and market regulation have lead to economic and political instability within
third world states. In the 1990s responses to regional conflicts affecting multiple failed states
were termed complex political emergencies (CPE’s). Jacobson (2006) qualifies CPE’s as
protracted conflicts involving few military engagements, but intense suffering on the part of the
civilian population. CPE’s became widely written about by both scholars and practitioners as
new forms of protracted political crises resulting from responses to socio-economic stress and
marginalization (Leader & Macrae, 2000; Dillon & Reid, 2000). Pieterse (1998), for example,
writes about internal wars reflecting major structural changes in global politics. There is general
agreement that the nature and dynamics of CPE’s are linked to the process of globalization and
the polarization of world economies. As David Moore (2000) mentions, the instruments of neo-
liberal economic globalization have contributed to the diminution of state capacity in the third
world, and as Leader and Macrae (2000) point out, this challenge to state competence has given
way to new and different forms of authority, namely the advent of war economies. Fitzgerald (1999) on the other hand cautions against a conclusive link between globalization and war, however, he does indicate that current international arrangements can either exacerbate or ameliorate domestic political tensions. Generally, perspectives that seek to understand internal conflicts by factoring in transnationalism, often attribute some degree of link between conflicts and the current globalized economic exchange between resource rich areas located in weak states and the world commodity market.

Recognizing and thoroughly addressing the politics of “weak” and “failed” states is even more critical now in the post-911 world order because they represent not only a national and regional threat, but increasingly a global threat to international peace and security. Since the end of the Cold War, Rotberg (2003) and Crocker (2003) argue that weak and failing states have become the single largest threat to peace and security, echoed by Ignatieff (2003a) and Fukuyama (2004) who similarly attribute the vast majority of international crisis since the fall of the Berlin wall to failed states such as Somalia, Haiti, Rwanda, Congo – to name a few. This construction of failed states as threatening global order is most evident in the US National Security Strategy (White House, 2002:iv) whereby it is clearly stated that, “America is now threatened less by conquering states than we are by failing ones.” Interestingly, for the purposes of this study, Afghanistan emerged as the prime example of a failed state that served as a haven for terrorists, stirring chaos and violence beyond its borders.

Mark Duffield (2001) and others have argued that the new securitization discourse that surrounds failed states promotes their ongoing surveillance, containment and management by internationals in order to prevent “spillovers” internationally (Ghani et al., 2005; von Einsiedel 2005; Rice, 2005; Stern, 2001). That is to say, internationals must ensure that these powerfully
dangerous states must be actively reformed (read: post-conflict reconstruction and development) essentially in service of global peace and security, so that their harmful and dangerous reverberations are contained (von Einsiedel, 2005). It is important to note, however, that this new security framework emerged long before the terrorist attacks of the World Trade Centre, and is only a current manifestation of a long held understanding in development discourse that poverty and underdevelopment are in themselves threats to international security (Cooper, 2005). Mark Duffield (2001) notes that global poor relief was increasingly framed as riot control, and hence, the key culprits that posed a security risk to the global political and more importantly the economic order, were those identified as failed or altogether collapsed states. I am interested in examining the discursive construction of state failure and how this practice relates to western powers that set out to re-engineer failed states “back” into stable ones through re-structuring state-society institutions and relations. My research seeks to tease out the intersections between labeling Afghanistan as a failed state, and the modalities of western political, economic and military power. By critically examining the discourse of failure this study questions the criteria to measure state capacities and questions the infringements on state sovereignty when states are rendered as failed. Furthermore, want is implied about the societies that reside and have managed to survive in such failed and defunct states? That is to say, does the label failed states tacitly assume failed civilizations and societies?
Part 2. Post-Conflict Reconstruction

2.1 Foundational Pillars of Post-Conflict Aid

The end of wars is often seen as presenting opportunities for countries to rebuild their societies, polities and economies. Almost as when something ends, it invariably means something new is about to take form. As Doornbus (2003) notes, donor mindsets tend to look at their role as builders invested with the responsibility to designing more effective and efficient governments. The last two decades have witnessed the expansion of international policies and programs to address the impact and aftermath of conflict, having stirred the creation of new departments and units within donor governments, international institutions and NGOs (Suhrke & Buckmaster, 2005; Barakat, 2005; MacGinty, 2003; Ottaway 20034). Since 1989 “post-conflict” has become a standard policy term among international donor agencies, and well over fourteen major peacebuilding missions were underway to facilitate peace, including Namibia (1989), Nicaragua (1989), Angola (1991), El Salvador (1991), Liberia (1993), Croatia (1995), Mozambique (1992), Kosovo (1999) Sierra Leone (1999), Afghanistan (2001) and most recently Iraq (2003) – to name a few (Paris, 2004). Seminal documents such as the UN Agenda for Peace (1991), the Brahimi Report (2000), and the DAC (2001) report on preventing violent conflict inspired and established new policy directives, paralleled by an expanding aid network of UN agencies, western governments, international financial and non-governmental organizations. The ethos of the current post-conflict peacebuilding and reconstruction framework is often attributed to the UN Agenda for Peace (1991), proposed by the former Security-General of the United Nations, Boutros Boutros Ghali, in his articulation of the collective will and action of the

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4 For example, World Bank has special projects under their conflict prevention and post-conflict reconstruction unit and in 1994 UNRISD established the war-torn societies project.
international community to identify and support structures of peace in war-torn societies. This rationale is substantiated by the primary objective of the UN Charter, that is, to save succeeding generations from the scourges of war (Agenda for Peace, 1991). The aim of peacebuilding put forth by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, is to create the conditions necessary for a sustainable peace in war-torn societies – that is, peace enduring long after the departure of the peacebuilders (Paris, 2004).

Most policy frameworks refer to five simultaneous pillars of post-conflict reconstruction that are meant to be addressed not only simultaneously but as interrelated and interdependent processes that include security, justice and reconciliation, social well-being, economic opportunity and governance and participation (Kumar, 1997; Tzifakis & Tsardanidis, 2006; World Bank 2005). According to the official OECD/DAC guidelines the ultimate goal of these activities is “structural stability,” that is, a mixture of the liberal strategy for peace including rule of law, human rights and social and economic development alongside strong institutions whereby conflicts are handled peacefully (OECD/DAC, 1997). This existing approach culminated after decades of international experience that evolved from quick fixes and limited reforms to a shift in thinking in the late 1990s when the international community came to a consensus that the post-conflict period required an investment of more money, more time and more intensity in terms of building effective and legitimate state institutions (Paris & Sisk, 2009). This shift corresponds with the new language of statebuilding that is commonly used in the literature, and is often considered a subcomponent of peacebuilding. The United Nations, for example, still uses the term peacebuilding which is used to describe the overall effort, whereas statebuilding is focused on constructing effective and legitimate government institutions. This would include providing security, rule of law, basic services, revenue from taxation and so on.
and so forth (Paris & Sisk, 2009). These same activities are also referred to as stabilization and reconstruction that are the more common terms used in the United States (Dobbins, 2008). Irrespective of the differences in terminologies, they are all underpinned by the same standard blueprint since the 1990s of political and economic liberalization. Political liberalization refers to the export of democracy, individual liberty and the promotion of peace and the economic liberalization refers to neo-liberal economics or globalization. Roland Paris (1997; 2004) refers to this fusion as market democracy which is the combination of liberal democratic polity and a market oriented economy firmly anchored in international policy circles as the panacea to war, underdevelopment and instability.

2.2 Post-Conflict Afghanistan: Overview

In Afghanistan, the World Bank’s 2005 country report concludes that the legacy of armed conflict up until the fall of the Taliban as well as the history of natural disasters (specifically the severe earthquakes and droughts) have severely damaged the political, social and economic infrastructures of the country. The report reveals the impact of conflict in terms of weakening central state authority and public service delivery as well as the destruction of infrastructure and the diversion of resources and capital re-directed to fuel the conflict. Not only were roads, irrigation systems, buildings, schools, agricultural crops and trade patterns demolished and disrupted, but productive capacities were displaced as more than 30% of the population was forced to flee. This was exacerbated by years of a brain drain as skilled and educated Afghans left, as did capital. The report states that conflict in Afghanistan had a negative effect on social capital as governance, rule of law, and community links were weakened, with added emphasis on the failure of the country to participate in the global economy.
In the post-911 period, following the US-led military defeat of the Taliban, the international community gathered in Bonn, Germany to outline Afghanistan’s road to recovery. The Bonn Agreement emphasized a neo-Weberian approach to statebuilding, a vision shared by all donor governments intent on helping to build a strong central government with a functional and efficient bureaucracy that extends security, rule of law, and basic social services across the country (Saltmarshe & Medhi, 2011; Edwards, 2010). Afghanistan’s post-conflict recovery is considered to be a nationally-directed process, articulated in the country’s National Development Framework (NDF), that although was drafted in consultation with the World Bank and other international agencies, is considered to be a uniquely indigenous initiative (see Donini, 2004). As Barakat (2005) and others note, the national framework was a means for the government to “own” the path for recovery, stipulating the need for all national and international work in the country to be carried out in accordance to the goals of the NDF in order to complement the government instead of competing, duplicating and bypassing the state (Donini, 2004; Rubin, 2006). However, over the years a persistent theme in the literature on post-conflict Afghanistan has been the persistent disregard of the NDF, particularly on the part of international agencies and foreign non-governmental organizations. As Rubin (2006) notes, the Afghan government’s inability to regain control over national policies and implementation is due to, on the one hand, the undermining efforts of insurgents, the illicit economy and warlords, and on the other hand, the challenge posed by the “second civil service” that is, the parallel aid structures created by international NGOs, donor governments, consultants and the UN.

Nevertheless, after the first few years of interventions, international reports generally applauded some significant milestones achieved in post-conflict Afghanistan, mainly the new constitution, high voter turn-out for the Presidential election, the return of over three million
internally and externally displaced Afghans, the enrollment of over 4 million children in public schools and a massive immunization campaign (World Bank, 2005; CSIS, 2005; GoA, 2005).

Concomitant to these gains, however, are setbacks such as political fragmentation, insecurity and the illicit drug economy that are considered the greatest threats posed to the political and economic stability of Afghanistan. In 2003-04, for example, Afghanistan accounted for three-quarters of global illicit opium production (Agriculture and AgriFood Canada, 2007). Both the illicit economy as well as the informal economy account for 80-90% of the total economy, and according to the World Bank (2005) and other reports, this economic condition threatens government legitimacy and stability as well as increases warlord power in many regions (see Senlis 2006; CSIS, 2005).

Afghanistan remains a challenge for the policy community, especially around issues of security and long term economic and political sustainability. Without doubt the primary challenge to peacebuilding in the country has been the ongoing armed conflict between the Taliban insurgency and counter-insurgency operations as well as the varied forms of insecurity and violence related to warlords, regional strongmen and other non-state actors. Recent reports, indices and statements from key international and Afghan national agencies such as the Brookings Afghanistan Index (October, 2010), Amnesty International Report (2010), Afghan Rights Monitor (2010), Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, and especially the 2010 Midyear report from the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) to the Security Council, all note the high rates of violence and insecurity in the country, a situation that is worsening with high rates of civilian casualties, human rights violations, intimidations and kidnappings. Much of this violence is linked to the insurgency and counter-insurgency and

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according to the Afghanistan Rights Monitor (2010) the death of many Afghan civilians has largely been overlooked and even rarely reported. The report further indicates that the Taliban insurgency has become “more resilient, multi-structured and deadly” (p. 2). This expansion and virulence of the Taliban is further confirmed in a 2010 Pentagon report, which notes that the abilities of the Taliban-led insurgency are expanding and its operations are characterized by deep roots and broad reach across the thirteen provinces. The report most significantly reveals that the Taliban insurgents dominate a vast contiguous zone of heavily populated territory across Afghanistan (Porter, 2010; Barnes, 2010). Recently, the Taliban insurgency has formally rejected reconciliation talks with the government of Afghanistan, indicating that the violent conflict within Afghanistan will not likely subside anytime soon. The Taliban insurgency has as of September 2010 reinforced their fight against "invaders and their supporters" (Kakar, 2010). As reported by the U.S. Department of Defense, the leader of the Taliban, Mullah Omar, issued a five-point directive in the context of launching more attacks against Afghan civilians considered to be loyal to the foreign presence (Joscelyn & Roggio, 2010).

In addition to violence and instability, the Afghan government has admitted weaknesses in the justice system (see Amnesty 2010 report), which has perpetuated crime and human rights violations. Furthermore, according to a report issued by the United States Institute of Peace (USIP), despite nearly $10 billion in international police assistance, the Afghan police are riddled with corruption and incompetence and are unable to protect Afghan citizens (Perito &

USIP, 2009; BBC News, 2003). The report confirms that the Afghan police is not only suffering from widespread corruption, but is unable to perform in the absence of a functioning justice system, in the absence of effective courts and prisons. The NATO review confirms that the Afghan government’s justice system is dysfunctional, eroded, and is fraught with corruption that it is not trusted by Afghans (Kouvo, 2009). A situation further substantiated by the Special Rapporteur report to the United Nations Human Rights Council that not only confirms that there is a dearth of protection offered to Afghans, but details the very specific and serious impediments to justice:

the criminal justice system is deeply flawed, and corruption and incompetence are widespread. Powerful or wealthy perpetrators are set free. There is a pressing need for action to be taken against serious cases of corruption by Government officials, as a first step in reducing the corruption that plagues the system. (Alston, P., & United Nations Human Rights Council, 2009, p. 3).

It is important to note, that the literature rarely explores the challenges of state-building in the country in the context of national sovereignty and the legitimacy of the country to direct the country’s welfare on their own terms; rather, the majority of the policy and scholarly discussions about Afghanistan emphasize greater agency coordination to avoid redundancy and duplication in services among other technical solutions (see Donini, 2004; Barakat, 2005).

2.3 Liberal Internationalism

The dominant model for peacebuilding today among international agencies, donor governments and International Financial Institutions (IFI’s) remains political and economic liberalization. Proponents of this model argue that although there are many limitations and
shortcomings to liberal peacebuilding it cannot be replaced because it is the only viable solution to rebuild war-torn societies (Paris 2010; Call & Cook, 2003; Chesterman et al., 2005; Fukuyama, 2004). This model typically prescribes democratic reforms, such as a focus on elections, human rights and the rule of law, alongside reforms of state institutions as well as neoliberal economic reforms which support market privatization, deregulation fiscal restraints and an emphasis on foreign private investments. The rationale to support this model and export it abroad is predicated on a belief that liberalism is the antidote to illegitimate violence and authoritarianism (Hoffman, 1995). Traditional liberalism, therefore, formulates a vision of peace as only possible when liberalism is promoted abroad. Democratic peace theorists, for example, assert liberal states – uniquely amongst themselves – do not go to war against each other. They take pride in the triumph of liberalism to sustain peaceful existence among fellow liberal states across North American and Europe over an impressive 150-year history (Keohane, 2002). So convinced are many liberals about the intrinsic tendency within liberalism to steer societies towards peace, they echo Kant himself, who expressed the need for each nation to not only promote liberalism but demand that its neighboring nation enter into the union of liberal states (see Keohane, 2002 and Francheschet, 2002).

This agenda to end wars and respond to their destruction is structured in liberal internationalism, an evolving tradition within liberalism often traced to Immanuel Kant’s seminal writings on “Perpetual Peace” (see Francheschet, 2002). According to Francheschet, (2002), liberal internationalism is a multifarious project of global reform, interested in the nature of sovereign states and the kind of freedom they can afford the individual both within and across territorial boundaries. In this sense, the liberal global project becomes one to promote and protect individual freedom, justice, equality, progress, rule of law and peace. This agenda requires both
political liberalism (motivated by respect for human rights, freedom, liberty) and economic liberalism (motivated by self interest, greed, and ambivalence to social costs) that is packaged in a new form of internationalism; one that merges these different strands of liberalism through the operations of global liberal governance (Francheschet, 2002). Current liberal internationalist thinking, for example, does not see neo-liberal practices of globalization as antithetical to promoting and securing peace, human rights and democracy in conflict regions. In fact extending from the liberal history of commercial pacifism, neo-liberalism holds to the dictates that market societies are fundamentally against war, and through free trade and less state intervention in private entrepreneurial interests, these states would not impose conflict on their people nor wage wars with other states. As Keohane (2002) claims, liberal scholars from the enlightenment onwards have consistently argued that commerce and trade will inevitably lead to peace, echoing Kant who claimed that “It is the spirit of commerce that cannot coexist with war, and which sooner or later takes hold of every nation” (quoted in Keohane, 2002, p.19).

Although it is not in the scope of this thesis to interrogate the assumptions of this claim, particularly in light of the origins and forms of current conflicts and intrastate instabilities, it is sufficient for the purposes of this argument to outline that liberal scholars make clear compatible connections between political liberalism and neo-liberal economic policy specifically, and its intended (almost inevitable) outcome for creating and securing peace. Most importantly, during the post Cold war period, the international community, mainly western donor governments, International financial institutions (IFI’s) and specifically the former Bretton Woods institutions, the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF), as well as the United Nations have formally accepted western liberal democratization and marketization as the standard model for peacebuilding interventions. No ideological debates or critical dialogues were required. In
contrast, with unequivocal and unchallenged confidence, the international community embraced western (neo)liberalism on the basis of the inevitability and desirability of this model for all societies (Paris, 2004). Indeed no alternative could be entertained, echoing Francis Fukuyama’s call for the “universalization” of western liberal democracy as the final form of governance to be reached by all societies irrespective of their specific and diverse historical, socio-political, economic or cultural contexts (Fukuyama, 1993).

2.4 The Impact of Political and Economic Liberalization

Since the 1990s many important studies have emerged documenting the various aspects and impact of peacebuilding and statebuilding efforts. A group of scholars, for example, have focused on the internal dynamics and implementation strategies of leading international peacebuilding actors calling for more information sharing across agencies, better coordination and shared goals (Miall, 2007; Roberts & Bradley, 2005). Research areas have also included internal factors such as the motives and modalities of spoilers that undermine peace (Stedman 1997; Newman & Richmond, 2006; Greenhill & Major, 2007), and the kinds of tensions that exist around war economies that carry over into the post-conflict period where there is a strong push for economic actors to transition from informal to formal markets (Goodhand, 2004; Cramer, 2009; Lister & Pain, 2004). A growing number of feminist scholars have engaged the topic of gender and peacebuilding, emphasizing the continuity of forms of violence and aggression against women, as well as the absence of gendermainstreaming in international activities (Enloe, 1993; Meintjes et al., 2002; Cockburn & Zarkov, 2002). Perhaps one of the most influential works has on international statebuilding as scholars writing in this field have made a strong argument for strengthening governmental institutions as the best strategy to
transition from war to peace (Paris, 2004; Fukuyama, 2004; Chesterman, 2004; Paris & Sisk, 2009).

Much of the literature, however, supports a general consensus in the academic and policy community that political and economic liberalization strategies have in fact not facilitated the conditions for long lasting peace and stability. Rather, as many critical scholars have further point out, peacebuilding interventions have failed over and over again leading to a crisis in both the liberal peace thesis and liberal interventions (Cooper, 2007; Richmond & Franks, 2009; Chandler, 2006). Typically half of all peace support interventions fail after 5 years with outbreaks of recurring violence which lead to wider instability and insecurity (Krause & Jutersonke, 2005; Montgomery & Rondinelli, 2004). An important study on the impact of liberalization in post-conflict contexts was carried out by Roland Paris (2004), in his book At War’s End. In examining 14 major peacebuilding efforts between 1989-1999, Paris (2004) concludes that international political and economic reforms have damaging and destabilizing effects and are likely to increase the likelihood of renewed violence. Paris (2004) argues that externally driven liberalization policies tend to operate too fast and in the absence of strong liberal and democratic institutions they have lead to instability and, in some cases, even the return to violence such as in Angola, Liberia, Rwanda and Cambodia. It is important to note that Paris does not negate or challenge the idea of market liberalization, he only suggests that the international community should first support institutionalization before liberalization. Both Paris (2004) and Fukuyama (2004) call for reforms within the existing peacebuilding agenda, specifically for better planning and more resources towards first rebuilding the social, political, economic and legal infrastructure that is required to sustain liberal and neo-liberal policies for the long run.
The leading agencies aggressively promoting neo-liberal economic reforms in post-conflict contexts include the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), both agencies continue to affirm the dominant liberal axiom, noted above, that free markets will ultimately facilitate not only economic growth but that they are prerequisites for long lasting peace and democracy (Keen, 2005). Generally the types of neo-liberal reforms in post-conflict contexts include strengthening economic governance (reforming tax, fiscal and monetary systems); privatizing state owned corporations; deregulating the economy; reform of public expenditures (health and education) and attracting foreign direct investments. Research over the years documenting the experiences of post war Cambodia, Sierra Leone, Rwanda and Mozambique have shown how macro-economic policies undermined the peace agenda by widening economic and social inequalities and consequently fuelling further intra-state violence (Hendrickson, 2001; Ali & Matthews, 2004; Costy, 2004; Keen, 2005; Andersen, 2000). In this regard, the critical points positioned by Schierup (1999) are relevant in his argument that the conditions of societies recovering from the aftermath of war are not suitable for the implementation of neo-liberal economic policies. Schierup (1999) insists that,

... privatization in the absence of capital, on freeing prices in the absence of working markets, and on the comparative advantage of cheap labour, when there are no jobs and no export opportunities, will lead to the perpetuation of economic crisis and increased social and political instability. (p. 22)

A number of critical scholars have affirmed these points noting how the strict macro-economic “disciplining” policies have created instability, high rates of social and political tensions and even violence (Costy, 2004; Andersen, 2000; Boyce, 2002; Doornbus, 2003; Ali & Matthew, 2004; Moodie, 2010). As Alexander Costy (2004) poignantly argues, peacebuilding
must begin to focus critically on the merits and dangers of accelerated liberalization as an underlying framework for post-conflict renewal.

2.5 Power, Politics and The Crisis of Liberal Peacebuilding

As mentioned briefly in the previous section there is widespread acknowledgement of the crisis of liberal peace interventions articulated by a number of scholars in the field (see, for example, Cooper, 2007; Chandler, 2006; Duffield, 2007; Richmond, 2011). The critiques point to the failure of interventions in terms of the recurrence of violence after five years of international support (Krause & Jutersonke, 2005); the merging of security and development and the broader militarization of peace (Duffield, 2007; Pugh, 2012); hegemonic practices of western actors and the failure of an accountable and transparent people-centered approach to peacebuilding (Richmond, 2011; Roberts, 2011); as well as the failure of liberal peacebuilding to respond to the imminent needs of local populations (Chandler, 2010; Roberts, 2011). Further, the neoliberal underpinnings of liberal interventions have not only been noted to have disastrous outcomes (see previous section) but have been vociferously challenged on the basis that market-based solutions dominate over political ones and take precedence over alternative possibilities (Pugh et al., 2008; Pugh, 2011). As Pugh (2011) argues, the influence of the Washington consensus about the superiority of neoliberalism has dominated peacebuilding approaches to the point where it has become paradigmatic of all liberal peace interventions. Post-conflict interventions have been linked to capitalist expansion, targeting borderlands and marginalized states that have untapped markets that have not yet been incorporated into the neoliberal capitalist orders (Duffield, 2001; Bartholomew, 2006; Panitch & Gindin, 2006).

In response to the growing literature critiquing existing practices of liberal peacebuilding, in 2010, Roland Paris published an article in the Review of International Studies arguing that the
criticisms have gone too far. Although Paris himself was one of the first critics of liberal interventions in post-conflict contexts (see Paris, 2004) and acknowledges that many critiques are warranted, he is particularly writing against what he terms is a “hyper-critical” school of academics and commentators that are making unwarranted denunciations of liberal peacebuilding, referencing scholars such as Mark Duffield, David Chandler, Oliver Richmond, Mandy Turner and Michael Pugh among others. Paris writes, “If the practice of providing large-scale assistance to post-conflict societies is to continue, peacebuilding will need to be “saved” from this exaggerated backlash” (pg.339). I suspect that this study will undoubtedly fall into the category of “exaggerated” backlash because Paris clearly equates any references between colonialism and imperialism to peacebuilding as not valid criticism (see next section). Paris also insists that much of what is suggested by critical scholars can be unmasked as variations of liberal peacebuilding as opposed to alternatives to it. He insists that liberal peacebuilding can “accommodate a wide range of political and economic structures as well as diverse methods for engaging with inhabitants of war-shattered societies” (pg.339).

This is a particularly important point that Paris raises. Paris (2010) is correct in his observation that concomitant to the critiques against liberal peacebuilding as a function of western hegemony are numerous strategies proposed by critical scholars that arguably can fall within a liberal framework. For example, greater participation and ownership of post-conflict models by societies themselves is widely considered to be an important step towards more equitable and effective peacebuilding interventions. Likewise, the ability for nationals to exercise command and control over aid programs is also proposed as the only way to redress the unequal power relations between donors and recipients (Lopes & Theison, 2003; Saxby, 2003; Morten-Jerve, 2002). In fact, aside from greater local ownership, many of the other proposed
reforms to peacebuilding echo similar strategies. They include Oliver Richmond’s concept of moving towards “an everyday notion of peace”, which argues for building peace through engaging with the peace articulated by ordinary people instead of top-down approaches (Richmond, 2008). Also David Roberts’ (2011) proposal of emancipatory peacebuilding which is to limit the role of externally designed models by situating a new balance wherein “external imposition is reduced and internal determinism is expanded” (p. 2539). Lastly, the acceptance of heterodoxies is an important contribution put forward by Cooper et al. (2011) which argues for the acceptance of anything that works for societies, including neoliberal models, centralized or decentralized governance, protectionist or integrative, modern, traditional or tribal forms and strategies for peace and stability. Irrespective of the alternatives suggested, Gareth Evans (2003) makes the important point that from the outset the only assurance to avoid failure is to know the limitations of what external actors can actually do, and what they cannot do.

These alternative methods suggested above can, as Paris (2010) argues, fall within the liberal purview because they promote many ideals espoused by liberal thought, such as justice, fairness and equitable relations. However, what is important to note is not that these alternatives resonate with liberalism, but why they in fact don’t direct liberal interventions and, quite frankly, never have been central to the peacebuilding and statebuilding agenda? Paris ignores this profound quandary, which needs to be critically interrogated especially since participatory, rights-based and people-centered models have been, for quite some time, part of the edifice of development studies and are ostensibly part of the institutional ethos of all the major aid donors and international aid actors.

In a compelling rejoinder to Roland Paris’ efforts to save liberal peacebuilding, key academics in the field, Neil Cooper, Mandy Turner and Michael Pugh (2011) challenge Paris’
critique against those critical of liberal peacebuilding, particularly his claim that there can be no alternatives to liberal peace. Interestingly, the authors point out that unlike Europe, the North American academic and practitioner communities have largely ignored and often dismissed radical criticisms of the neoliberal economic model that permeates peacebuilding, despite what they insist is a ‘nakedly transparent’ crisis of liberal interventions (p.1997). They suggest that orthodox practice is not open to alternatives to neo-liberal economics which they describe operate like “an evangelical faith” at every post-conflict crisis (pp. 1997-1998). The authors further argue that what Paris fails to examine is the extent to which liberal interventions are predicated on ignoring the lived experiences and needs of people and the reality that liberal peacebuilding has mainly been an externally imposed endeavor; it has neither been participatory or consensual. This study shares this conclusion and positions a post-colonial analysis precisely because peacebuilding, despite the rhetoric of liberal ideals and even the possibilities to be inclusive and people-centered, has become more associated with privileging and fostering hegemonic relations rather than supporting more ethical, equitable and accountable ones.

2.6 Modern Liberal Interventions and Comparisons to Imperialism and Colonialism

In his review of the critical debates surrounding liberal peacebuilding, Roland Paris (2010) purports that academics and commentators have gone too far in their conclusions that suggest liberal interventions are destructive and illegitimate. He specifically pinpoints comparisons between contemporary peacebuilding to European colonialism and imperialism as invalid, almost unfounded comparisons. Paris outlines two key arguments. First, he argues that any comparisons of the old colonial structure are no longer relevant because the international community operates exclusively on an “anti-colonialist ethic”. This is a rather simplistic
assumption that he does not attempt to defend or qualify especially given the writings of critical scholars in international relations that have convincingly exposed the euro-centric, neo-colonial and imperialist tendencies and underpinnings of global governance structures, practices and outcomes (see Barkawi & Laffey, 2002; Chandler, 2009; Chowdhry & Nair, 2002; Gruffydd, 2006). Furthermore, contrary to Paris’ claim that these comparisons to the colonial past are made exclusively by academics that exhibit anti-liberal sentiments, it is noteworthy to point out that some of the most explicit and extensive references to colonialism and imperialism, such as the use of the terms ‘empire lite’, ‘neo-trusteeship’, and ‘guided sovereignty’ to describe peacebuilding, have actually been espoused by pro-liberal scholars that support a more entrenched presence of western powers in war-affected societies(see Ignatieff, 2003; Krasner, 2004). For Michael Ignatieff (2003b) and Stephen Krasner (2004), the international community has no choice but to construct new forms of trusteeship which Ignatieff (2003b) famously termed as “empire lite”. Ignatieff (2003b) insists that modern nationbuilding requires the leadership and resources of an imperialist power to restructure war-affected societies into stable states, using military interventions if necessary. Krasner (2004) further argues for ‘shared sovereignty’ arrangements, that is, recommending international actors takeover domestic governance for “an indefinite period of time” (p.108).

In his second argument against unfounded comparisons to colonialism and imperialism, Roland Paris (2010) argues that a critique has gone too far if it equates modern peacebuilding with the self-interest and exploitation of former colonial powers. Paris narrowly defines colonialism as premised on imperial states primarily benefitting from the extraction of material and/or human resources. He writes “while modern UN-sponsored missions still reflect the interests of the world’s most powerful countries – and therefore cannot be viewed as ‘innocent
assistance’ – they have not principally been motivated by efforts to extract wealth from their host societies” (pg. 349). In their response to Paris (2010), Cooper, Turner and Pugh (2011) write that the handful of US companies that have clearly profited from Iraq’s oil challenges Paris’ naïve dichotomy equating colonialism with self interest and peacebuilding with altruism. Chapter five of this dissertation also challenges this claim, exploring how the mineral and investment laws of Afghanistan have clearly privileged foreign corporate control and ownership of Afghanistan’s lucrative natural resources. Roland Paris’ simplistic claim that only nineteenth century colonial powers were motivated by greed and the extraction of wealth from colonies reveals a very narrow understanding of the modalities of colonial, neo-colonial and imperialist endeavors, which arguably makes this study’s focus on a post-colonial interruption particularly relevant and important to the debate.

In their published response to Roland Paris, Cooper, Turner and Pugh (2011) not only reprimand him for his simplistic readings of neo-colonialism and imperialism, but interestingly the authors point out that there is, contrary to Paris’ assertions, in fact very little scholarly work making these comparisons to present day peacebuilding and statebuilding. They argue that more, not less comparative analysis of colonialism and imperialism is needed “to interrogate claims that current techniques of liberal intervention are both novel and benevolent” (pg.2003). Indeed, they are correct in their observation as most critical scholars in the field only make cursory references to the colonial or imperialist tendencies of modern day statebuilding and peacebuilding, widely arguing for example, how statebuilding has given international actors extensive decision making powers and new mechanisms of regulating, controlling and transforming the domestic governance structures of third world states (Chandler, 2006; Chandler, 2009; Duffield, 2001), and challenging the universalist mission of western models that impose
foreign conceived models onto non-western contexts through an authoritative and disciplining apparatus (Mayall, 2005; Chandler, 2006; Duffield, 2007). A key exception would be David Chandler’s (2006) important book, *Empire in Denial*, which offers a rare and engaging look into the imperialist tendencies of western elites that direct state-building as a means to civilize and reform ‘natives’ through technocratic programmes of “capacity building” and “good governance”. In doing so, Chandler (2006) argues that the west denies the power they exercise. Chandler (2006), identifies the US as the global hegemon, acting on behalf of international capital to wield new mechanisms of domination and control over sovereign states without acquiring domestic consent. Another notable exception is Mandy Turner’s (2012) insightful study of western peacebuilding practices in Palestine, arguing that western powers are exercising a modern version of the “mission civilisatrice” which she argues is manifested by a dual process of exploitation and domination concomitant to development and modernization.

### 2.7 Post-Colonial Analysis and Peacebuilding

It is important to note, however, that a specifically post-colonial analysis of peacebuilding and statebuilding is largely absent from the literature, but as Michael Pugh (2011) recently noted, the potential and future influence of neo and post-colonial studies will likely offer “the most noteworthy twist in the interrogation of paradigmatic liberal peacebuilding” (p.314). In his own work, Pugh (2011, 2012) mentions key postcolonial terms such as hybridity, mimicry and the subaltern, remarking on their usefulness towards a new understanding of peacebuilding, but aside from these cursory references he does not engage the post-colonial in any detail. Nonetheless, Pugh (2012) acknowledges the need in the literature to explore the continuity of the colonial worldview. He specifically argues that international actors and agencies have much in common with earlier colonial powers and that regime changes in
Afghanistan and Iraq, for example, cannot but replicate the colonization process. Therefore, what Pugh (2012) hints to is that there exists, in some form, a ‘colonial lens’ that guides liberal interventionists and that this means local knowledge or other local societal exchanges are either not considered relevant or rendered invisible.

In perhaps the first post-colonial reading of international peacekeeping, author Phillip Darby (2009) explicitly frames his arguments as being influenced by post-colonial thought. He acknowledges that postcolonialism has not weighed in on modern peacebuilding and statebuilding endeavors mainly because those writing in this field are from a background in international relations or political science. What Darby (2009) centrally argues is that liberal peacekeeping in the non-European world occurs within the mould of colonialism. He writes,

It is my contention that the liberal peacekeeping project is cast in the mould of colonialism. Action is determined from ‘above’ and outside. First World knowledge is valorized; the distinctive understandings and approaches of people in the developing world are marginalized – and very often not recognized as knowledge at all. The problems to be tackled are ‘located ‘out there’, in the otherness of the non-European world. The informing perspective is that the system – the larger structure of international order – must shape the workings of its constituent parts (p.701)

In mapping out the saliency of a distinct colonial worldview underpinning the current international order, Darby (2009) focuses on the liberal peacekeeping project as a strategy whereby non European people are locked into the restructuring of their polities by westerners whereby no alternatives to western precepts and approaches are possible. In his final analysis, Darby (2009) insists that there can actually be no engagement with liberal peacebuilding because it is “essentially a colonial undertaking” (p.709). That is to say, the entire peacebuilding and peacekeeping apparatus is far too colonial to be modified into a people-centered endeavor. This study follows Darby’s (2009) important work in this field and further develops a postcolonial
perspective by detecting the different strategies and colonial modalities that inform international interventions in post-conflict contexts. Although Darby’s (2009) analysis is general, by using the specific case study of Afghanistan, and employing key colonial modalities of mimicry and terra nullius, this dissertation carves a distinct postcolonial space for the study of modern day peacebuilding and statebuilding.

Part 3: Post-Colonial Discursive Framework

3.1 Why Post-Conflict Afghanistan? Why Post-Colonial?

My research interest in conflict and post-conflict regions of the world initially developed while I was working at the United Nations, on the steering committee to initiate Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. This resolution was historic and unprecedented because it was the first legal document issued by the United Nations that explicitly acknowledged the disproportionate impact of war on women and girls, the special needs of women in the aftermath of war, and emphasized support to women-led initiatives for peace and conflict resolution. Working on the draft resolution and specifically being in conversations with war-affected women from around the world, I became very interested in the role, function and impact of international actors in regions of protracted violence and war. It was during this time that I became very aware of privileged voices, the discursive power of western aid institutions and the extent of Eurocentric worldviews and structural racism within the international community. Although the passing of the resolution on October 31st 2000 was a cause for
celebration within the international women’s movement, I became increasingly disturbed by the international aid apparatus that the gender agenda was affixed to.

After 9/11, the global war on terror and its impact on the post-war context shifted scholarly analysis considerably and the salience of structural racism and imperialism was given greater attention. My interest in Afghanistan came about after the defeat of the Taliban by the US-led coalition when I was requested by an Afghan women’s organization to conceptualize and develop a training program for rural and urban Afghan women in the aftermath of the US-led war. While working on this project, as well as being recruited by the Canadian government to serve as the gender consultant for Canada’s largest aid project in Afghanistan (Arghandab Valley Project), I immediately recognized the awkward silences and tensions between Afghans and internationals. My informal conversations with Afghan women from across Afghanistan further highlighted many concerns about foreign expatriates working in the country, western interests and objectives and the impact and purpose of foreign aid. I became very aware of our privilege in the country as westerners and our easy access to resources as well as the tremendous decision making power we held. Even though I was working in the field of gender and human rights, I was also very much aware and very critical about the dominant discourses that were funded and supported by the international community, and the reliance on internationals to execute these frameworks without Afghan consultations or consent.

My initial research was geared towards exploring the topic of national ownership in post-conflict Afghanistan and the interviews I conducted for this study explored this topic from a practitioner’s perspective. I realized very quickly, however, that although the interviews were valuable, this dissertation needed to ask and explore some deeper questions as to the assumptions, values and relations that undergird post-conflict interventions. Therefore, this
dissertation shifted to an exclusive postcolonial (theoretical) reading of international aid interventions which became very necessary primarily because this was lacking in the literature. On a final note, by offering a postcolonial analysis my intention has been to illuminate what is often hidden and obscure but which informs and taints the implementation and the very approach of the emancipatory projects (women’s rights, human rights, justice, peacebuilding) that the western world is so principled and intent on promoting in post-conflict contexts.

3.2 Locating the Post-Colonial

The research questions posed in this study are situated within a post-colonial discursive framework, intending to unmask and interrogate the underlying knowledge base and institutionalized sets of power relations that govern post-conflict reconstruction and development interventions. What demarcates a post-colonial analysis from other critical approaches is that it allows us to discuss eurocentrism, racism, culture and the exploitation as well as the (mis)representation of the non-west as central to the discourse and practice of humanitarian and development aid. Unlike other theoretical approaches (such as World Systems Theory, Dependency theory), postcolonial thought allows is to highlight the often subtle tendency in the west to situate western civilization and western knowledge production as superior to other societies, and gives greater attention to the periphery that is often deemed inferior, uncivilized or barbaric (Young, 2001; Gruffydd, 2006; McEwan, 2009; Slater, 2004). This approach is critical to the study of international affairs and global politics generally because of the prevalence of structural eurocentrism that remains largely unquestioned and often goes unnoticed (Darby, 2006; Gruffydd, 2006; McEwan, 2009). The postcolonial, therefore, uniquely identifies and examines the continuity of colonial attitudes, patterns, relations and outcomes in the contemporary period, and helps to detect what Darby (2006) rightly describes as the ‘colonizing’
tendency of western discourses that continue to dismiss other (non-western) meanings, values and knowledge systems. In the field of international aid, as Ilan Kapoor (2008) suggests, the post colonial turns the focus back onto the colonizer so as to reveal dominant discourses and hegemonic politics that masquerade as noble and altruistic intentions. This is useful for a critical inquiry into the field post-conflict aid interventions, so as to uncover some of the overt, hidden or subtle forms of (neo) colonial exchanges and patterns of domination and exploitation, be they through as well as upon individuals and societies and including how they operate as discursive practices in structures, processes and institutions.

However, situating a definition, or even guiding principles of postcolonialism is a daunting task, mainly because of the scholarly debates and disagreements about the term itself as well as what it refers to. Often, postcoloniality refers to the varied forms of resistance by oppressed people against colonial domination and the legacy of colonial rule (see Loomba 2005). Postcolonialism as a field of study is fraught with confusion, tensions and contestations (see Childs and Williams 1997; Kapoor, 2008; McEwan, 2009), however, running the risk of proving the term entirely analytically reductive, Moore-Gilbert’s (1997) offers an important assessment of the term, describing postcolonialism as a field that is comprised of a “variety of practices, performed within a range of disciplinary fields in a multitude of different institutional locations around the globe” (p. 5). I appreciate two key clarifications offered by Blunt & McEwan (2002) about the term. The first is its reference to a period of time after (formal) colonialism and secondly, its reference to cultures, discourses and critiques that remain closely influenced by colonialism. Likewise I found Stephen Slemon’s attempt to define the term particularly useful for the purposes of this study. Slemon (1990) writes,
Definitions of the post-colonial of course vary widely, but for me the concept proves most useful not when it is used synonymously with a post-independence historical period...but rather when it locates a specifically anti- or post-colonial discursive ...one which begins in the moment that colonial power inscribes itself onto the body and space of its Others and which continues as an often occulted tradition into the modern theatre of neo-colonialist international relations. (p. 3)

It is important to clarify from the outset that I have chosen to situate the postcolonial as a discursive framework and not necessarily as a “theoretical framework.” I use the term ‘discursive framework’ following the example of Rita Abrahamsen (2003), who points out in her own efforts to apply the framework to African studies, that “…post-colonialism is not a conventional theory in any traditional academic sense of the word, and it cannot sensibly be treated as one unified body of thought. It is, instead, multiple, diverse and eschews any easy generalizations” (p.191). For this reason, by approaching post-colonialism not as a single theory but as a discursive framework I am acknowledging that the postcolonial is a fluid space of varied and synthesized theoretical traditions (post-structuralism, Marxism, post-development etc), offering a fluid space to critically engage the ideological context and ongoing debates and undercurrents within post-conflict reconstruction and development discourse. My understanding of the postcolonial as a discursive framework is premised on what Darby (2006) rightly describes postcolonial scholarship as a ‘toolbox’ that is not fixed in one place or rooted within a particular disciplinary domain. This fluidity allows for a multifarious mode of analyses that for the purposes of this study sets out to ask critical questions and interrogates post-conflict interventions in terms of theoretical, methodological and ethico-political positionality (Ashcroft et al., 1998).
Although postcolonial thought has encroached onto many disciplines and fields quite recently, it is important to note that postcolonial theory is more often than not specific to English literary studies, associated with literary and cultural criticism (Loomba 2005). What demarcates postcolonial theory from postcolonial thought is that the former mainly, although not exclusively, explores postcolonial literatures in the context of mapping out, identifying and resisting the colonial past and the continuity of colonial modalities. Post-colonial theory is heavily focused on (English) literary texts, whereas postcolonial thought, which informs this study, has a broader interdisciplinary focus that is committed to challenging and unmasking the philosophical, political, economic as well as the cultural underpinnings and legacies of colonialism and neo-colonial domination. This study gives salience to specific post-colonial theorists (Homi Bhabha and Edward Said) and acknowledges that many of the foundational elaborations of postcolonialism have come from some of the well known postcolonial theorists which include Gayatri Spivak, Homi Bhabha and Edward Said, each having made seminal contributions to the field that cannot go unnoticed. Generally, Said’s classic Orientalism, is considered to have inaugurated the post-colonial field by addressing the interconnections of knowledge, discourse and power; Spivak speaks to how the Other is represented and the imperial scripts in unmasking histories and realities; and finally, Homi Bhabha’s key contribution is his notion of colonial ambivalence, mimicry and hybrid identities in the postcolonial world (see Ashcroft et al., 1998). This dissertation mainly engages with Homi Bhabha’s (2004) construct of colonial mimicry and ambivalence (Chapter Three), and explores Bhabha’s ideas in broad strokes, grafting his general ideas about the colonial encounter between individuals and colonial authority (such as the British encounter with Indians) to the field of international aid and the relationship between the international community with the Afghan state. The remaining chapters
(Chapters Four and Five) draw from Edward Said’s (1995) critique of western knowledge production and representational practices as they are linked to western material, economic, cultural and political power. I use a post colonial analysis to explore the political and economic implications behind the west’s construction of Afghanistan as a failed state and the implications these representations have on agency and subjectivities.

In situating the postcolonial as a discursive field, this study recognizes that the analysis offered in the following pages could also be positioned under Marxist, neo-Marxist, post-modern, post-structuralist, deconstructivist and even psychoanalytic theory. Indeed they have been to some extent, but it is important to highlight that postcolonial writings do not claim “pure space” but are in my opinion unapologetically synthesizing varied discourses. Said’s (1995) application of power and knowledge in *Orientalism*, for example, draws from Foucault’s contributions to the conception of power and how it operates. Although unlike Foucault, Said perceives western domination as conscious processes, he nonetheless acknowledges Foucault’s influence, yet clarifies the details of his points of departure from post-structuralism (see Moore-Gilbert, 1997). Also, both Said and Spivak draw on Marxist and neo-Marxist influences, such as Gramsci, whose writings have influenced Said’s conception of domination and hegemony and for Spivak, Gramsci influences her account of how the subaltern, or the subordinate, is regulated in civil society (see Moore-Gilbert, 1997; Young, 1990). Spivak’s reliance on Marxist analyses is complemented by deconstructivist and feminist theorizing, akin to Bhabha’s reliance on psychoanalytical theory and post-modern influence (see Young, 1990). What is appealing about the postcolonial discursive space, therefore, is that it is vast and is an accommodating intellectual terrain. A wide and diverse range of scholars and writers occupy this field, many of whom are integrated into this study such as Frantz Fanon, Chinua Achebe, Ashis Nandy, George Dei, Gyan
Prakash, and Mahatma Ghandhi—to name only a few. The postcolonial is appreciated and in many cases celebrated as a contested unfixed mode of analyses, precisely because the colonial and neo-colonial realities it seeks to explore are similarly multiform, contradictory and complex (Kapoor, 2008; McEwan, 2009).

3.3 Postcolonial Thought, International Aid Interventions and the Category of Third World

It should be clear given the above discussion that one of the central goals of this framework is to “question, interrogate and challenge the foundations of institutionalized power and privilege, and the accompanying rationale for dominance in social relations” (Dei & Asgharzadeh, 2001, p. 300). For the field of international development and by extension post-conflict reconstruction and statebuilding, the preoccupation with “First” and “Third” World categories, demarcations, relations, conditions and circumstances makes the postcolonial necessary because of the tremendous emphasis on Other societies and Other states and cultures. Unlike other critical frameworks, what is made salient is the relationship between ‘donor’ and ‘recipient’ countries, and an examination of how (neo) colonial knowledge is produced and validated; how that power is exercised politically, economically, culturally; and the understanding of indigeneity and the pursuit of agency, resistance and reclaiming (see Dei & Asgharzadeh, 2001; Prakash, 1997; and Abrahamsen, 2003).

Since the early 1990s, the field of post-development studies emerged, critical of dominant development discourse from a post-structuralist/post-colonial framework. A number of scholars have engaged in a post-development critique of international aid operations (see Sachs, 1992;
A salient theme in much of the writing is to unpack the relationship between development knowledge and exercises of power. Drawing from Said’s work, for example, Arturo Escobar’s (1995) *Encountering Development: The making and the Unmaking of the Third World* elaborates on how development discourse produces knowledge about the third world through theories, practices, strategies and interventions, and in re-producing and re-enforcing these arrangements of knowledge, exercises power over the third world. Jonathon Crush (1995) adds that the field of development is saturated with texts, not only theoretical but largely technical. He states, “the texts of development have always been avowedly strategic and tactical – promoting, licensing and justifying certain interventions and practices, delegitimizing and excluding others” (p. 5). As this study will show, these practices are evident in the field of post-conflict reconstruction and statebuilding and are mediated and regulated by a matrix of institutions and agencies that make up the international humanitarian and development regime - from international organizations (UN, World Bank), states, universities to development agencies – all of whom take part in conceptualizing and then authorizing a particular set of objectives and interventions for war-affected societies.

Interestingly, Escobar (1995) describes how foreign aid interventions bring the third world into existence and the discourse determines the domain of what development is and how it

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6 It should be highlighted that post-development sits alongside a range of other critical contributions to development studies that have circulated for quite some time now, including dependency theory, world-systems, people-centered, popular, neo-populist, rights based, gender-sensitive, basic needs, participatory, and sustainable development. These efforts to re-frame development have surfaced from across the disciplines, by economists (Sen, 1999), feminists (Porter & Judd, 1999), sociologists (Frank, 1967; Booth, 1993) environmentalists (Adams, 2008), anthropologists (Ferguson, 1994; Gardner & Lewis, 1996) and others, proposing interruptions and fresh strategies to the “development as usual” practice.
is to be achieved. In this regard, Spivak points to how, for example, the third world was “worlded” by the west, and in doing so arranged into colonies of control by and for the west (Young, 1990). For Spivak, imperialism is violently to put together the episteme that will “mean” (for others) and “know” for the self (west) the colonial subject (Young, 1990).

According to Watts (1995), Spivak would see development as not only territorial and economic but also as a project to create subjects to be governed. Gustavo Esteva (1992) explores this invention of the development subject, whereby the majority world was named by examination of such indicators as growth, trade, democratic mores and other such measures that defined people by what they were not - but had to become. In this sense, Escobar (1995) states how development colonized reality and became reality, he writes:

> In other words, development is what constructs the contemporary Third World, silently, without our noticing it. By means of this discourse, individuals, governments and communities are seen as “underdeveloped” and are treated accordingly. Needless to say, the peoples of Asia, Africa and Latin America did not always see themselves in terms of development. The history of development is relatively recent….when a whole new political economy of truth was set into place. (pp. 23-24)

> By stating the “invention” of development, postcolonial analyses does not deny the material conditions of poverty, landlessness, illiteracy and other forms of inequity and injustice that are pervasive around the world. This is an important point. Rather, as Abrahamsen (2003) outlines, it challenges their conceptualization and the political processes that make them possible. It is as Ziauddin Sardar (1999) notes, the power to define which demonstrates colonial and neo-colonial relations. Defining exactly what democracy is, good governance, justice, poverty, sustainability, and so on and so forth. The act of defining creates the discourse that normalizes not only the right of the first world to control, adapt and reshape the structures,
traditions and ways of living of the third world, but to do so exclusively on western standards and models of progress, growth, and efficiency.

3.4 Limitations and Critiques against the Postcolonial

At the outset, it is important to note that applying postcolonial thought to post-conflict interventions in Afghanistan is an unusual intellectual undertaking, and one likely to be resisted by scholars in international relations, political science and even postcolonial studies. This is mainly because postcolonial thought is not an established site of critical inquiry in international affairs, and only a handful of scholars, such as, Phillip Darby, Michael Pugh, L.H.M Ling, have used postcolonial critique, and even they have only made cursory references to postcolonial theory. As for scholars in the field of postcolonial studies, Darby (2009) notes, they have been reluctant to engage in international political affairs, and have been “strangely silent about the workings of the contemporary international system, most of all with regard to peace and security.”(p. 700). In a special issue of New Formations, Neil Lazarus (2006) a postcolonial studies scholar, makes a compelling case for fellow postcolonial thinkers to engage international politics, specifically in the post 911 context. He argues that in light of the war on terror and the post-911 invasions, occupations and long term destabilization of entire regions, one would expect that these events would be important to postcolonial scholars to challenge colonial and imperial practices and unmask “dominant assumptions and prevailing modes of practice” (p.20). However, Lazarus (2006) admits that despite what is unfolding in the world, a critical engagement with postcolonial studies will likely not happen. Writing in 2006, he was indeed correct because despite the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, the postcolonial scholarly community has been unusually silent.
Understanding some of the difficulties and very valid and constructive critiques about postcolonial analysis can perhaps explain why scholars in this field do not venture outside the discipline. The first critical position involves the postcolonial preoccupation of representations, texts, imagery and in exposing the “all-encompassing” hegemony of western discursive practices, but remaining silent on the material reality, poverty and struggles of marginalized people (Dirlik, 1994; Jackson, 1997; Jacobs, 1996). Postcolonialism has been criticized for being disconnected, somewhat vague and impractical (Simon, 1998). As Benita Parry (2004) argues in her materialist critique of postcolonialism, the field is too heavily rooted in discourse, so much so that critics in the field largely disconnect colonialism and colonial practices from historical capitalism. Furthermore, she insists that the preoccupation of critics has been on ‘discursive’ or ‘epistemic’ violence more so than on engaging with the actual militarized and violent struggles of oppressed communities and the systems they are challenging and seek to reform. Parry’s analysis is echoed by Aijaz Ahmad (1995) who further critiques the field for being all over the place and often used to refer to a global condition impacting the third world, even in contexts where no formal colonization ever took place (such as in Iran and Afghanistan).

Many in the foreign aid community have had a particularly tense relationship with postcolonial thought, mainly because no practical solutions are offered to improve the lived realities of impoverished communities around the world (see McEwan 2009). Unlike other critical perspectives within development that have equally situated a vociferous challenge to the dominant discourse of development, these alternative perspectives have nevertheless made solid contributions that have helped change the field for the better (for example, participatory development and rights based development). The postcolonial critique, however, has more often than not rejected western aid interventions altogether because of the trap of reproducing some
other version of “science, liberation and development” (Nandy, 1983, p. 270). By unilaterally rejecting foreign aid interventions, the postcolonial project then sets out to affirm and carve spaces for counter-knowledge systems and promotes a somewhat romantic return to indigeneity. Certainly there exists a need to reclaim other forms of knowing, but what if this romantic gaze of tradition and indigeneity also produces other forms of violence and hegemony? George Dei (1998) does acknowledge the likelihood of uncritical allegiance to tradition, yet he argues for scholars seeking to reclaim African indigenousness to engage in the act of self-criticality in order to not reproduce inequalities, injustices and domination. Despite the cautionary reminders among a handful of scholars like Dei (1998) and Ilan Kapoor (2008), there is a tendency to essentialize and romanticize the local, the traditional and the subaltern within both postcolonial and postdevelopment studies (see for example Ashis Nandy, 1983; Sachs, 1992, Munck & O’Hearn, 1999).

In acknowledging these valid critical interruptions to postcolonial theorizing, this study attempts to redress some of the disconnects and occlusions mentioned above, but also some key gaps and limitations of this research study must be identified at the outset. First, this study although is heavily discursive (Chapters Four and Five) on representational politics and engages post-colonial theory, mainly ambivalence and mimicry (Chapter Three), I have used this approach as a means to bring attention to, and place a greater emphasis on, the political, economic and cultural implications and outcomes of interventions that further entrench inequities in Afghan society. Therefore, unlike many typical postcolonial critiques, this study draws heavily on practitioner reports and scholarly analysis of the situation in Afghanistan, incorporating reports and studies published by donor governments, aid agencies and international institutions. This study, therefore, attempts to ground the postcolonial by engaging in a critique
of neoliberal, market-centered policies, liberal democratic reforms and even reforms to state bureaucracy, to name a few. In doing so, the postcolonial offers an invaluable lens for critical inquiry into peacebuilding and statebuilding because it helps one to detect what are essentially modern day colonial modalities, relations and assumptions that masquerade as altruism and western sacrifice towards aiding and rebuilding fallen and broken foreign lands.

Secondly, a key limitation in this study is the absence of the survival, resilience and resistance strategies on part of Afghans in their encounter with the international community. A post colonial framework recognizes and values knowledge consciousness arising locally and the intellectual agency of local subjects and their capacity to use knowledge to challenge, rupture and resist colonial and imperial relations of domination as they play out in international aid. This research leaves the door open for further research and field work to gain a strong understanding of Afghan agency in the wake of an unprecedented presence of foreign decision making powers, and further, more research is needed to also detect the varied forms of mutual transformation that may have happened on both sides that perhaps move us beyond a simplistic analysis of domination and resistance. Lastly, I realize that unlike many research studies on post-conflict peacebuilding and statebuilding this study does not propose solutions or offer recommendations to improve the existing international efforts underway in Afghanistan. As such, this study can be rightly criticized for offering only endless problematizations without moving the discourse and practice of aid interventions ‘forward’ so as to promote more just and equitable outcomes. As I discuss in the concluding chapter of this dissertation, for ethico-political reasons I have intentionally not included recommendations in order to support Gayatri Spivak’s (Spivak & Harasym, 1990) call for a moratorium on global solutions offered by western academics and
institutions, and Ilan Kapoor’s (2008) insistence on the need for greater personal and institutional “self reflexivity” so as to not contribute to the continuity of unequal, neocolonial relations.

3.5 Terminologies

The West

This study warrants some clarifications and elaborations on key concepts and terms used extensively throughout the following chapters. The term the ‘west’ is central to this study and as Ziauddin Sardar (1999) reminds us, “neither the West nor the Orient are monolithic entities: both are complex, ambiguous and heterogeneous” (p. 2). For the purposes of this study, I use the term to at least partially refer to the geographical entity of Europe and North America, but it is not confined to this limitation. The west is not only a geo-political entity, but in this study it refers to the “seat” of Europe’s intellectual and philosophical legacy of modernity and Enlightenment rationality (Hall, 1992), manifested through modern discourses such as development, liberal democracy, human rights and capitalism that inform the structures, processes and the discourses of the western aid establishment. I echo both Stuart Hall’s (1992) reference to the west as very much an “idea”, and Ashis Nandy’s (1983) clarifications that situate the west beyond a geographical and temporal entity to a psychological category, emphasizing how the west is in fact everywhere, “within the West and outside ... in structures and in minds” (p. xi). The non-west typically refers to societies that are governed by the dictates of religion, culture, tradition and include non or anti-rationalist tendencies (Sardar, 1999). Although one could certainly concur with Sakai’s (2005) observation that the west is indeed a “mythic construct”, she makes a poignant observation that despite the intellectual ambiguity of the term in literature, the west has a global appeal and is without doubt universally known through some common sets of intelligible understandings.
Colonial/Colonialism/Imperialism

This study defines colonialism as the forceful annexation of lands to not only directly rule over societies but to restructure the political and economic structures so as to extract wealth and fuel European capitalism (Loomba, 1998; Saurin, 2006; McEwan, 2009). The term colonial, therefore, is in reference to the techniques and strategies that are used to control and dominate others (Loomba, 2005). According to Saurin (2006), colonialism is often understood as a peculiar expression of imperialism or a derivative of it. Imperialism is the exercise of political control to spread and secure capitalist interest (Nederveen 1988), and as Ania Loomba (1998) remarks, Lenin predicted that the entire world would absorb European finance capitalism and that this global system of capitalist relations was called imperialism, which constituted the highest stage of capitalist development. As Loomba (1998) maintains, it is capitalism that is the distinguishing feature that separates colonialism and imperialism. That is to say that direct colonial rule is no longer necessary for imperialist economic domination because imperialism is an exercise of power through institutions and ideologies (Young 2001). It is important to note that colonialism and imperialism are not the same thing, however, imperialism can subsume colonial relations. That is to say, it is only through imperialist domination and control that originates from the metropoles that colonialism or neo-colonialism comes into being (Loomba 1998). The salience of the term colonial and neocolonial in this study draws from Kwame Nkrumah’s (1965) understanding of the internal crisis of third world states. He argues that modern states are predicated on the continuity of traditional colonial rule by other means. That is to say, so long as the political and economic systems of independent states are directed, regulated and monitored by outside powers, neocolonial relations exist. What is important to clarify here is that this study maintains that the continuity of a colonial worldview and the sites of authority and
domination over non-western people is, as Edward Said (1995) has argued, a conscious and arguably even a deliberate process. Postcolonial thought rejects an understanding of hegemonic relations between the west and the non-west as some kind of arbitrary phenomenon (as Foucault did), that is adhoc, accidental or unintentional. Rather, western domination of the non-western world is considered a conscious and purposive process (Moore-Gilbert 1997).
Part 4: The Argument and Chapter Outline

This dissertation challenges the basic assumption that post-conflict statebuilding operations are solely oriented towards supporting and strengthening a strong, central and stable liberal democratic government in Afghanistan and a prosperous society. I centrally argue that the continuity of a colonial worldview can be detected in modern statebuilding practices in Afghanistan. As such, interventions primarily rekindle and reassert the west’s own sense of meaning and purpose in the country, ensuring that westerners, and not necessarily Afghans, are the primary beneficiaries of post-conflict interventions. By establishing and validating only those reforms that resonate with or originate from the western world, westerners are always in charge and never made to feel ‘out of place’ in Afghanistan. Interventions, therefore, construct an outwardly oriented state, responsive to the desires and needs of the international community, rather than being inwardly oriented and responsive to the needs, expectations and lived realities of the majority of Afghans. To advance this argument this dissertation will specifically focus on the concepts of colonial ambivalence and mimicry as well as terra nullius to demonstrate that the continuity of a colonial worldview, and its concomitant relations, processes and outcomes, underpin modern statebuilding practices in Afghanistan. These core arguments will be presented in the following four chapters outlined below.

4.1 Colonial Ambivalence and Mimicry
In Chapters Two and Three of this dissertation I am interested in historically situating and critically examining the rapid changes underway in post-conflict Afghanistan, now under the helm of western governments and international agencies. After the United States military successfully toppled the Taliban government, ending its infamously extremist and authoritative rule over Afghanistan, the international community quickly established itself in the country, promoting a spectrum of liberal reforms whilst exercising unprecedented decision making powers. In a matter of a few years these reforms were geared to transform a formerly anti-modern governance structure into a modern liberal state, including a Weberian-styled state apparatus that is committed to democracy, the principles of human rights, social justice and a free-market economy. In a country well known for historically resisting modernization campaigns and foreign influences, these swift transformations are quite remarkable. This dissertation seeks to engage the modalities and impact of these post-911 western-led reforms.

Chapter Two sets out to chart Afghanistan’s political history with the intention to illuminate its history with the western world beginning with the British in the early nineteenth century. Since the early 1800s Afghanistan captured the colonial imagination and was characterized as *terra incognita* (unknown land). Although the country escaped direct colonial conquest by the British, this chapter sets out to highlight subsequent attempts by foreign powers to control, influence and modernize the country. The historical analysis provided is in no way exhaustive, rather, my intentions are specifically to survey the country’s modern political history to determine if there were any parallels to the current invasive forms of foreign decision making that have drastically shifted the country onto a new political and economic trajectory. This chapter makes the argument that there are in fact no parallels. Although the country was influenced by multiple foreign powers over the last century, and was even briefly occupied by
the Soviets, I demonstrate that Afghan political rulers and ruling parties remained defiantly nationalist and were staunchly against all forms of intrusive foreign meddling. It was only in the aftermath of 9-11 that the west, at long last, established a strong foothold inside the country and is now able to achieve a “new” familiarity with this once distant and impenetrable country.

This historical overview sets the context for Chapter Three where I apply the post-colonial constructs of ambivalence and mimicry to demonstrate the continuity of a very distinct mode of (neo)colonial relations evidenced in modern statebuilding operations. My analysis draws from Homi Bhabha’s account of the colonial civilizing mission to be only a partial and intentionally incomplete project. Bhabha’s (2004) notion of ambivalence in colonial mimicry locates the desire that the colonized adopt the beliefs, values and traits of the colonizers, but the full actualization of this civilizing and moral mission is simultaneously perceived as a threat to colonial rule. Since imitation could unsettle the fixed identities and boundaries that demarcate rulers from the ruled, Bhabha (2004) argues that the legacy of this mission is to be partial, incomplete and even contradicted, so as to ensure that the full and complete transformation of the colonized is never achieved. Drawing from this analysis, I argue that the international community has facilitated the emergence of a ‘mimic’ state in Afghanistan; a partial and fragmented state that is only expected to resemble or merely ‘perform’ liberal political democracy, rather than attain full statehood. I argue that the mimic state is characterized by interventions that help to build and support a strong, central liberal democratic state on the one hand, while undermining and preventing the very foundations of a strong state from emerging on the other. I argue that these contradictory strategies are an outcome of neocolonial state relations, which derail Afghanistan’s long-term stability, but fulfill the west’s desire to witness a glimpse
of itself from within this country, enabling a liberal ideological defeat to be declared over competing worldviews, in this case Islamic extremism.

4.2 Terra Nullius

Chapters Four and Five critically examine the epithet “failed state” used to describe Afghanistan. My analysis interrogates the discursive framing of state failure that is tied to unprecedented forms of western political, economic, institutional and now military power. By situating a post-colonial analysis, my aim in this chapter is to reveal the continuity of the colonial ‘worldview’ of terra nullius in relation to the modern discourse of state fragility and failure. This colonial concept was historically used to justify colonial penetration into lands (mainly Africa and Australia) that were (mis)labeled as ‘empty’ or ‘vacant’ waste lands. These lands were deemed ‘empty’ because they were considered to have no legitimate or recognizable forms of political sovereignty and were understood to be economically backward. In constructing these inhabited lands as ‘vacant’, the British felt that they could then legitimately seize control over these lands as a means to put them to ‘proper’ and ‘productive’ use (Ivison, 2003). I argue that we can detect a new terra nullius in the aftermath of 9/11, one that justifies extensive and permanent forms of international interventions based on declaring Afghanistan as having dysfunctional and deficient (modern) political processes and structures, as well as having an ‘idle’ and highly inefficient economy. In rendering Afghanistan as a failed state I have argued that Afghanistan’s sovereignty is bypassed and the country is opened up to western capitalist penetration and technical-political interventions in ways that benefit the needs and desires of the international community more so than Afghans.
In making this argument, Chapter Four concentrates on the political contours of the *new terra nullius* and fundamentally challenges the underlying assumption that all states, irrespective of their specific cultural, socio-political history, must function as modern liberal democratic states. Failing to do so, particularly in the post-911 era, has rendered these governmentally ‘vacant’ states as threats to international peace and security. I argue that the discourse of failure has subjected these countries to extensive and likely permanent structural reforms. This chapter questions the very expectation for Afghanistan to perform like a mature western liberal state within less than a decade, whereas, modernization and democratic institution building in Europe developed and matured throughout Western Europe only after hundreds of years of struggle. I further draw from a post-colonial analysis to demonstrate the Eurocentric and racist undertones that are attached to the term state failure, arguing, for example, how Afghanistan is only discursively understood by what it lacks, what is absent or has never existed, rather than what actually does work, and the spaces of ingenuity, creativity and survival carved by Afghans that support a counter-discourse of hope and prosperity.

Chapter Five continues this discussion by focusing on the economic contours of the *new terra nullius*, specifically examining Afghanistan’s natural resource industries estimated to be worth over 3 trillion dollars. In exploring the modalities of the *new terra nullius*, I argue that Afghanistan is constructed primarily as an economically inefficient and backward state, and its natural resources are largely ‘untapped’ and ‘idle’, requiring foreign capital, technology and the introduction of a foreign facilitated financial regulatory environment to help jumpstart the industry. In examining Afghanistan’s national mineral laws, I demonstrate how foreign firms are now able to capture, control and consume all of the country’s existing and potential resource wealth in the country, which will prove detrimental to Afghans in the future. Furthermore, I
argue that the international community is purposively setting Afghanistan up for further instability by ignoring the ‘resource curse’ thesis which acknowledges the susceptibility for further violence in war affected countries that are endowed with natural resource wealth. As the analysis in this chapter reveals, in constructing Afghanistan as an economically ‘empty’ state, the new terra nullius justifies reorienting Afghanistan’s resource economy away from benefitting Afghans and the Afghan economy, and shifting it towards foreign economic actors who will most definitely be the primary beneficiaries of Afghanistan’s mineral wealth.

Chapter Six concludes this study by reviewing and further examining the relations fostered between the international community and Afghanistan and offers some critical reflections on the ethico-political project to decolonize post-conflict reconstruction and statebuilding.
CHAPTER TWO

The Elusive, Distant and Impenetrable Land - Resistance and Resilience in Afghanistan’s Political History

Introduction

In late 2001, the United States military successfully toppled the Taliban government, ending its infamously extremist and authoritative rule over Afghanistan. In the aftermath of this victory, the international community has “dressed” the Afghan government with the key elements that characterize a matured modern western liberal state, including a Weberian-styled state apparatus that is committed to democracy, the principles of human rights, social justice and a free-market economy. In a country well known for historically resisting modernization campaigns and foreign influence, these swift transformations are quite remarkable. In this study, I am interested in historically situating and critically examining the rapid changes underway in post-conflict Afghanistan, now under the helm of western governments and international agencies. I contend that the post-conflict state of Afghanistan is a mimic state, merely “performing” a full range of western liberal reforms, procedures and formal processes often associated with a matured liberal democracy, without actually becoming a fully functional, effective and responsive state to its citizens. Although the next chapter will explore more of the complexity and nuances of the mimic state, the objective of this chapter is to argue that there were no parallel ‘imitative’ or ‘mimicking’ governments that emerged onto the national political
scene in Afghan history, to the extent that we see today in the aftermath of the 2001 US led military invasion.

For the purposes of this chapter, I aim to demonstrate that Afghanistan’s governance history is one that can be characterized by a resistance to direct foreign interference and the maintenance of limited and selective international engagements. To establish this argument, this chapter charts Afghanistan’s political history since the late nineteenth century to highlight how the country escaped the direct impact of the Western colonial civilization mission, despite the long standing western colonial desire to capture and deeply penetrate into a country that was widely understood to be an unknown, hostile and impenetrable land. In defeating foreign invasions and mitigating the influence of foreign political and ideological campaigns throughout the twentieth century, Afghanistan has remained a deeply traditional, religious and closed society. More importantly, despite embarking on its own modernization campaigns, I aim to show that Afghan political rulers and ruling parties, although at times brutal and oppressive to Afghan citizens, remained defiantly nationalist and were staunchly against all forms of intrusive foreign meddling.
Part 1: Distance, Strangeness and the Inviolability of Afghanistan

1.1 Colonial Desire: In Search of the Long Lost Tribe

‘You’ll be cut to pieces before you’re fifty miles across the Border,’ I said. ‘You have to travel through Afghanistan. It’s one mass of mountains and peaks…and no Englishman has been through it. The people are utter brutes, and even if you reached them you couldn’t do anything…No one knows anything about it really.’ (Kipling, 1987, p. 253)

The above quote, taken from Rudyard Kipling’s (1987) short story, *The Man Who Would Be King*, is about two British men, Peachy Carnahan and Daniel Davot, who are on a quest to become kings of a small region in Afghanistan. The main characters express a desire to extend the British dominion from India into this vast and strange new land. Published in 1888, Rudyard Kipling, a British poet and author, cleverly grants his main characters the opportunity to rule over the small province of Kafiristan (present day Nuristan). Known for the imperialist tone in his writings, Kipling perhaps intended this fictitious victory for the English as a way to assuage the very real and tremendous losses suffered by the British army during the Anglo-Afghan wars of the nineteenth century. The story captures the British desire to learn more about and become familiar with Afghanistan, a distant and mysterious land, which as Edward Said famously pointed out was typical of European fiction and non-fiction Orientalist writing (Said, 1995). In describing Afghan culture and society, Kipling engages in a common undercurrent of Orientalist writing, that is, enabling the west to re-discover and recognize itself in relation to its Other (Said, 1995; Ashcroft et al., 1998). This re-discovery of Self occurs through the character Dravot, who upon his interactions with the people of Kafiristan, hints to an innate closeness, or rather, a peculiar resemblance between Afghans and the English. Dravot feels an odd affinity towards
Afghans indicating a very real possibility that perhaps one day Afghans, unlike other colonized subjects, may actually ‘become’ fully English. Dravot remarks:

‘I won’t make a Nation,’ says he. ‘I’ll make an Empire! These men …they’re English! Look at their eyes – look at their mouths. Look at the way they stand up. They sit on chairs in their own houses. They’re the Lost Tribes, or something like it, and they’ve grown up to be English.’ (Kipling, 1987, p. 269)

Interestingly Kipling’s literary tale of Afghan resemblance to the English is similarly found in the influential writing of Mountstuart Elphinstone, the first British Ambassador to Kabul from 1808–1809, whose nine volumes on Afghanistan informed the edifice of what was later to become the official colonial knowledge of Afghanistan (Hopkins, 2008). This defining body of work presented a philosophical history of Afghan society, filled with important facts and details, it sought to locate Afghans in the hierarchy of civilizations. As Hopkins (2008) notes, Elphinstone’s writings made strong parallels between Afghans and the Highland Scots, making the case for Afghans to eventually be ‘Anglicised’. In fact several key authors writing on Afghanistan in this early period were Scotsmen, including William Moorcroft, Alexander Burnes and Alexander Connolly, and they also made comparisons between Afghans and Scotts, such as comparing the tribal khan to a Highland laird as well as the similarities in the mountainous terrain and the fiercely independent characters of the Pashtons, much like Scotsmen. As Hopkins (2008) adds, “In the Afghans, they recognized a distorted and faint image of themselves, although lower on the hierarchies of civilizations” (p. 20).

For these writers, as well as Rudyard Kipling, Afghanistan held the potential of becoming a fully civilized nation, and could very well be a ‘lost tribe’ awaiting British cultural influence and political rule. Returning to Kipling’s main characters, having survived the long and arduous
journey to reach the mysterious province of Kafiristan, they were finally able to confirm the inadequacies of Afghan culture and society, thereby, justifying British domination over Afghans. Kipling’s fictional characters certainly accomplished this task within Kafiristan, however, in stark contrast to this fictitious victory, the actual British military experience in Afghanistan was both humbling and humiliating, at the very least.

The British experienced multiple setbacks for territorial conquest beginning in 1839 and through to the early 1900s. Often referred to as the ‘Great Game’, the British sought to conquer Afghanistan for fear of an imminent attack against British India by Tsarist Russians (Misra, 2004; Hughes, 2008). Towards the end of the first Anglo-Afghan war (1839-42), however, the British experienced the worst disaster in British military history when in 1842 over 16,000 British soldiers were murdered in Afghanistan’s Koord – Kabul pass by the Ghilzai Pathans (Margolis, 1999). In 1858, Frederick Engels published an article in The New American Cyclopaedia, Vol. I, on Afghanistan focusing on this very war, stating, “The Koord-Kabul Pass became the grave of nearly all the army, and the small remnant, less than 200 Europeans, fell at the entrance of the Jugduluk Pass. Only one man, Dr. Brydon, reached Jelalabad to tell the tale.” (Engels, 1858, para. 10). This disconsolate moment in British history was captured in Lady Elizabeth Butler’s famous painting, The Retreat from Kabul, depicting the anguished lone British survivor, Dr. Brydon, arriving at the gates of Jelalabad. Fowler (2007) and Gulzad (1994) point out the significance of this defeat, explaining how the retreat of the British from the first Anglo-Afghan war seriously damaged the ‘invincible’ image of the British, especially in South Asia. The fact that this wealthy and powerful empire was driven out of the country by “tribal” people is considered to have contributed to the destabilization of British power across South Asia generally, and inspiring the growing anti-imperialist movement within British India which later
led to the 1857 War of Independence. In effect, the events could be considered to have triggered the decline of British rule in South Asia, only to be further exacerbated by the end of the second and third Anglo-Afghan wars from 1878 to 1880, then again in 1919, when all hopes to annex Afghanistan into the British Indian empire came to a conclusive and abrupt end (Hyman, 2002).

In her interesting study of British travel writing and journalist accounts of Afghanistan, Corinne Fowler (2007) stresses the damaging impact the Anglo-Afghan wars had on the British, arguing that Afghanistan became known as an uncolonisable territory and a reminder about the limits to British authority and influence. Fowler hints to the idea that the British never quite recovered from their failed attempts to annex Afghanistan, a defeat that only re-enforced the west’s long standing legacy of having little access to or influence inside the country since ancient times. In Frank Holt’s detailed historical study of Alexander the Great’s military expeditions in the region, for example, he remarks that over 2000 years earlier even Alexander the Great’s advanced and unstoppable army, suffered the most difficult and costly as well as inconclusive war in Afghanistan (Holt, 2005). For the British, being ‘driven out’ of Afghanistan in an era of British colonial expansion was a serious setback especially since, as Homi Bhabha (2004) contends, the prevailing opinion among colonialists at that time was to conquer and transform the darkest corners of the world. By reaching these far and distant lands, Bhabha notes that power was exercised through “things being known and people seen in an immediate, collective gaze” (p.158). During this period of imperial expansion virtually the entire Islamic world had come under direct or indirect European rule, except Afghanistan, which remained fiercely independent (Magnus & Naby, 1998). This quandary was explicitly conveyed in 1876 by Lord Lyton, the newly appointed Governor General of India. He wrote:
I believe that our North-West Frontier presents at this moment a spectacle unique in the world; at least I know of no other spot where, after 25 years of peaceful occupation, a great civilized power has obtained so little knowledge over its semi-savage neighbours, and acquired so little knowledge of them, that the country…is an absolutely terra incognita… (as quoted in Gulzad, 1994, p.75)

1.2 Implications of Afghanistan’s status as Terra Incognita

In the above passage Lord Lyton is undoubtedly perplexed. The implications of referring to Afghanistan as a terra incognita can be discerned through a close reading of Edward Said’s Orientalist stratagems. In his seminal work, Edward Said (1995) draws from Foucault’s ideas around knowledge and power to assert how British colonial domination over the Orient was typically associated with their ability to gain access into and acquire knowledge of Egyptian and Indian culture, history and civilization. In the British claim to intimately ‘know’ these cultures, they authoritatively concluded the inferiority of these civilizations as a means to justify British rule. In discussing the British desire to gain familiarity of Orientals by studying and observing them, Said suggests that this knowledge is what makes ruling and managing subject races both easy and profitable. Hence, Afghanistan’s impenetrability may have been deeply disturbing to the British colonial psyche, if for no other reason than as Achebe (1994) notes, that understanding and controlling the ‘native’ went hand in hand. Nevertheless, it is perhaps reasonable to infer that the British ‘borrowed’ from what Said (1995) refers to as an existing family of (Orientalist) ideas that prevailed in nineteenth century Europe, affirming the incivility of Islam and Muslim cultures generally. Not surprisingly, Afghanistan emerges from within this Orientalist gaze as a distant, impenetrable and rugged land, inhabited by people with a tenacious conviction to tradition and an unmatched resistance against foreign incursions and influences.

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7 See, for example, both volumes of Sir John Kaye’s (2010) “History of the War in Afghanistan”; also the poetry of Rudyard Kipling (1987) and George Macdonald Fraser’s (1969) Flashman novel series. Also Sir Federick Robert’s memoirs of his march to Kandahar during the second Anglo-Afghan war of 1878-9 (see Atwood, 2008).
The western fictional imagination as well as travel, anthropological and politico-historical accounts cemented the widely constructed trope of Afghans as an elusive, tribal and war-mongering people (see Van Dyk, 1983).8

In my examination of the west’s protracted distance from Afghanistan, it is important to contextualize why Afghanistan’s nineteenth century ‘escape’ or ‘exception’ from British colonialism is significant. Post-colonial researchers often argue that it is only through direct territorial conquests, such as the kind associated with European imperial expansion in the nineteenth century, that Europe gains ‘proximity’ to colonized people and hegemonic relations between the colonizer and colonized are fully realized (Jan Mohammed, 1985). By conquering foreign lands, the colonizers are able to directly control the political, economic structures as well as other aspects of the internal and external life of the colony, and in doing so, there is an inevitable ‘mingling’ of European ontology and epistemology (Altbach, 2006; Tiffin, 2006). As Jan Mohammed (1985) suggests, direct rule unleashes the internalization of an entire system of western values, attitudes, institutions and mode of production to be accepted by the native. Although Afghanistan has been subjected to tremendous foreign influence throughout its history, Afghans were able to bypass the kinds of radical interruptions and reformulations that characterize societies having experienced European colonialism. In her discussion about the violence indigenous societies endured as a result of European contact, Linda Tuhwai Smith (1999) remarks, “The talk about the colonial past is embedded in our political discourses, our humour, poetry, music, storytelling and other common sense ways of passing on both a narrative of history and an attitude about history” (p. 19). Afghanistan certainly escapes these kinds of

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8 In Jere Van Dyk’s (1983) book, this American travel writer writes about his brief travels into Afghanistan describing it as “something magnetic and timeless….I thought that kings and armies could come and go, but this ancient, eroded, wind swept land would outlast them all” (p.17)
deeply complex and interwoven entanglements with Europe, which as Dipesh Chakrabarty (1992) describes, is evident in the multiple and diverse histories of Europe’s former colonies in Africa, Asia and Latin America, wherein each tend to produce some variation of Europe’s history.

The emphasis here, therefore, is to recognize Afghanistan’s ‘exception’ to territorial conquest as signifying not just an impressive resistance against British military expeditions, but effectively the concomitant apparatus of enlightenment rationalism, notions of modernity and European civility that were held back, at least for some time. In this sense, Afghanistan can be seen to have, using Jenny Sharpe’s (1989) account of colonial violence, removed itself from the ‘binding brightness’ of the civilizing project, whereas other subjected populations were directly caught in the path of its trajectory. That is to say, unlike British India and other states in Asia and the Middle East, Afghanistan was able to distance itself from the direct and immediate affects of the civilization mission, which fundamentally meant having largely escaped the singular, homogenizing experience of being first a colonized, and later a post-colonial “commonwealth” state. This is not to suggest, however, that by thwarting direct colonial rule Afghanistan signifies a rare, and albeit curious exemption from the totalizing impact of liberal, humanistic universalism. As will be discussed in the next section, the ‘binding brightness’ of western civilization mentioned by Sharpe (1989) did attempt to sway over the country beginning in the twentieth century, steered by the neo-colonial pursuits of Britain, America and the USSR (Hyman, 2002). However, the purpose of this section was rather to illustrate the west’s desire, attempts and failures to ‘know’ Afghanistan through territorial conquest throughout much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The existing ‘mimic’ post-conflict state of Afghanistan, therefore, emerges and is characterized by the west’s unprecedented access and decision-making
authority inside the country since 2001. The liberal, democratic and capitalist shifts currently underway in Afghanistan are important to historically contextualize because, as argued here, they symbolize the fulfillment of the west’s desire to gain control by embarking Afghanistan on the path of western political modernity, so that it finally resembles and no longer resists the inevitable path towards the unitary, and universal path of enlightenment modernity.
Part 2: The Early Twentieth Century ‘Anti-Imperialist’ Afghan Rulers, Modernizers and Reformers

2.1 Afghanistan as the “hermit kingdom”

The characterization of Afghanistan as a terra incognita in the late 1800’s remains fixed in much of the writing on Afghanistan leading into the twentieth century. The sense of a strange, inviolable and impenetrable land and culture is, for example, easily detected in twentieth century American and British travel writing (see for example Van Dyk 1983). Arnold Fletcher’s (1965) lengthy study of Afghan history and culture begins by describing what could be seen as the general western understanding of the country by the middle of the twentieth century. Fletcher (1965) writes,

The name Afghanistan, to many outsiders, suggests a country remote, little known and presumably exotic – if only because the Persian suffix istan (“land of”) is so frequently an appanage to the names of improbable and fictitious places. Despite Afghanistan’s crowded past and present importance, few Westerners have an accurate idea of its location, and for most, the people and the policy of the country are a mystery. (p.1)

Fletcher refers to Afghanistan as a “hermit kingdom”, a moniker that arguably hints to the west’s restricted access and influence inside the country in the twentieth century. As Nixon and Ponzio (2007) observe, the path to modernize Afghanistan, particularly with foreign-facilitated and funded efforts, has throughout Afghan history remained an elusive goal. In fact since the late nineteenth century and onwards it has usually been an urban-centered approach largely excluding much of the traditional and conservative base of the country.

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9 For example see the travel accounts of John Griffith’s (1967) as well as Wilber’s (1956) thorough study of Afghanistan’s culture, politics and history.
foreign influences and foreign ideologies, mainly capitalism, liberalism and communism have each distinctly supported the modernization of Afghanistan throughout the twentieth century, and more often than not, these external influences have either been very brief, gradual or have had a superficial impact on Afghan polity and society. In alienating the rural majority, modernization and westernization has consistently been vociferously and violently challenged, often leading to state failures. As Johnson and Leslie (2008) astutely note, “a careful reading of Afghan history would have taught us that change cannot be forced, from the outside or from within” (p. 99).

In the following discussion, the political history of Afghanistan will be reviewed, albeit in broad strokes, to demonstrate that the west’s present role in Afghanistan in the aftermath of the 911 appears to have – at long last – “broken in” a new relationship with the country. The aim here is to chart the ‘anti-mimic’ political history of Afghanistan. Since the early twentieth century, despite the deliberate attempts at modernization and even westernization that were forcefully, and at times brutally implemented in the country by national elites, it will be argued that these previous governments did not produce a comparable ‘mimic’ state like the one that has emerged in Afghanistan today. Although the path to modernize Afghanistan in the past was also funded by foreign governments and fraught with contradictions and outright resistance, the political attitude among previous Afghan leaders was by and large one that remained staunchly suspicious of foreign meddling and interference, and was explicitly anti-imperialist.

2.2 Early Reformers: The Emergence of the Modern State and Afghan Political Authority (1880-1933)

Beginning in the aftermath of the second Anglo-Afghan war, Amir Abdul Rahman (1880-1901) was the first leader to bring Afghanistan under centralized authority with the financial support of the British. Under his rather brutal and authoritative reign, the rudimentary
beginnings of a modern state were starting to take form as civil administration expanded as it never had before and provincial government officials formally replaced tribal authorities (Lieberman, 1980; Goodson, 2001; Fitzgerald & Gould, 2009). The Amir successfully brought some degree of economic growth and uniformity in the country devastated by the Anglo-Afghan wars, especially in his efforts to restore trade and industrial development by creating new small scale industries and in introducing a uniformed monetary system (Gulzad, 1994; Fletcher, 1965). Concomitant to these statebuilding reforms, the Amir also focused on social reforms which included an attempt to use religious sources to forbid child marriages, forced marriages and marriage gifts (Johnson and Leslie 2008). These reforms undoubtedly suggest that the Amir sought to rather extensively re-order Afghan polity and society.

Despite his efforts to modernize Afghanistan, the Amir was deeply suspicious of foreign influence, and particularly sought to maintain distance from any direct or meddling British involvements in the country. Although the foundations of a modern state were established, the Amir did not, however, pursue a path of intrusive westernization akin to the rapid transformations underway in Japan during the same period. In fact, in his written instructions to his son Habibullah who was to succeed him, the Amir cautioned against further intrusive reforms until and unless people were ready to receive them. Notwithstanding the brutality and violence that often accompanied many of the Amir’s modernizing reforms, he was nevertheless cognizant of the deep hatred and animosity Afghans held towards foreigners, and particularly the British. The Amir was widely known to resist efforts that would compromise Afghan autonomy and neutrality (Lieberman, 1980). In contrast to the Amir’s cautious approach, Watson’s (2007) discussion of Japan’s imperial mission in the same period reveals an aggressive modernization strategy that was explicitly through Westernization. Watson (2007) identifies what we can
identify as Japanese mimicry in the late nineteenth century as a specific strategy for transformation that was used in order for Japan to emerge as a competitive imperial power in the region. In contrast to the Amir’s suspicions of western influence, in an 1887 speech given by the Japanese Foreign Minister Inoue Kaoru, the ‘mimic’ strategy for Japanese reform was explicitly outlined:

What we must do is to transform our empire and our people, make the empire like the countries of Europe and our people like the peoples of Europe. To put it differently, we have to establish a new, European-style empire on the edge of Asia. (as quoted in Watson, 2007, p. 173)

Unlike what unfolded in Japan and in other parts of Asia and the Middle East, Afghan rulers engaged in modernizing strategies by remaining anti-imperialist, and even anti-western, preferring instead to maintain their autonomy and a distant relationship with the west (Liberman, 1980; Hyman, 2002). For the Amir, modernization was not a strategy to resemble Europe, but a strategy for Afghanistan to assert its national independence and inculcate a strong and unified political culture that can withstand foreign influence. Radical reforms were launched by the Amir so as to ensure Afghanistan gains international recognition and can secure itself as an independent and fiercely autonomous nation (Gulzad, 1994; Fitzgerald & Gould, 2009). In addition, as Lieberman (1980) suggests, beginning with the Amir until the 1950s Afghan leaders remained isolationist in their relations with foreign governments.

Under the reign of Amir Abdul Rahman’s grandson, Amanullah (1919 to 1929), major social, economic and political reforms were implemented, but vehemently resisted by tribal elites and traditionalists largely because Amanullah was seen to be too western-centric in his reforms. Amanullah’s reforms included modern and secular co-education, advocating monogamy, removal of the veil, end of seclusion and compulsory education for girls and the promotion of
international trade (Gray, 2007; Johnson & Leslie, 2008; Suhrke 2008). Amanullah’s wife and sister were champions and public advocates for women’s rights in Afghanistan, and under Amanullah’s rule, women went abroad to study for the first time. This agenda to modernize the country and implement reforms were funded by a spectrum of foreign governments, including aid from the Soviet Union, Turkey, Germany, Italy and France. In a cursory review of his reforms it would appear Amanullah sought to imitate the west, especially since he and his wife were known to have a penchant for European culture and traveled extensively in the west. However, despite his appreciation for European culture, Amanullah was, however, recognized as an anti-imperialist ruler. His political reign corresponded with Britain’s final attempt to annex Afghanistan in 1919, and Amanullah’s successful political and military confrontation against the British, as well as his indifference towards the Russians, were well known and often left his regime a target of externally funded campaigns of sedition (Lieberman, 1980; Fitzgerald & Gould, 2009; Hyman, 2002).

According to Hyman (2002), under Amanullah’s rule and from 1919 onwards, there were two themes that were prioritized by the political elite in Afghanistan. The first was to remain staunchly anti-colonial and anti-imperialist and the second was to pursue modern state-building. The juxtaposition of these two priorities reveals an explicit understanding among early Afghan leaders that the path to modernize Afghanistan, albeit through foreign funds, was to be an autonomous process that required Afghan leaders to protect the country from excessive foreign influence and control. Interestingly, the British themselves did not construe Amanullah’s liberal reforms as a form of mimicry or imitative flattery, but in stark contrast, they further angered and aggravated the British. Quoting the former British ambassador to Afghanistan Leon B. Poullada (1919-1929), Fitzgerald and Gould (2009) note that for some British officials Amanullah’s
reforms were in fact very threatening to the empire because they demonstrated the ability of a free (non-occupied) nation to progressively move on the path of modernization without being under direct British rule.


Amanullah’s rule in Afghanistan and his reforms were transient. The leader was forced to evacuate the country due to popular uprisings and even a rebellion from within military quarters, which most Afghans believe was initiated by the British themselves (Gray, 2007; Fletcher, 1965; Fitzgerald & Gould 2009). In order to appease the conservative and traditionalist elements across the country, King Nadir Shah immediately stepped in to rule Afghanistan and reverse some of Amanullah’s reforms in efforts to appease the conservative leaders in society and promote greater stability (Gray, 2007). Although Nadir Shah’s rule would ‘turn back the clock’, that is to say, by giving more support to tribal leaders and mullahs, his son King Zahir Shah (1933-1973) facilitated one of the longest and peaceful periods of Afghan history, and a time that symbolized relatively close and friendly relations between the international community, and particularly with the United States. Under King Zahir Shah and Prime Minister Mohammed Daoud Khan, Afghanistan returned to a nationally directed modernization program that could be seen as a continuation of the first widely initiated reforms introduced in the country by King Amanullah in the 1920s. Under Zahir Shah’s rule, but specifically, under Prime Minister Mohammad Daoud’s leadership, the 1950-60s was a period for rapid development across many parts. An international airport was established, roads were paved, irrigation and telecommunications facilities were erected, new schools opened across the country and natural resources were developed (Lieberman, 1980). According to Spink (2005) the government was attempting to build a
national identity among Afghans, and in doing so, education was prioritized as more students were sent abroad to study and the first modern universities appeared. As Newell and Newell (1981) write, “the liberal era left a permanent mark…Kabul truly became a cosmopolitan center of trade, diplomacy and international intrigue” (p.45).

The new constitution in 1964 was emblematic of these radical shifts underway in the country, introducing free elections, a parliament, civil rights and gender equality. The constitution further paved the path for a free press, freedom of assembly and association, established an independent judiciary and implemented the supremacy of secular law (Runion, 2007). This period was also marked by radical social reforms, such as the government’s controversial decree that purdah was no longer required to be worn by women in Afghanistan. In the 1960s and 1970s women held high positions in society as doctors and professors, and would freely walk in public streets without being publicly harassed for not conforming to proper Islamic dress. It would be misleading to suggest that Afghanistan embarked on western modernity consistently and evenly throughout the country during the reign of King Zahir Shah. As both Johnson and Leslie (2008) and Hyman (2002) note, much of the social changes were confined to the urban elite, and even by the late 70s most of these changes had little to no impact in the rural communities (Griffiths, 1967). Writing in the late 1960s, John Griffiths’ (1967) personal observations of the modernization programs under King Zahir Shah in the 1960s applauds Afghanistan’s ‘progress’ specifically in terms of what he construes are social, economic and political changes that visibly demonstrate some glimpses of westernization and modernization. Griffiths (1967) writes,

The changes in Afghanistan over the last ten years have been far-reaching. Now you can travel around the country, between the main centres…You can see a woman’s face, and
drink scotch…You can turn on a light and pick up a telephone…You can hear a heated debate in a democratically elected parliament. (p. 135)

In Griffiths’ travel narratives, real progress and change in the country is measured only in terms of that which most closely resembles the comforts and familiarity of ‘home’ (such as parliamentary democracy, paved roads and the availability of scotch etc). Likewise, for Griffiths (1967), the challenges and weaknesses in the country are those related to the stereotypical epithets long held and known about Afghanistan by the west, namely the resilient and almost ‘irrational’ attachment to tradition and culture. Griffiths (1967) highlights the pitfalls of Pashtun nationalism, for example, considering Pashtun culture to be a primitive and an alienating force within Afghanistan, and one that will ultimately undermine modernization, industrialization and urbanization in the country. Certainly Griffith’s impressions of the Pashtun ethnic group in the late 1960s are quite telling, given the eventual emergence of the largely Pashtun dominated political movement known as the Taliban that would arrive on the national political scene in the 1990s.

It would also be misleading to suggest that the period of modernization and development within Afghanistan from between the 50s-70s was a result of the close, and penetrating presence and influence of the United States and other western powers. In fact, the U.S and Afghanistan have had a vacillating relationship, and although Afghanistan was dependent on foreign aid from western powers, the government under Zahir Khan can hardly be seen as a mimic state. This is largely because Zahir Shah’s government, although dependent on both western and eastern aid, had for the most part remained diligently suspicious of all kinds of foreign interference and demonstrated a much stronger tone of autonomy and decisive negotiating behaviors in its relationship with the international community. Afghanistan’s official relationship with the
international community was perhaps inaugurated when Afghanistan was internationally recognized as a member of the League of Nations in 1934. Subsequently the United States, under President Roosevelt, established the first diplomatic relationship and issued a treaty of friendship. Up until this time there was no official U.S diplomatic mission to Afghanistan, and much of US official dealings went through the British foreign offices (Fletcher, 1965; Newell & Newell, 1981). Although there was a keen interest on part of Zahir Shah to engage in economic relations with the U.S, as Fitzgerald and Gould (2009) reveal, the U.S. remained distant and rather disinterested in the country, but eventually opened the first US embassy in Kabul in 1942.

In understanding the complex relationship between the U.S and Afghanistan, it is important to contextualize the foreign aid relationships that were fostered in the aftermath of World War II between the United States and its allies in the Third World. Afghanistan like many other Third world nations received U.S aid money as part of Harry Truman’s four point plan widely known as a strategy to promote liberal democracy and capitalism and deter the threat of Soviet expansion. However, as Fletcher (1965) notes, Afghans were aware that they received far less aid than other neighboring countries, such as Pakistan and Iran. By 1956, for example, Afghanistan had received six million dollars whereas Iran and Pakistan each received over 100 million dollars. As Fletcher (1965) writes,

..Though the United States was providing funds for Afghan development, the manner in which they were provided evoked more annoyance than gratitude. None of the money, it should be noted, had been in the form of an outright grant, and Afghanistan had never defaulted on an international obligation. The implication that the United States government had so little confidence in the Afghan government was thus looked upon as an insult to its integrity as well as to its intelligence. (p. 267)

Afghanistan received aid funds not only from the U.S, but in an effort to maintain neutrality and resist too much foreign meddling, also received assistance from the Soviet Union,
the United Nations as well as other western powers (Lieberman, 1980). In fact, by the 1970s there were more than twenty nations which had bilateral aid operations in the country, including all of the Western European countries, most of the East European communist bloc and a few Muslim nations (Newell & Newell, 1981).

However, since the 1950s, it was the Soviet Union and not the United States that financed numerous large-scale development projects in the country, such as roads, highways, irrigation and hydroelectric power projects (Hughes, 2008). The path to develop and modernize Afghanistan, therefore, was mainly financed by multi-million dollar grants by the Soviets (Azmi, 1986; Fletcher, 1965). As Ahmed Rashid (2000) notes, between 1956-78 Afghanistan received $533 million in economic assistance from the U.S, but a staggering 2.5 billion from the soviets in both economic and military aid. Under the foreign policy leadership of Prime Minster Daoud, closer aid and political relations were developing, but these close ties did not initially alarm the United States (Gibbs, 2006). In his analysis of recent declassified U.S government documents about the relationship between the former Soviet Union and Afghanistan, David Gibbs (2006) conveys U.S intelligence reports that concluded the Soviets had no intention for political subversion, and the general sentiments among US officials also at that time was that Soviet aid was in fact very successful and effective. In this regard, Gibbs (2006) clarifies the US decision to not match Soviet aid, dollar to dollar, was made because the US government in the 1950s and 1960s did not want to enter into a competitive environment with the Soviet Union in the region. However, it also seems that Afghan’s remained staunchly independent despite the aid flows from the Soviet Union. According to Gibbs (2006) a 1958 US State Department document paraphrased one Afghan official who stated:
It is ‘beyond imagination’ that Communism could make any inroads in view of Afghan traditions, religion, and the very nature of the Afghan regime…. [The Afghan official] wanted to assure his American friends that the Soviet technicians in Afghanistan have in no instance engaged in improper activities, nor would the Afghan government tolerate any such activity by them. (p. 242)

Afghanistan’s close ties to the Soviet Union and teetering relationship with the United States became noticeably evident in the 1950s, as the Afghan government grew increasingly impatient with the United States’ refusal to offer military assistance to help modernize and expand the Afghan army. Afghanistan also pressured the U.S to accept the independence of “Pashtunistan”, which in effect meant the United States would need to re-negotiate the north west border with Pakistan (Fletcher, 1965). The United States, however, borrowed the British indifference on the matter of re-visitng the 1893 border division (Durand Line) dividing the Pashtun ethnic community between present day Afghanistan and Pakistan. An indifference which no doubt caused tense and strained diplomatic relations between the United States and Afghanistan (Runion, 2007). Irrespective, what is generally understood to have marked a clear point of departure from an entrenched American influence in Afghanistan occurred in 1953 under Prime Minister Daoud, who made a decisive shift towards the Soviets by accepting a $32.4 million dollar loan (Azmi, 1986). This decision was significant because it opened Afghanistan up to communist cells inside the Afghan army and air force, which were the effective units that staged the coup against the government in 1978. Prior to this coup, however, in 1973 Prime Minister Daoud overthrew Zahir Shah and became the new President of Afghanistan, however, despite Daoud’s history of facilitating an entrenched aid relationship with the Soviets, Gibbs (2006) notes, that President Daoud in the short time he was in office adopted an anti-communist policy. Popular protests to Prime Minister Daoud’s authoritarianism, however, laid the groundwork for a coup in April 1978. The military coup was carried out by the Marxist Afghan
army officers in 1978, and the ambitious Revolutionary agenda stirred violence and resistance in the country, which subsequently unleashed the Soviet invasion of the country on Christmas Eve in 1979 (Hughes, 2008; Azmi, 1986).


The commitment to modernize Afghanistan on socialist principles was initially steered by a small group of Soviet trained Afghan military and government leaders that were part of the Peoples’ Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA). In April 1978 this small group of leftist leaders seized the government, often termed the ‘Saur Revolution’ and declared the establishment of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (DRA) with President Nur. M. Taraki as their new political leader (Gibbs, 2006). As noted earlier, since the 1950s the Afghan government was receiving considerable financial aid from the Soviets, as Hughes (2008) points out, between 1955-1979 the USSR provided an estimated $1.25 billion worth of military aid, and $1.265 billion in economic assistance to the Afghans. The pro-Soviet Afghan regime that first rose to power in 1978 announced a national plan for land reform, greater freedom for women and an end to Afghanistan’s tribal social structure (Grau, 2007). In fact, all the subsequent Afghan leftist regimes from 1978 up until the Soviets fully withdrew from Afghanistan in 1991, took on many policies, institutions and structures that appeared to have ‘mimicked’ the communist Soviet government.

In understanding Soviet influence in Afghanistan, particularly the coming to power of various leftist ruling parties beginning in 1978 and up until the collapse of the Soviet Union, one could very well suggest that perhaps the proto ‘mimic state’ first occurred under the influence and ideological direction of the Soviet Union. Certainly from the previous discussion, it was established that the early modernizers from Amir Abdul Rahman, Amanullah, King Zahir Shah
as well as President Daoud, although committed to modernizing Afghanistan, were still deeply nationalist and fiercely protective of Afghanistan from foreign conquest, influence and meddling. Since the leftist regimes that came into power from 1978 onwards, however, many Soviet styled policies and institutions were adopted, such as the set up of the Ministry of Defense, the Ministry of the Interior (Sarandoy) and the Ministry of State Security (the secret police or Khad) (Grau, 2007). There was also a commitment to radical social change, specifically commitments to land reform and redistribution. Indeed one could see an embryonic mimic socialist state developing, particularly because of the tremendous amounts of Soviet aid entering the country and the number of Soviet trained and educated intellectual, political and military elites holding power and influence within the government and in the military. In my proposed framework to qualify only the current post-conflict government of Afghanistan as a mimic state, I am suggesting that although the Soviets financed and influenced Afghan governments from 1978 to the early 1990s, I aim to make evident in this section that in contrast to the current post-conflict government that is being deliberately and coercively transformed into a modern western liberal and neoliberal state, from above, the Soviets although influential within Afghanistan, were not only unable to create a ‘mimic state’ not only because they were deeply entangled in a costly and destructive military operation, but also because the Soviets had very little political interest in radically transforming Afghan polity and society into a soviet styled socialist state.

Upon gaining control over Afghanistan, the ruling PDPA regime initially carried out a nation-wide strategy for reform that angered much of the rural population, particularly land redistribution, greater rights and freedom for women (many women were members of the PDPA) and changes to the bride price and marriage (Ishiyama, 2005). In order to instigate land reform the PDPA were responsible for the killing of village mullahs, pirs and others that resisted the
reforms and challenges to tribal aristocracy. Within the first 16 months since the PDPA came into power, there was a strong impulse among the political and military elite to facilitate a radical makeover of Afghan rural society, but the widespread armed resistance led to the subsequent reversing of land reform and social reform efforts (Ishiyama, 2005). In his analysis of the Afghan-Soviet history, Hilali (2003) notes that since the Saur Revolution of April 1978 Afghanistan was pushed into a civil war in which the Marxist regime was largely unable to enforce its radical socialist inspired reforms. Even the poor rural majority virulently resisted the ideology of the regime and it’s abuse of power. In fact, a key Soviet advisor to the Afghan government, Marshal Akhromeev, remarked on the absence of strong support throughout the country, indicating that the Kabul regime is militarily strong, but that the revolution had lost the struggle as only a minority of the population supported the communist government (Halliday & Tanin, 1998). At most, the PDPA had control of one third of the country and the active support of only 3-4% of the population, however, party membership accounted for less than 1% of Afghanistan’s total population (Ishiyama, 2005). As Halliday and Tanin (1998) further note, the Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Vorontsov went further, and pointed out that up to 80% of the mainly rural population had gained nothing from the revolution.

The key barrier for the PDPA was that it was largely supported by the urban educated elite and had very little support among the rural majority. Also, the government was significantly dependent on Soviet military and security officers in addition to a large number of Soviet political advisors working with and advising the government (Hughes, 2008). As Azmi (1986) as well as Halliday and Tanin (1998) both note, there were thousands of Soviet trained military officers and civilian specialists, managers and educators, and in fact Soviet political advisers had the closest everyday involvement with the PDPA leaders. Even as early as 1970, almost half of
the nearly 2000 foreign experts in the country were from the Soviet Union. This ‘embedded’ Soviet presence is very much characteristic of a mimic-state that is under the politico-ideological direction of foreign experts. However, as Halliday and Tanin (1998) describe, the leftist Afghan leaders were more often than not hostile and uncooperative with the Soviets and were less committed to Soviet style communism. In Geraint Hughes (2008) overview of the Soviet-Afghan war, for example, he relates the mutual contempt and distrust that existed between the Soviets and their Afghan allies in the government and the military. From before and even in the aftermath of the Soviet invasion, many Afghan communist sympathizers even from within the army as well as the government either went over into the opposition or left the country because there was a widespread feeling that they were not following government orders but taking orders from the Soviets directly. This type of intellectual and political resistance to the Soviet presence is critical for the purposes of this discussion, in clarifying the differences between the kinds of resistance to imitative practices that existed during the period of Soviet financed Kabul regimes in comparison to the existing post-conflict government in Afghanistan. In fact, Halliday and Tanin (1998) note that the greatest problem the Soviet advisers and officials had with the Afghan regime, and in particular with the top officials of the PDPA, was the outright refusal of the latter to follow the advice which Moscow was giving them. As they write,

The overall picture given over the period from 1978 to 1989 is of constant disputes between Soviet and Afghan officials, and of persistent obstruction, overt and covert, by the latter of the policies that Moscow was advocating. The story of Afghan-Soviet relations through-out this period is therefore one of the inability of the Soviet leadership, despite Kabul’s reliance on its economic and military support, successfully to impress its policies on the PDPA leadership. (p.1373)

Some scholars such as Maley (1987) and Gibbs (2006) argue that building communism actually played little or no part in the Afghan government since 1978, and as William Maley
(1987) further observes, even in the document titled *Fundamental Principles* of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan, issued in Kabul in April 1980 by the leftist government, the document did not mention either socialism or communism. As many scholars have noted, the leftist regimes in Kabul despite receiving enormous military and financial aid and assistance, sought to maintain their autonomy. As William Maley (1987) writes, even the Soviets acknowledged and recognized this because since December 1979 they classified Afghanistan not as a ‘socialist state’ but as a ‘developing country’, or as Halliday (1999) notes a ‘socialist-oriented’ party (p.678). Creating a new society was the stated goal of the Afghan ruling party, however, it appears that even among the Marxist Afghan elite, these reforms were not so much vested in mimicking a soviet styled socialism. It is important to also emphasize that even despite the political and economic advice of the Soviets within the government, months prior to the Soviet occupation the Foreign Minister Shah Wali publicly accused the Soviets of becoming too involved within the internal affairs of the country instigating the removal of the long-time ambassador Alexander Puzanov. Hafizullah Amin’s brief government in 1979 also changed its pro-Soviet foreign policy to gain support from other Muslim countries and the US. In fact throughout the period leading up to the Soviet invasion, under Amin’s influence the Afghan government eagerly sought to resist the Soviet influence by reaching out to other Third world and Islamic governments, including Pakistan and Iran (Azmi, 1986; Hilali, 2003). This distance and disavowal is explored by Gibbs (2006), who presents a declassified memorandum from early December 1979 by KGB chief Andropov raised a who wrote,

Alarming information started to arrive about Amin’s secret activities, forewarning of a possible political shift to the west. These reports include the following: Contact with an American agent about issues which are kept secret from us. Promises to tribal leaders to shift away from [the] USSR and to adopt a “policy of neutrality.” Closed meetings in which attacks are made against Soviet policy and the activities of our specialists. The practical removal of our headquarters from Kabul, etc. The diplomatic circles in Kabul
are widely talking of Amin’s differences with Moscow and his possible anti-Soviet steps. (p. 256)

Although the Soviet-backed Kabul regimes had many components of a mimic state, the regimes were resistant to direct Soviet influence but even more interesting is that new research reveals that the Soviets themselves had little interest in coercively transforming Afghanistan into a socialist state. Drawing from David Gibbs analysis of recent declassified government documents, Gibbs (2006) reveals that Soviet officials actually dismissed suggestions of an existing or even prospective socialist or communist Afghanistan. Gaining access to formerly classified Soviet documents, Gibbs (2006) notes that the Soviet Union always viewed Afghanistan as backwards and quoting one Soviet official who states, “If there is one country in the developing world where we would like not to try scientific socialism at this point in time, it is Afghanistan” (p.246). Not only was there no decisive or intrusive agenda to transform Afghanistan into a communist state on part of the Soviets, but as Gibbs further notes, the declassified documents show that the Soviets had very little interest in invading or occupying Afghanistan for anything more than protecting their national security. Gibbs (2006) provides a lengthy quote by KGB chief Yuri Andropov who states in the months leading up to the Soviet invasion,

We must consider very, very seriously the question of whose cause we will be supporting if we deploy our forces into Afghanistan. It’s completely clear to us that Afghanistan is not ready at this time to resolve all of the issues it faces through socialism. The economy is backward, the Islamic religion predominates, and nearly all of the rural population is illiterate. We know Lenin’s teaching about a revolutionary situation. Whatever situation we are talking about in Afghanistan, it is not that type of situation. Therefore, I believe that we can suppress a [mujahiddin] revolution in Afghanistan only with the aid of our bayonets, and that is for us entirely inadmissible. We cannot take such a risk…[Speaking again later in the day] the people do not support the government of Taraki. Would our troops really help them here? In such a situation, tanks and armored cars cannot save anything. (p.250)
As mentioned earlier, the Soviets became very weary of Afghan president Amin’s growing distance from Soviet influence, who they suspected would eventually align with the Americans (Hughes, 2008; Halliday, 1999). As Gibbs (2006) insists, although the Soviets had little interest in invading Afghanistan, tensions were mounting due to Amin’s blatant efforts to distance Afghanistan from the USSR. The decision to invade on December 25th 1979 was primarily to secure Soviet interests and pre-empt Soviet fears of a growing U.S influence in the region (Gibbs, 2006). The Soviets killed Amin and replaced him with Karmal who was flown from Moscow and installed as the new president. The ‘revolution from above’ as coined by Barnett Rubin was fiercely resisted by the Mujahiddin, a resistance backed by many countries especially the US in which support to the rebel fighters became the largest single operation in the history of the Central Intelligence Agency. Under the presidency of Carter and then Reagan, the USA provided a total of $2.15 billion worth of assistance to Mujahiddin groups between 1979 and 1988, and this assistance was matched by the Saudi monarchy (Hughes, 2008). As the Soviet Union’s largest single military intervention after 1945, the implications of the Soviet invasion were immensely destructive and destabilizing for Afghanistan. Over one million Afghans were killed in the war and alongside the widespread destruction of roads, schools and the overall economic infrastructure of the country, another six to seven million Afghans were driven out of their homes into refugee camps in Pakistan and Iran (Rostami-Povey, 2007). As Rostami-Povey (2007) explores in detail, a great majority of Afghan men and women refugees faced tremendous discrimination, and experienced many forms of economic and social exclusion. As early as 1983 many senior political and military leaders in the Soviet Union, including Mikhael Gorbachev, realized that the military invasion was not effective, and the losses were tremendous including
the deaths of thousands of Soviet soldiers and the cost of war reaching over 15 billion rubles (Halliday, 1999; Gibbs, 2006; Hughes, 2008).

Since the early 1980s Gorbachev and others began to transform the political environment within the Soviet Union in order to facilitate the full withdrawal of Soviet troops by 1989 (Grau, 2007; Hughes, 2008; Mendelson, 1993). The Mujahiddin resistance was gaining ground and many Afghan allies and Soviet sympathizers were fleeing the country and deserting their positions. In Hughes (2008) overview of the Soviet presence, he further notes that among the reasons for the Soviets to leave not only included the frustrations and tensions between the Soviets and Afghan political leaders, but a failure to exert a unified policy within Afghanistan, largely because of the bureaucratic infighting over operational and policy decisions within both Kabul and Moscow. The Soviets were more or less frustrated because of the factionalism and disunity that characterized all four of the PDPA periods between 1978-92 (Ishiyama, 2005; Hilali, 2003).

Under each of these Kabul regimes, the government was fraught with in-fighting and dissension, creating difficult obstacles for policy formation and implementation (Maley, 1987). These internal divisions, for example, disabled any effort at gaining consensus and a strategic and unified approach to organizing Afghan society. In effect, policies were not possible or as Halliday and Tanin (1998) write, “it is hard to discern any clear pattern here, since whatever benefits may have been made possible by such shifts of policy were countered by the hostility which the Soviet presence, and attendant destruction, aroused among the population” (pp.1366-67). Ultimately, the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 signaled the collapse of the Soviet-backed Afghan government, and effective January 1st 1992 Russia along with the United States ceased all aid to the actors of the Afghan civil war. What transpired in the aftermath of the Soviet
withdrawal was an international indifference and disengagement from Afghanistan. The country was no longer of strategic import to the west in the post-cold war period, and the country disintegrated into another civil war (1992-1996) involving the various Mujahiddin factions who were fighting for state control.

As the next section reveals, amid the fighting and instability of the civil war, the Taliban emerges in the 1990s intent on bringing order, stability and Islamic rule to Afghanistan. When the Taliban first emerged, the world was briefly mesmerized by what Johnson and Leslie (2008) describe as “a raggle-taggle bunch of religious zealots from Qandahar that were quickly taking over more and more territory across the country” (p. 26). The Taliban emerged from Qandahar in 1994 as a grassroots Pashtun tribal movement, connecting rural Islamic values to a political and military campaign intent on removing warlords from power (Coll, 2004). The Taliban in the 1990s was among the few governments in the world that were closed, deeply hostile, and culturally as well as politically remote, inaccessible and immutable to western influence and advancements.

Thus far, this chapter demonstrated a common theme within the political history of Afghan rulers and political parties that were deeply suspicious, weary and resistant to foreign influence and domination in the country. The former Taliban government was no different, and therefore, it is incredibly significant that in the aftermath of the U.S military invasion of Afghanistan, westerners now exercise unprecedented access and political authority across this once remote and impenetrable country. There is a sense that the west, through introducing liberal reforms in the post-Taliban government has, at long last, established a strong foothold in the country and is now able to not only achieve a “new” familiarity with the once Afghan society,
but can through actively promoting modernization and westernization be able to see some semblance of itself in its most distant, belligerent and radicalized Other – the Taliban.
Part 3: Western Distance and the ‘Belligerent’ Taliban Years

3.1 The Rise of the Talibs

In his thorough discussion on the rise of the Taliban insurgency, Antonio Giustozzi (2007) offers a detailed analysis of the Taliban and neo-Taliban ideology, describing it as a “mix of the most conservative village Islam and Deobandi doctrines” (p. 12). Giustozzi (2007) argues that the west was initially considered a cultural (not a political) enemy by the Taliban government when they first came into power, but increasingly over the years the Taliban withdrew from diplomatic relations with the rest of the world. There is no doubt that the Taliban government was widely considered an elusive group to the west, echoing stereotypical notions of a ‘hermit kingdom’ as discussed previously. Ahmed Rashid (2000), a well known Pakistani journalist and best-selling author, described the Taliban as a ‘secret society’, indicating the difficulties in the west to know much about them, especially since the Taliban was averse to all media outlets, which as Maass (2002) and Misra (2004) construe was a clever tactic to ensure the outside world knew very little about them, and to deny international access to the country.

In Steve Coll’s (2004) detailed history of the CIA presence in Afghanistan since 1979, he relates the U.S State Department’s initial hope that the Taliban would secure peace and stability in the country. However, the United States was not particularly interested in actually engaging

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10 According to Steve Coll (2004) the roots of Taliban ideology are located in the efforts of both Saudi and Pakistani intelligence agencies. They built numerous madrassas in Pakistan and one such madrassa, Haqqannia, is located in Peshawar and attracted tens of thousands of Pashtun (Talib) students from Kanadahar. The curriculum was known as Deobandi, related to the Deobandi movement of India in the nineteenth century, which strongly sought to eliminate modern intrusions on traditional Islamic life. As Ahmed Rashid (2000) points out, the deobandi interpretation of Islam as practiced by the Taliban undermined traditional systems of authority and legitimacy among Afghans. The harsh interpretation of Islamic law went against the strong Sufi/mysticism practiced in the country. It is an anti-Sufi and anti-Shia practice which Rashid writes, “contrasts with the long-standing Afghan tolerance and moderations towards non-Muslims such as Sikhs, Jews and Hindus who ran much of Afghanistan’s economy and money markets previously” (p.177)
the government (also see Mackenzie, 1998). Likewise, the Taliban government (1996-2001) also sought to maintain considerable diplomatic and economic distance from most western powers, and even out rightly resisted foreign involvements of any kind, even aid assistance, the west’s most ‘benevolent’ form of intervention. As a result aid transfers from the United States and other western donors had largely declined in the aftermath of the Soviet withdrawal from the country in 1989 (Goodson, 2001). The United States government, under the Clinton administration, failed to assert a strategic policy towards the Taliban, and the country remained a faint flicker on the global stage (Coll, 2004; Rashid, 2009). This distance and indifference, however, quickly turned into international disdain by the mid 1990s against the regime’s support to Osama bin Laden and the brutal record of human rights violations, specifically the harsh public decree’s against the rights of women and girls. Afghanistan was, as Lawrence Malkin (2000) sharply noted, the greatest wasteland of the Cold War.

The difficult and acrimonious relationship between the Taliban and the international community started to take form once the Taliban unveiled their strict and harsh laws in Kabul, such as banning television, dancing, music, singing and other activities considered to be against a traditional Islamic lifestyle. This rigid application of Shariah law also made it difficult for the Taliban to foster friendly relations with other ‘non-Muslim’ governments, but this isolationist approach was further reinforced by Osama Bin Laden’s anti-western influence in the country. The Taliban persecuted ethnic and religious minorities, notably having destroyed the Bamian Buddha’s and other cultural (non-Muslim) artifacts in the country and revived public executions to demonstrate their power to Afghans (Cole, 2008).

Indeed, the most widely deplored laws were those targeting women, specifically prohibiting women from working and women and girls from studying outside the home and
forcing women to cover their faces and cover their bodies by wearing the chador/burqa in public (Coll, 2004, 2008; Dupree, 1998). Consequently between 40,000 to 150,000 women who were working as civil servants, doctors, lawyers, teachers and nurses lost their jobs, and over eight thousand female undergraduate students no longer attended classes (Dupree, 1998; Coll, 2004). As Steve Coll (2004) remarks, in 1996 it was unclear if the United States perceived the Taliban as friend or foe, but by Autumn 1997 after persistent lobbying by the Feminist Majority and other human rights and humanitarian NGOs, the first words of an antagonist relationship between the U.S towards the Taliban were uttered by Secretary of State Madeleine Albright. In 1997, while visiting a refugee camp in Peshawar, Albright departing from a prepared speech, mentioned for the first time the reasons as to why the U.S opposed the Taliban. She stated

I think it is very clear why we are opposed to the Taliban. Because of their approach to human rights, their despicable treatment of women and children and their general lack of respect for human dignity….that is more reminiscent of the past than of the future. (Mackenzie, 1998, p. 90)

What can be discerned from Albright’s sharp critique is the complete cultural distance and incommensurability the west felt existed between “our” western values and norms and the Taliban’s belligerent and antiquated behaviors. As Misra (2004) writes, “Afghanistan became a country which everyone was taught to be suspicious and to hate” (p.75). The frequent references to the Taliban as fanatics, zealots and fundamentalists prevailed in the west, and as Misra (2004) further notes, what perhaps most baffled the world about the Taliban was its war against modernity. Interestingly, the U.S government expected that the Taliban would eventually morph into a moderate, pro-modern Saudi-type government (Coll, 2004). However, instead of being ‘subdued’, the Taliban became increasingly hostile towards the west and became the dangerous and belligerent Other, rupturing all glimpses of westernization and modernization in its path for
governance, and in effect was set out to return Afghanistan back to the ‘dark ages’ (Dupree, 1998). In identifying Taliban-controlled Afghanistan as a ‘rogue state’ Khalilzad and Byman (2000) writing in the Washington Quarterly, refer to the growing danger of the Taliban regime’s radical ideology that would, if left unmanaged by the west, spread into other parts of the Muslim world. They argued for the immediate weakening of the regime by the U.S government, insisting that negotiations and diplomatic measures would simply not work. As the US Ambassador to Pakistan William Milam commenting on his efforts to engage the Taliban mentioned, “Every time I met with these guys, I felt like I was going back to the 14th century.” (Fiklkins, 2001). This war on modernity was largely understood as involving the Taliban’s insistence on a ‘pre-modern’ reading of the Quran, dismantling the nation state for a quasi Islamic political system, rebuffing international laws and global governance institutions, replacing the secular order with the divine order, and attacking symbols of western technology, wealth and status in the country (Misra, 2004). The profound sense of alienation and civilizational distance and disconnects are strongly echoed in the writing of Lawrence Malkin (2000) after his visit to Afghanistan. Malkin (2000) a journalist for Time and the International Herald Tribune writes,

It was a step backward to an age before people understood the serial nature of events and the concept of what we now call cause and effect. Society was conducted by rules of personal honor, family obligation, and group hierarchy, not by law. Beyond the tribe, a sense of the public simply did not exist, and barely any sense of nationhood. Cycles of punishment and revenge in Afghanistan predated even the ideas that began to develop in our civilization around the time of Sophocles’ Antigone. More of South Asia lives like this than its rulers like to admit, but at least there is some overlay of the Western ideas of time, causality, and other principles first enunciated by the Greek philosophers. In Afghanistan there was none. (pp.58-59)

Certainly during the 1990s and especially noticeable in the political rhetoric leading up to the war, the clear civilizational divides between the west and the Taliban were drawn. Much of
the public writing circulating in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks, in effect dusted off and illuminated Samuel Huntington’s 1993 thesis on the clash of civilizations. Leading newspapers and journals such as the New York Times and the Economist unproblematically adopted Huntington’s thesis about the underlying irreconcilability between Islam, Muslim cultures and of Western civilization in order to explain the horrific attacks in New York city. The Economist, in a special report on ‘Islam’s tensions’, appreciated Samuel Huntington for his “cruel and sweeping, but nonetheless acute observation” about Muslims “convinced of the superiority of their culture and obsessed with the inferiority of their power” (Enemies within, enemies without, 2001, para. 5). The Taliban, were specifically portrayed as a violent and barbaric group, whose authoritarianism and intolerance were considered emblematic of Pashtun culture. The Pashtun’s are, as Lieble (2007) notes, the most tribalized ethnic group in the world inhabiting much of Afghanistan and northern Pakistan and are notoriously known for their strict and often harsh legal and moral code termed ‘pashtunwala’. Much like Griffiths account of Pashtun culture mentioned earlier, in Arnold Fletcher’s (1965) extensive study of Afghanistan, he anticipates the code of the Pashtun’s to fade away and eventually be fully replaced with nationalism, ostensibly because of the increasing trade and aid relations with the western world. However, in his detailed analysis of Pashtun culture, political history and structure, Lieble (2007) notes that despite the clashes with Islamic laws, the Pashtun code remains commonly and widely observed and respected. As much as the outside world constructs the Pashtuns as an unruly,

difficult and warmongering people, as Lieble (2007) further indicates, the Pashtuns prefer a distant and non-interfering relationship with foreigners:

The Pushtunwali is an absolutely xenophobic ‘code’ at its base... the presence of foreigners is considered a gross violation of Pushtun honour and brings on the principle of haya or shame. (p. 507)

The Pashtun’s are repeatedly cast as a deeply insular, rigid and traditional society, emblematic of what is preventing Afghanistan from the path towards modernity (Rashid, 2000). In Larry Goodson’s (2001) historical analysis of the country, published before the events of September 11th 2001, for example, he echoes the resistance to change, noting that the country is “bereft of most of the structures now held to be essential in most modern governments” (p.169).

In fact, Goodson (2001) notes the deep political and ethnic divisions that have ruined the country, and like most of the accounts of Afghanistan in the 1990s, refer to the country as a classic ‘weak state’ that is often dismissed by the west as “a land of drug traffickers, terrorists, and bizarre religious fundamentalists” (p. 168).

Just as western governments sought to distance themselves from the often standoffish behavior of the Taliban, the international humanitarian and development community was also unwilling to channel aid through a weak, hostile and non-centralized government (Maley, 1998; Goodhand & Chamberlain, 2000). In 1988 the Geneva Accords included an agreement that the international community, through the UN, should engage in a substantial program of relief and rehabilitation in the country. As Goodhand and Chamberlain (2000) note, the UN coordinating agency in Afghanistan preferred channeling aid through the formation and support of Afghan NGOs, instead of foreign aid actors. In 1991 approximately 21% of UNDP’s US$2 million budget was channeled via Afghan NGOs through 66 projects. The barely visible international aid
community became further estranged from the country when the Taliban came into power and issued public decrees against girls attending school, as well as prohibiting women from working. As Johnson and Leslie (2008) note, agencies saw this as “a direct attack not only on their values but also on what they believed to be universal rights” (p. 84). Many international aid actors either stopped operations in the country altogether or significantly curtailed their operations out of protest. The British organization, Save the Children, for example, suspended health and education programmes and UNICEF made a decision to not fund education in parts of the country where girls were denied public education. Oxfam, another leading NGO out rightly condemned the Taliban and in 1996 they suspended their Kabul operations in protest against the treatment of women as did UNICEF (Dupree, 1998; Johnson & Leslie, 2008). The international community was increasingly becoming agitated by the Taliban, and as Ahmed Rashid (2009) cogently revealed,

Increasingly isolated and reviled by the international community, the Taliban became more confrontational. …the Taliban also escalated tensions with the UN and aid agencies, passing new laws that made it virtually impossible for such agencies to continue to provide relief to the Afghan population. The Taliban shut down Western run hospitals, refused to cooperate with a UN-led polio immunization campaign for children, and imposed even more restrictions on female aid workers, such as preventing them from driving cars. The Taliban arrested eight westerners and sixteen Afghans belong to a German aid agency and accused them of trying to promote Christianity, a charge punishable by death. (pp.18-19)

The tense and estranged relations between many western aid actors and the Taliban culminated into negotiations between the United Nations and the Taliban government. A UN team was sent to Kabul in 1999 and after 10 days of negotiation an agreement, or a Memorandum of Understanding was reached. The UN representatives sought to subdue the Taliban’s harsh rules, but the international aid community was not terribly supportive of the
memo, claiming that the gradual steps to give women more freedoms agreed to by the Taliban was a betrayal to international human right standards. Tensions were further exacerbated in October 1998 due to President Clinton’s military actions in Afghanistan in the aftermath of Al-Qaeda’s attacks on two U.S. embassies in Africa. The following year, under U.S pressure the United Nations passed Resolution 1267 demanding that the Taliban hand over Osama Bin Ladin and stop supporting international terrorism. The Taliban repeatedly ignored the U.S and the UN and in December 2000 the UN resolution 1333 imposed a complete arms embargo against the Taliban, seizing all assets outside Afghanistan (Saikal, 2000). Leading up to the events of September 11th, the Taliban government became increasingly antagonistic towards the west, enabling a strong case to be grounded for their removal. In fact, in the aftermath of the World Trade Center attacks, the Bush administration even went as far as to stress that the Taliban were not even ‘real’ Afghans, but rather, were foreign invaders who had taken over the country (Winkler, 2008).

**Conclusion**

The tragic events of September 11, 2001 catapulted Afghanistan from the periphery of western interests to the center of a global anti-terror campaign. Since the emergence of the Taliban government in the 1990s, strong political, moral and civilizational divides were constructed on both sides to emphasize the Manichean separation between modern, secular societies from traditional and religious ones. The U.S led war on terror expediently removed the Taliban government from power for refusing to hand over Osama bin Laden, the alleged ‘mastermind’ of the 9-11 attacks, and for supporting and harboring international terrorists. On October 7th, 2001 a U.S led military campaign was waged against the Taliban government and by December of that same year the United States was victorious. As established in this chapter, the
West had historically never fully gained political or military influence over Afghanistan, however, in the aftermath of the U.S victory, western governments and international agencies have now gained unprecedented access and decision-making authority inside the country. World powers gathered in Bonn in early December 2001 and selected Hamid Karzai, a pro-western Pushtun political figure, to serve as the Chairman for Afghanistan’s Transitional Administration. As the next chapter explores, Karzai was instrumental in ensuring that post-conflict Afghanistan purposively and aggressively resembles the path of western political modernity, hence transforming Afghanistan into a ‘mimic’ post-conflict state.
CHAPTER THREE

The Post-Conflict ‘Mimic-State’ of Afghanistan: From Distance to International Proximity

Introduction

The primary objective of this chapter is to offer a conceptual framework of political mimicry and to introduce my construct of the ‘mimic’ state. I am drawing closely from the highly debated post-colonial concepts of mimesis and mimicry, largely prevalent in literary criticism, to help tease out some of the obvious as well as the undeclared, obscure and implicit interactions that often characterize colonial and neo-colonial relations. This chapter centrally draws from Homi Bhabha’s (2004) seminal work, The Location of Culture, wherein the author situates mimicry as the seemingly subordinated position of colonized subjects as their identities are reconfigured to emulate and adopt the doctrines, attitudes and behaviors of colonizers. For Bhabha (2004), the relationship between the colonizer and colonized is never simple: although the colonizer deeply desires that the colonized are remolded into some version of themselves by inculcating the attributes and traits of post-enlightenment modernity, the full realization of this civilizing mission may inevitably threaten to destabilize colonial authority. In my adaptation of Bhabha’s (2004) notion of colonial mimicry, I seek to emphasize this intrinsically complex and ambivalent relationship that is best characterized by Bhabha as the desire of the colonial power “for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite” (p. 122).

Further, this chapter explores the continuity of colonial mimicry strategies through modern western state-building interventions in Afghanistan. I argue that the international community has facilitated the emergence of a ‘mimic’ state; a partial and fragmented state that is
only expected to resemble or merely ‘perform’ liberal political democracy, rather than attain full statehood. The mimic state is an outcome of an ambivalent relationship between the international community, specifically the United States, towards Afghanistan. It is characterized by interventions that help to build and support a strong, central liberal democratic state on the one hand, while undermining and preventing the very foundations of a strong state from emerging on the other. I argue that these contradictory strategies are an outcome of neocolonial state relations which seek not to actualize liberal political modernity, but rather to fulfill the western colonist’s longstanding desire to witness a glimpse of itself from within a Muslim country that has historically resisted westernization and modernization (see previous chapter). Political mimicry, therefore, sets out to anchor western resemblance, familiarity and authority in the country, but does so only to the extent that an ideological defeat can be declared over Islamic extremism in Afghanistan.
Part 1: The Making of a Mimic State

1.1 Mimicry and Imitating European Civility

In analyzing colonial relations, post-colonial scholars have discussed the intent on part of colonial powers to actively reform the colonized population into their own image. It was assumed that by adopting European values, lifestyles and modalities of social, economic and political organization, the colonized populations would fall into the colonialist plan to be properly reformed into civilized subjects, reaffirming an unequivocal and unchallenged confidence among colonizers about the desirability and the inevitability of European post-enlightenment civility (Ashcroft et al., 1998; Nandy, 1983; Jung, 2007). According to the social theorist Ashis Nandy’s (1983) study of British colonial politics in India, this confidence was necessary for British rule over India’s millions because, as he observes, the British could not have ruled over Indians if they even remotely perceived themselves to be “moral cripples” (p. 10). This self-perception was so central to the colonial mission that any counter alternative to the European worldview that gained credibility and legitimacy among the colonized was constructed as a serious and dismantling threat to the very foundations of colonial power (Nandy, 1983). Colonial powers needed to believe in the superiority of their own cultural, political and economic practices and models first, before expecting subjugated populations to fully accept them without resistance. Or, as Buchan and Heath (2006) note, in the colonial imagination the ‘savage’ sees “white, western culture reflected back as ‘civilization’; a beneficent gift to the colonized” (p. 6).

Imitating the colonizer, therefore, was understood by Europeans as the inevitable outcome of an inferiorized Other to resemble and perhaps to ultimately ‘become’ like them, “civilized, democratic, individualistic, and rational” (Barrueto, 2004, p. 342). These imitative
acts were considered normal and acceptable because they mimicked the dominant models of
accepted social and political virtues. Interestingly, post-colonial scholars have also pointed out
the corresponding desire on part of many colonized subjects to imitate white cultural forms,
willingly adopting the attitudes, behaviors, dress and other aspects of white culture (see Fanon,
2006; Ferguson, 2002; Bhabha, 2004). Homi Bhabha (2004) in his preface to The Location of
Culture, for example, acknowledges the strong impulse among subjected populations to conform
to and emulate foreign practices, customs and lifestyles. Bhabha traces these mimic men through
the fictitious characters of George Orwell’s Dr. Veraswami in Burmese Days and V. S Naipaul’s
Ralph Singh in the Mimic Men. Both fictional characters are colonial subjects that most
commonly share a strong likeness for and attachment to European culture and lifestyle. This
desire to be in proximity to and hence emulate ‘high’ culture, was for Bhabha (2004) at least
initially about “emulating the canons of elite ‘English’ taste (or what we knew of it) and
conforming to its customs and comforts” (p. x). In this respect, he highlights that individually
and collectively, non-European cultures under colonial rule are deeply negated because all
worthy pursuits are away from one’s own culture, society and country.

The very idea of personal or even political imitation of colonial powers is harshly
criticized in the work of Frantz Fanon (1925-1961), a psychiatrist and philosopher whose
writings have exerted a shaping influence on the field of post-colonial studies. Fanon (1967)
bluntly designates this imitative behavior as an ‘inferiority complex’ that stems from internalized
self-loathing for one’s own culture and identity. As subjected populations try to take on
European culturo-political traits, Fanon states that they erode their own cultural originality. In
the context of Africa, he argues that the attraction to Europe forms part of a set of cultural and
psychological pathologies rooted in the colonial relationship. The black man tries to imitate the
white man in an attempt to be an enlightened and modern human being, but according to Fanon (1967), subsequently realizes that his black skin makes this impossible. In this sense, mimicry reinforces the authority of the colonizer because of the impossibility of the Other to become the same.

Ashis Nandy (1983) and Frantz Fanon’s (1965) critique of former colonies’ adaptation of European political and economic models provide useful guidelines for sketching the foundations of the mimic state. Nandy (1983) notes that Indians after independence from Britain saw their salvation in becoming more like the British, and interestingly, it was this mindset where the idea of having a nation-state (just like the west) crept into the imagination of Indian elites at the near end of the British colonial era. The elites were convinced that the absence of such a state apparatus would effectively demonstrate Indian ‘backwardness’ (Nandy, 1998). Analogously, Fanon (2006) feared that in the aftermath of World War II, newly independent African states would not only inherit colonial governance structures, but, as Nandy (1983) highlights, would also be led by western-educated elites who were ideologically committed to nationalism and western political and economic modernity. Fanon cautioned the newly independent African states from blindly adopting the political frameworks of their former colonizers. He feared that they lose their autonomy and become structurally oppressed and disadvantaged in the international community, to the detriment of their own national struggles against poverty, hunger and illiteracy (Jefferess, 2008). Fanon, in this sense, certainly foresaw the unequal and exploitative relationship that now exists between the first and the third world. As dependency (Marxist) theorists and post-development scholars have argued, the third world is now locked into a structurally disadvantaged and marginalized international capitalist system,
making it virtually impossible for countries to pursue autonomous, alternative, or perhaps ‘anti-mimic’ social, political and economic policies (see Escobar, 1995; Munck & O’Hearn, 1999).

Grafting on western political and economic models is certainly a key characteristic of a mimic state in L.H.M Ling’s analysis of formal mimicry. As a post-colonial scholar of International Relations, Ling (2002) was the first to characterize states that end up imitating western liberal political traditions, either coercively or willingly, as engaging in what she calls ‘formal mimicry’. She argues that these societies adopt liberal ideology together with its ‘developmental paraphernalia’ such as foreign aid, foreign consultants, international policies, rules and regulations. For Ling, formal mimicry entails contradictory, superficial and emulative liberal and neo-liberal state practices and behaviors because third world societies have not developed an integrated and substantial liberal tradition of their own. Mimicry occurs when states must borrow, rather superficially, conventional liberal traditions until they can adequately articulate an innovative or synthesized ideology for themselves. Although Ling (2002) problematizes formal mimicry as “surface copying” (p. 117), her analysis lends to an understanding of imitation as an outcome of an internal deficiency which is for the most tolerated by the west.

In Ling’s (2002) analysis, therefore, it is the absence of an authentic liberal tradition which forces third world societies to imitate western liberal formulations, and the west encourages imitation as a means to exert and maintain economic superiority and ideological control. For Ling (2002), however, even a coerced practice of formal mimicry may over time evolve into what she terms ‘substantive mimicry’, that is, “a cumulative strategy of integrated, more coherent problem solving, producing a hybrid sense of self and other…substantive mimicry fosters learning that draws on the cultural richness…..” (p. 117). In other words, Ling (2002)
anticipates a deeper, more innovative and internally developed liberal tradition, but she does not elaborate on the conditions and factors that are needed to facilitate this ‘deeper’ and more synthesized approach. Even if political imitation is practiced initially and then ‘morphs’ into a hybrid practice, some of the underlying political, cultural and ethical undercurrents are still not addressed in Ling’s (2002) analysis. For instance, she overlooks the unequal power dynamics that facilitate and perpetuate the parroting of only western liberal, democratic and capitalist models and she fails to problematize the overarching expectation that all states must ‘catch up’ to the western world. Hence, in the final analysis, even Ling’s (2002) substantive mimicry does not escape the west’s enduring narcissism and the kinds of unequal relationships it fosters with the non-western world; a fundamental quandary that is captured in the writing of Edward Said (1995) who states,

It is as if, having once settled on the Orient as a locale suitable for incarnating the infinite in a finite shape, Europe could not stop the practice; the Orient and the Oriental, Arab, Islamic, Indian, Chinese, or whatever, become repetitious pseudo-incarnations of some great original (Christ, Europe, the West) they were supposed to have been imitating. (p. 62)

I qualify the existing Afghan government as a mimic-state not because of the country’s inability to generate a unique and original liberal tradition on its own, nor as Ling (2002) suggests, in anticipation of syncretic or hybrid state practices. Certainly, it remains to be seen whether the current liberal reforms will become organically synthesized with the richness of Afghan tradition. Rather, in my framework, drawing closely from Bhabha’s (2004) notion of colonial mimicry (discussed below) I maintain that political mimicry is an instrument of neocolonial state relations, and therefore, is characterized by the west’s ambivalence towards Afghanistan which has meant that interventions that help build and support a strong liberal
democratic state are in tandem with strategies that undermine and even subvert any real chance for a strong Afghan state to emerge. I argue that these ambivalent interventions only foster a mimic state, one that appears (at least on paper) as a modern liberal state, but has not, and will likely never attain full statehood. Unlike Ling’s (2002) analysis, therefore, the imitation of western political forms does not pave the way for an endogenous process for statebuilding to occur, it merely pitches the tents of western familiarity, authority and proximity in Afghanistan, and only in so far as a western ideological defeat can be declared in the country.

1.2 Colonial Ambivalence and The Mimic State of Afghanistan

Homi Bhabha’s (2004) notion of ambivalence in colonial mimicry locates the desire by the colonized to absorb and inculcate the beliefs, values, attributes and traits of the colonizers. But, the full actualization of this civilizing and moral mission is simultaneously perceived as a threat to colonial rule. That is, a successful civilizing mission would inevitably enable the fully reformed colonized subject to emerge claiming his or her full rights to post-Enlightenment ideals of equality, liberty, freedom and self determination, thus rendering colonial rule obsolete. Since imitation could unsettle the fixed identities and boundaries that demarcate rulers from the ruled, Bhabha (2004) argues that the legacy of this mission is inevitably partial, incomplete and even contradictory, so as to ensure that the full and complete transformation of the colonized is never achieved. Ambivalence, or the desire for something and also wanting its opposite, is therefore a familiar colonial strategy, aptly described by Bhabha (2004) as the desire for a reformed and recognizable Other “that is almost the same, but not quite the same” (p.122).

In Bhabha’s (2004) account of mimicry in colonial India, the British needed to construct new and familiar identity formations for Indians because a population of unrecognizable and irreconcilable Others would prove to be an ineffectual colonial strategy. This point is best
illustrated by Thomas Babington Macaulay, a British politician and historian in the early 1800s, who argued for the reform of Indians into civilized subjects as a strategy to guarantee Britain’s long-term commercial success in the region (Young, 1967). In a speech delivered to the British parliament, Macaulay stated:

“...To trade with civilized men is infinitely more profitable than to govern savages. That would, indeed, be a doting wisdom, which, in order that India might remain a dependency, would make it a useless and costly dependency, which would keep a hundred millions of men from being our customers in order that they might continue to be our slaves. (as quoted in Young, 1967, p. 717)

Further, Macaulay suggested that the British ought to reform a distinguished class of Indians who would be “Indian in blood and color, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect” (Bhabha, 2004, pp. 124-25). The latter would enable the British to share some sameness with Natives and the former would help the empire expand and penetrate into India. These ‘mimic’ men would prove to be an indispensable component of British rule, acting on behalf of colonial authority to manage, maintain and police the indigenous population (Jefferess, 2008; Bhabha, 2004). The looming fear, however, was that these mimic men would perhaps one day gaze back at the British with a more authentic version of themselves. As Bhabha (2004) relates, to mollify the threat of the fully civilized native, Charles Grant, a British politician in the late 1700s, argued for ‘partial’ reforms to be carried out. These reforms would include, for example, spreading Christianity and offering limited western education, so that colonial authorities could have “a sense of personal identity” (p. 124), whilst constructing a non-threatening form of colonial subjectivity. Bhabha unmasked the ambivalence that underpins this colonial attitude as the British desire for Indians to be Anglicized, by adopting English tastes,
dress, values and the language, while restricting them from becoming fully English. Or as Bhabha (2004) puts it, “to be Anglicized is emphatically not to be English” (p. 125).

It is here that Fanon helps us to understand this particular aspect of the colonial relationship further. He poignantly states that, “As painful as it is for us to have to say this: there is but one destiny for the black man. And it is white” (Fanon & Philcox, 2008, p. xiv). In his description of the relentless pull on the subjected populations to imitate and inculcate European culturo-political traits, Fanon admits that the colonized are trapped, for the more they try to become white, the more they have committed their own cultural originality “to the grave” (Ibid, p. 2). Far worse, however, is that the pull to be more like ‘them’ will, according to Fanon, always be futile because the colonized can never achieve full whiteness. Or, quoting Cesaire, “No matter how white one paints the base of the tree, the strength of the bark screams underneath” (Ibid, p. 175). For Fanon, the colonial relationship is set up in such a way that the native will fail or always fall short of becoming a ‘complete’ mirror image of the colonizer. Mimicry, therefore, can be understood not as a strategy used to measure the degree of assimilation, but rather, to measure the consistent failure of natives to become like Europeans (Jefferess, 2008). The consequences are grave for the colonized as they are perpetually made to feel inferior, unequal and inadequate in their own societies, whereas the colonizer who lives as a ‘minority’ in the country always has the upper hand and is never made to feel inadequate or out of place (Ibid, p. 73). Using the example of his home country, Fanon writes Martinique’s population of over 300,000 blacks are made to feel inferior every day in their own country, while the 200 or so white Europeans are very comfortable and even consider themselves superior to the local population (Ibid, p. 73).
Mimicry, therefore, for the purposes of this study, begins on the premise of an intended failure, or partial success of the ‘native’ to realize post-enlightenment civility. In the following discussion I aim to map out the political contours of the mimic state by demonstrating how ambivalent interventions that broadly attempt to build the state into a strong, central and modern liberal democratic state, yet simultaneously undermine it, make it only possible for Afghanistan to resemble a western liberal state, but never quite be the same as one.
Part 2: Western Ambivalence towards Afghanistan: To Build the State and to Tear it Down

2.1 Building the State and Celebrating the Liberal Democratic Makeover of Post-Conflict Afghanistan

A new age of liberal political modernity was certainly intended for the Afghan state in the aftermath of the US defeat over the Taliban, particularly since under the Taliban the country lacked even the basic requirements of state-building, or as Maass (2002) bluntly remarks, did not fulfill the preconditions for a ‘nascent government’ nor hold the potential for maturing into a future government. There was, therefore, an unequivocal and unchallenged confidence among western powers for the desirability and the inevitability of the Afghan polity to embrace modern, western liberal democratic reforms. Former President George Bush declared America’s non-negotiable demands in Afghanistan for free speech, the rule of law, limits on the power of the state, free market, private property, justice and religious tolerance (BBC News, 2002).

This intention was evident from the very beginning when plans to radically restructure post-Taliban Afghanistan were formally unveiled at the first international meeting of western powers held in Bonn, Germany in December 2001. Signed by various anti-Taliban Afghan factions on December 5, 2001, the Bonn Agreement established an interim government and outlined the goals for statebuilding which were later echoed and reaffirmed by the Afghan Compact, then the Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS). All three documents remain the pivotal roadmaps guiding Afghanistan’s transformation from an under-resourced and largely dysfunctional state towards the inevitable path of a reformed, modern, market-driven, liberal democratic state. The Bonn Agreement emphasized a neo-Weberian approach to statebuilding, a vision shared by all donor governments intent on helping to build a strong central
government with a functional and efficient bureaucracy that extends security, rule of law, and basic social services across the country (Saltmarshe & Medhi, 2011; Edwards, 2010). Certainly, no alternative could have possibly been imagined for Afghanistan since Afghans were largely shut out of the key decision-making processes leading up to the Bonn conference (Suhrke, 2008; Emadi, 2010). Eventually, they were invited during the final phase of the negotiations and were presented with a draft agreement that was nothing short of a complete overhaul of the country’s polity and economy. Clearly, Afghans were expected to implement the plans and strategies conceptualized and directed through the authoritative practices and institutions of western powers. As Suhrke (2008) notes, the only strategy envisioned for post-911 Afghanistan was rapid liberal modernization.

Following the commitments made at Bonn, the reforms implemented during the period from 2002 to 2005 were quite remarkable mainly because they followed decades of war and instability and years of strict and undemocratic Taliban rule. The newly drafted constitution adopted in 2003, for example, safeguards freedom of speech, freedom of assembly and upholds the right to life, liberty, property and privacy for all Afghan citizens. In addition to the constitutional checks and balances on the powers of the President and the National Assembly, the constitution has deepened the responsibilities of the state to provide adequate health care and education to all citizens and protects citizens against torture, prioritizing the rule of law and justice for citizens. Afghanistan’s new constitution further impressed upon the state to adhere to international conventions ratified by the government, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention Against All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). These rights are complemented by the reforms to rebuild the country’s judicial system, namely the training of lawyers and judges and an emphasis on the rule of law and the
setting up of legal and regulatory amendments that would largely disavow the legitimacy of customary law.

Overall, between 2002-2013, international donors have pledged a total of US 62 billion in aid to help rebuild the country, only 26.7 billion of which was disbursed between 2002-2009, with a little over 10 billion of this amount provided by the US alone (Poole, 2011). The overall funds allocated to Afghanistan, however, are inadequate to the tasks at hand, and in comparison to other post-conflict countries, Afghans have received far less aid per person than many other post-conflict countries such as Bosnia, Kosovo, and Iraq (Poole, 2011). Nonetheless, the leading donors have been the US, the EU, Great Britain, Germany, and Canada, and each donor has targeted aid towards a number of different projects aimed at building the efficacy, legitimacy and reach of the state, such as the expansion and restructuring of the health and education sectors; building the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) and the judiciary; reforms in public administration and public financial management and the restructuring of government ministries and agencies (World Bank, 2013). Efforts to reform governance have been met with significant challenges. According to the World Bank, the pre-2001 government structure was immensely ineffective, with many ministries lacking basic materials and equipments to deliver services, not to mention a significant shortage of trained and skilled government personnel adept in such necessary areas as budget preparation, accounting, procurement, expenditure programming and program management (World Bank, 2013). The World Bank administers the largest funds allocated towards strengthening and rebuilding the central government through the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF). The fund is supported by 33 donor countries and since 2002 has raised 6 billion to provide on budget financing to the Afghan government for salaries, restoring infrastructure, providing training and capacity building for civil servants, investments
in education and health, rural development initiatives and reforming public finance management (World Bank, 2012).

Many technical reports and scholarly analyses have assessed the progress of statebuilding initiatives (USAID, 2012; World Bank, 2012; Giustozzi, 2012) and almost every report has indicated that corruption, lack of skilled civil servants, weak management and under-funded ministries with limited and often unpaid staff, have continued to make statebuilding a slow paced and largely unsuccessful endeavor. Interestingly, the World Bank acknowledges that it takes generations to witness real and substantive changes to governance, claiming that it may take well over 20 years for post-conflict countries to achieve political stability and have an effective government bureaucracy (World Bank, 2011). Despite the challenges ahead, the international donor community pledged 16 billion for Afghanistan at the 2012 Tokyo Conference and the Tokyo Declaration reaffirmed that “good governance at national and sub-national levels is essential for strong and sustainable economic development and improved livelihoods of the Afghan” (Tokyo Conference on Afghanistan, 2012, p. 4) The former U.S. Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, also reaffirmed the central goal of a strong and stable government in Afghanistan stating,

Afghan security cannot only be measured by the absence of war. It has to be measured by whether people have jobs and economic opportunity; whether they believe the government is meeting their needs….. President Karzai has made a strong public commitment to stamping out corruption, implementing key reforms, and building Afghanistan’s institutions. We will support him and the government in that endeavor to enable Afghanistan to move toward self-reliance and away from dependence on donor assistance…The United States will request from our Congress assistance for Afghanistan at or near the levels of the past decade through the year 2017. And our assistance will create incentives to help the Afghan Government meet mutually agreed reform goals (US Department of State, 2012, para. 5-12).
Certainly there is still a long and arduous journey ahead for Afghanistan, but as the above quote demonstrates, western powers ostensibly are still committed to building a strong central government in Afghanistan. As overviewed in this section, many important inroads have already been achieved, such as a parliamentary style democracy, regular national elections, a progressive constitution, a human rights council, judiciary, and security forces. Afghanistan appears to have all the important features of a liberal democratic state, and much scholarly research continues to focus on the extent and real impact of the liberal project. My analysis, however, departs from this body of literature, and as the following discussion will reveal, the project to promote liberal democracy is mired by foreign-led strategies that have undermined and will likely even subvert any real chances for a strong state to emerge in the near future.

2.2 The Parallel ‘Donor State of Afghanistan’

Over the years, the international donor community has widely recognized that greater national ownership of foreign aid is essential for long term aid efficacy and sustainability, decreasing donor dependence and increasing better aid coordination and coherence, particularly in post-conflict contexts (International Rescue Committee, 2012; Ebnother & Fluri, 2005). Ownership has been a relatively new focus in the aid industry, and the lack of ownership by recipients is a major reason for not only the failure of aid programming but the failure of reaching overall development objectives (Lopes & Theisohn, 2003). This is most acute in Afghanistan, as Sedra (2006) observes, the mere perception that reforms are seen as imposed externally, can serve to de-legitimize and derail the post-conflict process. The Paris Declaration explicitly calls for donors to align their aid in accordance with ‘partner countries’ priorities, systems and procedures’, hence for this to happen in Afghanistan, aid must not only be aligned to the Afghanistan Compact and National Development Strategy (ANDS) but more importantly that
it must be routed through the national budget and treasury. In doing so, the Afghan government can create greater capacity within its ministries to conceptualize, plan and shape programs, while increasing its visibility and legitimacy among Afghans by directly working in communities (International Rescue Committee, 2012; Rubin, 2006).

Despite the consensus in the international aid community to promote local ownership and work closely (not competitively) with national governments, this has not happened in Afghanistan. Rather, donor activities have almost completely bypassed the government, thus undermining the priorities and strategies set out by the Afghan government in the national development framework. At the Kabul, London and most recently the Tokyo donor Conference in 2012, the Afghan government has repeatedly insisted donors channel 50% of their aid through the government’s national budget and that 80% of their programs be aligned with the country’s national priorities (U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO), 2012). This insistence has been in response to the tremendous amount of aid, between 77-80%, that has consistently bypassed the Afghan government between the years 2002-2009 (Rubin & Hamidzada, 2007; Goodhand & Sedra, 2010). The Afghan government has not only been frustrated by the marginal amount of aid allocated through its national budget, but the disparity between what donors commit and the actual aid amounts disbursed. For example, between the years 2002-2009 46.1 billion was committed but only 26.7 billion was dispersed (Poole, 2011). This discrepancy makes it difficult for the government to properly plan and implement long term projects, thus stifling government outreach and services to communities (Rubin, 2006; Goodhand & Sedra, 2010).

Since donors have not worked with the very government that they seek to strengthen, their work has inadvertently undermined and further weakened the Afghan government’s ability to lead, coordinate, determine and assess the overall impact and goals of development.
programming. The government is frustrated by donors who are investing billions of dollars in the country on a wide range of programs without feeling any obligation to inform, consult or coordinate their work with the relevant Ministries\textsuperscript{12}. Their \textit{ad hoc} and uncoordinated behavior, working wherever and on whatever they want across the country, has caused duplications, inefficiencies, uneven progress and outright program failures (Sinno, 2008; Rubin, 2006; McKechnie, 2011). Donors have been widely criticized for implementing disparate, poorly planned, short-term and expensive projects that relied heavily on foreign consultants, and that often did not meet the needs of Afghans. Consequently this has caused growing resentment and mistrust by Afghans against the international aid community and their own government for failing to improve living conditions after almost a decade of aid (Alvi-Aziz, 2008; Bezhan, 2006; Donini, 2007; International Rescue Committee, 2012; McKechnie, 2011).

Part of the problem is of course the legitimate concerns raised by donors about the high level of government corruption, lack of capacities, inefficiencies and lack of skilled personnel (International Rescue Committee, 2012; Rubin & Hamidzada, 2007; GAO, 2012). However, irrespective of these very real limitations, allocating aid through the government budget is widely acknowledged as the only and most sustainable course of action for the long term sustainability of development objectives. Furthermore, what is perhaps most important to emphasize is that the donor community can no longer justify bypassing, and thereby undermining, the government in the name of greater aid efficiency, proven results or having developed a more trustworthy and positive relationship with communities in comparison to the government. In reality, there is widespread Afghan dissatisfaction and disillusionment of aid interventions, and foreign NGOS

\textsuperscript{12} For example, in many cases donors have worked directly with communities bypassing relevant Ministries, such as funding foreign NGOs to build schools and develop curriculum without the Ministry of Education’s approval (see Rashid, 2008).
have especially developed a reputation of being wasteful and self-serving rather than helping Afghans (Pain, 2012; Sinno, 2008; Waldman & ACBAR 2008; Saltmarshe & Medhi, 2011; Alvi-Aziz, 2008; Donini, 2007). In his study of local perceptions about aid interventions, Donini (2007) reveals that Afghans perceived no visible improvements to their daily lives and also felt that a more effective way of disbursing aid was actually through the government. Although many Afghans surveyed acknowledge government corruption and ineffectiveness, (Cordesman, 2010; Donini, 2007; Torabi et al., 2008; Larson & AREU, 2011) most wanted Afghans and the Afghan government to run their own affairs and implement programs because they felt that bypassing the government would be disastrous to statebuilding in the long term.\(^\text{13}\)

It was only relatively recently in 2010 that donors finally agreed to allocate a higher portion of aid through the national budget. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID), for example, has now increased its development assistance through the government’s national budget from 10% in 2008 to 46% in 2011 (GAO, 2012). However, the years of funding outside the institutions of the state has already produced and cemented a parallel donor ‘sub government’ across the country. Over the past decade donors have managed to set up their own local representative bodies instead of working with existing local governance structures, thus explaining why no common vision for local government has emerged to date (Sinno, 2008). Although foreign development actors have gained visibility in communities, the government has remained largely invisible and irrelevant to basic service delivery and other development programming across the provinces, thus stifling genuine public trust and hindering

\(^{13}\) It should also be noted that redirecting aid to the government would not only exercise and build internal state capacities but would ensure that more aid money actually remains in the country. That is to say, redirecting aid to the government would offset the high international transaction costs that currently consume 30% of total aid to Afghanistan and would also help to retain the estimated 40% of aid that returns to the donor country either as corporate profit, foreign consulting salaries and other expenses related to technical assistance (Goodhand & Sedra, 2010; Bezhan, 2006).
the legitimacy of the government in the eyes of Afghan citizens (Rashid, 2008; Saltmarshe & Medhi, 2011; Rubin, 2006; Rubin & Hamidzada, 2007). This is an important point because a widely recognized weakness of the government is that it has not had an extensive reach outside of Kabul. The trend of omitting the government from planning, budgeting, and being accountable for the majority of development programming has created a political context whereby the government merely acts as a ‘symbol’ of governance (Courtney et al., 2005; World Bank, 2009). The implications are grave because one of the ways the government of Afghanistan can gain legitimacy among Afghans and the international community is if it actually controls, mobilizes and is held accountable for a substantial amount of economic resources that are dispersed through the national budget. Doing so would not only build the state’s institutional capacities but government accountability of the budgeting process is one of the first steps toward democratic governance (Goodhand & Sedra, 2007; Rubin, 2006; Rubin & Hamidzada, 2007). As one World Bank Study notes, the parallel donor structures has also meant that Afghans cannot hold their own elected officials accountable for the delivery of services (World Bank 2009 report), nor can members of parliament debate and direct social policy and development interventions for Afghans. For Suhrke (2008), without the “power of the purse” (p. 644), the Afghan parliament is just a forum of debate rather than channeling Afghan grievances and demands into action at the national level. Interestingly, even Francis Fukuyama in his study of statebuilding in post-conflict contexts, refers to donor behavior as destructive, arguing that they are actually complicit in destroying the very national institutional capacities they are intent on building (Fukuyama, 2004).
2.3 Warlord Democratization?

The first few years after the overthrow of the Taliban government, the US government under the Bush presidency was not interested in promoting democracy or nationbuilding in Afghanistan. There was a reluctance to invest in the country long term; rather, the focus was almost exclusively on eliminating Al-Qaida and counter-terrorism (Hassan & Hammond, 2011; Suhrke, 2008). By late 2003, however, the Bush administration became much more committed to the future of democracy in the country and a shift from counter-terrorism to the “Freedom Agenda” took place. For many scholars, this shift was at least partly a result of the Bush administration’s desire to demonstrate success in the country in time for a Republican re-election (Hassan & Hammond, 2011; Rashid, 2008; Bezhan, 2006; Tadjbakhsh & Schoiswohl, 2008). As Tadjbakhsh and Schoiswohl (2008) contend, Republicans rushed elections in Afghanistan because they sought to claim success for facilitating Afghanistan’s first democratic presidential elections. In the lead up to the elections, therefore, U.S spending for democracy and development in Afghanistan doubled from 740 million in 2003 to 1.9 billion in 2004 (Rashid, 2008), and as Hassan and Hammond (2011) write, under the Bush administration “democracy promotion was raised to the level of an idol of the tribe” (p. 533). However, it has become increasingly evident that the kind of democracy the international community has helped to bring about in the country has not led to nurturing democratic norms and a strong democratic culture, rather, it has only reinforced, legitimized and further expanded the power and influence of warlords and regional strongmen.

The project to bring democracy to Afghanistan meant that the Bush administration focused solely on holding national parliamentary and presidential elections. According to Smith (2011), former UN team leader in Afghanistan, the design and planning of the elections were
rushed with very little groundwork dedicated to understanding Afghanistan’s political and electoral environment. The electoral system chosen for Afghanistan was The Single Non-Transferable Voting System (SNTV) used in only a few countries around the world which meant that voters would elect individuals instead of political parties. Research on Afghan elections, however, has confirmed that the SNTV has not only encouraged vote-buying and widespread bribery of election officials, but that it has not led to nor supported democratic governance (Reynolds & Carey, 2012; Saltmarshe & Medhi, 2011; Sinno, 2008). The SNTV was chosen under the assumption that Afghan political parties were not to be trusted and that they were not adequately formed (Smith, 2011).

However, Afghanistan actually has a history of political parties that were already formed, or which could have benefitted from additional time and resources to help them run their campaigns. Their absence has entrenched the highly personalized nature of Afghan politics which has resulted in a stifled Afghan parliament which is unable to engage in policymaking, challenge the executive branch, aggregate local and diverse interests, nor effectively address national level issues (Suhrke, 2008; Nixon & Ponzio, 2007; Saltmarshe & Medhi, 2011; Bezhan, 2006; Reynolds & Carey, 2012). The absence of effective legislative representation has significantly undermined democracy in the country. As Reynolds & Carey (2012) insist, no longstanding democracy exists in the modern world today with an absence of viable political parties, which begs the question as to why the international community would invest millions of dollars in an electoral system that excludes the participation of Afghan political parties in the first place, especially since political parties have been part of Afghanistan’s political history.

Consequently, warlords and corrupt individuals with power, wealth and resources were elected, thereby adding to a corrupt and fragmented parliament (Hassan & Hammond, 2011;
Suhrke, 2008; Nixon & Ponzio, 2007). Their participation in governance has actually revived and re-established old rivalries of the different elite factions that had emerged in the 1980s which led the country to violent civil conflict and strife. These rivalries were in fact formally included from the very beginning of the state-building process involving international actors during the Bonn process. Although the 2001 Bonn Agreement was premised on supporting a multi-ethnic and politically balanced government, incorporating warlords and militia leaders into the central government was deliberately deemed by the U.S government and other internationals as the best strategy to preclude violent opposition to the central government (Azarbaijani-Moghaddam, 2007; Nojumi et al., 2009). Far from planting the seeds of representative democracy, the Bonn process actually sparked the beginnings of an internal war (2002-2009) between two opposing elite factions; the former Northern Alliance whose help to overthrow the Taliban was ‘rewarded’ by their inclusion in formal politics, against Karzai’s allies. The Northern Alliance dominated key government positions including some of the most important ministries such as Defence, Planning, Commerce and Intelligence (Sharan, 2011). Consequently, the internal war between the Northern Alliance and Karzai’s allies created in many ways a political deadlock, and statebuilding as a result, was manipulated, resisted and ultimately stifled by these intense, internal rivalries (Saikal, 2002).

Warring warlords and regional strongmen whose powers are now legitimated and reconstituted within the country’s formal political system have rendered any effort for an equitable distribution of national resources for development impossible (Sharan, 2011; Nojumi et al., 2009). Interestingly, as Bezhan (2006) points out, Karzai and the Americans have been unable or unwilling to diminish the power of warlords because of Karzai’s limited power and influence over many parts of the country. Therefore, corrupt and powerful warlords and
criminals, many of whom obtained votes by coercion and intimidation, have not only been tolerated but given access to the parliament in such a way as to be formally ‘in charge’ of the democratic process and governance of the country (Bezhan, 2006; Hassan & Hammond, 2011). Barnett Rubin (2006, p. 180) most aptly describes this state of affairs as “warlord democratization”. A sentiment echoed by Malalai Joya, a former parliamentarian in the National Assembly, who delivered what was perhaps the most courageous critique of Afghan politics to date in 2007 and was consequently suspended for her criticisms. In a speech from 2011 Joya sharply criticizes western powers and Afghan leaders for making a mockery of democracy, she states:

Over the past nine years, the US and their allies made the warlords so powerful that they easily hijacked the election results. It was a selection, not an election. Most members of parliament are law breakers, drug-dealers—not law makers—democracy never comes by bombing innocent civilians, supporting a corrupt government, and empowering a bunch of brutal and dark-minded warlords. We don’t want such democracy, and if the Western powers continue to impose this kind of dictatorship under the name of democracy on our people, our people may have no option but to rise against occupation. (Randol, 2011, para. 21)

2.4 A State of Warlords and Regional Strongmen

In a 2012 Washington Post article, journalist Michael Gerson rightly criticized President Obama for his consistent “fog of ambivalence” towards Afghanistan. Indeed, Gerson’s (2012) critique may very well explain the U.S. government’s ongoing duplicitous and contradictory policies that are likely to disrupt any long term chance for peace and security in the country. As the previous discussion established, although the US and international community have set up the formal democratic process in such a way that has strengthened and legitimized the power of warlords, I contend that it is the ongoing financial support to warlords that is the Achilles-heal upon which the Afghan government will likely collapse (Nojumi et al., 2009; Aikins, 2012;
United States House of Representatives & Tierney, 2010). From 2002-2008, for example, although a total of $1.8 billion was spent on democracy, governance, rule of law and human rights, the United States spent far more money, estimated at over 2 billion dollars, on warlords, strongmen and commanders who were given millions of dollars in cash, goods and even arms in exchange for providing the US with a wide range of security services (Goodson & Johnson, 2011; Goodhand & Sedra, 2007; Aikins, 2012; United States House of Representatives & Tierney, 2010; Hassan & Hammond, 2011; Human Rights Watch, 2002). In a report submitted to the Congress, the Department of Defense awarded these lucrative contracts to Afghan subcontractors to secure the safe transport of American goods to U.S. troops across the country. Also, a number of these unaccountable clusters of local militias were hired to guard military bases and development project sites as well as to serve as proxy forces to fight the insurgency, conduct intelligence operations and engage in covert anti-terrorism activities (Goodhand & Sedra, 2007). The billions of dollars poured into foreign contracts found their way into the hands of militias and warlords that were relatively unknown and weak before coming into contact with US funds. In a matter of a few years, however, they have very quickly gained tremendous economic, military and political strength as well as legitimacy by helping the US military and the CIA. Because they are exempted from national disarmament programs, according to Hassan & Hammond (2011), these non-state armed actors have been fortified with so many weapons and ammunition that the country has transformed into “a multitude of states in the form of warlords” (p. 537).

The report to Congress acknowledges the incommensurability between the United States’ military and security objectives and the larger political goal of state building, but it fails to hold the Department of Defense responsible for the possible political implications of strengthening
non-state armed actors whose very political and economic power rests on the continuity of a weak, inefficient and under resourced central government. According to a report published by the Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs of the United States House of Representatives, “any single individual who commands hundreds or thousands of armed men in regular combat and operates largely outside the direct control of the central government is a competitor to the legitimacy of the state” (United States House of Representatives & Tierney, 2010, p. 20). By arming groups who are explicitly working against the state, the US government is contributing to the very real possibility of the country relapsing into violent conflict and possible state collapse in the aftermath of U.S. and international troop withdrawal in 2014. This link is somewhat hinted at in another study published by the Center for International Cooperation at New York University which argues that the implications of funding and fortifying the military strength of an unprecedented number of sub state actors are “wide-ranging and potentially destabilizing” to the political order of Afghanistan (Aikins, 2012, p. 3). Certainly the current employment of tens of thousands of Afghans (mostly armed guards) in local militias is alarming given these armed actors will likely not want to give anything up when the international community is no longer in need of them or when foreign troops pull out of Afghanistan. It is also unlikely that these non-state armed forces, currently unaccountable to the central government, will willingly disarm and demobilize in order to make way for the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) to assert its complete monopoly of force in the country.

This situation is in clear contradiction to the US government’s stated objective to build and strengthen a robust central Afghan army and police force – two critical components of a strong modern state - that must be capable of removing all armed competitors vying for local, regional and even national power. Since 2002, Congress has provided more than $51 billion to
build the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), this amount is well over half of the total budget for Afghanistan’s reconstruction (SIGAR, 2012), targeted to train and equip the Afghanistan National Army (ANA) and the Afghanistan National Police (ANP). One would assume, therefore, that given these significant investments of time and resources, the US government would be seriously concerned about the future of ANSF to be able to deal with the multitude of mini armies across the country. This is especially disconcerting given ANSF is widely known to be poorly trained, ill equipped and suffering from high rates of corruption and attrition (Goodson & Johnson, 2011; Courtney et al., 2005; Livingston et al., 2004). As the Centre for International Cooperation report concludes, given the immense number of these foreign funded militias “even the most robust Afghan National Security Force (ANSF) presence, capable civil service, and sustained international assistance will be unable to prevent a possible return to violence and political crisis” (Aikins, 2012, p. 14). The Afghan government has acknowledged this as a crisis situation and has officially banned all private security corporations. As of August 2010 private firms were to transfer their operations over to a relatively new government entity known as the Afghan Public Protection Force (APPF) that seeks to be the sole provider of pay-for-service security requirements in the country. It is, however, not an initiative that has been taken seriously either by the US government or the warlords and militias that continue to be subcontracted by western governments.

Nonetheless, the government remains adamant about banning these mini armies, accusing them of criminal behavior, widespread corruption, arbitrary killings and violence (Koring, 2012). Although the report to Congress fails to implicate the US government directly to the rise of
violence and human rights abuses associated with foreign contracts, a number of human rights reports indicate that warlords are by far the most serious threat to peace and security and the rise of warlordism has exacerbated insecurity, crime, suicide attacks and murders (see Human Rights Watch, 2002; Reid & Human Rights Watch, 2009; International Rescue Committee, 2012; Azerbaijani-Moghaddam, 2007; Kolhatkar & Ingalls, 2006). The Center for International Cooperation (CIC) study specifically notes that the lucrative contracts offered by the US government and other foreign governments for security purposes have actually perpetuated violence and insecurity in many regions because more instability and violence means more money and arms given for security. These foreign contracts, therefore, have been associated with rising crime, murders and violence, and in the city of Kandahar alone, foreign contracts are responsible for close to half of all targeted killings (Aikins, 2012). Recent reports, indices and statements from leading international and Afghan agencies all note the alarming and deteriorating security conditions across the country in part caused or exacerbated by warlords and their militias. In particular, the rise of gender and sexual-based violence has been alarming. Warlordism has contributed to the continuity of rape and violence against women as well as the rise of forced child marriages, kidnappings, honour killings and daily harassments with no laws 

14 It does mention, however, that some 20 individuals and entities that are subcontracted by the U.S. are in fact actively supporting the insurgency, however, what is deeply problematic is that there is no effort on part of the Department of Defense to find out who is being sub contracted and their background. The report identifies, for example, a few warlords such as Commander Ruhullah, Koka and Abdul Razziq, all of whom have become the strongest and most powerful political and economic forces in their regions, widely known to intentionally undermine the legitimacy of the government, and who are closely entangled in corruption, illegal trade and smuggling that undercuts the ability of the government to generate revenues.

and judiciary to protect women and girls. It has been repeatedly stressed that all women and girls are potential targets in public space by resurgent opposition forces, local warlords and powerful criminal groups and militias through threats, intimidations and physical and sexual violence (Amnesty Human Rights Defenders, 2006; Rawi, 2009; Azerbaijani-Moghaddam, 2007; Reid & Human Rights Watch, 2009).

Afghans identified rising violence as their biggest problem, and in interviews with villagers across Afghanistan, it was evident that the government was seen as weak and illegitimate whereas warlords, drug lords and the heads of illicit trade networks ruled the countryside (Giustozzi, 2012; Nojumi et al., 2009; Kolhatkar & Ingalls, 2006). With no effective national army, police force and with a weak judicial system, it has become virtually impossible to counter the influence of the militias. According to the Human Rights Watch (2002), women, minorities, displaced persons and anyone, even government officials who dare to challenge warlords have no one to turn to when their lives are threatened. Warlords have kept local populations under control and quell any independent political organizing. The victims and witnesses do not dare to step forward given the fact that almost no protection can be guaranteed, especially outside the main cities (Kolhatkar & Ingalls, 2006; Friborg, 2004; Giustozzi, 2012). As Giustozzi (2012) notes, re-establishing a state judiciary in Afghanistan has been impossible because of the influence and widespread presence of these non-state armed groups who have used their political leverage to secure protection from prosecution for their criminal activities. A Human Rights Watch report (2002) best describes what is unfolding in the country by strongly criticizing the United States warlord strategy as unleashing what appears as an unstoppable human rights crisis across the country. The report states,
When the U.S. confirmed its commitment to the future of Afghanistan, it spoke about the primacy of democratization and human rights. Yet its actions have shown this commitment to be shallow. After the overthrow of the Taliban, it employed a “warlord strategy” in order to relieve it of its security and human rights responsibilities. (Human Rights Watch, 2002, par. 7)
Part 3: What is the Purpose of a Mimic State?

Thus far I have sought to unmask western ambivalence in Afghanistan by revealing how international interventions build and strengthen the Afghan state but simultaneously contribute to its decline and likely collapse. I argue that this mixed bag of interventions are emblematic of the continuity of colonial mimicry strategies that only enable a partial liberal democratic state to emerge, despite the billions of dollars that continue to be invested in statebuilding. Not only is a modern liberal state not likely to be established in Afghanistan anytime in the near future (Johnson & Leslie, 2008), but as Sinno (2008) aptly notes, US policies and funding earmarked to support the Afghan state will most likely “crumble under the weight of its own contradictions” (p. 275). This leads us to then question what the role and purpose of a mimic state is, if only a partial vision of liberal democracy is desired.

I argue that the purpose of political mimicry is to enable the west to ‘see’ and ‘celebrate’ a glimpse of itself reflected back from within its most distant Other. Nothing more than a partial vision of liberal political modernity is necessary so that the west can declare an ideological victory over alternative and competing worldviews, which in this case is the Islamic extremism of Al-Qaeda and the Taliban, but also includes all anti-western and anti-modern elements from within Afghan society and beyond. In the imitation and adaptation of western liberal discourse and politics, even if superficially, the mimic state becomes the best conduit to demonstrate and declare the triumph of the west by the radical transformation of a religiously conservative and largely illiberal political culture into a modern democratic state in just a few years after the US defeat. The former President George Bush clearly stated that the war against the Taliban government was very much an ideological struggle between liberal and non-liberal values, Bush
remarked, “The war we fight today is more than a military conflict; it is the decisive ideological struggle of the 21st century” (The White House, 2006, para. 16). Therefore, an ideological victory was imperative to declare because the war on terror constructed Islamic extremism as a grave threat to all free and open societies, and as discussed in previous chapters, the incorporation of marginalized and failed states into the sphere of neoliberal capitalist democracies is not an option (Bartholomew, 2006; Thobani, 2007).

In an intriguing article on the instrumental use of language by policymakers in the Bush administration, Hancock (2011) notes that the Bush administration intentionally constructed a hegemonic narrative of promoting human rights and democracy abroad as a strategy to provide ‘cues for mood responses’ for the American public, rather than convey the details, complexities and even the contradictions of its mixed bag of foreign policy goals. This dominant narrative subscribes to the national ethos of American exceptionalism, described by Hancock (2011), as a persistent myth that the U.S. alone is the only polity to deliver worthy ideals and political values to the underprivileged world. Thus the spread of democracy and freedoms in the world can only be accomplished by the United States, which in the words of former President George Bush, remains “the single surviving model of human progress” (New York Times, 2002, para. 11). As both Hancock (2011) and Wolfe (2008) note, the framing of this hegemonic narrative is all that is necessary to justify the continuity of military and humanitarian aid to countries like Afghanistan and Iraq. As long as Americans believe that democracy and liberty are settling into these illiberal and oppressive societies, then any contradictory U.S foreign policies tend to remain largely unquestioned and unchallenged by the American public (Wolfe, 2008). In short, the U.S. government can remain content with its perfunctory involvement so long as Afghanistan continues to mimic some form of western liberal democratic practice. Instead of real substantive
democratic changes, the mimic state merely possesses the political ‘dressings’ of a western
liberal democratic nation (such as elections, parliament, a constitution, judiciary and the signing
of key international documents, etc), echoing President Obama’s intention of not making
Afghanistan a ‘perfect’ place (Landler & Cooper, 2011).

3.1 Women’s Rights Agenda

One of the most visible markers of liberal victory is the status of Afghan women. The
dominant narrative contends that the U.S singularly rescued and liberated Afghan women from
the harsh dictates of Islamic rule enforced by the Taliban (Russo, 2006; Stabile & Kumar, 2005;
Ferguson & Marso, 2007; Chishti & Farhoumand-Simms, 2011). This western-liberal liberation
positions the US and international institutions as the sole guarantors and overseers of gender
equality, hinting to the irreconcilability of women’s rights with any other framework that is not
western, secular, or liberal (Russo, 2006; Chishti & Farhoumand-Simms, 2011; Zine, 2006). As
Zine (2006) has argued, Muslim societies are constructed as anti-liberal, anti-democratic and
staunchly traditionalist, and the project to rescue them from their barbaric cultures echoes the
ideological rhetoric of the Crusades. The underlying objective is for the Muslim world to be
aligned to western principles of freedom and liberty and the absence of these freedoms is a
constructed threat to the national security of all democratic societies (Biswas, 2006; Thobani,
2007). Thus, taming the excesses of the Islamic world by universal values of liberty, freedom
and democracy are critical to counter the surge of oppression, violence and irrationality of
Muslim cultures that reside outside of modernity (Pasha, 2007). For Eisenstein (2007), it is not
surprising that women are used as decoys of imperialist fantasy and that the agenda of women’s
rights and human rights has mystified and rationalized the misogynist and racist undertones of
U.S. global liberal and capitalist expansion.
As I have argued elsewhere, the US and the international community have relied heavily on ideologically driven gender reforms which meant focusing on efforts that most prove Western liberal victory over the Taliban, rather than actually improving the lives of Afghan women (Chishti, 2010). Gender reforms were deliberately used as a counter-insurgency strategy to undo as well as challenge Islamic extremism and the Taliban’s hold in society. In her detailed study on aid and gender in post-conflict Afghanistan, Abirafeh (2009) argues that at the level of rhetoric, Afghanistan can be seen as one of the largest gender focused interventions and that Afghan women have become the barometer to measure the success or failure of the liberal transformation. In the first few years after the US-led invasion, women’s re-entry into the public realm was celebrated, especially their return to parliament, schools and jobs. This meant that Afghan women were visibly benefitting from their new found freedoms and opportunities, and thus became the symbol of defeat against an antiquated and extremist Islamist worldview (Chishti, 2010). Interestingly, Abirafeh (2009) reveals that the continuity of funding for women’s programs in the country now rests on this very same assumption, that is, an understanding that the task of liberating Afghan women is incomplete and therefore more funds are needed to continue the struggle. In fact the following quote from the head of an aid organization interviewed in Abirafeh’s (2009) study speaks volumes to how entrenched this worldview is:

The world’s image of Afghan women was that they were horribly oppressed and abused—the worst image of women anywhere in the world. This has continually fuelled programs attempting to help Afghan women. That bourka is the ultimate symbol of the backwardness of Afghanistan. Westerners gasp at its sight. There is nothing more reproachable in terms of the absence of women’s rights. Even though the quantity of coverage [of Afghan women] has obviously reduced, the quality hasn’t. It’s still catchy to talk about how oppressed and wretched they are. (Abirafeh, 2009, p. 38)
It became clear very early on that the international community’s commitment to women’s rights was more “on paper” rather than substantively making a difference in the lives of Afghan women (Rostami-Povey, 2007; Ferguson & Marso, 2007; Azarbaijani-Moghaddam, 2007; Abirafeh, 2009; Rawi, 2009; Reid & Human Rights Watch, 2009). Much of the initial groundwork to advance gender equality was welcomed by Afghan women, including the Afghan Constitution which promotes the advancement of women and gender equality; Afghanistan’s ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW); Security Council Resolution 1325 and Afghanistan’s National Development Framework (NDF) and National Development Strategy (ANDS) which stresses gender-sensitive programming. However, translating these commitments into meaningful improvements for women over the years has simply not happened. Rather, research engaging the perspectives of Afghan women on the topic of aid interventions has revealed that they perceive there to be an overemphasis on issues of culture, human rights and political rights, and far less attention to food security, employment, security and health (Rostami-Povey, 2007; Sinno, 2008; Ahmed-Ghosh, 2006). As one woman interviewed in Jalalabad noted, “they keep talking about women’s rights and democracy but people are hungry and sick” (Rostami-Povey, 2007, p. 51). Afghan women have felt that their plight was manipulated and appropriated by western powers, mainly because of the meager efforts towards anti-poverty initiatives, women’s health programs, human rights enforcement, local socio-economic development and other such initiatives that would reflect a more responsive commitment to women’s needs and rights (Rostami-Povey, 2007; Abirafeh, 2009).

Feminist researchers have revealed the general distrust among Afghan women towards the aid community, accusing them of imposing an alien culture that shows very little respect to
Afghan culture and is far removed from the lived realities of women (Abirafeh, 2009; Ahmed Ghosh, 2006; Rostami-Povey, 2007; and Alvi-Aziz, 2008). By most accounts, the current women’s rights agenda echoes the westernization and modernization era of the 1920s, 1960s and 1970s when Afghan male elites were predominately implementing gender reforms based on western models on behalf of women. These efforts were largely unpopular among Afghan women because they were not only perceived to be foreign, but that they exacerbated the divide between urban and rural women and also the gap between formal political rights and the actual circumstances of women (Rostami-Povey 2007; Abirafeh 2009). The key difference in the current context appears to be that the women’s rights agenda today is explicitly entangled in an ideological war, and the prevailing Orientalist tropes about the backwardness of Islam and Muslim women are the unchallenged axioms guiding aid intervention (Chishti & Farhoumand-Simms, 2011; Abirafeh 2009). As a result, initiatives by Afghan women that are non-secular, non-western, but articulating a pro-Islamic rights-based approach are simply bypassed by international donors in fear of affirming that which is most feared and despised (Abirafeh, 2009; Chishti & Farhoumand-Simms, 2011). As Abirafeh (2009) reveals in her study, contrary to the assumptions of the aid community, the majority of Afghan women interviewed did not identify sex as their most salient identity, but Islam. Hence, sideling religious identity, or even the perception of it among Afghan women, undermines the impact of aid interventions. Although the Afghan women’s movement has historically been both secular and faith-based, because the gender agenda rests exclusively on western ideological stilts, the international community has for the most part amputated the hard work of many religiously oriented women’s groups whose struggle for women’s rights, especially under the Taliban regime, has been both effective and well received by women precisely because they were faith-centered (Chishti & Farhoumand-
Simms, 2011). The women’s rights agenda is, as Abirafeh (2009, p. 52) contends, under an “ideological occupation” and, therefore, the quest for rights and equality has become an “aid-induced myth”, that has largely failed.

### 3.2 Carving a Liberal Democratic Island in the Muslim World

In addition to celebrating the perceived gains for Afghan women, the U.S and much of the western world also celebrated the country’s return to democracy. The national elections were celebrated, especially the 2004 presidential elections when an impressive turnout of eligible voters elected Hamid Karzai as the country’s first democratically elected President (Rubin, 2006). Although Afghanistan’s last parliamentary elections were held in 1969 under King Zahir Shah, before he was ousted from power by a military coup in 1973, the self-congratulatory sentiments of western powers left an impression that the west delivered the very first taste of democracy to the country, and that Afghans were grateful for it (U.S. Department of State, 2004). The underlying impressions circulating across the western world was that the country was awakening a dormant democratic spirit that for far too long was suppressed by the tyranny, extremism and backwardness that plagued the Muslim world generally. In the official report of the U.S. government’s Bipartisan Observer Team, for example, the elections were said to have signified “a new democratic politics” (U.S. Department of State, 2004, p. 1), this of course disavows Afghanistan’s complex history and previous experiments with democracy (Smith, 2011). Nonetheless, the authors of the report go on to suggest that there is a window of opportunity to consolidate a strong spirit of liberal democracy in Afghanistan, considered the heart of the Muslim world, which would thereby create a ‘gravitational pull’ on neighboring countries like Pakistan, Iran and Iraq to model their political structures and construct a new national political identity as Afghanistan has done.
There is no doubt that any fledgling democracy has bumps and obstacles, however, as
described previously, the kind of democracy that has unfolded in Afghanistan is barely
‘performing’ democratic practices, much less honing democratic norms and practices through
building and strengthening accountable, just and transparent democratic institutions and
processes. As Barker (2008) rightly claims, the US has intentionally supported a ‘low-intensity
democracy’ in Afghanistan, and this appears to be sufficient enough to claim the successful
liberal makeover of Afghanistan’s illiberal and staunchly Islamic polity. What is detectable in the
writings of many western academics and politicians is that post-Taliban Afghanistan presented
an opportunity for the west to cultivate western liberal democracy within one of the world’s most
peripheral, traditional and tightly religious states in the Muslim world. The opportunity for the
west to finally ‘see’ itself in Afghanistan was not to be taken lightly, given the much discussed
notion of ‘Muslim exceptionalism’, which is the widespread acknowledgment of the
underrepresentation of Muslim states among the world’s electoral democracies (Lakoff, 2004;
Goldsmith, 2007). This is the dominant narrative in the western academy, media and political
circles premised on the fundamental incompatibility between Islam and democracy, promulgated
by some influential academics such as Francis Fukuyama, Robert Kaplan, Samuel Huntington,
and Bernard Lewis16. These writers have argued that the Muslim faith and civilization is resistant
to and in many ways incompatible with the goals of modernity, freedom, secularism and
democracy. According to Bernard Lewis (2002), for example, the culture of tyranny, extremism
and backwardness has plagued the Muslim world, and unlike other parts of the world, Muslim
lands have failed to make serious modern advances. The entire Muslim world is, as Lewis (2002)

16 There are a number of published writings that purport this thesis, such as Robert D. Kaplan’s The Coming
Anarchy: Shattering the Dreams of the Post Cold War; Samuel Huntington’s The Clash of Civilizations and the
Remaking of World Order; Francis Fukuyama’s The End of History and the Last Man; and Bernard Lewis’ “Roots
of Muslim Rage”.

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crudely, writes “limping in the rear” (p. 43). He argues that although many Muslim countries have experimented with democracy, with the exception of Turkey, the long quest for freedom has only left a “string of shabby tyrannies” across the Muslim world (p. 43).

Muslim exceptionalism can be understood as the belief that Muslim cultures have an intrinsic aversion to democracy and lack liberal democratic mores and values in comparison to other cultures (Huntington, 1993; Lewis, 2003; Goldsmith, 2007; Lakoff, 2004). These ideas were widely popularized by Samuel Huntington in his Clash of Civilizations thesis, and as Goldsmith (2007) notes, have encroached onto official U.S. foreign policy positions and in the analysis of democracy by influential international organizations such as the World Bank and the United Nations. This belief is substantiated by the empirical evidence that proves the comparative absence of democracy in the Muslim world vis-à-vis the rest of the world. According to the 2011 Freedom House survey, for example, out of the world’s 194 countries 87 countries that are labeled ‘free’, that is, countries with a broad scope of political freedom, civil liberties, civic life and independent media, are almost exclusively in the western world. Those countries labeled as ‘partly free’ are mainly in Latin America and parts of Africa and include some Muslim countries such as Bangladesh, Turkey and Morocco. However, almost all Muslim majority countries, excluding a handful like Indonesia, are among those states labeled as ‘not free’. Although it is not in the scope of this study to explore the relationship between Islam and liberal democracy (see Hashemi, 2009; Diamond et al., 2003) what is important to point out is that this dominant narrative correlates Muslim societies with the absence of democratic values, institutions, and practices and the most common understanding remains that Muslim societies are outside the fold of modernity, and are easily influenced by fanaticism, are staunchly anti-secular and closed to constructing a free and democratic, open society (Pasha, 2007; Lewis, 2002).
Therefore, in transforming Afghanistan, even if superficially, into a liberal democratic state, the country can at the very least be formally aligned to the dominant worldview shared by the United States, Europe and other “like-minded” non-western states (such as Japan and South Korea) that submit (each in varying degrees) to the liberal world order of rights, freedoms, market economies (Sørensen, 2011). According to a RAND report, these liberal reforms cannot help but be beneficial in some way to Afghanistan, even if they are able to in some small way mitigate the failings of the Muslim world generally that remains “out of step with contemporary global culture” (Benard, 2003, p. ix). For Mustapha Kamal Pasha (2006), the aim of western liberalism in the Muslim world is precisely to ensure the Muslim world does not fall out of step of a homogenized (global) cultural space because the resistance and resilience of Islamic societies against westernization challenges the foundations of western hegemony by exposing the very idea of a possible alternative design to organize the social world. With the onset of globalization, a more intensified transnational Islam is a sure challenge to US hegemony that asserts the inevitability of western liberal democracy for all countries to pursue (Fukuyama, 1992; Ignatieff, 2003). Promoting liberal values, even aggressively, is a point made crystal clear by the former President Bush in his compelling and provocative speech at the National Endowment for Democracy:

The advance of freedom is the calling of our time; it is the calling of our country… We believe that liberty is the design of nature; we believe that liberty is the direction of history. We believe that human fulfillment and excellence come in the responsible exercise of liberty. And we believe that freedom -- the freedom we prize -- is not for us alone, it is the right and the capacity of all mankind…Freedom is finding allies in every country; freedom finds allies in every culture. And as we meet the terror and violence of the world, we can be certain the author of freedom is not indifferent to the fate of freedom. (National Endowment for Democracy, 2003, par. 41)

The project to free the world and declare liberal ideological triumph against competing worldviews and ideologies is a very familiar strategy, especially in post-conflict contexts. As
discussed in Chapter One, the United States declared defeat over the Soviet Union at the end of the Cold War, hence the first wave of liberal, capitalist nation-building was implemented through the Marshall Plan (1948-1952), with the goal to “permit the emergence of political and social conditions in which free institutions can exist” (Mills, 2008, p. 22). Much like how the existing threat to peace and security is coached in the language of Islamic extremism today, the necessity of the Marshall Plan was framed around the need to contain the threat of Soviet expansion and was advocated, at least partially, on the grounds of Americans needing to ‘save’ western civilization. Similarly in the aftermath of 911, the invasion of Afghanistan was also positioned as a war between good and evil with the US having to once again shoulder the burden of saving western civilization, this time from Islamic extremism (Gregory, 2004). The ideological pillars of statebuilding in Afghanistan echo the efforts in Japan after World War 2, for example, where the objective was to transplant American democracy onto a foreign and strange society as a means to bring civilization and enlightenment to Japan. Or, as John Dower has argued, the aim was to convert the Asia/pacific region into an “American lake” against communism (as cited in Koikari, 2002, p. 26). The Marshall plan was the first moment in U.S history wherein the Monroe doctrine to support freedom and democracy was extended beyond North America and much like modern statebuilding today, it was premised on consolidating American hegemonic power and solidifying the confidence and triumph of American ideological victory (Mee, 1984).

Conclusion: Slippages between Mimicry and Mockery

The overall aim of this chapter was to map out the political contours of the mimic state, characterized by ambivalent international interventions in Afghanistan that have given way to a
partial and incomplete liberal democratic state. This partial glimpse of liberal political modernity is an outcome of neocolonial strategies that at once support central governance while subverting the very foundations of a strong state from emerging. My analysis borrows from Homi Bhabha’s (2004) description of colonial mimicry strategies in India and his description of the modalities of colonial ambivalence that simultaneously desired Indians to be Anglicized in matters of taste, dress, values and language, but that they could never be permitted to become fully English. This meant colonial powers sought to only partially reform the Native into their own self image because a fully reformed Native was perceived as a threat to colonial rule. In a similar vein, I have argued that the mimic state is subject to ‘civilizing’ reforms, but only in so far as a liberal ideological defeat can be declared over alternative or competing worldviews, in this case Islamic extremism, but as evidenced in this chapter, international policies and practices circumvent any real possibility for a viable, liberal-democratic state to emerge in Afghanistan. As such, this study maintains that a strong democratic state is not desired because it weakens, if not absolves, western political domination over Afghanistan’s domestic governance. As Ashis Nandy (1983) reminds us, what is absolutely essential to the colonial worldview is for the civilizing mission to never end. Thus the goal to reform, enlighten and discipline Others can never be fully accomplished because it would mean the end of colonial power and authority over the non-western world. For Nandy (1983), the absence of a civilizing project would actually paralyze the colonizer. Transplanting this dynamic onto a national scale, I argue that if a strong, democratic and functional Afghan state were to emerge, it would most definitely loosen the grip of international actors who have enjoyed unprecedented access and decision-making authority in the country. Therefore, at the heart of nation building in Afghanistan lies the west’s desire for only a partial transformation of the Other into Oneself which warrants ongoing reforms, grants
western powers proximity and resemblance, whilst constructing a non-threatening form of colonial subjectivity.

From the discussion thus far, one may infer that political mimicry is an exercise of absolute western power over Afghans. The mimic state certainly appears compliant and even passive to the dictates of foreign powers. According to Bhabha, however, even those who are subjected to the political and cultural structures of colonial domination have varying experiences of subjugation, empowerment, autonomy, disempowerment and exploitation (Jefferess, 2008). For Bhabha (2004), the relationship between the colonizer and colonized is never a simple or straightforward tale of domination and subjugation. Even the slightest alterations and smallest differences against colonizers are often the most significant elements of subversion and transformation (Jefferess, 2008). In his chapter on Sly Civility, Bhabha (2004) writes about these forms of subaltern resistance which is often identified in the literature as ‘passive resistance’. The strategies range from secretly “undoing” foreign-led projects to individual and collective strategies of silence, back talking, cheeky sarcasm, and even gossip. In the context of post-conflict interventions in Afghanistan there is very little research that documents Afghan resistance to and transformation of foreign aid programming. As Abirafeh (2009) notes, many Afghan men and women acknowledge concepts like gender and human rights in public because they realize they need to do so in order to secure funding, but they often mock these presumed universals in private. Although it is not in the scope of this research study to detect and investigate the forms of resistance on part of Afghan, I suspect much of Afghan dissent remains ‘invisible’ and must continue to be ‘under the radar’ for very good reasons. For Bhabha, resistance need not necessarily be overt or confrontational, but may operate through subverting the dominant agenda by interpreting and reacting in ways not “originally” intended.
As Kothari and Cooke (2001) argue, communities have always engaged in acts of passive resistance to survive development intrusions, whether that is through their silence, withholding information, concealing inequities or “playing along” with foreign aid actors. As Kothari (2001) remarks, development practitioners generally fail to detect these strategies because they generally do not acknowledge the capacity of individuals and communities to “resist inclusion, resist projections about their lives, retain information, knowledge and values, and act out a performance and in doing so present themselves in a variety of ways” (p. 151). It is highly probable that Afghans also engage in silence and polite nods of approval in boardroom meetings dominated by foreign consultants and donor representatives. Afghans engaging in these hidden forms of resistance may very well subvert interventions in ways that, as Nustad (2001) observes, can undermine the ideological basis on which they are constructed. As Nandy (1983) contends, colonized subjects who do not act or behave according to the dictates of those in power engage in their own “diffused way…an alternative language of discourse” (p. xvii), which, in effect, is the practice of anti-colonialism. Much more research is necessary to understand the varying forms of local and institutional forms of resistance, be they counter discourses or tactful alterations of dominant development models that point to the agency of communities and even organizations to pursue their own contending and diverse objectives. Lorenzo Bordonaro’s (2009) study of how youth in Guinea-Bissau appropriate development discourse is a good example of the strategies employed by development ‘beneficiaries’ to use normative development as a strategy to launch their own agenda by legitimizing, contesting and subverting power relations. Clearly, official development programs that are intended to be directed towards one thing, can be surreptitiously appropriated to serve other interests and re-directed towards other goals by Afghan communities, the government and even aid agencies. These subversive
acts tend to remain undocumented, but they do, nevertheless, transform and re-configure international interventions in ways we do not fully understand because they are never written down and thus never make their way back to be part of western institutional knowledge. Suffice to say, one can only imagine the range of social and political interactions and strategies that inform aid programs marked as ‘failures’ and even those deemed as ‘successful’ initiatives.

Furthermore, I am convinced that in many cases the Afghan government engages in its own acts of resistance and defiance to the international community by merely ‘performing’ liberal politics as a strategy to gain international support and secure long-term financial and military assistance. It ‘poses’ as a modern liberal state to ensure that foreign governments remain financially committed to the country, particularly against the tide of insurgent threats and attacks aimed at destroying the foundations and legitimacy of this fledgling new state. Although some third world states have at times outrightly disavowed the terms and conditions of international donors, the majority must maneuver through the international state system – economically and politically – which requires some strategy of mimesis and mimicry. In Hoehne’s (2009) study of Somaliland’s succession from Somalia, for example, he identifies the savviness of local actors in Northern Somalia who upon declaring the independence of Somaliland from Somalia, established in a ‘mimetic fashion’ the ‘prototypical state structures” such as a cabinet, parliament and judiciary, for the strategic purposes of gaining international recognition and acceptance as well as to achieve some form of internal credibility and stability. Similarly, Afghanistan has also undergone major structural transformations as described earlier in this chapter (elections, reforms to the judiciary, parliament etc) and has produced all the necessary documents that echo its commitment to liberal, market-centered democracy which concomitantly has meant receiving some form of donor approval.
However, further research is needed to unmask the ways in which Afghans and the Afghan government may engage in mimicry to maneuver their own interests, but also to perhaps defy, transform and resist international interventions. In this latter sense, Gardner (2006) reminds us that not only can mimicry be a strategy by which the colonized can engage in a strategy of survival by mimicking the rulers to maneuver their own interests, but that mimicry also lends to a strategy of subversive agency of in authenticity by the mockery and parody of the rulers. The subversive element of mimicry exists in the very act of mimicking colonial authority, whereby the colonized can, as Kapoor (2008) suggests, disarticulate the voice of authority by slipping into a mocking and menacing presence (Ashcroft et al., 1998; Bhabha, 2004; and Kapoor 2008). Leela Ghandi (1998) writes that mimicry designates first the ethical gap between the normative vision of post-enlightenment civility and its distorted colonial (mis)imitation, in so much as colonial subject only appear to be observing the political imperatives of colonial discourse. What haunts the colonizer therefore, as Ferguson (2002) notes, is that which appears like respectful imitation but is actually parody. Bhabha insists that this gap between mimicking and mocking colonial power is where the civilizing mission is threatened by the “displacing gaze of its disciplinary double”, to which he poignantly asks, “What is the nature of the hidden threat of the partial gaze?” (p. 127).

Certainly one can detect some semblance of the mockery of liberalism in Afghanistan by the Afghan government’s ability to, on the one hand, appease the international community by officially supporting, for example, women’s equality, yet simultaneously engaging in practices that are anti-liberal and supportive of traditional and conservative readings of women’s roles. Despite the country’s ratification (without reservations) of the Convention to Eliminate All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), its adoption of a constitution that secures
women’s equality and the passing of the 2009 Law on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, the Afghan government has made a mockery of women’s rights by continuing to imprison hundreds of women and girls on ‘moral crimes’, and passing laws that permit husbands to deny wives food and sustenance if they refuse to obey their husbands and require women to receive permission from their husbands to work (Boone, 2009). Furthermore, President Karzai in March 2012 Karzai publicly supported a statement made by Afghanistan’s Ulema Shura, a government-sponsored council of religious leaders, that explicitly stated some form of violence against women was acceptable, that women are secondary to men and that women should not travel alone nor be in public settings with men, including schools and workplaces (Barr & Human Rights Watch, 2012). Nonetheless, Afghanistan parades as a liberal-democratic state, and engages in a kind of mimicry that Homi Bhabha best describes is akin to wearing a mask – a partial representation (much like an actor or a partial imitator) that is in of itself disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse. As Bhabha (2004) describes, by recapitulating the desires, agenda and the authority of the colonizer, and doing so incompletely, the subversive desire of the colonized “articulates those disturbances of cultural, racial and historical difference that menace the narcissistic demand of colonial authority” (p. 126).

What is inevitable, however, is that in the re-articulation and repetition of a partial presence, Afghanistan constructs what Gayatri Spivak refers to as a catachrestic space, which is an exercise of changing the meaning of ideas, principles and terms used by those who dominate (Morton, 2003). The mockery of liberalism is evident in Afghanistan’s treatment of women’s rights, but perhaps the very practice of imitating western concepts and forms incompletely, is also leading to new, syncretic ideas through a process of shifting, reversing and displacing concepts, and in doing so, challenging the binary categories of colonized/colonizer, aid
recipient/donor and oppressed/oppressor. As McLennan (2003) argues, Homi Bhabha’s theory of mimicry is hardly simple, and in no way suggests that the ruler succeeds in its civilizing mission or that the ruled engage in exclusive acts of resistance. Instead, there is a “constant intellectual, political and psychic negotiation happening between the colonizing and colonized subject positions, so that variable hybrid moods, conditions and products emerge over time” (McLennan, 2003, p. 73).
CHAPTER FOUR

State Fragility and the New Terra Nullius: Confronting the Politically ‘Vacant’ State of Afghanistan

Introduction

In attempts to understand the kinds of aid relationships fostered in post-conflict contexts, it is important to first critically review the underlying assumptions and implications associated with labeling states, such as Afghanistan, as ‘fragile’ or ‘failed’. Since the late 1980s, fragile/failed states have been associated with causing widespread social, economic and political conflict and disruptions, however, it is only since the events of September 11th that they have received serious attention by western governments and international organizations. In the aftermath of the September 11th attacks, fragile states shifted from the periphery of global policymaking to the forefront, and are now constructed as dangerous threats to international peace and security (Bilgin & Morton, 2004; Dorff, 2005; Bulley, 2008; Adebajo & Sriram 2001; Cooper, 2005; Reno, 2000; Rice, 2005). Afghanistan was specifically implicated in the dominant 9-11 narrative as a weak state that was easily ‘captured’ by a global terrorist network and was used as the launching ground for one of the most deadliest attacks against the United States. Western governments remain convinced that when governance systems break down as they did in Afghanistan, then even the weakest, the furthest and the poorest of the world’s states, can potentially become lethal threats to international peace, thus warranting extensive foreign-facilitated reforms (Kaplan, 2008).
In this chapter, I seek to identify and unmask some of the underlying biases, assumptions and ideas informing the discursive construction of state ‘failure’ and ‘fragility’. These ‘fragile/failed’ states, within which over 900 million people in the world reside (Chauvet & Collier, 2008), are discursively constructed as chronically deficient states in their political and economic capacities and structures, hence necessitating both short and long term external mediation, restructuring, monitoring and in some cases, such as in Afghanistan and Iraq, even military occupation. By situating a post-colonial analysis, my aim in this chapter is to reveal the continuity of the colonial ‘worldview’ of terra nullius in relation to the modern discourse of state fragility and failure, particularly as it pertains to Afghanistan. This colonial concept was historically used to justify colonial penetration into lands (mainly Africa and Australia) that were (mis)labeled as ‘empty’ or ‘vacant’ waste lands. These lands were deemed ‘empty’ because they were considered to have no legitimate or recognizable forms of political sovereignty and were understood to be economically backward. In constructing these inhabited lands as ‘vacant’, the British felt that they could then legitimately seize control over these lands as a means to put them to ‘proper’ and ‘productive’ use (Ivison, 2003). I argue that we can detect a new terra nullius in the aftermath of 911, one that justifies extensive and permanent forms of international interventions based on declaring Afghanistan a failed state, having dysfunctional and deficient (modern) political processes and structures, as well as having an ‘idle’ and highly inefficient economy. By failing to be a strong, central modern liberal state, the new terra nullius renders Afghanistan as politically vacant, hence endangering international peace and security if it is not properly managed and reformed. I insist that the entire discursive framing of Afghanistan’s failure echoes the classical notion of res nullius, rooted in Roman Law, wherein all ‘empty things’, including lands considered as idle, unproductive and unoccupied (terra nullius) are
considered ‘common’ property that are available to colonizing nations to permanently inhabit and rule (Mbembe, 2001).
Part 1: Terra Nullius and the Idea of ‘Empty’ Lands

1.1 The Doctrine of Terra Nullius

In 1788, The British government annexed Australia, or New South Wales, as a ‘colony of settlement’ recognizing the absence of any substantial society residing in the territory. Despite having encountered the indigenous community, James Cook, the Captain of the first British expedition, proclaimed the region as terra nullius, or ‘land of no people’. The indigenous people were rendered inconsequential, a people that had no society, sovereignty or private property, and thus, the Crown assumed full ownership of the entire continent (Ritter, 1996). In describing the first contact between the British and the Aboriginal community, Partington (2007) describes the ‘invisibility’ of indigenous habitation suggesting that

… the British could not detect from their ships or after they landed, any clear links between people and fields, buildings, livestock or goods that could identify stable Aboriginal groups or political entities with whom treaties might be made or proprietorship defined. (pp. 97-98)

Unlike other British colonies (such as India or North America), no official transactions or negotiations were made for the purchase or lease of the land mainly because the Aboriginal communities living on the continent were not recognized as owners of the land (Buchan & Heath, 2006). Centuries later, however, in a historic decision by the High Court of Australia in November 1992 (*Mabo and Others v State of Queensland*), the doctrine of terra nullius that was used to legitimize the colonization of the Australian Aborigine nation on the basis that the continent was ‘nobody’s land’ was officially rejected. As an outcome of the High Court’s decision, the doctrine of terra nullius came to the forefront of political and scholarly discussions about the origins, implications and use of the term.
In his extensive historical review of the term, Lesaffer (2005) traces the doctrine of *terra nullius* to the concept of *occupatio* in classical Roman law (50 B.C.–250 A.D.), which meant that everything which was either abandoned or belonged to nobody could be acquired through occupation. Most scholars agree that the doctrine only gained currency and widespread acceptance during the period of European colonial conquests beginning in the 16th century, and especially by the nineteenth century when it was more formally adopted into international law (Borch, 2001; Lesaffer, 2005; Partington, 2007). In a frequently cited legal opinion written in the late 1700s by the influential judge Sir William Blackstone in his seminal and influential work on common law titled “Commentaries on the Laws of England”, the specific details about which lands could be legitimately classified as “empty”, and thereby claimed by the Crown, are explored. Blackstone wrote that the Crown could legitimately claim lands that were either completely uninhabited or even sparsely populated by ‘uncivilized’ inhabitants that resided in a primitive state of society (Buchan & Heath, 2006). The right to declare *terra nullius* in reference to a primitive state of society is as Borch (2001) reveals, in reference to a people regarded to have developed some language and attachments to family and community – but no further. It is in this sense that Buchan and Heath (2006) rightly argue that the concept of *terra nullius* is fundamentally rooted in a colonial worldview that accepts a hierarchy of social progress, that is, in distinguishing savagery and barbarism from western civilization. They argue that lands inhabited by ‘savages’ could be taken through the non-recognition of alternative indigenous social and political forms, and this was sufficient reason to declare the continent to be *terra nullius*. The centrality of this savage versus civilized colonial trope that was used to justify the occupation of Australia is most evident in the words of Lord Stanley, Conservative Prime Minister, who in 1844 wrote:
There are many gradations of ‘uncivilized inhabitants’, and practically, according to their state of civilization, must be the extent of rights which they can be allowed to claim, whenever the territory on which they reside is occupied by civilized communities….The aborigines of New Holland generally are broken into feeble and perfectly savage migratory tribes, roaming over boundless extents of country, subsisting from day to day on the precarious products of the chase, wholly ignorant of or averse to the cultivation of the soil, with no principles of civil government, or recognition of private property. (As cited in Partington, 2007, p. 101)

In Lord Stanley’s words, the criteria used to dismiss the Aboriginal communities as not being sufficiently ‘civilized’, and therefore, enabling the British to claim rights over their land could be demarcated by two key qualifications. The first is the level of political ‘maturity’, which he refers to in his claim that there is no recognizable government or no ‘principles of civil government’, and secondly, the absence of economic ‘maturity’, qualified by his reference to the absence of land cultivation and private property. The Eurocentric bias used to measure the ‘worth’ or even the existence of other communities is evident, and as Buchan & Heath (2006) sharply note, “Indigenous social forms are constructed, not simply as different or incommensurable, but insufficiently developed and therefore inferior to European socials forms” (p. 9). Post-colonial writer Achille Mbembe (2001) reveals this practice of *territorium nullius* on the continent of Africa, arguing that because Europeans viewed Africa as largely ‘uninhabited and masterless land’, this meant that the European settler did not need to accommodate or respect any claims made by the inhabitants because as Grovogui’s (2002) points out, ‘natives’ lacked civil institutions as well as a basic understanding of rights. Africans were not considered to have any real society, nor legal or political attachments to land or territory, and therefore Europeans effectively claimed sovereign rights over Africans (Grovogui, 2002).
1.2 Legitimate versus Illegitimate Political Structures

The classical notion of *terra nullius* centrally disavowed other forms of indigenous political and social organization, and in doing so, claimed the ‘absence’ of legitimate political power and authority (see Ritter, 1996; Partington, 2007). Even into the twentieth century, we find in 1926 M. F. Lindley’s definition of *territorium nullius*, which also applies to *terra nullius*, as the following, “…If a tract of country were inhabited by isolated individuals who were not united for political action, so that there was no sovereignty to exercise there, such a tract would be *territorium nullius*” (as cited in Partington, 2007, p. 97). The early European colonizers engaged in strong moral and political arguments to justify appropriating lands because indigenous people had no written laws, no formal state-civil society relations and the absence of formal and centralized political institutions (Banner, 2005; Wolfe, 2007; Buchan & Heath, 2006). What is critical to point out, is that only a strong, central authority was considered a form of legitimate political rule. This emphasis is no doubt emblematic of the influential political ideas in Hobbes’ work *Leviathan* published in 1651. Hobbes proclaimed the centrality of sovereign power or ‘the commonwealth’ as the highest form of social and political organization that was necessary for advancements in society. Hobbes suggested that the lack of sovereign power meant that individuals existed only in a state of nature, more or less, wandering rather aimlessly as a way of life which Hobbes’ most famously refers to as being “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short” (Hobbes, p. 9).

A Hobbesian Leviathan then is essentially a strong state capable of protecting its own citizens and protecting the state from external aggression (Stepputat et al., 2007). As Wolfe (2007) aptly notes, this perceived absence of ‘legitimate’ political rule thereby enabled the Europeans to exclusively declare that ultimate sovereignty belonged only to Europeans, because
non-western peoples were in a state of perpetual political primitiveness. These sentiments were echoed by the British parliament towards the political society of the Aborigines of New South Wales. As Partington’s (2007) mentions, in 1837 a Select Committee of the House of Commons described them as

…forming probably the least-instructed portion of the human race in all the arts of social life. Such indeed, is the barbarous state of these people and so entirely destitute are they of even the rudest forms of civil policy, that their claims, whether as sovereigns or proprietors of the soil, have been entirely disregarded. (p. 101)

The right to colonize lands because of the lack of recognizable social and political modes of organization and structures drew legitimacy from the early philosophical writings of John Locke and to some extent Immanuel Kant. A fundamental liberal belief is that society must comprise of individuals naturally endowed with the capacity for autonomous, self directing activity, in matters related to their participation in the market, civil society, organization of domestic life and so on. Writing about the Natives of North America, John Locke classified societies that were not politically organized with a state and civil society as primitive, because of the absence of written laws, property rights and having no social contract. In his liberal exclusivist tone, Locke rendered informal kinship based societies, arguably with diverse and alternative forms of social and political organization, as inconsequential, and therefore, in need of civilized reforms (Hindess, 2001). According to Lloyd (2000), although Immanuel Kant repudiates the idea that indigenous people are incapable of owning their land, he too only acknowledges civilized society as those that have adopted European forms of government and law. For John Lock, societies incapable of acting and helping themselves should be cleared out of the way. Hindess (2001) explains that this approach warranted political action whereby land should be confiscated and individuals should be either enslaved or reformed under colonial rule.
Certain population groups in liberal political reason need to be ruled to correct behaviors and attitudes that are inconsistent with civilized norms, and therefore, destructive to the expansion of freedom and liberty. These ideas, circulating at the same time that European powers were vying for colonies across the world, influenced the serious engagement of the doctrine of *terra nullius* by positivist international lawyers of the 19th century. As Lesaffer (2005) notes, these lawyers mainly recognized states only in their western forms as subjects of international law, and held that non-state entities (that is states that did not have the similar state structures as Europeans) could not hold sovereignty, thus were to be subjected to the doctrine of *terra nullius*. 
Part 2: Exploring the *New Terra Nullius*

2.1 State Failure and Afghanistan’s Vacant Governance

It is evident that the classical use of *terra nullius* was at least partly applied to contexts wherein no European styled political forms were detectable, and thus, lands were classified as ‘empty’ with no sovereign authority. Currently, the majority of states, especially post-1945 independent states that emerged out of a colonial past, have adopted many of the political forms and institutions from their European predecessors (Migdal, 1988). Many states in the third world are, as Jackson (1990) clarifies, ‘de jure’ sovereign states that are for the most part only formally recognized as independent nations. However, in many of the world’s formally sovereign states whose domestic political structures in terms of authority, law and security have fallen apart are classified as failed and fragile states. These states, such as Afghanistan, are expected to be reformed and reconstituted into some stable form by the international community (Zartman, 1995). The only viable, recognized and accepted model for states is the liberal, democratic and capitalist model (Thomas, 2000), echoing Fukuyama’s (1995) insistence that there is simply no alternative for states other than democratic capitalism. In my framework of the *new terra nullius* I argue that Afghanistan and other failed/fragile states are rendered ‘empty lands’ for not functioning as strong, liberal democratic states, and are denied full sovereign rights for not developing ‘effective’, ‘legitimate’, nor ‘mature’ liberal political forms.

Since the early 1990s, the academic and policy community have been increasingly concerned about a group of states, which included Afghanistan, Somalia, Cambodia and Sierra Leone, whose governance structures have either completely dissolved or were highly unstable causing conditions of widespread social and political unrest, protracted conflicts, population
displacements, human rights violations and widespread suffering (Ball, 2002; DFID, 2005). The terms “failed” and ‘fragile’ states emerged in scholarly and policy documents to refer to states with varying degrees of internal state corrosion and duress, that ostensibly create and/or exacerbate widespread social, economic and political disruptions, which may (or in some cases, may not) lead to violence and outright war (Adebajo & Sriram, 2001; Cooper, 2005; Reno, 2000; Rice, 2005; Hoffman & Weiss, 2006). Afghanistan’s protracted conflicts are often inextricably linked to its status as a failed state, however not all failed states lead to wars (Chad) nor do all wars emerge from failed states (Kosovo and East Timor). Over the past decade, key scholarly works and practitioner reports have explicitly identified these states as having some common political traits and characteristics that separate them from strong, functional states. Specifically, state fragility has increasingly been associated with poor economic management, weak state institutions, social exclusion, the failure of democratization and the inability of the state to resolve societal grievances (OECD, 2006; IMF, 2008; Ghani et al, 2005; Reno, 2000; Rice, 2005; Rotberg, 2003; Le Billon, 2000). Essentially, poor governance and weak state capacities were the two defining criteria that typically demarcated weak and fragile states from strong states (Rotberg, 2004; Ghani & Lockhart, 2008; IMF, 2008). Over the past decade, a number of lists, indices and reports have emerged to identify, define and track the world’s fragile and failed states. Since 1997, the World Bank’s annual Country Policy and Institutional Assessment

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17 Refer to Hoffman & Weiss (2006), and Maley, Sampford, & Thakur (2003) for an overview of other terms used in the literature such as “disrupted states”, “quasi-states” and “shadow states”, each distinctly highlighting a particular erosion of state capacity. Gros (1996), for example, refers to various terms on a continuum of statehood from anarchic states (Somalia) to phantom states (Zaire) and aborted states like Mozambique.

18 Failed States Index, for example, published yearly since 2005 by Foreign Policy and the Fund for Peace, evaluates “state decay” in terms of economic implosions, human rights violations as well as a list of other government performance indicators. In their 2010 Index, titled “Postcards from Hell”, Somalia, Afghanistan and Yemen are rated among the top ten failed states (see Rotberg, 2002). Other indices include: Norman Paterson School of International Affairs; Indicators for Foreign Policy Fragility Index; Kennedy School Index of African Governance; Economist Intelligence Unit’s political Instability Index. Similarly, the Brookings Institution published its index of...
(CPIA) rating, for example, is one of the most widely referenced listing of fragile states (see IMF, 2008; Chauvet & Collier, 2008; Steets et al., 2008) and is used by the World Bank to help determine aid allocation to recipient states. This annual rating measures state fragility in terms of weak government policies, institutions and poor governance (World Bank, 2006). Some of the worst CPIA performers in the last few years have been Eritrea, Togo, Central African Republic, Sudan and Afghanistan (Steets et al., 2008).

International organizations, institutions and bilateral agencies have strived to formulate a common understanding and approach to the problem of state failure, that is perhaps best described in the *Principles for Good International Engagement in Fragile States and Situations* published in 2007 by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2007). This widely circulated and influential report emerged out of the OECD Development Assistance Committee’s (DAC), Fragile States Group (FSG) established in 2003 to assist western donors reflect on key lessons learnt and it encourages greater and more sustained international engagements to help build effective, legitimate and resilient modern state institutions. The overarching priority identified by the OECD is to strengthen governance structures and the most effective model to be replicated in fragile states is the western, legal-rational Weberian state structure (OECD, 2008a). This is the model that guides the state building objectives of the international community, and generally involves an expectation that a state will practice representative democracy as a basis for the stability and competence of a strong, legally structured, centralized state with strong political, organizational, managerial and military capacities in addition to having an efficient public bureaucracy (Dunn & Miller, 2007). In short, a modern state as envisioned by the social theorist Max Weber (Mann, 2006). This ideal
emerged within the western world in various forms, but as Skocpol (1979), Mann (1986) and Migdal (1988) acknowledge, it refers to a strong and authoritative rulemaking center, alongside robust and efficient public institutions that are backed by the coercive powers of the state. The emphasis is on a ‘rational’ state, one that is governed by the rule of law and operates through an expansive state bureaucracy that extends from across large cities to remote, rural regions. As Weber pointed out, the modern state is based on legal-rational authority and operates through a high performing government bureaucracy, thus achieving the most rational exercise of power over human beings (Seibel, 2010).

Afghanistan, perhaps more so than other states, is considered to be particularly pre-modern, that is to say, it is bereft of any functioning and legitimate forms of modern central governance mainly because there was never a sustained and strong centralized state system in Afghan history (see Chapter Two). The state always had a very limited presence in the countryside with weak public institutions and only brief periods of exerting a monopoly on violence. Afghanistan’s intermittent history of liberal democratic reforms since the late 1940s, especially under King Zahir Shah’s rule (1964-1973), brought forth some democratic institutions and structures, however, the entire state bureaucracy eventually ceased to function because of the years of protracted wars and conflicts that followed (Suhrke, 2008). According to Maass (2002) the country, prior to 2001, did not even fulfill the preconditions for a ‘nascent government’ or hold any potential for maturing into a future government on its own mainly because Afghan state and society relations were dominated by the principles and patterns of paternalism, nepotism, tribalism and ethnic-regional favoritism (Shahrani, 1998; Maass, 2002; Giustozzi, 2007). As Cole (2008) sharply notes, the governance structures in pre-911 Afghanistan actually resembled
Muslim rule of the nineteenth century when clerics, as opposed to elected officials, controlled the cities from Baghdad to Bukhara.

Afghanistan’s very specific political history is, however, rendered irrelevant in the discourse of state failure, as are the specific colonial histories, socio-political conditions and other factors that have prevented modern governance structures from emerging and being sustained in the third world generally. Instead, these states are only expected to ‘perform’ a list of state functions associated with modern statehood. Although this list varies, especially between neo-liberal and neo-Weberian institutionalists (Hameiri, 2009), some of the common criteria used to measure state capacity include: a government’s ability to effectively hold legitimate elections (Bjornlund et al., 2007); raise revenues from society (Stepputat et al., 2007); have stable and viable national public institutions (Goldsmith, 2007; Stepputat et al., 2007); an independent judiciary (Goldsmith, 2007); monopoly of violence (Holsti, 2004); strong policy making institutions; ability to make credible and binding executive decisions; strong fiscal and monetary policies and regulations; safeguarding and protecting human rights and the provision of security; authority and legitimacy; checks and balances on corruption and predatory behavior (OECD, 2008a; Lambach, 2006; Hoffman & Weiss, 2006; Holsti, 2004; Brinkerhoff & Brinkerhoff, 2002). Perhaps the most critical function is the ability of governments to offer public goods, such as offering basic security, public education and adequate healthcare. The markings of a failed state, therefore, begin from this extensive ‘to do’ list, and by every estimation many states in the majority world, including Afghanistan, have either never performed these tasks all at once, or have for decades measured poorly.

In 2001, the World Bank’s Afghanistan approach paper confirmed the absence of even the basic features of a modern state, indicating the tremendous amount of work that will be
needed in order to modernize the eroded public institutions of the Afghan state and restore basic
governance. According to the report years of conflict destroyed the public infrastructure, leaving
a shortage of experienced and skilled civil servants and state institutions are largely non-
functional. The Bank acknowledges that even the most basic government functions do not exist,
such as policy setting, program planning and budgeting (World Bank, 2001). In a follow up
report a few years later, the World Bank continued to stress the urgency of a neo-Weberian
agenda for state building for a country that continues to be “denuded of infrastructure, human
capacity, and financial resources” (World Bank, 2005a, p. xxi). The Afghan government is
essentially expected to perform a range of government functions it has never historically
implemented. According to Cramer and Goodhand (2002), the country never established a
functioning and extensive taxation system to generate internal income, citing for example, that
even in the year 1972 when agriculture and livestock were the two largest sources of national
wealth, the government yielded only 1% in revenue from these economic activities. In the fiscal
year 2009/10 the Afghan government collected 9 percent of the total GDP from taxes, which
although is an improvement, it is still one of the lowest rates among low income countries in the
world (World Bank, 2010a). According to the World Bank (2010), this situation is compounded
by the government’s inability to execute the development budget, having been able to spend only
38 percent of budgeted expenditures. The Bank identifies weak government capacity and the
government’s general inability to both formulate and execute investment projects as a key
capacity gap and both the World Bank (2010) as well as the IMF (2010) concluded in recent
reports that Afghanistan has failed to achieve basic fiscal sustainability

Despite the billions of dollars of aid channeled to the country, Afghanistan is still unable
to exercise a monopoly of violence, provide security and public goods such as health care and
education to citizens, nor the ability to mobilize and redistribute resources or mediate internal conflicts on its own (Cramer & Goodhand, 2002; Montgomery & Rondinelli, 2004). International reports have further confirmed the country’s weak political governance, broken infrastructure and bureaucratic inefficiencies (CSIS, 2005; World Bank, 2004) that have contributed to the country having among the world’s lowest health and socio-economic indicators. In 2010, for example, Afghanistan ranked 155 out of 169 countries in the Human Development Index. The government has been unable to provide basic public goods to citizens consistently and evenly across the country. According to the Brookings Institute, for example, close to half of all Afghans live below the poverty line and only 23% have access to safe drinking water and only 12% have adequate sanitation. Certainly the inability of the state to offer basic public goods undermines the state’s legitimacy in the eyes of the population, thereby continuously demonstrating and proving ‘vacant’ governance. Afghanistan is considered to be a very long way from fully functioning as a modern state and a rational and efficient modern state is nowhere to be ‘seen’.

There are many explanations put forward for Afghanistan’s chronic failure in governance, such as the informal power of traditional institutions and politico-military control held by regional militia commanders, warlords and tribal strongmen (see Debiel et al., 2009; Giustozzi, 2007; Cramer & Goodhand, 2002; Montgomery & Rondinelli, 2004). Much of the established reasons for state failure are also applicable to the Afghan context, such as the lack of ‘absorptive capacities’, that is, the shortage of skilled personnel, nepotism in government and high levels of corruption. President Karzai’s government has been fraught with accusations of inefficiency and corruption and the country has had the second-worst corruption rating among 180 countries (World Bank, 2010). This corruption has been noted in Afghanistan’s political sector as well. As discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3 the 2009 elections were not only fraught with violence but widespread election fraud, including premature closing of polling stations and multiple voting (Amnesty International, 2010). There is widespread acknowledgement that the parliament is fraught with warlord politics and elected officials have failed to earn sufficient political legitimacy among Afghan citizens. Basic security also remains a key challenge, with the rise of criminal gangs and a largely corrupt and inadequately equipped police force unwilling and incapable of handling the high rates of murder, kidnapping robbery and looting that are pervasive across the country.
2.2 Failed States and International Terrorism

In my framework of the *new terra nullius*, I further argue that in the aftermath of the September 11th attacks, fragile and failed states were thrust into a new security discourse, which constructed poor or weak governance in distant lands as key threats to international peace and security. Afghanistan’s history as a weak state is emblematic of this shift, because the Afghan state’s poor governance was construed as the key reason as to why the terrorist organization al-Qaida was able to hijack the country and unleash its global terrorist operations (Fukuyama, 2004). In recent years these “governmentally empty” states, as Rotberg (2002) describes, are the single largest threat to peace and security since the end of the Cold War and this has led to an unequivocal consensus among academics and policymakers that they can neither be left alone nor ignored by the international community (OECD, 2006; Goldsmith, 2007; Cooper, 2005; Elliott, 2003; DFID, 2009; Kaplan, 2008; Hughes & Pupavac, 2005; Stepputat et al., 2007). The phenomena of failed states has, as Hehir (2009) aptly notes, made a significant shift from the periphery to the center of global politics. Western states are now encouraged to intervene and take part in restructuring the domestic governance structures of non-western states because the restoration of weak or defunct states are, as echoed by Robert Rotberg (2004), the most urgent policy concerns for western governments this century.

This sentiment is reverberated across academic, policy and practitioner circles (USAID, 2005; IMF, 2008). According to the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID, 2005), for example, there is “no more urgent matter facing USAID than fragile states, yet no set of problems is more and intractable” (p. 1). The Organization of Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) similarly mandates the international community to prioritize and actively support the transition of fragile states to capitalist political modernity, making a commitment of
at least 10 years to replace, rebuild or substitute public infrastructure in fragile countries that are experiencing weak public sector governance (OECD, 2008a; OECD, 2007). In response, many western governments have allocated more funds to strengthen fragile states, for example, in 2009 the British government revealed that at least 50% of all new bilateral country funding will be targeted to fragile countries (DFID, 2009). Foreign aid to fragile states represents approximately 30% of all Official Development Assistance (ODA) (OECD, 2010a) and in April 2009 the G20 endorsed an expansion of IMF lending to fragile states from USD 250 to 750 billion to be funded through bilateral loans from member states (OECD, 2010a). The international community has prioritized a range of interventions, including filling in service-delivery capacities, spearheading major civil service reforms, sectoral policy reforms and providing extensive technical support and expertise to governments (OECD, 2008b; Brinkerhoff, 2010; Krasner, 2004). Interestingly, there is no mention of infringing on state sovereignty, but in contrast, the OECD frames these interventions as beneficial for long term stability and development at a much lower fiscal cost (OECD, 2006).

It is important to note that fragile states even prior to September 11, 2001 were associated with protracted conflicts, including genocide, civil conflicts and natural resource wars as well as various other adverse effects. However as Hameiri (2009) and GeiP, (2009) note, in the 1990s, failed states were primarily seen as regional problems and/or humanitarian issues, with the

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20 One such example is the World Bank’s launch of the Low-Income Countries Under Stress (LICUS) initiative aimed to improve aid effectiveness in fragile states, described as those states that have weak policies, institutions and governance (see World Bank, 2006). By 2005 the LICUS initiative prioritized peacebuilding and state building – essentially building and strengthening the governance capacity of fragile states.

21 For example, droughts, famines, small arms proliferations and global criminal networks (Cammack et al, 2006). Also in the last decade, a wide range of government, inter-governmental and academic analyses have also linked the ‘fragile state syndrome’ to such global and regional ‘spillover’ effects, such as terrorism, violent conflict, destabilizing refugee flows, environmental degradation, the trafficking of drugs and guns, and the spread of diseases (Krasner, 2004; OECD, 2006; Simons & Tucker, 2007; Kaplan, 2008; Cammack et al., 2006; Rotberg, 2004; François & Sud, 2006).
exception of the interventions in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo in the 1990s, and it was only in the aftermath of the events of 9-11 that failed states emerged as priorities on the foreign policy agenda of western governments. Scholars and practitioners studying the ‘spillover’ effects of failed and fragile states increasingly attributed these often transnational adverse and harmful outcomes to the absence of strong governance structures and central governing authority (see François & Sud, 2006; Simons & Tucker, 2007). François & Sud (2006) and Simons & Tucker (2007) refer to this absence as ungoverned or ungovernable territories, whereas Dorff (2005) suggests that these countries experience what he terms ‘legitimate governance deficit’ or as Krasner (2004) describes ‘sovereignty failures’. Irrespective of the specific terminologies used, the scholarly community has identified defunct governance, or as I suggest ‘vacant’ governance, as a source of regional and international instability and violence. The ‘havoc’ stirred by badly governed states is aptly noted by Kaplan (2008), who suggests that failed/fragile states are now “a menace unlike any other, endangering international security, while ruining the lives of hundreds of millions across the globe” (p. 1). The explicit links between the breakdown of governance systems and widespread instability are most clearly expressed in the following passage by Derick and Jennifer Brinkerhoff (2002):

When governance systems break down or are destroyed, the door is opened to instability, oppression, conflict and unchecked political and economic opportunism…Post 911 September events have focused attention on Afghanistan but it is only one case among many; a partial list of others includes Kosovo, Liberia, Somalia, Sierra Leone, Rwanda and East Timor. In all of these cases, governance and administrative systems are both part of the problem – due to their absence, insufficiency, or capture – and part of the solution – in their centrality to the viability of the state. (p. 51)

It is not surprising, therefore, that in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks, an international agenda to prioritize and reinforce a common fragile states (FS) agenda in the name
of protecting national and international security interests emerged (Hameiri, 2009; Cammack et al., 2006; François & Sud, 2006). The US National Security Strategy (United States, 2002, iv), for example, clearly stated that, “America is now threatened less by conquering states than we are by failing ones.” The dangers posed by weakly governed states were outlined in a 2008 research report submitted to the U.S Congress and primarily included terrorism, international crime, nuclear proliferation and regional instability. The threats posed by failed states did not dissipate at the end of the Bush era, but were re-articulated by the Obama administration. Published in his December 1st 2009 remarks to the nation, President Obama noted that the threats posed by fragile states will endure as a definitive challenge marking U.S involvements during this entire century. Linking state fragility as a key threat to the national security of western governments is now commonplace and anchored in the security policies of many western governments including Canada and the United Kingdom.  

In their review of the post-911 Fragile States agenda of the United States, UK and Germany, authors Cammack et al. (2006) note that state fragility only came to the forefront of US policymaking after September 11th, and the underlying assumption was that better political and economic governance in these troubled states, even regime change if necessary, will improve the security of western states and diminish global terrorism.

However, as Aidan Hehir (2009) centrally argues, this new consensus linking failed states to international terrorism lacks serious inquiry, proof and validity. According to Hehir (2009) in

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22 For example Canada’s National Security Policy, the first-ever comprehensive statement issued on national security, also articulates a commitment to build and support good governance capacity in failed and failing states for reasons of national security (see Government of Canada, 2004). Similarly the UK government has identified new threats posed to westerners by the world’s poorest and most distant fragile states. The UK government’s Department for International Development (DFID), for example, issued a white paper on fragile states in 2009 emphasizing the risks to global peace, emphasizing the need to intervene with pro-poor policies and good governance interventions in the interest of a ‘common security’ platform. That is to say, building just, strong, and effective states around the world is now in the mutual interest of both British citizens and those citizens living within these badly governed fragile states (DFID, 2009).
his study analyzing the quantitative data of failed states, he concludes that the security threat posed by failed states is actually “exaggerated and fundamentally flawed” (p.73). Other critical scholars have concurred with this point (see Chandler, 2006) and it appears that not all failed states are equally constructed as threats to international peace and security. For example, the majority of the top 20 failed states listed in the Failed States Index are never mentioned as threats to global peace and security within US security documents, nor are they identified as existing or even potential sites for counter-terrorist interventions. These failed states include the DRC, Ivory Coast, Zimbabwe, Chad, Haiti, Guinea, Liberia, Burundi, Sierra Leone so on and so forth. In contrast, it is only a handful of failed states, mainly Muslim-majority states, that make the ‘cut’ as threatening states and are specifically targeted by military interventions and aggressive political and economic policies. These states are primarily Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan and Yemen and they exclusively underpin the entire discourse linking failed states to terrorism. In discussing the new terra nullius, therefore, in the post-911 context, Afghanistan alongside a handful of other, mostly Muslim majority states, are reprimanded for not fulfilling the basic functions of modern statehood, thus warranting their active reform into capitalist liberal democracies to now protect the national security interests of western governments (Ottaway, 2003; von Einsiedel, 2005; Carnegie, 2004; Goldsmith, 2007).

2.3 The Problem of Sovereignty

The dominant narrative attributes state failure to domestic incapacities, and furthermore, suggests that these states have eroded their own rights to full sovereignty (Groovogui, 2002). Francis Fukuyama (2004), for example, claims that in states like Somalia and Afghanistan that are run by warlords, the very idea of state sovereignty is a fiction or as he writes a “bad joke” (p. 97). For Fukuyama, sovereignty is a privilege–not a right–that can be revoked if states behave
badly. Susan Rice (2005) echoes a similar exemption to full sovereign rights, she argues that those states that cannot fulfill core responsibilities such as provide basic services and security, “may also fail to exercise effective sovereign control over their territory” (p. 3). This is perhaps a more common understanding, also evident in Cammack et al.’s (2006) report surveying current thinking and practice of the Failed State (FS) agenda. They contend that although governments are predicated on the principles of sovereignty, if they fail in their responsibilities to provide for their citizens, then they must submit to international organizations such as the UN, the World Bank and others to help them perform the basic tasks expected from independent, sovereign nations (Cammack et al., 2006).

In their analysis of the modern empire, Hardt and Negri (2000) argue that a new understanding of global sovereignty is emerging whereby the west has now established de-centered and de-territorialized power, operating in such a way within individual states so as to “reorganize them and redirect them toward new ends” (p. xv). The authors argue that the new empire legitimizes itself through reconfiguring and reengineering national administrative capacities, domestic laws and policies of other states. This right to intervene within the domestic politics of other countries is afforded by an international consensus on the basis of spreading universal rights and democracy. A leading post-colonial writer, Partha Chatterjee (2004) appears with this analysis, and he too acknowledges that the new empire is heavily invested in spreading global democracy and in exerting control and influence through national political and economic structures. Chatterjee (2004), however, would argue that there is nothing new about this, acknowledging that the west never accepted the full sovereign rights of nations outside the western world. In fact even in Europe, not all states are recognized as fully sovereign. Post-conflict countries such as Bosnia and Kosovo, for example, even after decades of international
administration continue to remain under extensive foreign control and are still not regarded as autonomous states (Ottaway, 2003; Hughes & Pupavac, 2005). These countries, like Afghanistan, are targets for “neo-trusteeship” arrangements favored by scholars like Ignatieff (2003) and others (see Krasner, 2004; Montgomery & Rondinelli, 2004), making the very idea of modern imperialism a necessary pursuit carried out as a ‘favor’ to citizens living in these badly governed territories.

For Afghanistan, the west is not only able to strip any claims of sovereignty, but even the very topic of Afghanistan as a sovereign and independent nation is largely absent in scholarly, policy and political discussions. This brazen disregard of Afghan sovereignty is evident in an article published by the editorial board of The Christian Science Monitor (2010) which reported a public quarrel between President Obama and President Karzai over who has decision making authority over Afghanistan’s future. The article refers to President Karzai’s frustration, stating Mr. Karzai resents the fact that his fledgling democratic government cannot veto certain NATO methods, such as night raids on Afghan homes in search of Taliban fighters – raids that sometimes terrorize a household or result in civilian casualties. And he dislikes the fact that so many foreign workers operate outside his government’s control. To him, the 1,500 workers in the US Embassy in Kabul seem like the reigning rulers.

One can discern that the right to bypass sovereignty is conditional on government performance, and ‘vacant’ states like Afghanistan are invariably subject to extensive structural reforms to re-map domestic governance structures. The priority is essentially (but not exclusively) a technical one, enabling foreign experts to reform every branch of government without requiring popular support or domestic approval (Chandler, 2006; Hameiri, 2009). Reforms aimed at reconstituting the Afghan government have involved rapid government
restructuring, involving foreign experts that have obtained unprecedented access and decision making powers in all Ministries, setting up working committees, schedules, and log frames to monitor results (Suhrke, 2007). The United States, for example, has targeted aid to strengthen the judiciary structure in Afghanistan, whereby funds are directed at training judges, writing investment laws, rewriting criminal codes and professionalizing the police force (Krasner, 2004).

As Barakat & Chard (2002) argue, in the many post-conflict contexts, international actors, like the UN, IFI’s and bilateral donors have pursued a policy of direct intervention, involved in the day to day administration of a country and essentially substituting the government through a program of direct technical assistance and supervision, which they argue are justified on grounds of chronic state incapacities.

In critiquing the discourse of state failure, it is important to make salient that the intention is not to then suggest that the criteria used to evaluate Afghanistan’s efficacy as a state are, borrowing from Said (1995), exclusively a bunch of lies and myths that if one was to take a closer look the real ‘truth’ would reveal otherwise. I do not set out to dispute the shortcomings of third world governance structures or of Afghanistan’s political performance as a state. Rather, my framework of the new terra nullius challenges the dominant Eurocentric bias that permeates the discourse on state failure/fragility generally, but specifically in terms of how post-conflict state building in Afghanistan is only recognized, represented and evaluated vis-à-vis an ideal modern western state structure that as argued thus far may not ever be possible to replicate given the country’s current politico-historical context. In the remaining sections I offer a post-colonial critique of the failed state discourse and in so doing it is not my intention to argue that Afghanistan, and other failed/fragile states, should be left alone with no assistance from the international aid community or that the international community should stop supporting liberal
democratic reforms. Rather, my aim in this chapter is to reveal that the international community is unable or unwilling to ‘see’ and understand Afghanistan on its own terms, and that this perhaps stifles the possibility of other political forms and practices to emerge that may very well be more meaningful, effective and responsive to people’s needs.
Part 3: Critical and Alternative Perspectives

3.1 The Historical Roots and Relevance of the Modern Liberal State

Thus far, this chapter has argued that failed and fragile states are discursively rendered ‘vacant’ for failing to function like western liberal states, without any reference or accommodation to their diverse experiences, and specific cultural, politico-historical contexts. The new terra nullius only recognizes the modern liberal capitalist state as the exclusive model for statehood, regardless of diverse societies, histories, traditions, value systems and institutions (Biswas, 2002; Gruffydd, 2006; Arif, 2002). This means all states are coerced to traverse through only Europe’s past and adopt the same versions of a rational, industrial and democratic capitalist state (Gruffydd, 2006), which is, as Saurin (2006) writes, reflective of the west’s desire to universalize its own story as a self validating endeavor. This singular vision has been increasingly criticized by scholars who question its relevance and applicability to non-western contexts (Chopra, 2003; Hoffman & Weiss 2006; Gruffydd, 2006; Ottaway, 2003; Arif, 2002). Scholars such as Roberts (2009), Mamdani (1996), and Englebert and Tull (2008) ask whether or not it is realistic or even fair to expect post-colonial states to function identically to mature western states that developed after hundreds of years of struggle. The international community rarely, if ever, questions its expectation for states like Afghanistan to perform like a mature western state within less than a decade, whereas, modernization and democratic institution building in Europe developed and matured throughout western Europe for hundreds of years, mainly between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Although it is not in the scope of this study to review European state building extensively, it is very important to briefly contextualize and historicize the birth of the modern
western state, which in the literature on state building is often ahistoricized and recognized as an unproblematic and desired universal model. The modern state developed in Europe for centuries partly as a result of the philosophical debates among Enlightenment thinkers such as John Locke, John Stuart Mills, Rousseau and Alexis de Tocqueville over the idea of legitimate rule by the consent of the governed, elected representations, freedom, rule of law and human rights. These often fascinating intellectual elaborations were no doubt critical, but other factors such as the appropriation of foreign lands and the wealth accrued by colonial and imperial conquests, the Industrial Revolution and domestic political repression were also other key facilitative processes for European state building. The Treaty of Westphalia was instrumental in laying some of the basic foundations of the modern nation state system, primarily the notion of equality between states and state sovereignty, that is territorial integrity and the right to non-interference. However, leading up to Westphalia what is evident from the west’s own historical journey to liberal democracy, is that the transition from religious identity and religio-political authoritarianism to nationalist allegiances and democratic politics was never a peaceful, and uniformly clear-cut transition. The transition to democratic rule was challenged for centuries from within the moral and religious establishments, namely the Catholic Church, and is associated with the brutal and violent wars across the continent that spanned hundreds of years, from the Thirty years war 1618-1648, until the final defeat of Napoleon in 1814 (Holsti, 2004; Halperin, 2006; Stepputat et al., 2007). This complex set of political trajectories and struggles within Europe over centuries eventually afforded the modern liberal state with superior rationality and the task of advancing Enlightenment humanist ideas and liberal political rationalities (Newman, 2007).
In tracking this long and tumultuous history of European state building, Halperin (2006) sharply reveals that contrary to popular perceptions, it was not until the middle of the twentieth century that liberal democracy was fully established in western European societies. She argues that western states, much like third world states, have only until relatively recently shared many things in common, particularly partial democratization, the curbing of civil liberties by extralegal patronage systems, and corruption. In fact, she argues that it was only Norway on the eve of World War I that implemented the universal right to vote, whereas in every other part of Europe, democracy remained partial. As Newman (2007) explains, this European model of statehood, in its modern liberal democratic form, was universalized and inscribed onto non-European states with these kinds of ‘hidden truth’. That is, a long and bloody history of violence, partial democracy, dislocation and communitarian identification. This concealment is as Krishna (2006) describes a kind of forgetting or ‘willful amnesia’, whereby the ideal western liberal state is rarely historicized in the context of its rise that was very much connected to a rather illiberal history of European imperialism that caused and perpetuated genocide, enslavement and structural violence (Krishna, 2006; Gruffydd, 2006; Bessis and Cammiller, 2003). The international community in engaging its own ‘willful amnesia’ about the west’s protracted and often violent historical and political process to achieve full democratization, arrogantly stipulates that Afghanistan embrace and fully perform liberal, capitalist democracy within a decade – if not earlier (see Ottaway, 2003).

The spread of the modern state to the non-western world was initially associated with colonialism as former colonies inherited many European political institutions (Stepputat et al., 2007). Afghanistan, however, unlike other countries in the region, was never under direct colonial rule. Therefore, this meant that the country bypassed the initial colonial strategy for
spreading the modern state apparatus. Interestingly, although Fukuyama (2004) extols the merits of colonialism in building durable and modern political systems in India and Singapore, many scholars have associated the legacy of colonial rule with molding weak political institutions as a strategy of indirect rule and the use and abuse of the modern state structure to exercise direct and continuous bureaucratic control over the indigenous population (see. Stepputat et al., 2007; Jan Mohammad, 1985). One could suggest that the colonial political structures inherited by many newly independent states actually perpetuated a weak and ineffective bureaucracy (Chabal & Daloz, 1999) as well as what Mamdani (1996) suggests as sowing the seeds of division between rural and urban governance. In this regard, expecting many post-colonial states to fulfill a list of proper and expected state functions is as Cramer & Goodhand (2002) poignantly describe, merely a ‘fantasy’ that clearly shows a lack of historical memory. For Francis Fukuyama (2004), however, there is no other option but to transfer strong governance institutions from the First World to the Third World, however, he does admit that the west does not exactly know how best to implement this transfer. For Afghanistan, building a strong central state apparatus in a context where modern central governance barely existed historically is critiqued by Englebert & Tull (2008), who question international efforts focused on strengthening governance and rebuilding state capacities in contexts which only imply the prior existence of functioning and effective public institutions that are ‘waiting’ to re-emerge.

3.2 State Failure and Western Discursive Authority

It is evident that Afghanistan’s failure at liberal, political modernity is arguably the only starting point from which to understand and discuss the country’s political conditions and future. After many years of intervention the criteria for modern statehood is still not being met and Afghanistan remains discursively ‘locked’ in as a failed state, requiring ongoing western
supervision and interventions. This chronic failure as a state is, as Andreasson (2005) notes, part of a ‘reductive repetition’ of core deficiencies that is supported by diverse reports, statistics and studies. A post-colonial analyses is helpful to interrogate the west’s discursive authority over evaluating, classifying and categorizing the degree and extent of Afghanistan’s failure because concomitant to imposing a particular set of meanings and understandings about what a ‘normal’ state is, are strategies and interventions that are exercised to ‘correct’ aberrant states. Michel Foucault’s (1972) and Edward Said’s (1995) seminal contributions on discursive formations are helpful to understand the ways in which certain assumptions and claims about political and economic state capacities and incapacities are (re)produced, in order to justify western domination. Foucault’s (1972) explanation of discourse has helped to illuminate how power operates through the production and institutionalization of certain meanings and concepts that are constructed as ‘truth’, whilst negating or dismissing competing and alternative narratives and interpretations. Edward Said’s (1995) Orientalism, arguably considered the locus classicus of postcolonialism, borrows from Foucauldian discourse theory to show how the knowledge produced about the Orient, in terms of describing it and authorizing truths about it, facilitated western power over the Orient. Said (1995) showed how the Orient was discursively constructed as a culture of laziness, mendacity, irrationality and violence and how these truths were positioned in such a way that only westerners are “objectively” able to really know the Orient. By mapping these “truths”, the knowledge produced invites or justifies the extension of western power.

Unlike post-structuralism, postcolonialism recognizes western domination of the non-western world as not some arbitrary phenomenon (as Foucault did) but a conscious and purposive process (Moore-Gilbert, 1997). Edward Said (1995) believed that all western
discourse about the east is determined by the intention to dominate these “Other” territories and peoples. By creating and authorizing the inferior “Other” (read, irrational, voiceless, backward) Said indicates that the West’s superior culture and civilization (read: rational, moral, dynamic, progressive) is simultaneously co-constructed and hence justifies intervention and dominance (Young, 1990; Moore-Gilbert, 1997; Childs & Williams, 1997). Said (1993) later recognizes that Orientalism can be misread as an all powerful discourse that negates the agency of the colonized, perhaps rendering them mute and helpless against this dominant discourse. His analysis is still potent in linking western discursive practices to western power and the parallels to the discourse on state fragility are clear. As discussed previously, the knowledge accumulated by policy makers and scholars repeatedly re-enforce, validate and further legitimize the language of state failure and poor governance, and in turn, emphasize the role of western governments to remedy this urgent problem. It is, as Said (1995) reveals, a strategy that relies on layers upon layers of information, ideas and ‘knowledge’ that are consistently exchanged and reaffirmed as objective truths or facts, making the very task of asking a different set of questions often impossible. Certainly the lists, indices and reports detailing the causes and symptoms of state failure in Afghanistan are what Gayatri Spivak (in Kapoor, 2008) refers to as a structure of ‘information retrieval’ that cannot be separated from western institutional power. Foucault’s examination of how discourse and power operate highlights the ways in which social and political realities are known and in effect are brought into ‘being’ by these discursive practices that permit only certain modes of understanding, while negating others. The exercise of discursive power, that is to say, in making a failed state come into ‘being’ is, as Jonathon Crush (1995), astutely notes, associated with very real interventions and practices which result in very real and concrete (even disastrous) outcomes.
The west’s discursive authority in classifying and categorizing non-western states furthermore leaves very little room for these states to refute, criticize or contest their identification as failed states. This is most evident in the growing criticism against the World Bank’s Country Policy and Institutional Assessment (CPIA), a ranking used by the World Bank as well as by the international community to assess the degree of state fragility. Countries are ranked based on their economic management, governance, structural and social inclusion policies. This ‘one size’ fits all formula determines the World Bank’s aid allocations per year and countries which perform well receive as much as seven times more aid than countries judged to be poor performers, a division which has largely meant that the poorest countries do not receive enough aid resources. The CPIA has been widely criticized because governments are unable to appeal or contest their ranking, particularly in explaining the influence of internal as well as external factors that affect their governance performance, such as drought, wars, or even the impact of failed international policies and fluctuations in commodity prices, erratic aid and other financial flows (Alexander, 2012). In fact, the CPIA and all major indices and ranking of failed states operate under the assumption that states only fail because of internal weaknesses, ignoring the very possibility that a history of colonialism, the persistence of failed international policies and the continued impact of the global neo-liberal order have perpetuated if not caused states to malfunction (Bilgin & Morton, 2004; Ottaway, 2003).

3.3 Failed States and Failed Citizens?

On a final note, does the discourse of failed states imply failed people and societies? I would surmise that most governments and their societies labeled as ‘failed’ refuse to self-identify themselves in the language of inferiority and deficiency. The Afghan government, for example, never refers to itself as a failed state in its official documents; to do so would mean admitting to,
or worse, believing in some natural internal weakness or intrinsic incapacities. The language of failed states, however, is abundant with negative and pessimistic references, terms such as conflict ridden, inefficient, corrupt, incompetent are frequently used to describe states hinting to a dreary and turbulent future. Very little is ever written about what works well in Afghanistan, what is promising and even hopeful. Instead, Afghanistan is repeatedly defined in terms of what they lack, what is weak, deficient, absent, or has never existed. Frantz Fanon (1963) argued that colonial power rested on representing the Native in terms of an absence of values and even the negation of good values. It is, as Achille Mbembe (2001) reveals, a deliberate strategy to mark out the ‘absolute otherness’ of foreign lands, confirming that these societies remain incomplete and unfinished in comparison to the western world and that they exist with an “absence of a center” (p.8). In his analysis of Europe’s representation of Africa, Mbembe (2001) further argues that African culture has always been understood as “incapable of uttering the universal” (p. 4), and repeatedly described in pejorative ways of lack and non-being. The western discourse knows absolutely everything about what Africa is not, and absolutely nothing about what African societies actually do and who the people living in these societies are (Mbembe, 2001).

In understanding states and societies only by what they have not and may never become, Hughes and Pupavac (2005) accurately highlight how the discourse of failed states fundamentally questions the very capacity of populations to survive even when governance structures break down or are non-existent. Instead of rendering Afghanistan and other countries as ‘empty’ of recognizable and legitimate political forms, what Roberts (2009) and others (Karokhail & Schmeidl, 2006; Chopra, 2003; Arif, 2002) suggest is for existing political forms to be recognized. Perhaps the ‘invisibility’ of skills and capacities at the national level, are actually ‘visible’ at local and regional levels of governance? Chopra (2003), for example,
challenges the conceptual markings of failed states that are based on an assumed absence or disarray of key government functions. He insists that just because the political order is not up to western standards, this does not mean that populations cease to exist, but rather, communities invariably set up their own sites of political legitimacy “throughout the time of the state, before it collapsed or the foreign occupation before it left, and in the wake of both” (p. 223). In Afghanistan, for example, during the years of conflict, alternative governance structures helped to bring a certain degree of order and stability in communities coping with the absence of a central government. Even today, in many parts of the country, it is not the central government that is legitimized by many Afghans, but traditional, non-formal institutions that exert de facto political authority and are considered the only effective and accessible forms of governance for most Afghans. Therefore, by failing to include the real influence and impact of local (traditional) governance, the discourse of failed states most certainly overlooks competent and relevant political structures and activities. It is important to note, however, that traditional institutions are, very much like formal governments, also sites of corruption, injustice and violence that cannot be overlooked.

The political landscape of Afghanistan is marked by a variety of diverse and competing modern (formal) and traditional (non-formal) political forms. In outlining the political contours of the new *terra nullius*, my point here is to suggest that in failing to acknowledge the strengths, weaknesses, abuses, intersections and potentialities of these diverse forms of governance, the new *terra nullius*, by simply rendering them as ‘empty’ forms, assumes that these diverse and resilient governance forms of power will just become obsolete in the wake of modernizing reforms.
Conclusion: The Desired Failed State?

As Chapter Two overviewed in detail, Afghanistan had only fleeting moments in history as a strong central state. Indeed the reach of the state never extended into every corner of Afghan society, nor did Afghans historically (and arguably even today) always desire a strong central government presence. Most Afghans have actually regarded the state as an intruder, even an enemy, and therefore, Afghan state institutions have always remained weak not necessarily because of a lack of military or political resources, but because of a strong society and regional leaders that have purposely sought to undermine central authority (Giustozzi, 2007; Shahrani, 1998). In fact many poor states afford the central state only limited legitimacy and prefer local control of resources and local governance over central governance mainly because of common experiences of state corruption and persecution (Roberts, 2009). This begs the question, is a strong central and bureaucratized state even desired? The modern liberal state is certainly not a passive entity in the lives of citizens but seeks to deepen and regulate the individual’s relationship with the state in ways that Newman (2005) describes are a series of “normalizing strategies and disciplinary techniques designed to subjectify the individual—to turn him into the ‘good citizen of the state’” (p.16). The goal, therefore, is for the state to have unmediated access to citizens, hence the need to dissolve autonomous or competing institutions such as traditional institutions or other structures that turn people’s gaze away from the state. Therefore there is a real possibility that Afghans may fundamentally resist a strong central state especially if having one means that autonomous and traditional non-formal religious and political institutions are challenged or will be undermined. Traditional institutions, such as shura councils, have a long and established presence in Afghanistan, and since the country was at war with no central state for decades, these institutions held de facto and legitimate political power, and many still
continue to do so. Furthermore, when the state did emerge for brief periods, as Chapter Two indicated, many Afghans often retreated from the state either because of the violence and persecution they suffered or reforms that were popularly resisted. Perhaps Afghans desire only a ‘weak’ state, one that can have basic administrative, diplomatic and security functions, but does not intrude into the everyday lives of people? These kinds of questions that challenge our normative understanding of a modern state are rarely taken seriously, rather, the international community is relentlessly pursuing to create one of the world’s most centralized states in Afghanistan. As the Bonn agreement reveals, almost all executive, legislative and judicial power is held within the national government and the President appoints every significant official. This is a tremendous shift for a country that has historically resisted centralized power and one can anticipate that rural Afghanistan will likely challenge Kabul as it holds all policy, budgetary, and military authority.

In his study of western development interventions, Arif (2002) argues for the possibility of non-western societies to theorize the roles and functions of the state differently and diversely. His key point is to highlight that European political forms are one among many existing theories for state building and that in failing to recognize political diversity, western concepts may possibly create “an identity crisis and schism in people’s cultural consciousness” that may derail any genuine and responsive political path from developing (Arif, 2002, p. 13). David Roberts (2009) adds to this discussion, arguing that indigenous and traditional political practices and structures do not simply disappear because there is a flood of new institutions financed by the west. He writes that “It would be folly to imagine that centuries or millennia of different trajectories of political evolution can be intellectually ignored and technically papered over with little more than elections and the expectation that people simply change their values and
overwrite their experiences when something new comes along” (p. 172). This does not mean that there is nothing to gain from liberal, democratic governance, certainly as Roberts (2009) conveys, many post-conflict states have benefited from externally facilitated democratic reforms, such as elections, constitutional reforms, reforms to the judiciary and human rights legislations. However, it is the complete disavowal of other forms of political practice that remains problematic. In my examination of the *new terra nullius* it is precisely this political act of invalidating alternative political realities that the west is able to absolve itself of any efforts to create real (internal) political legitimacy, coherence and even entertain the possibilities of hybrid political models that may actually work.

What I hope this study makes fundamentally evident is the need to ‘decolonize’ the field of state building and post-conflict interventions. In doing so, however, there is a danger of articulating a fundamental incommensurability to western capitalist political modernity, a perspective that can be detected in Englebert and Tull’s (2008) study of African states. The authors reveal this culturo-historical and political ‘distance’ in the following passage:

> Most African states have never had effective institutions, relying instead on the personalized networks of patronage. They have never generated sustainable growth. Factionalism has always been politically prevalent, and states have more often been instruments of predation and extraction than tools for the pursuit of public goods. In vast parts of Africa, state failure is less an objective condition than a permanent mode of political operation. (p.110)

Indeed these words do play into the stereotypical epithet of Africa’s chronic state of decline and backwardness and could also be extended to peg Afghanistan as equally incapable to ever absorb ‘capitalist modernity’ because of a strong and resilient traditional culture, not to mention the country’s history of disavowing central state authority (see Chapter Two). However, taken from another perspective, the authors raise an interesting argument by fundamentally
questioning whether African states should be expected to, and even coerced into functioning and ‘performing’ exactly like modern Western states. As Jeffrey Herbst (1997) notes, the nation-state system was imposed on African states that virtually replaced the diversity of pre-colonial political organizations. In doing so, he argues that current African nation-states have never fully realized the basic functions of sovereign nations, that is, a monopoly of violence, an administrative presence across the country, offering basic public goods and popular allegiance to the state. For Herbst (1997), new alternatives are possible given the evidence that most failed states are unable to perform exactly like western mature neo-Weberian states. The international community, however, must enable the intellectual and political spaces needed for people residing in the non-western world to conceptualize alternative forms of state authority. As Herbst (1997) writes,

The current unvarying reliance on the states that Europe gave to Africa must give way to a world which at least recognizes the possibility of alternatives. The recognition that reform is possible should be guided by two propositions. First, proposed alternatives must, in the end, come from the Africans themselves. No alternative to the nation-state is going to be forced on Africa, especially given the history of colonialism that began with the Berlin Conference. Second, the aim of any alternative should be to increase the dynamism of state formation, so that stronger national units can emerge and dysfunctional ones do not necessarily have to continue indefinitely. Not only would such dynamism have strong resonance with the African past, it would also be critical to setting the essential foundation for political and economic development. Of course, dynamism also means instability, and potentially conflict. The downside of dynamism must be acknowledged and efforts made to ameliorate the damage that could occur if states are to become more fluid creations (pp. 132-133).

In this chapter I have attempted to demonstrate that we can detect the continuity of the classical concept of terra nullius in the current discourse of failed states. Afghanistan is labeled a failed state and is rendered politically ‘vacant’ for failing to function as a modern, neo-Weberian state committed to capitalist political modernity. Furthermore, in the post-911 context, failed
states have been repositioned as the leading threats to international peace and security, and therefore, the western world is now obligated to aggressively reform these states in the interest of protecting their national security. My aim in this chapter is also to reveal that the international community is unable or unwilling to ‘see’ and understand Afghanistan on its own terms, and that the focus on a liberal capitalist state perhaps stifles the possibility of other political forms and practices to emerge that may very well be more meaningful, effective and responsive to people’s needs. In the next chapter I aim to further expand my framework by exploring the economic contours of the new terra nullius, specifically the discursive practice of rendering the Afghan economy as an ‘idle’ and highly inefficient economy that requires international reforms and investments in order to for the Afghan economy to become an effective and modern capitalist economy.
CHAPTER FIVE

State Fragility and the New Terra Nullius: Confronting the Economically ‘Idle’ State of Afghanistan

Introduction

This chapter continues the previous discussion on the new terra nullius by focusing on the economic contours of this framework. Recalling the earlier discussion, European colonizers legitimized the appropriation of inhabited indigenous lands as terra nullius (empty lands) if indigenous political forms were considered to be different or insufficiently developed in comparison to European forms. These societies were considered to be traditional, savage societies if they did not have similar or comparable political systems, such as central political authority, a formal legislative body or written laws. In constructing these territories as ‘empty’, colonizers justified appropriating these lands because no legitimate territorial claims to sovereignty were recognized (Buchan and Heath 2006). In my analysis of the political contours of the new terra nullius, I argued that the continuity of this colonial worldview can be detected towards states that are unwilling or unable to perform the expected tasks and functions associated with mature western democratic liberal states. As the previous chapter examined, states that fall short of this ideal model are labeled as ‘weak’, ‘fragile’ or ‘failed’, thereby warranting varied forms of international interventions. Concomitant to the disavowal of indigenous political forms, Europeans also justified the appropriation of foreign lands if they were considered to be economically underdeveloped. That is to say, in the classical notion of terra nullius, if
indigenous inhabitants were not perceived to be ‘properly’ cultivating their land or if they did not privately own land, the territory was considered ‘vacant’ and inhabitants were not recognized as legitimate land owners (Ritter, 1996; Banner, 2005). The European colonial rationale was to therefore exploit these lands that were otherwise constructed as idle, wasted and underutilized, or as Edward Said (1980) succinctly notes, “waste, disorder, uncounted resources, was to be converted into productivity...” (p. 78).

In locating the origins of *terra nullius*, Lesaffer (2005) traces the concept to Hugo Grotius (1583-1645), the Dutch humanist, who justified seizing uncultivated and unsettled lands of nomadic hunters or pasturers as a natural right, extending ownership to any individual who chose to settle on the land or cultivate it. The assumption that land could be seized if it was not privately owned or put to productive use is more frequently associated with the 18th century liberal philosopher John Locke (Lloyd, 2000; Borch, 2001; Partington, 2007). In writing about the North American Native context, Locke justified the British appropriation of indigenous lands, without consent, because these lands were not mixed with labor, and therefore, the land was rendered inefficient and with no ownership (Wolfe 2007). Locke echoed a strong assumption among many Europeans at that time, insisting that non agricultural people cannot be said to have true legal possession of land, therefore, their land could be seized by European settlers provided that the Europeans had the intent to make productive use of the land (Banner 2005). In their review of colonial texts of the early nineteenth century, Buchan and Heath (2006) reveal the pejorative tone evident in European writing describing native communities that never cleared land, tilled the soil, planted a tree, grain or root. William Hull, a colonial magistrate, captures the prevailing attitudes among colonialists in the late 1800s stating that “It is an axiom of civil life, that no nation or tribe can acquire or maintain a right to the soil, unless it profitably
occupies or tills it” (Buchan & Heath, 2006, p. 10). Interestingly, although the colonial perspective denied Native ownership of their lands based on inferior livelihoods and backward land use, Mercer (1993) points out that in the same period of European expansion, much of Britain itself was not farmed, but this did not render parts of Britain as ‘wasteland’ that could then be appropriated by foreigners.

In exploring the continuity of this colonial worldview, in this chapter I argue that although classical terra nullius declared non-agricultural lands as ‘empty’, in my framework of the new terra nullius, I insist that many fragile/failed states are constructed as resource rich but economically idle, inefficient and even ‘cursed’ lands, thereby justifying international economic restructuring. This chapter focuses on Afghanistan’s natural resource industries, specifically minerals, which have captured significant international attention because of the estimated 3 trillion dollar wealth of these potential industries (Risen, 2010; McNeil, 2010; Shlaes, 2010). In exploring the modalities of the new terra nullius, I first argue that Afghanistan is constructed primarily as an economically inefficient and backward state, and its natural resources are largely ‘untapped’ and ‘idle’, requiring foreign capital, technology and the introduction of a foreign facilitated financial regulatory environment to help jumpstart the industry. In exploring this argument, I aim to contextualize my discussion of Afghanistan’s natural resource industry within what is described in the literature as the ‘resource curse’ thesis.

This thesis is a widely accepted ‘truism’ in academic and policy settings that highlights the paradox of resource rich states, accruing billions of dollars of revenues from private investments, with having among the highest rates of poverty, corruption, authoritarianism and violent conflicts in the world. The phenomena is widely recognized within the institutional knowledge of western governments and international agencies, however, I argue that instead of a
cautionary approach towards Afghanistan, the international community is supporting the full extraction of natural resources, thus exposing Afghanistan to the inevitable negative and even dangerous implications associated with the resource curse thesis. Therefore, I argue that the new *terra nullius* is unfolding in such a way that the international community is *deliberately* setting up Afghanistan for failure. That is to say, by bypassing its own institutional knowledge about the causes and triggers of the resource curse phenomena, the international community paves the way for the very high probability that Afghanistan’s existing conflict will most likely intensify and the widespread government corruption will most certainly derail any equitable redistribution of resource wealth to the majority of Afghans. Lastly, this chapter examines the various mining and investment laws that have been introduced in Afghanistan, a legal framework that I claim is primarily written for foreign private investors to be able to establish corporate ‘territories’ that can bypass the local economy and fundamentally curtail both the short and long term ‘ownership’ of the natural resource industry by Afghans themselves.
Part 1: The Economic Contours of the *New Terra Nullius*: Constructing the Economically ‘Idle’ State

1.1 Failed States as Economically ‘Idle’ and inefficient

In exploring the economic contours of the *new terra nullius*, I argue that failed states are rendered ‘empty’ due to economic inefficiencies, such as poor economic policies and mismanagement. According to the World Bank, fragile states grow only one third as fast as other low income states and have one-third the per capita income. They also have a 50% higher debt-to-gross domestic product ratio, and double the poverty rates of other low-income countries (World Bank, 2006; Chauvet & Collier 2006; World Bank, 2005b) As explored in the previous chapter, the idea of ‘chronic’ political vacancy, that is, states in a perpetual state of political inefficiencies appears to be accompanied by benighted and depleted economies. This idea of the chronic state of economic failure is made evident by the World Bank’s assessment that economic stagnation lasts for over 56 years in fragile/failed states, and worse still, is the Bank’s estimate that there is only a 1.8% probability that these states will ever make any marked improvement (World Bank, 2006). This dismal and rather dreary economic outlook reverberates across academic and policy circles and the following are some of the common economic indicators used to prove the inferiority and inefficiency of fragile/failed states: the inability of states to raise and manage revenues from taxation, aid or natural resources (DFID, 2010; USAID, 2005; Rotberg, 2004; IMF, 2011); poor macroeconomic policies, such as policies that fail to address fiscal and trade deficits, stabilize inflation, secure a stable currency, regulate exchange rates and reserves, and provide basic monetary and financial regulation (DFID, 2010; DFID, 2009; USAID, 2005; Chauvet & Collier, 2008; World Bank, 2006, World Bank, 2005b); inability to generate growth
(DFID, 2009); poor financial services and a weak private sector (USAID, 2005; OECD, 2010); poor or damaged infrastructure, such as roads and highways to transport goods (OECD, 2010; IMF, 2011) and poor management of natural resources (USAID, 2005).

This list of expected economic activities and functions are just as expansive as the list of expected political functions explored in the previous chapter. The purpose here once again is not to assess the merits of each specific criteria but rather, to convey the general consensus in the international community that renders states as economically ‘empty’ because they do not perform in ways identical to advanced neo-liberal economies. The point to be further emphasized is that very little attention, if any, is paid to the reasons and conditions that prevent states from functioning in such ways. For example, a history of failed international interventions like structural adjustment policies, as well as a particular country’s history of war and conflict, political instability, declining terms of trades, and the impact of natural disasters. For decades, neo-liberal institutionalists aggressively promoted a minimalist third world state, one that essentially did not meddle in the affairs of society, especially the market. The adverse impact of structural adjustment policies have been widely linked to fracturing governance, thereby causing and exacerbating the very conditions of state fragility. Even Francis Fukuyama (2004) admits that these policies were flawed and that neo-liberal economic reforms in the third world have largely failed, leaving some countries worse off. However, very little regard is given to these external factors that perpetuate weak governance, and policy discussions have largely absolved externally-directed macro- economic and political processes and policies from any accountability or responsibility for creating or perpetuating weakness, conflicts and tensions within countries (see LeBillon, 2000; Berdal & Malone, 2000). As Williams (2004) notes, globalization destroyed the ability of states to be the main guarantors of stability and in distributing resources equitably
to ordinary citizens. However, despite these recognized external triggers, the World Bank’s Country Policy and Institutional Assessment (CPIA) framework, for example, measures state economic fragility only in terms of the extent of market-supporting institutions and the degree of market led growth, disregarding both internal and external factors that often disrupt local economies.

In evaluating the economies of fragile/failed states only in terms of their integration into the global marketplace, the sole emphasis among western institutions and donor governments is to build and restore capitalist markets so that fragile/failed states can be competitive players in the global economy. The priority is to strengthen the financial sectors and particularly to remove trade barriers and encourage the growth and expansion of the private sector (Rotberg, 2004). Pursuing economic restoration has most often meant jumpstarting an investment climate through facilitating changes to investment and business laws, supporting export promotion services and other business support services (USAID, 2005; World Bank, 2005b; OECD, 2008a). According to the OECD, generating market-led growth is central to state legitimacy because it forms the basis for resource mobilization which they insist will ultimately have a positive impact on citizens (OECD, 2008a). The underlying assumption is that only those states with strong neo-liberal policies and robust institutional frameworks are economically stable, whereas the vast majority of the world’s poorest states are thereby projected as neither contributing to nor benefitting from economic globalization. That is to say, these states are rendered as economically ‘vacant’ and the implications associated with their high rates of chronic inadequacies include: perpetually low growth rates; failure to attract foreign private investments and high risks for any disruptions or volatility in the global financial market (DFID, 2009; Kaplan, 2008; Riphenburg, 2006). It is important to further note that according to many researchers and policy makers,
failed states require economic re-ordering because they create tremendous negative economic spillover which adversely affects neighboring countries (Murdoch & Sandler, 2002; Chauvet et al., 2006; Chauvet & Collier 2008; World Bank, 2005b). In their study of twenty-three failed states, for example, Chauvet & Collier (2008) reveal that the annual economic losses incurred by failed states is US$800 billion, however, the economic losses incurred by neighboring states is US$4,700 billion because of such costs as trade disruptions, refugee flows, cross border violence and organized crime. The authors conclude that donor governments must offer extensive foreign-facilitated economic (technical) assistance to failed states because the total cost incurred by the international community is well over US$ 5,500 billion in net present value (or US$280 billion per year) which exceeds the amount failed states receive in international aid. As Chauvet & Collier (2008), write “The loss of income due to lower growth in failing states is so large that it calls for international action” (p. 15).

1.2 Post-Conflict Afghanistan and the Markings of an Economically ‘Empty’ State

In my analysis of the new terra nullius, the purpose of foreign interventions and capital investments, therefore, is to make ‘productive’ use out of these otherwise, economically marginal, inefficient and underdeveloped markets that can become a financial burden for the international community. Afghanistan’s economic idleness is widely recognized, and the indicators mentioned in the previous section have not been fully met by Afghanistan for decades. The World Bank’s 2001 economic overview of the country, for example, refers to Afghanistan’s economy as being in a state of collapse, with no functioning infrastructure to facilitate economic recovery, such as no treasury, tax collection, telecommunications, electricity or even existing markets to be supported. The authors of the report sharply note that Afghanistan is not only among the world’s poorest countries, but one of the most miserable states in the world. A few
years later, the Bank’s first extensive economic report in the country after twenty-five years, identifies the country as severely deficient in the most basic infrastructure required for sound economic development. The report notes the absence of effective economic policies, damaged roads and highways, and the lack of insurance options, business support services, agricultural extension services and marketing, as well as quality control or assurance for export development (World Bank, 2005a). The new terra nullius constructs Afghanistan as an economic wasteland and scholarly and policy reports substantiate this claim by correlating Afghanistan’s fragility to the poor and disabling economic environment that has persistently failed to integrate into the global capitalist economy for decades (World Bank, 2001; Riphenburg, 2006).

This conclusion is echoed in Riphenburg’s (2006) analysis of Afghanistan’s economy, pointing to the limited internet access available across the country, the lack of newspaper circulation, no adequate telecommunications infrastructure, and most revealing in her list of absences is that in the entire country there are only two automated teller machines. For Riphenburg (2006), Afghanistan’s chronic and severe economic deficiencies require urgent modernization reforms because the country can only escape the poverty trap by benefitting from rapid economic as well as political liberalization. This push for modernization in post-conflict contexts is echoed by numerous international reports and scholarly analysis (Fukuyama, 2004; Paris, 2004; DFID 2010). As Schmeidl (2002) reveals, Afghanistan has for decades been one of the world’s most poorest countries, and a perpetually pre-modern society with over 80% of the population that is directly dependent on the rural informal economy and engaged in either subsistence agriculture or pastoral nomadism. According to international estimates between 70-80% of Afghanistan’s population continues to reside in rural areas, and small farm agriculture dominates the Afghan economy (Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, 2007). As a rentier state,
that is, a state that receives the bulk of its national budget from foreign aid, much of this aid money is ostensibly directed at building the economic infrastructure of the country—roads, schools, bridges, highways—which were all, more or less, damaged or destroyed by long periods of war and violent conflict. In fact, Afghanistan’s violent conflicts largely crushed the country’s industrial sector, closing down many factories and disrupting trading networks, in addition to curtailing the agricultural economy.

Similar to the experiences of most war-affected states, these disruptions to the formal economy have often meant that economic livelihoods across Afghanistan were dependent on the informal economy. In outlining the economic contours of the new terra nullius, I further argue that the informal economy, despite its ability to support and sustain the livelihoods of the majority of the rural poor, is dismissed as an inefficient space that largely wastes resources and hinders ‘real’ economic growth and potential. For the World Bank, the informal economy in Afghanistan is seen as stifling the country, accounting for 80-90% of the total economy (including drugs). The World Bank (2005a) prioritizes a strategy for the country to break out of the existing ‘informal equilibrium’ and move towards a ‘formal equilibrium’. This transition is referred to in the language of moving away from a ‘vicious’ to a ‘virtuous’ cycle, and the virtuous formal economy is constructed by the World Bank as the only means by which a solid and productive economy can emerge, one that enables an emerging class of entrepreneurs to contribute to the economy by “investing, registering themselves, paying taxes, and benefitting from the rule of law and availability of services” (World Bank, 2005a, p. xix). In failing to acknowledge economic activities within Afghanistan’s formidable informal sector, the new terra nullius bypasses the very real sites of economic security for the majority of Afghans whose livelihoods inhabit this sector (Kantor, 2008). Very little effort is directed towards strengthening
and further supporting the networks of entrepreneurial creativity and innovations among Afghans that have earned their living from the informal economy amid a politically and economically strenuous history. It is within the informal sphere wherein most Afghan women, for example, were able to support their families through income generating activities, and where most small farmers and traders as well as local artisans are able to trade and barter their goods. Instead, the World Bank (2005a, p. xvii) refers to this sector as merely a “coping mechanism for Afghan’s survival”, one that fuels corruption, erodes the rule of law and disables economic expansion.

The informal sector is not only rendered inefficient in fragile/failed states, but in Afghanistan as in other war-affected states, it is furthermore, pejoratively associated with ‘shadow’ or ‘grey’ economies in which international crime, corruption and the illegal trade of weapons and drugs thrive (Felbab-Brown, 2009). Over a decade ago, William Reno coined the term ‘warlord politics’ to describe the conditions within many fragile/failed states that are ‘hijacked’ by sub national groups that are able to effectively undermine central state authority by using violence to secure economic and political control through non-formal market channels (Reno, 2000; Hoffman & Weiss, 2006). These illicit economies are characterized by the unregulated flow of legal and illegal goods, money and even people, and are considered to undermine democratization by contributing to corruption (Haufler, 2007). Afghanistan, for example, has been referred to as the “narcostate”, characterized by a flourishing illicit economy for years based on opium production as well as the illicit trade in gems, wildlife and other goods (Felbab-Brown, 2009; Goodhand, 2002; Suhrke, 2007). Even in the aftermath of the US-led invasion, opium accounted for an estimated one third to over half of the Afghan economy and three quarters of the global illicit opium production (World Bank, 2005a; Suhrke, 2007). For the World Bank (2005a), Afghanistan’s reliance on opium production is the ‘lynchpin’ of its vicious
cycle. This reliance has meant that resources are shifted away from the state, enabling non-state actors involved in the drug trade to wield considerable political and military control and legitimacy across the provinces. Although opium production is known to sustain the basic livelihoods of large segments of the rural population, it is nevertheless, mainly considered to be creating and perpetuating disorder, insecurity and corruption across the country (Felbab-Brown, 2009). The international community, therefore, justifies the neo-liberal economic re-ordering of Afghanistan and other fragile states, especially in post-conflict contexts, in order to restore ‘legitimacy’ to the economic sector, and to assist governments in tracking, directing and monitoring the production and flow of legitimate goods, simultaneous to curtailing and eventually abolishing illegal trading networks.
Part 2: Afghanistan and the Resource Curse Thesis

2.1 The Discovery of Mineral Wealth and the ‘Cursed’ State of Afghanistan

The Afghan government’s history of weak economic governance and the concomitant strength of non-state actors to control and regulate economic activities across the country is precisely the reason as to why news about Afghanistan’s trillion dollar wealth in natural resources has been met with considerable concern and pessimism (Risen, 2010; McNeil, 2010; Shlaes, 2010; Collier, 2010). In June 2010, the New York Times was the first to report that based on an extensive geological assessment financed by the United States government, close to $1 trillion dollars of ‘untapped’ mineral wealth was discovered across Afghanistan, the article notes,

The previously unknown deposits — including huge veins of iron, copper, cobalt, gold and critical industrial metals like lithium — are so big and include so many minerals that are essential to modern industry that Afghanistan could eventually be transformed into one of the most important mining centers in the world. (Risen, 2010, para.2)

This announcement, according to Oxford University’s Paul Collier (2010), has now geo-strategically positioned Afghanistan to be “part of the last frontier for resource discovery” (para. 11). According to the report published by the initial mission team that was financed by the US department of Defense’s Task force for Business and Stability Operations (TFBSO), Afghanistan has rare earth elements such as niobium and lithium that are found in only a few places in the world (Department of Defense, 2011). Forbes magazine notes, that the only other country that has comparable large reserves is China, which accounts for 97% of all production of many rare earth elements. In 2009, however, the Chinese government announced that it would reduce exports of these minerals for conservation and environmental protection, an
announcement that no doubt caused considerable strain for Japan, America, and other countries
that are highly dependent on these minerals primarily for their defense industries, as well as for
manufacturing cell phones, car batteries and other goods (Chang, 2010).

The US Defense task force (TFBSO) identifies the presence of niobium in Helmand province as a particularly lucrative industry primarily because China controls 99 percent of the world’s supply. In addition, the TFBSO report anticipates that Afghanistan will further become a world leader in the production of lithium, cobalt and copper, estimating over $60 billion worth of lithium deposits, comparable to those in Bolivia (currently the world’s largest reserve), 50 billion in cobalt and over 29 billion in copper deposits which can potentially mean that Afghanistan may have the largest copper mines in the world. This wealth in minerals is in addition to gold deposits, as well as oil and petroleum that are plentiful and equally lucrative (Riechmann, 2010; Department of Defense, 2011). Furthermore, Afghanistan’s Ministry of Mines announced in August 2010 the discovery of an oilfield in northern Afghanistan that is estimated at generating over 1.8 billion barrels (Reuters, 2010). This was a significant discovery that is in addition to the country’s already 150 million barrels of known reserves.

The news of Afghanistan’s natural resource wealth of trillions of dollars should be widely celebrated, especially since the geological survey included only a limited number of sites, and it is very possible that many more prospective sites that have not yet been explored will very likely increase the countries overall wealth potential. Since Afghanistan is one of the world’s poorest countries and is dependent on copious amounts of foreign aid to execute its national budget, this wealth potential is very promising. Certainly the revenue of millions of dollars per year can be greatly beneficial for a country that has been consistently ranked amongst the world’s top 5 poorest countries for years and has one of the world’s lowest per capita incomes and some of the
world’s most dismal and bleak social and health indicators (see, for example HDR, 2010). However, instead of a spirit of optimism and hope, this news of abundant wealth has been met with considerable unease and pessimism. There is a widespread acknowledgement in the west that Afghanistan’s natural resource industry is more of a curse than it is a potential source for prosperity (see Collier, 2010; Risen, 2010; S. M., 2010). This sentiment is most explicitly echoed in an article published by the Economist on June 14\textsuperscript{th} 2010. The following quote reveals a strong consensus that Afghanistan’s mineral wealth is more or less ‘wasted’ on a perpetually failed, corrupt and inefficient state.

As if Afghanistan wasn’t cursed enough, it now looks like it has a resource curse… Such extraordinary mineral wealth could drive a renaissance of the country's real economy...if Afghanistan were Australia. Unfortunately, rather than a highly educated, secular, demographically homogenous monolingual society, Afghanistan is a mostly illiterate, fanatic religious society composed of rival ethnicities speaking different languages, driven by bloody clan feuds and a 30-year-long ideological civil war… It seems to me that the best Afghanistan can hope for is to become Saudi Arabia or Kazakhstan. The worst that could happen is that it becomes Congo. Given its ethnic, security, and human-development-index profile, the Congo scenario looks more likely. (S. M., 2010)

In predicting that Afghanistan will plunge into the ‘Congo’ scenario, the Economist is referring to what many scholars refer to as the ‘resource curse’ (Le Billon, 2005; Haufler, 2007; World Bank, 2006; Humphreys et al., 2007). The term “resource curse” first emerged in the 1990s and quickly gained currency as a result of research carried out by a group of key scholars such as Auty (1993), Karl (1997) and Collier & Hoeffler (1999) in reference to the observed paradox that natural resource-rich states such as Sierra Leone, Nigeria and the Congo, with an abundance in one or a few resources such as oil, gold, diamonds and other valuable minerals, tend to be underdeveloped and prone to conflict. That is to say, instead of generating growth and prosperity, these states have been associated with the opposite trend. With only a few exceptions
(Chile, Malaysia and most recently Botswana), researchers have revealed that resource rich lands in the third world tend to have weak and stifled democratic institutions, slower economic growths, lower per capita incomes, poor living standards, low health care budgets, poor school enrollment and low adult literacy rates compared to non-resource rich lands (Frankel, 2010; McFerson, 2010; Humphreys et al., 2007; Arezki & van der Ploeg, 2007; Le Billon, 2005; Omeje, 2008a).

In examining resource wealth in Africa, McFerson (2010) notes that the continent has 7% of the world’s reserves of oil and vast deposits of minerals and gems such as gold, diamonds, copper, cassiterite, coltan, cobalt, uranium and zinc. However, Africa lags behind the rest of the world in all key economic and social indicators. In fact, the continent has among the world’s worst life expectancy, literacy and educational attainment rates. Countries like copper exporting Zambia, for example, have very low levels of social development, higher malnutrition, low health care budgets and low literacy (DFID, 2009; Le Billon, 2005). According to the 2010 United Nations Human Development Index, the lowest social development indicators can be found in many resource rich countries, such as Afghanistan, the DRC, Chad, Liberia, but also, it should be noted, that there are some notable exceptions such as Argentina, Mexico and Botswana (HDR, 2010). Most researchers in the field confirm that the profits from vast quantities of oil, minerals, gemstones and timber have often not benefitted the poor populations, but rather, have in many countries been pocketed by political elite or warring factions and have fuelled some of the world’s most intractable wars, such as the conflicts in Angola, DRC, Liberia and Sierra Leone (Le Billon, 2005; Collier & Hoeffler, 1999; Rotberg, 2004). Furthermore, several contemporary discussions around the resource curse thesis have made the link between resource-rich countries and the almost inevitable decay of democracy, human rights and freedoms, in
addition to being associated with weak and corrupt political governance (Ross, 2001; McFerson, 2010; Friedman 2009; Le Billon, 2005).

Certainly given Afghanistan’s existing political and economic challenges, as well as the country’s protracted violent conflict, there is a very real and legitimate concern that the resource wealth will likely never reach the vast majority of Afghans, and more troubling, may actually trigger resource wars, jeopardizing the prospects for any long term peace and stability. In the following sections I argue that despite international policy and scholarly consensus that Afghanistan will likely suffer the resource curse in the worst possible way, the international community ignores this evidence accumulated over decades and blatantly promotes the full extraction of these industries across the country with no caveats or protective measures. The Afghan government and the US government are enthusiastically and aggressively seeking to attract foreign investments, and in an online letter to prospective investors, the Embassy of Afghanistan based in Washington expresses the new ‘moment’ of capitalist modernity that is now penetrating Afghanistan. The embassy proudly declares that the government aims to foster an investor friendly environment by enacting the most liberal investment laws in the region (“Investing in Afghanistan”, n.d.).

Similarly, the US government’s Task force for Business and Stability Operations (TFBSO) which was launched in 2006 as part of the US Defense department’s ostensible effort to support both Iraq and Afghanistan’s economic development, has been active in recruiting and hosting prospective investors in Afghanistan. This task force, which as mentioned earlier, funded the initial geological survey assessing Afghanistan’s mineral wealth potential, is no doubt a heavily funded and influential arm of the US Defense department. In outlining the modalities of the *new terra nullius*, in the following sections I argue that Afghanistan is given no choice but to
risk the resource curse because foreign private investment is recognized as the only option to make productive and profitable use out of Afghanistan’s latent and ‘idle’ trillion dollar wealth. In this sense, I fundamentally argue that the new terra nullius is unfolding in such a way that the international community is deliberately setting up Afghanistan for failure. That is to say, by bypassing its own institutional knowledge about the causes and triggers of the resource curse phenomena, the international community paves the way for the very high probability that Afghanistan’s existing conflict will most likely intensify and the widespread government corruption will most certainly derail any equitable redistribution of resource wealth to the majority of Afghans.

2.2 Resource Curse: Weak Governance and Corruption

One of the underlying factors contributing to the resource curse thesis is weak and corrupt governance (Keen, 1998; Le Billon, 2005; Arezki & van der Ploeg, 2007; Omeje, 2008a; Williams, 2011). According to an IMF report, only countries of high institutional quality and efficiency such as Canada, Australia and Austria, positively grow and fairly redistribute wealth within their countries from their export based resource industries. In contrast, those states that have poor institutional structures and policies and high levels of government corruption will likely not redistribute the wealth fairly, and instead, much of the wealth will fall into the hands of a small group of elites (Arezki & van der Ploeg, 2007). Since revenues from resource wealth (also known as rents) are transferred from corporations to the government in the form of royalties and taxes, strong institutions and accountable and transparent governance are therefore necessary to ensure this wealth is properly managed. Rents are particularly prone to corruption because governments receive millions of dollars directly from corporations, without actually expending any resources or efforts. As McFerson (2010) notes, governments essentially receive
copious amounts of money for their unearned control over resource rich lands, and this corporate-government relationship is fraught with shortcomings because there is often no transparency in the amount of money transferred, making it difficult for citizens to track revenues or hold the state accountable (Karl, 2007).

In countries marked by poor and corrupt governance, researchers have conclusively noted that resource rents often ‘disappear’ and are largely pocketed by elites, and consequently, populations endure chronic poverty, high mortality rates, high rates of illiteracy and unemployment. In the case of Congo, for example, Paul Collier (2010) notes that despite over one billion dollars in gold that is extracted and exported annually, only a mere $37,000 of this wealth is actually accounted for by the national treasury. This discrepancy is alarming, especially considering this miniscule amount is supposed to benefit the Congolese population through the state’s provision of public goods such as education, healthcare and infrastructure. The international community is very well aware of the high level of corruption and lack of transparency and accountability associated with extractive industries. In response, there have been some international efforts spearheaded to promote greater transparency, such as the UK government’s Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative, and more recently, the Extractive Industries Transparency Disclosure (EITD) Act, an unprecedented legislation in the United States requiring US based energy and mining corporations to disclose how much they pay to foreign governments.23

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23 These efforts aim to support a more ‘positive’ and transparent involvement by western corporations involved in overseas resource extraction. The UN-supported Kimberly process to certify diamonds is another initiative aimed at better corporate conflict sensitivity (Haufler, 2007). Arguably a more promising campaign is the Publish What You Pay (PWYP) campaign launched in June 2002 by primarily by major international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) Global Witness 2008, the Catholic Agency for Overseas Development (CAFOD), Oxfam, Save the Children UK, and Transparency International UK. This campaign aims to help citizens of resource-rich developing countries hold their own governments accountable through a more accountable and transparent system, and very
Although these are positive steps they are by themselves insufficient to mitigate the scale of the problem. In one of the most influential and detailed studies on the resource curse thesis, Philip Le Billon (2005) maps out the scale and intensity of natural resource based corruption. In his example of oil rich Nigeria, he notes that the country generated over $350 billion dollars in oil wealth over the past 35 years, but the percentage of Nigerians surviving on less than $1 a day has risen from 36% to 70%. Not surprisingly, the Nigerian population is outraged about the rampant corruption within the government, particularly because the rural population living on the land where oil is produced has been living in impoverished conditions for decades (Oluwaniyi, 2010). Given that the Niger Delta region generates more than 80% of Nigeria’s total revenue and more than 90% of the country’s total exports, these high levels of poverty are very disturbing (Akpabio & Akpan, 2010). Furthermore, environmental pollution caused by the extraction of oil, such as gas flares, acid rain and the contamination of agricultural resources have forced many of the region’s inhabitants to leave. As Oluwaniyi (2010) writes, “While oil in itself is central to the history of industrial capitalism, its discovery and extraction in Nigeria’s Niger Delta region has ushered in a miserable, undisciplined, decrepit and corrupt form of ´petro-capitalism’” (p. 310).

Given Nigeria’s experience, and other similar examples in the Congo, Sierra Leone, Sudan (see Omeje, 2008a), the absurd paradox of resource rich lands being marked by entrenched poverty is a significant cause for concern when exploring the prospects ahead for Afghanistan’s resource wealth. In briefly highlighting the situation in Nigeria’s oil region, it is easy to agree with prevailing research and an international consensus that states the need for a recently the coalition successfully helped to push forward the Extractive Industries Transparency Disclosure (EITD) Act. For more information on the Publish What you Pay Initiative, refer to the website http://action.openthebooks.org/t/2217/content.jsp?content_KEY=351
strong, accountable and transparent government to ensure wealth is properly and fairly redistributed in society. Without doubt, Afghanistan by all estimations has a long way ahead to achieve this condition of core political and economic stability and transparency. In a joint report on Afghanistan’s investment climate published by both the British Department for International Development (DFID) and the World Bank (2008), Afghanistan is noted to suffer from a weak policy environment, weak policy enforcement, inefficient business licensing and permits, unpredictable tax structures and especially high rates of government corruption. This list certainly echoes the earlier discussion in this chapter around Afghanistan’s chronic status as an economically ‘empty’ and inefficient state.

However, what is critical to point out here is that many in the international community assume that Afghanistan’s economic backwardness can be remedied by privatization and an investor friendly economic climate, enabling the country to then benefit and reap the profits of its lucrative extractive industries. The Afghan government and the US Department of Defense’s Task force for Business and Stability Operations (TFBSO) fundamentally subscribes to this worldview, as they are both actively encouraging foreign investments to help jumpstart the countries extractive industries, glossing over the reality of widespread corruption at all levels of government. Proceeding ahead without any caution or cursory concern that the Afghan government will be handling millions of dollars of revenue each year contradicts the decisions made by many leading international aid donors to not channel aid funds through the Afghan government’s national budget because of the pervasive corruption. Interestingly, The US government itself held back over 4 billion dollars of aid and the EU community withheld 200 million specifically because of corruption concerns in 2010 (Peled, 2010).
Despite these formidable reservations on part of the aid community, the US Defense Department’s Task force presents a confident and rosy picture that foreign corporations, the Afghan government and Afghans will all mutually benefit from foreign investments. The Taskforce explicitly states that the royalties and fees paid to the Afghan government will “lead directly to the construction of roads, schools, hospitals, and proof of a successful society” (Fritz et al., 2011, p. 6). This simplistic statement feeds into the fictitious script that foreign investment will mean economic development and economic prosperity for all Afghans, rendering issues of corruption and weak governance as inconsequential. However, according to the 2009 Global Corruption Report, Afghanistan ranked in the bottom five alongside Somalia, Myanmar, Iraq and Haiti. The report specifically focuses on the private sector, and notes that post-conflict states are particularly susceptible to entrenched corruption especially if the state has access to natural resource rents.

It is also worth noting that in an extensive 2010 UN study on corruption based on interviews of over 7,000 Afghans in twelve provincial capitals, Afghans paid over 2.5 billion dollars in bribes over a twelve month period (UN, 2010). The report further states that drugs and bribes are the two largest income generators in Afghanistan, amounting to about half the country’s GDP. More problematic for the purposes of our discussion is that public officials are identified as the main culprits in corruption charges, including the police, judges, prosecutors, and even senior government officials and members of parliament. The pervasiveness of corruption within the government and across sectors in society has been publicly admitted by President Hamid Karzai (Rubin, 2009), and was notoriously made public by the fraudulent activities of one of the country’s central banks (Kabul Bank) which implicated senior members of the Karzai government. Kabul Bank’s fraudulent activities involved over 900 million dollars
and the investigation revealed that not only were the Bank’s administrative bodies, supervisory bodies and decision making bodies all implicated, but that bank officials also worked closely with government officials and bribed elected officials to secure votes in order to advance their interests in parliament (Filkins, 2011; Rubin & Nordland, 2011). In only briefly outlining some of the corruption acknowledged and confirmed by international actors such as the UN, the World Bank, and foreign governments, the very idea of billions of dollars in rents from natural resource extraction that must pass through the Afghan government to ostensibly ‘reach’ Afghans eventually in the form of sound social and economic development seems highly doubtful - to say the least.

2.3 Resource Curse: Wars and Political Instability

Over the past decade, another strong trend that can be detected in the research on the resource curse thesis is the correlation between the presence of lucrative natural resources and armed conflict (Keen, 1998; Collier & Hoeffler, 1999; Berdal & Malone, 2000; Le Billon, 2005; Ballentine & Nitzshke, 2005; Humphreys et al., 2007). In his influential book, Resource Wars, Michael Klare (2001) argues that in resource rich states characterized by entrenched social and political tensions, wars and conflicts will likely be triggered as state and non-state actors will vie to capture and control resource wealth. This has been made evident by the protracted conflicts in oil rich Nigeria, gold endowed Congo and diamond rich Angola and Sierra Leone (Berdal & Malone, 2000; Bannon & Collier, 2003). The resource curse thesis situates these conflicts as greed motivated violence and rebellion, suggesting political motivations become secondary to economic ones. Furthermore, because the trade is so lucrative, the economic agenda of non-state actors may in fact thrive on the instability and conflict, such as what has unfolded in the Congo and Sierra Leone, thereby any efforts to achieve peace are deliberately sabotaged (Collier, 2000).
Although the nature of the conflicts differ, the literature confirms this high probability of armed conflict and protracted violence that is further accompanied by a number of other vices such as threats and intimidations against civilians, looting, extortion, kidnapping, smuggling and money laundering. According to his extensive analysis on conflict in natural resource rich lands, Le Billon (2005) identifies four kinds of full armed conflicts that will likely unfold in these states, mainly coup d’état, peasant rebellion, warlordism and secessionist struggles. What is missing from this list are imperialist wars, particularly in reference to the U.S led invasions in Afghanistan and Iraq. For Omeje (2008b), writing from an anti-colonial perspective, western and other foreign powers actively take part in the struggle to control natural resources and this has often meant that they are deeply entangled in the political economies of resource rich lands. This has meant that not only are wars waged, but also to secure their economic advantage foreign powers will prop up unpopular client regimes and fortify their power through military aid and defense partnerships.

It can be reasonably discerned that Afghanistan, a country that remains politically unstable and in a chronic state of violence and civil unrest, should only expect the continuity of conflict, or worse, greater intensity of war in the scramble and competition between state and non-state actors to control resource extraction and generate wealth. Given the number of foreign geo-strategic interests in the country already, there is little doubt that foreign militaries, particularly the United States, will exert all efforts to ensure that the trillion dollar resource wealth is not captured by insurgents and other belligerent non-state actors. Perhaps there is no coincidence that the US Defense Department’s Task force for Business and Stability Operations (TFBSO) is actively involved in the planning details of Afghanistan’s extractive industries. There can be no doubt that the existing conflict will only intensify as the insurgency will likely
aim to disrupt the foreign corporate presence and subvert and sabotage the ability of the Afghan
government to profit from the extractive industries. The Taliban insurgency is reported to have
already announced that it will target foreign mining corporations and any individuals working
with them, claiming the illegitimate government of Afghanistan has no right to issue permits
(France 24, 2010).

Much like other resource rich states, foreign corporations are therefore likely to hire
private security firms, and also make security arrangements with local militias and powerful
armed factions to protect their investments and operations in the country (Watts, 2008). Certainly
other criminal gangs and regional strongmen will also likely be vying for influence and control
over the resources, and in the absence of strong law enforcement, communities residing on
resource rich lands may suffer from economically motivated violence and intimidation. In his
detailed analysis of the political turmoil in oil rich Nigeria, for example, Michael Watts (2008)
reveals the degree of insecurity and chronic violence that is associated with natural resource rich
lands. In Nigeria, civilian militant groups have formed to retaliate against foreign oil companies
and the Nigerian military’s assaults on communities. This has led to a climate of insecurity,
involving car bombings, disruption of oil installations, pipeline explosions, kidnappings, attacks
on government buildings and murders. As a result of an escalation of violence in 2006, according
to Watts (2008) the Nigerian government estimated that between 1999-2005 oil losses amounted
to 6.8 billion, losses that were intended by an insurgency movement that has deliberately sought
to disrupt foreign oil operations by 30%.

The point here is to highlight that the extractive industries in Afghanistan, much like in
Nigeria and elsewhere, will most likely amplify the existing hyper militarized post-conflict
space, as conditions are already ripe for the escalation of violence for control over resource
wealth involving a range of armed actors including insurgents, competing factions, civil defense militias, private security forces, armed criminal gangs and others. Given the likelihood of this escalated violence in the country, the US Defense department’s Taskforce and the Afghan government, however, have been unusually silent about the armed conflict in the country in their active efforts to attract foreign investors. Since the announcement in the summer of 2010 about the trillion dollar wealth potential in the country, the defense department’s taskforce has been hosting western corporations in Afghanistan and organizing ‘tours’ of potential mining sites. It may very well be that some form of security arrangements are being negotiated as incentives to invest in the country, and no doubt, to assuage the security fears and concerns of foreign corporations.

Likewise, the government of Afghanistan, through The Afghan Investment Support Agency (AISA), an independent institution that is attempting to facilitate a ‘one-stop shop’ to serve the interests and needs of investors, has noticeably downplayed the conflict (AISA, 2010). In a detailed AISA document outlining the market prospects for mining, the existing war and conditions of violence are entirely absent from the list of formidable ‘challenges’ in Afghanistan that will impact foreign corporate activities. How can the existing armed conflict in the country not be considered as a major challenge? This omission becomes more problematic considering that most of Afghanistan’s mineral deposits are, according to a report by the United States Institute of Peace, located in regions where the insurgency is the strongest. Instead, the AISA document highlights issues such as lack of infrastructure, lack of investment in modern machinery and shortage of skilled workforce as the most major challenges. The only reference to the existing armed conflict in the country can be gleaned from only one sentence at the end of the
entire document, which reads that “security and de-mining is gradually improving” (AISA, 2010, p. 16).

In omitting the very real risk of intensified conflict, the US government, the Afghan government and many supporting members of the international community (such as the World Bank) are disavowing research accumulated over the last decade, that confirms that unstable, politically fragile and contested governments, such as the Karzai government, will stir varied forms of violence and unrest among the larger population. As explored in the previous section, corruption alone within the Afghan government will increase the distrust of Afghans towards the state, and many segments in society will likely challenge the legitimacy of the state to hold and receive resource rents. As the research on the resource curse indicates, the potential for civil unrest is high, and in this tenuous climate, rent-seeking governments will likely spend much of their profits on defense budgets rather than in social welfare programs in order to remain in power and in control of the industries (Le Billon, 2005). Political elites often appropriate state resources (military, judicial, etc.) to ensure their power is firm and may even engage in alliances with rebel factions in ways that David Keen (1998) aptly describes as “cooperative conflict”.

David Keen (1998) was among the first researchers to draw from the examples of Sudan, Cambodia, Peru and other states to illustrate how weak and corrupt governments will engage in what he terms as ‘cooperative conflict’, that is, conflicts which involve government soldiers and public officials taking bribes and participating alongside rebels to fight other non-state competitors as well as threaten uncooperative civilians residing on resource-rich areas. In Sierra Leone, for example, human rights activists have noted that government soldiers as well as rebels have pillaged and robbed communities for control over resources, and in the Sudan the government used air force and ground attacks to drive residents off oil areas that were not under
government control (Le Billon, 2005; Keen, 1998; Woodward, 2008). This state-based violence in Sudan is an important lesson for the international community that is currently focused on strengthening and expanding the Afghan National Army. As the Afghan government will no doubt employ the army to secure its control across the multiple sites of resource extraction in the country, David Keen (1998) provides a cautionary approach, in that “a poorly trained and equipped army may be unable effectively to confront rebel forces and may turn on civilians, partly in pursuit of immediate economic gain and partly out of fear and frustration” (p. 28).

2.4. The Resource Curse Thesis and the ‘Virtues’ of Private Investment

The international community is very much aware of the scholarly and policy consensus on the causes and conditions that lead to the resource curse phenomena discussed in the previous sections. There are certainly many serious risks for Afghanistan, however, the country is actively being encouraged to attract foreign private investments in order to jumpstart its extractive industries. In my framework of the new terra nullius, I argue that in actively encouraging foreign private investments, the international community is deliberately setting the country up for failure because the high risks associated with resource extraction that are firmly anchored within the institutional knowledge of western governments and international organizations, are being effectively ignored. That is to say, it is from within the international community’s own published studies and accounts of the resource curse thesis that confirm that there will be a very high probability that Afghanistan’s existing conflict will only intensify and that the widespread government corruption will most certainly derail any equitable redistribution of resource wealth to the majority of Afghans. Given the institutional recognition of these high risks, instead of promoting a cautionary approach, or perhaps even suggesting that the Afghan government hold
off until the country’s economic and political situation improves, Afghanistan is only expected to activate its natural resource industries, and to do so, through foreign private investment (AFP, 2011; Economist, 2010). Much like the classical notion of *terra nullius*, there is simply no alternative for the country because ‘idle’ land that is not made productive and profitable is considered wasteful and inefficient.

This ethos of the *new terra nullius* is perhaps best articulated by Haufler’s (2007) acute observation that post-conflict contexts offer a rare ‘opportunity’ for foreign investors to invest “at a time when there is little regulatory oversight, and little market competition” (p. 143). Although the author does agree that foreign investments if not properly regulated by the state can precipitate a return to violent conflict and worsen corruption, the emphasis remains on the overall positive benefits of capital investments because it is often the only option fragile/failed states have to fully develop their under-developed natural resource industries. For example, Afghanistan is considered to have no mining culture, and according to one geologist, it would take the country a few decades to fully exploit its mineral wealth if left on their own, suggesting that Afghans need “more than just a gold pan” to now help them extract minerals (Risen, 2010). There is certainly some truth to this because the capital and technology that is required for large-scale resource exploration and extraction is held only by a specialized group of multinational corporations (Humphreys et al., 2007), and it is precisely because of this context that many international policy makers choose to disregard or downplay the resource curse thesis.

In an IMF report examining the resource curse thesis, although case study examples of conflict, underdevelopment and instability are discussed, the authors of the report staunchly maintain the centrality of private investment as “an important driver of growth performance” (Arezki & van der Ploeg, 2007, p. 7). Since 2003, foreign direct investment to fragile states has
increased largely because of investments in natural resource production and the nine oil producing nations in the list of forty three fragile states accounted for 79% of this increase between the years 2003-2008 (OECD, 2010). Quite simply put, for the IMF and the World Bank, resource rich states require foreign private investment to initiate resource extraction, and as the IMF explicitly states, it is through foreign investments and by creating an enabling neo-liberal investment environment that “the resource curse is turned into a blessing” (Arezki & van der Ploeg, 2007, p. 10).

This narrative that private investment is the cure to the curse is at best simplistic, but one that many international actors, including aid agencies, have subscribed to. Following the announcement of the country’s trillion dollar mineral wealth potential, USAID immediately organized a mining investment conference in September 2010, inviting members of the Afghan government, mining companies, investment bankers and others to urge foreign investments and inform investors about Afghanistan’s new investment friendly environment. Similarly, the World Bank has also endorsed and promoted this unfettered environment for foreign investments in the country, most evident by their active role in writing Afghanistan’s new mining and investment laws, which are one of the most liberal investment laws in the region. Interestingly, although the Bank has documented the impact of the resource curse for decades and financed some of the most influential research in the field (see, for example Collier & Hoeffler, 1999), the following statement on their website conveys the World Bank’s distinct resource ‘management’ approach to extractive industries in Afghanistan,

Simply put, if managed properly, mining in Afghanistan has the potential to be a driver of poverty reduction and sustained growth. The Afghan government is conscious of the resource curse challenges and has taken important steps to address them. These steps include actions to
improve the implementation of legal frameworks for effective environmental, social and fiscal regimes; the provision of training and capacity building in relevant ministries and agencies; and the overall improvement of the country’s security situation. In this context, the World Bank Group and other partners have been supporting the Government of Afghanistan in establishing the building blocks for developing its mineral resources in an effective and transparent manner. These building blocks include broad institutional reforms, capacity building and transparency initiatives (World Bank, 2010b).

Indeed, the World Bank’s cautious tone hints to the possibility that much could go wrong. However, there is an underlying assumption that with some institutional reforms and more training and capacity building initiatives at the Ministerial level, the Afghan government will somehow be able to effectively mitigate the negative effects of the resource curse. This optimism is evident in a 2010 report published by the World Bank’s Oil, Gas and Mining Unit, in which the Bank’s efforts to support natural resource industries is stated to have been met with “spectacular results with respect to Investment”, however, only “good results with respect to institution building” (McMahon, 2010, p. 2). In assessing the situation in Afghanistan there is arguably a need for a more realistic approach, not an optimistic one. By merely suggesting that Afghanistan will only need to undergo some institutional reforms and include some precautionary measures, the World Bank is acting irresponsibly, especially since the only independent review of Afghanistan’s first resource-based foreign contract published by Integrity Watch Afghanistan has stressed that there are in fact no functioning regulations and regulatory bodies set up by the government to monitor the industry (Integrity Watch Afghanistan, 2008).
2.5 The Counter “Corporate-Resource Curse Thesis”

A closer look into the resource curse thesis will further reveal that policy and academic writing often associates mainly national actors (government or non-state actors) with corruption, bad policies, mismanagement of rents, looting, smuggling, violence and rebellion, whereas foreign governments and foreign corporations are absent from any direct and incriminating role in the resource curse. They are either innocent bystanders or necessary economic agents (see for example the important work of Collier, 2000; Keen, 1998; Le Billon, 2005; Berdal & Malone, 2000; and Arezki & van der Ploeg, 2007). From a postcolonial framework I claim that in constructing only national actors in resource rich lands as greedy, exploitative, corrupt and violent, this enables foreign governments and corporations to be understood only as ‘saviors’ that have an overall positive presence by bringing the benefits of capital, technology, jobs and wealth to these economically idle, inefficient and destitute countries (see Le Billon 2005; Collier, 2000; Arezki & van der Ploeg, 2007). In the literature, very little attention is paid to the propensity or susceptibility of foreign corporations to exploit the resources, environment and labor of another country with impunity. Most corporations, for example, situate themselves within a space of ‘innocence’, particularly in conflict settings, assuming they are neutral actors that are only caught up in a bad situation of existing tensions and instabilities. Although there are some scholarly works that unmask the assumed neutrality of corporations (see Zandvliet, 2005; Stiglitz, 2007; Watts, 2008; Sovacool, 2011), for the most part, as Watts (2008:60) astutely points out, foreign companies have generally no analytical presence in scholarly research on predation and rebellion in resource rich states, but rather, appear “as the unfortunate corporate entities that are predated by rebels”.

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Despite this dominant narrative, communities around the world have resisted foreign corporations, particularly their involvement in environmental degradation and in destabilizing security and triggering political and economic instability. In Nigeria, for example, leaked internal reports of Shell and Chevron confirm that oil companies were involved in cutting deals with local chiefs to the detriment of community development, paying cash to unemployed youth for security and intimidation, and using military and private security to subdue civilian protests (Watts, 2008). In some places, such as in Colombia, oil companies are given the ‘license’ to repress and police agitated communities with violence and impunity (Buxton, 2008), and in other regions foreign corporations have also taken part in the illicit arms trade, financed rebellions to secure favorable concession rights, and made payments to local rebel groups after extortion threats (Ballentine, 2004). Given these kinds of corporate dealings, Benjamin Sovacool’s (2011) notion of a ‘corporate resource curse’ makes sense. His study reveals that the alliance between corporations and governments often curtail any efforts by civil society and the public to positively influence the extractive economy. He rightly insists that corporations are indeed the ‘missing’ link in the resource curse thesis, causing more harm to local communities than offering benefits. This rare admission is not echoed by the majority of scholars in the field, in Le Billon’s (2005) influential work in this field, for example, he does not explicitly implicate the negative role of foreign governments and corporations but does acknowledge that multinational corporations have thrived on the absence of democracy in resource rich lands. In relation to Nigeria’s human rights records, Le Billon (2005) includes a quote from a western based oil company stating “for a commercial company trying to make investments, you need a stable environment. Dictatorships can give you that” (p. 23). Generally, multinationals admit that based on their history in resource rich areas they would prefer dictatorships over even strong
democratic regimes suggesting that businesses have been wary of “messy democratization processes” (*Ibid.*).

Instead of admonishing the activities of corporations, and particularly highlighting their active role in the resource curse thesis, there is a disproportionate emphasis on implicating local and national actors. For example, armed resistance against corporations and the state are mainly perceived as peevish, violent behavior that disrupts efficient operations. They are most often projected as having no real or legitimate grievances against the state and foreign corporations. Paul Collier’s influential work (2000), for example, reduces rebel activities to organized crime, arguing that insurgencies in resource rich territories are mobilized less around real grievances, and more around greed. Not surprisingly Collier’s greed- based perspective is widely accepted by resource-rich governments as well as by the IMF and the World Bank that prefer to point the blame for violence and unrest on belligerent non-state actors. In his examination of the conflict diamond trade in Sierra Leone, Kabia (2008) challenges this assumption. Although he acknowledges that the RUF has indeed contributed to gross human rights violations and the perpetuation of exploitation and conflict, Kabia highlights that the origins of RUF can actually be traced to aggrieved university students and community members that formed the group because of the inequity and injustice they witnessed around the mining of diamonds. He argues that it was the absence of democratic space and a responsive government which created the conditions for RUF to initially use violence. This analysis of the RUF is a far cry from Collier’s (2000) rather simplistic and dismissive reference to rebels as participants of organized crime networks with no real or legitimate grievances.

Similarly in Nigeria, the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) were also initially made up of gangs created and financed by politicians to rig elections,
however, the young men turned against the government and organized themselves into a movement to fight for the people residing in the Delta to share in the benefits of oil through investments in roads, schools and hospitals (Duffield, 2010). Although it is not the purpose of this study to investigate the motivations and behaviors of these groups, the point to be made is that one cannot infer that resistance groups are more motivated by greed than grievance (see Zalik, 2008). What often does not go reported are the failed negotiations and small scale protests against foreign oil companies that involve many community members, such as the hundreds of Ugborodo women from Nigeria protesting underdevelopment in their communities through a blockade of a Chevron natural gas pipeline (Arubi, 2010). These women in 2010 were protesting the declining living standards in their communities and the lack of shoreline protection facilities, insisting that Chevron destroyed their livelihoods because of the oil pollutions. As the following section explores, instead of supporting and protecting communities, the Afghan government has passed new investment laws that will likely pave the way for the long term foreign corporate monopoly over Afghanistan’s lucrative resource industry, and in doing so, exacerbating the welfare of Afghans and the country’s vulnerability to the resource curse phenomena.

3.1 The New Laws and the Establishment of a Foreign Corporate Monopoly

In my framework of the *new terra nullius*, I further argue that in making productive use out of Afghanistan’s latent, ‘idle’ yet lucrative natural resource industry, the Afghan government has been promoting and facilitating foreign corporate control over the extractive industries, instead of supporting and promoting domestic ownership and local economic development. The emphasis has been to first reconfigure domestic legal frameworks so that international capital can easily and quickly flow in and out of the country, offering foreign investors full ownership over their ventures with virtually no barriers in the extraction, processing and exporting of natural resources. The Afghan Embassy in the United States accurately claims that Afghanistan has one of the most liberal investment laws in the region and offers a lucrative investment environment. The investment laws that were passed shortly after the US-led victory were written with the ‘help’ of World Bank advisors, and in examining these new laws it is evident that these ostensibly *national* laws are not written for the benefit of Afghan citizens but are almost entirely oriented for a foreign (corporate) audience. I centrally argue that they fundamentally facilitate a foreign monopoly over these resources, creating conditions for ‘foreign corporate territories’ to be formed within the country that can effectively bypass the domestic Afghan economy, and furthermore, operate in the country with very little restrictions and oversight.

The various laws governing the Mineral, Oil and Natural Gas industries, as well as private investment, make no distinction between foreign and domestic entities. By making no
distinctions, the laws privilege foreign firms that have unfettered access to capital, technology and labor to easily win contracts over domestic entities. There is no recognition that decades of war and violence have structurally disadvantaged domestic economic actors from being able to ‘fairly’ compete with foreign corporations within their own country. In the World Bank’s (2009) economic update report on Afghanistan and a survey conducted in 2009 and 2010 of over 700 Afghan businesses carried out by the Center for International Private Enterprise (CIPE 2010), Afghan owned businesses, despite their intentions to expand, stated that they were unable to do so because of tremendous government corruption, the continuity of insecurity and damaged infrastructure across the country. The survey clearly revealed the structural disadvantages for domestic firms caused by decades of war, indicating that only one-third of Afghan businesses actually bid on contracts. A key barrier to expansion is the lack of access to capital, as the CIPE survey confirmed, less than 15% of all the businesses surveyed were able to obtain bank loans, while the rest borrowed money from family and friends or relied on their savings. In failing to take these kinds of restrictions into account, that is, by not offering adequate protection and support to redress structural barriers, existing and even emerging domestic firms will most certainly be disadvantaged and unable to compete with foreign investors over lucrative, long term contracts.

Although no measures are in place to legally protect domestic firms from unfair foreign competition, the very idea of ‘fair and competitive’ bidding must be interrogated, particularly because it is at best a tenuous principle in practice. The government of Afghanistan, for example, upon awarding its first and largest contract in 2008 to a Chinese firm to establish the Aynak copper mine in Logar Province, was criticized for unfair bidding practices (Gilpin & Pandya, 2010). The China Metallurgical Group was awarded the contract to develop one of the largest
copper deposits in the world, and the 3 billion dollar investment by the Chinese firm is now the largest foreign investment in Afghanistan’s history (Huntzinger, 2008). Clearly, the bidding process involves billions of dollars that allow only a handful of multinational corporations in the world to take part in. This approach hardly seems fair, particularly since only large scale and capital intensive operations are preferred over smaller scaled operations, in which case Afghan economic actors will likely never be the primary owners and benefactors of Afghanistan’s resource industries. This inevitable outcome is never problematized by the Afghan government or the international community. Instead, I claim that domestic ownership is in fact intentionally undermined because the Afghan state recognizes that it can only receive billions of dollars of revenues through taxes and royalties from multinational corporations, not from domestic firms. Mining activities could over time contribute to over half of Afghanistan’s current national budget (Huntzinger, 2008). This highly profitable arrangement for the Afghan government is perhaps the underlying reason as to why the state offers no legal protection or incentives to support the expansion of an Afghan owned industry of small scale mining and resource extraction. The laws, therefore, echo the neo-liberal logic that rejects any hints of protectionism, and in doing so, helps facilitate the conditions for a foreign corporate monopoly over the resource industry. In expunging all possibilities for domestic ownership, I argue in the following sections that the *new terra nullius* enables foreign firms to easily transfer billions of dollars of profits out of the country, inevitably creating such conditions in which foreign countries and foreign economies will likely benefit more from Afghanistan’s immense mineral wealth, more so than Afghans.

### 3.2 Investment Laws and the Implications for Afghanistan’s Domestic Economy
It is my central argument that the ostensibly *national* investment laws governing the resource industry are oriented *away* from Afghans and *towards* privileging foreign corporations. Consequently, the domestic economy will likely be sidelined and more problematic is that the trillion dollar resource industry will only provide marginal benefits to the majority of Afghans. In substantiating this argument, as a starting point, it is important to recognize that unlike other countries which restrict foreign ownership and stipulate joint ventures, foreign firms working in Afghanistan can be awarded 100% ownership and are able to lease large tracts of land for up to fifty years. Far more problematic is that the laws essentially permit multinationals to ‘parachute’ in their entire workforce as well as any goods and services. The implications for Afghans are profound, because essentially foreign firms are able to completely bypass any local economic encounters or any obligations to support local economies if they are not inclined to do so. Although the laws do encourage foreign corporations to hire and train Afghans and support local Afghan goods and services, it is not required. Afghan laws furthermore enable corporations to easily transfer their profits out of the country with little to no restrictions. The laws maximize their profits by providing various financial incentives such as deferral and even reduction of tax payments, custom fees and partial and even complete exemption from tax payable business receipts.

In helping foreign corporations maximize their profits, this inevitably means that the bulk of Afghanistan’s resource wealth will be channeled out of the country, benefitting foreign economies, rather than in actually remaining in Afghanistan. According to a report by the Christian Science Monitor, Afghans expressed concern that Americans would now permanently occupy the country and appropriate the mineral wealth. This fear is based on a general suspicion and frustration among Afghans that much like the aid money entering the country that has not
benefitted their communities, the mineral wealth will also likely not reap any immediate benefits for ordinary Afghans and only government elites and foreign corporations will directly profit (Arnoldy, 2010). Afghans have good reason to be skeptical, particularly because there is a very real possibility that much like what has unfolded in Nigeria, the living standards of Afghans will remain the same, or worse, they may further deteriorate concomitant to the profits accumulated by both the government and foreign corporations. This will likely be the outcome because the laws do not explicitly prioritize the Afghan economy. For example, the laws include no conditions for corporations to purchase local products as part of their licensing agreement, to form joint ventures or conduct capacity building and the transfer of technology to local economic actors. There are also no stipulations for the mandatory employment and training of Afghans or restrictions on the number of expatriates working in the country. Another critical absence is that foreign firms are not required to use a certain percentage of locally produced Afghan goods and Afghan services. Therefore, instead of stipulating that foreign firms locally process raw materials, the laws enable foreign firms to export raw materials for processing outside of the country if it is more economically viable for them to do so. Certainly, industries in the home countries of these corporations, such as the United States and China, will likely benefit more from Afghanistan’s vast resources under these conditions, further undermining the full economic prosperity of small to medium Afghan processing industries that can not only be bypassed by foreign firms, but are further prohibited to extract and process minerals on their own without a legal license.

I argue that the only clear opportunity that is anticipated for Afghans in the emerging extractive industries is menial labour. The World Bank’s 2010 overview report on mining in poor countries, for example, does not mention the need for domestic ownership, but rather,
focuses on how the mining sector should maximize employment opportunities for local populations (McMahon, 2010). This outlook is reverberated by the US Defense Department’s Taskforce, as they identify the benefits to Afghans mainly in terms of employment in construction and as mine workers. For example, the Taskforce assumes,

construction employment rates at 12,000 to 20,000 people per mine and direct long term stable employment at the mine of roughly 6,000 people each. A medium-scale copper mine like Balkhab could attract $400 million in investment, 2,000 to 5,000 jobs during the construction phase, and direct long term employment of up to 1,200 people….These figures alone do not account for those people employed by the related industries necessary—the lab technicians, sampling crews, truck drivers, and hospitality industry workers—to support the mining towns. (Fritz et al., 2011, p. 6)

These anticipated opportunities for Afghans are largely labour intensive, and the taskforce fails to mention that foreign corporation can in fact bypass domestic labour and domestic industries entirely if they choose to do so. Interestingly, in her detailed qualitative research study on household incomes in Afghanistan, Kantor (2008) concludes that the Afghan government’s emphasis on private sector development and foreign direct investments have only assumed to bring employment to Afghans, but they have not actually expanded job opportunities across the country. Paula Kantor remarks that this is largely because the Afghan government does not place any conditions on investors to create plenty of well paying jobs with decent working conditions. Nevertheless, assuming it is more economically feasible for multinationals to hire local Afghans, the potential labour opportunities for Afghans will certainly be helpful because of the high rates of unemployment across the country (Kantor, 2008). As noted in the Center for International Private Enterprise (CIPE, 2010) report, for example, opinion polls since 2006 have revealed that Afghans rate jobs and economic prosperity as the country’s greatest need, more so than security. However, the number of positions for menial labour (see supra) are
still quite limited and because they will likely be temporary and seasonal, the prospects for long
term job security will be negligible. Furthermore, even the World Bank has acknowledged that
since the late 1970s the technological advancements in the mining sector have changed the
industry considerably and mining operations today employ far fewer people than in the past,
hence as the Bank astutely notes “reducing the benefits communities received from mining”
(McMahon, 2010, p. 8).

3.3 The Possibilities for a People-Focused Approach to Support Afghan Economic
Sovereignty

Thus far, I have attempted to outline some aspects of the new investment laws that will
likely undermine the domestic economy and offer only marginal benefits to Afghans. In arguing
that the laws governing the resource industry are oriented away from Afghans and towards
privileging foreign corporations, in this section I seek to anchor some policies, stipulations and
incentives that are absent in Afghanistan’s policy framework, but which if included, could help
mitigate the risks of the resource curse and ensure that communities are the primary benefactors
of their country’s resource wealth (see for example Ross 2007; Humphreys et al., 2007).
Interestingly, there is an explicit reference in the various Mineral laws that identify the ‘people of
Afghanistan’ to be the primary benefactors of the country’s resource wealth, a sentiment also
expressed by the Department of Defense’s Taskforce for Business and Stability Operations in
Afghanistan. According to the Taskforce, their operations are guided by this underlying question:
“What are the indigenous resources the Afghan people can use to create such a viable economic
base, thereby ensuring Afghan economic sovereignty?” (Fritz et al., 2011, p.3). I argue that there
are in fact no legal provisions or policies that support these mainly rhetorical references to
prioritize the welfare of Afghans. Furthermore, I aim to show that the international community is
aware of best practices and alternative policies and provisions that can offer some support to communities residing in resource-rich states, especially since these policies have been promoted in other countries with some success. However, what is disturbing is the conspicuous absence of these provisions from Afghanistan’s policy framework.

As a starting point, I would suggest that the laws should be revised to stipulate that only Afghans by birth and Afghan-based companies have the right to develop mines and mineral fuels. This is perhaps the best strategy to ensure the resource industry actually promotes Afghan economic sovereignty. Although this legal revision is highly unlikely in the current political climate, perhaps a more realistic starting point is to revise the laws to make it conditional for foreign investors to purchase local goods and process raw materials locally as well as stipulate that firms form joint ventures with Afghan businesses and invest in development projects. In places like Papua New Guinea, for example, the World Bank has intervened to ensure foreign and domestic business partnerships are established and that local development programs are prioritized (McMahon, 2010). In addition, the Bank has also encouraged foreign corporations to enter into memorandums of agreements directly with their host communities. Local communities have also been supported to participate in mining agreements, and there are even examples of the Bank’s strong advocacy efforts to support the involvement of women in contract negotiations.

These inclusive and community centered practices are most certainly a result of the history of the intense resistance over decades against foreign corporations, which in some cases, such as the 1989 local resistance in Bougainville, Papua New Guinea, led to the shutting down of mining operations altogether (McMahon, 2010). As a result, the Bank has been active in supporting consultations between governments and citizens, especially for citizens to have greater decision making power. For example, in some resource rich states there are community
organizations established, such as the Community Based Natural Resources Management (CBNRM) in Botswana. This program partly transfers the management of resource lands directly to local areas so communities living on the land can ensure they benefit and have their voices heard (Thakadu, 2005). This project, as well as others are designed to increase local decision making capacities, so that communities can determine whether and how resources are to be extracted and by whom, in addition to how the revenues will be spent and the kinds of regulations needed to protect revenues from corruption (Humphreys 2005).

Oddly, these community-centered strategies are completely absent in Afghanistan’s policy framework, despite their implementation in other countries as part of the Bank’s ‘lessons learnt’ practices. Since these basic community centered approaches are not included, it is unlikely that the Afghan government will include other provisions such as establishing a third party fund, in which resource rents are directly deposited, therefore, bypassing the government altogether. This inclusion would certainly mitigate corruption in addition to legislation mandating the full public disclosure of all contracts as well as any conflicts of interests and judicial reviews (Humphreys, 2005; Bell & Faria, 2007; Humphreys et al., 2007). Furthermore, the Bolivian government’s 2004 national referendum to determine how the government should manage natural resources is an exemplary example of nation-wide democratic engagement. The government made public the structure of the oil industry and the likely size and impact of oil revenues, and also held community based forums to discuss expenditure priorities and appointed representatives (Humphreys, 2005). It is doubtful that the Afghan government will introduce national referendums, but many of the options outlined, I argue are practical inclusions that could go a long way to ensure transparency, accountability and reduce corruption. In highlighting these...
options, however, what is glaringly evident is the range of options that are possible, but are currently not on the table for Afghans.

Perhaps these strategies will be considered in the future, but their current absence confirms their secondary importance for the World Bank and Afghan government, especially since billion dollar corporate bids are already underway and there is no mention of mandatory community participation. In fact, instead of protecting the interest of communities from foreign exploitation, the government, in contrast, offers incentives to foreign investors and also aims to make their interaction with communities ‘hassle’ free. A strong case in point is that the laws allow foreign corporations to evict Afghans off resource rich lands, albeit with proper compensation. Since the judicial system in the country is weak, and widely acknowledged as corrupt, community grievances and/or land claims will likely be untenable in courts, especially if communities have no legal protection and are left alone to fight against foreign firms with large legal defense budgets and government support. In one of first independent reviews of Afghanistan’s new resource economy, the authors of the Integrity Watch Afghanistan (2008) report emphasize that there are essentially ill defined or no regulatory bodies to protect communities and ensure social, labour, environmental obligations are met. This is especially the case with land tenure and environmental protection. Instead of working to protect Afghans, the government of Afghanistan’s Investment Support Agency (AISA), which purports to be the ‘one stop’ agency for investors, promises to issue licenses to corporations in less than one week. This speedy process is applauded by the World Bank, which now ranks Afghanistan 16th in the world in terms of the ease in starting a business. Certainly thorough consultations with affected communities will be absent, not to mention a complete investigation into the background of the applicant and a careful review of the intended business plan. These efforts require a longer time
frame than under one week, particularly to assess the short and long term environmental, socio-political and economic implications.

In addition to community-centered and sensitive provisions and strategies, the Afghan government could have also included a framework for the possibility of state owned enterprises to emerge in the future. State owned firms prevent the natural resource economy from being monopolized by foreign firm and help to ensure revenues are reinvested in the country. They can be further supported by legislation allocating a certain percentage of mineral production to the state, in addition to the state securing rights over a percentage of private sector profits (Stiglitz, 2007). Not surprisingly, Afghanistan’s mining laws entirely dismiss these possibilities perhaps because of the World Bank’s own bias against supporting state owned firms that have incurred a documented history of “poor management, lack of reinvestment and the typical governance challenges” (McMahon, 2010, p. 7). However, contrary to the World Bank’s conclusion, both Julia Buxton (2008) and Anna Zalik (2008) highlight some positive aspects of state run firms based on their analysis of resource extraction in Latin America. As both authors point out, after years of popular unrest against neo-liberal policies, populations supported revisions to laws regulating national resources by bringing leftist regimes into power across Latin America. Venezuela, for example, under the Chavez government revised the constitution in 1999 and the hydrocarbons law of 2001, which lead to the rise of taxes and royalties and initiated the re-nationalization of the resource industry. Venezuela has one of the world’s largest oil and natural gas reserves in the world, and until the election of Hugo Chavez in 1998, the country’s entire resource industry was privatized. For Chavez, the objective was for Venezuela to have full sovereign rights, which although still includes privatization, it only does so with checks and balances to ensure that the Venezuelan government has majority stake and greater regulation
(OPEC Bulletin, 2006). According to Buxton (2008), these shifts were positive as they directed approximately 6 billion dollars directly into social programs in 2005 and 8 billion in 2006 to such programs as health, housing and job creation. The Venezuelan experience serves as a solid example for Afghanistan. The social and health projects that were implemented by community-based organizations contributed to improving the country’s human development index and reduced levels of poverty. Furthermore, according to government statistics, Buxton (2008) notes that state redistribution has led to the construction of 3,000 primary schools, and over 1 million students were supported to finish secondary education as well as thousands of students were given scholarships to attend university. In the past decade, other leftist governments in Latin America, such as Argentina and Nicaragua, have also called for greater national public control over natural resources, however, these shifts unfolding in region were for obvious reasons not popular with the World Bank, and therefore, were absent in the drafting of Afghanistan’s mineral laws.

Based on the discussion thus far, it is evident that people-centered provisions could have been included within Afghanistan’s legal framework, especially since these options are already part of the World Bank’s institutional knowledge and were implemented based on the experiences of other resource-rich states. In concluding this section, however, I would suggest that by far the best option for Afghanistan, given the country’s existing economic and political challenges is for the country to do nothing. To essentially leave the wealth in the ground and either wait until conditions improve, or promote and support only low intensive, domestic extraction. However, this option which I would suggest is the only option that will ensure a resource curse is not triggered in Afghanistan is not even considered by the US government, Afghan government or the World Bank. In fact, the literature on the resource curse thesis seldom
explores the option of doing ‘nothing’ (see for example, Le Billon, 2005; Haufler, 2007; McMahon, 2010). This rare perspective is, however, uniquely articulated in Humphreys et al.’s (2007) very thoughtful and thorough examination on the resource curse thesis in their edited book entitled *Escaping the Resource Curse*. Although the book explores a variety of options and strategies, the authors do note that in those cases where there is a strong possibility that governments will use revenues for their own purposes, rather than for the good of society, then the international community should discourage private investment and promote postponing extraction of resources. Joseph Stiglitz (2007) expands on this suggestion in his contributing chapter by arguing that privatization can actually exacerbate corruption and will likely lead to a situation where neither the state nor the communities will be paid a fair share for their resources. Stiglitz clearly exposes the negative implications of foreign investments by, for example, clarifying the primary motivation for corporate involvement. Stiglitz (2007) writes, “Their objective is not to increase your well-being, but theirs…whatever the contract that has been signed, corporations are tempted to cheat – to pay less than they are supposed to” (pp. 24-25). Stiglitz argues that even in the United States, corporations involved in resource extraction have a history of corruption and cheating, giving recent examples from Alaska and Alabama. Given the current context in Afghanistan, therefore, I would concur with Stiglitz’s wise advice to simply wait, and in the meantime for governments to focus on strengthening their political institutions and investing in the development of their own state-owned enterprises such as Norway, Malaysia and Chile have done with relative success.

**Conclusion: Colonial Empires and Robbing Natural Wealth**

In identifying the economic contours of the *new terra nullius*, this chapter has argued that Afghanistan, as a failed state, is constructed as resource rich but economically idle, inefficient
and even a ‘cursed’ land, thereby justifying international economic restructuring. I have argued that the continuity of the colonial worldview of *terra nullius* can be detected, a rationale used to construct lands as ‘empty’ and justified their acquisition if indigenous economic forms were considered to be underutilized, backward or insufficiently developed. In my framework of the *new terra nullius*, this chapter examined Afghanistan’s nascent natural resource industry and the strong push for private investment to make productive and profitable use of the country’s latent and ‘idle’ trillion-dollar resource wealth. I have argued that in actively supporting and promoting investments to jumpstart the country’s extractive industries, the international community, mainly the World Bank and the US government, has deliberately set Afghanistan up for failure because of the widely known and accepted risks associated with the resource curse phenomena. The country is now susceptible to an intensified conflict over control of the resource wealth as well as the diversion of billions of dollars worth of resource rents away from Afghan communities due to structural corruption. Clearly as the previous section outlined, the international community is very aware of a range of strategies to prevent or mitigate the negative implications of the resource curse thesis, but has failed to do so.

In assessing the impact of foreign investment in the country this chapter anchors a dominant theme evident throughout this study. That is, to locate existing post-conflict reforms as a strategy to achieve greater foreign proximity and ‘resemblance’ to the state. As the analysis in this chapter has revealed, the policy framework for Afghanistan’s resource economy is directed *away* from benefitting Afghans and the Afghan economy, and is oriented *towards* foreign economic actors by including privileged and familiar terms for corporate activities. This is a familiar colonial strategy, one that was even noted in an IMF study on resource extraction (Arezki & van der Ploeg, 2007) which acknowledged, rather explicitly, the underlying ‘colonial
settler mentality’ of foreign exploitation over third world natural resources. The search to invest
and extract natural resources from Afghanistan is part of what feminists, Marxists and other
critical scholars have long identified as a history of colonial exploitation in foreign lands that is
motivated by the search for gold, ivory, tobacco, salt, minerals and other raw materials (see Isla,
2007).

Indeed raw materials and natural resources are central to the colonizer/colonized
relationship, and the current ‘capture’ of Afghanistan’s extractive industry reverberates this
familiar colonial history of resource appropriation, which is concomitant to military subjugation,
patriarchal domination, environmental degradation and labour exploitation. Therefore, there is
nothing particularly new about the anticipated foreign corporate monopoly over Afghanistan’s
resources, it is only a continuity of a colonial practice to claim control over resource rich lands
by offering trading companies unfettered access to mining and extraction as well as the right to
subjugate populations (Mbembe, 2001). The Afghan Mineral laws echo the privilege given to
foreign economic actors over domestic ones, and as Omeje (2008b) points out, the
corporatization of public laws initially emerged in colonies (and not in Europe) through imperial
edicts and laws that were established to ensure colonial monopoly over exploration and rights
and access over resource wealth, whether mining, oil, iron diamonds or coal. As Omeje (2008b)
writes, “Additional laws that, among other benefits, guaranteed unhindered access to land
through compulsory expropriation, conscription of cheap labour…and general tax incentives
were put in place in various colonies to support the operation of the early transnational
corporations” (p. 3). This chapter’s discussion on the new terra nullius, therefore, sought to
anchor and substantiate the continuity of this colonial desire, by identifying how Afghanistan’s
‘national’ laws enable foreign firms to capture, control and consume the lucrative resource wealth in the country.
CHAPTER SIX

Toward Decolonizing Statebuilding

The overall purpose of this study was to address the problematic of repeated failed international interventions in war-affected societies, specifically in Afghanistan, where the ostensible goal of restructuring the Afghan state into a stable and strong liberal democratic state remains an elusive goal. Drawing from post-colonial analysis, this study applied the constructs of colonial ambivalence and mimicry, as well as *terra nullius*, to international post-conflict interventions in Afghanistan in efforts to bring attention to the continuity of a colonial worldview that underpins modern statebuilding practices. As such, this study has argued that post-conflict interventions, echoing the legacy of colonial missions, primarily rekindles and reasserts the west’s own sense of meaning and purpose in the country, ensuring that westerners, and not necessarily Afghans, are the primary beneficiaries of post-conflict interventions.

This study first explored post colonial theorist Homi Bhabha’s (2004) notion of colonial ambivalence and mimicry to contextualize the contradictory international policies and interventions that support the central Afghan state on the one hand, while undermining and even subverting the chances for a strong state to emerge on the other. I argued that mimicry is characterized by ambivalent interventions that have given way to a partial and incomplete state in Afghanistan, one that resembles or mimics liberal political modernity, rather than attains full statehood. I have argued that this partial glimpse of liberal political modernity is deliberate, because as Bhabha (2004)points out, the colonial fantasy is never to complete the full transformation of the colonized, for that would warrant the end of the colonial mission, or as
Ashis Nandy (1983) points out, paralyze the colonizer. Rather, a partially reformed and recognizable Other is desired, one who is almost the same, but not quite the same (Bhabha, 2004). As Chapter Three explored in detail, this ambivalence can be detected in international strategies that on the one hand focus on strengthening central Afghan political and economic governance, while on the other hand, bypass this very government by setting up a parallel aid apparatus across the country, and far worse, fortifying warlords and armed non-state actors that continue to undermine the state and will likely overthrow it after international troops withdraw from the country. I have argued that these conflicting strategies are an outcome of neocolonial state relations that seek to reorient the Afghan state only to the extent that the west can “see” itself and declare a liberal defeat over alternative or competing worldviews, in this case Islamic extremism.

Secondly, this study explored the continuity of the colonial construct of terra nullius, used to justify the appropriation of inhabited lands that were pronounced empty or vacant if no recognizable nor legitimate political forms and economic activities were detected. I have argued that the new terra nullius emerges in the discourse of labeling Afghanistan a failed state for having dysfunctional and deficient (modern) political processes and structures, as well as having an ‘idle’ and highly inefficient economy. In rendering Afghanistan a politically ‘vacant’ state, the country is set up for highly intrusive foreign interventions that direct the state away from the possibility of adopting different visions of governance that may resonate more closely with Afghanistan’s own politico-historical trajectory, and towards the singular path of a modern, liberal-democratic state. Furthermore, in examining the economic contours of the new terra nullius, this study exposed the ways in which western powers and foreign corporations are able
to capture, control and consume the resource wealth in the country on the basis of declaring Afghanistan’s economy as ‘idle’ and inefficient.

In this concluding chapter, I intend to further explore and substantiate the key argument of this study that westerners, more so than Afghans, have become the primary beneficiaries of post-conflict interventions, and as such, post-conflict interventions construct the Afghan state away from Afghans and towards the west. In Part 1 of this chapter, I further the discussion on how the Afghan state is outwardly oriented to be responsive to the expertise and expectations of the international community, rather than being inwardly oriented and responsive to the needs, expectations and lived realities of the majority of Afghans. Westerners navigate across the country on familiar and recognizable political, social and economic terrain in ways that have alienated the majority of Afghans and distanced them from the modern Afghan state. In Part 2 of this chapter, I argue for new directions and possibilities in aid relations and outcomes that rest on the concomitant transformation of conditions abroad but also shifting and restructuring western societies from within. To do so, however, this study recommends a fundamental shift on part of the West from doing more abroad to doing far less, and paying greater attention to unpacking and dismantling the kinds of relations and interventions that perpetuate inequity and injustice that this study has helped to tease out. In this sense, the findings of this study recommend the project to decolonize post-conflict reconstruction and statebuilding. Not surprisingly, this means moving away from contributing to the existing discourse of ‘best practices’ or ‘lessons learnt’ or to any of the toolkits, theoretical or otherwise that attempt to help improve and augment the efficacy of existing international activities in Afghanistan. Rather, this study concludes by affirming and restating Gayatri Spivak’s acute advice to the western establishment that it should take a moratorium on producing any more global solutions (Spivak and Harasym 1990) and Ilan
Kapoor’s (2008) insistence on the need for greater personal and institutional “self reflexivity” so as to not contribute to the continuity of unequal, neocolonial relations. I contend that perhaps by not doing, by not imposing and by not producing, conceptualizing or planning, the west stands to gain considerably from listening, receiving, learning and reflecting. Taking up less ‘space’ may enable war-affected societies to critically engage and theorize alternative and perhaps competing frameworks in their efforts to make the post-conflict agenda more relevant, inclusive and meaningful to their lives.
Part 1: Statebuilding in Afghanistan: A Foreign Pre-‘Occupation’

1.1 Carving the Familiar and Expunging the Unfamiliar

As this study has shown, the political and economic road maps used to restructure Afghanistan are those that open up only those spaces that engage western expertise and secure the west’s knowledge, authority, experience and relevance in the country. Whether the focus is on promoting liberal democracy (Chapter Three) a neo-weberian state structure (Chapter Four) or market capitalism (Chapter Five), or even other fields not extensively addressed in this study, such as rural development, media literacy or gender reforms, I insist that they primarily facilitate the west’s access into Afghanistan on familiar terms, affirming its relevance, leadership and authority in the country. This has meant that westerners and western educated Afghans can create and direct new programs, overcome new challenges, master new skills, gain more experience, have new achievements to celebrate and failures to evaluate. These interventions always frame westerners as the active knowers, the noble givers and neutral interveners, whereas Afghans are passive recipients who need to be emancipated, reformed and disciplined into modern western subjects.

Thus, no paths for the recovery of Afghanistan begin in spaces that are unfamiliar to, or alienate westerners. There are rarely any strategies, policies or frameworks in which westerners take the back seat and are not in charge of. They are never obligated to learn the local language, accept or even have to understand an alternative worldview from their own, be trained in a different approach or undergo capacity training based on another set of standards. Rather, westerners are able to ‘parachute’ into the country and immediately begin to direct, coordinate, create, consult and advise programming without even having to know the language, the history,
religion or culture of Afghans. Ahmed Rashid (2009) poignantly remarks, “Above all, arrogance and ignorance were in abundant supply as the Bush administration invaded two countries in the Muslim world without any attempt to understand the history, culture, society, or traditions of those countries.” (p.xiii)

This point is also brilliantly captured by Noah Feldman (2004), remarking on his first visit to Iraq as a constitutional advisor in the aftermath of the US invasion. The situation he describes can most certainly be related to the presence of American and other international aid workers in Afghanistan. In the following passage Feldman (2004) is describing his reaction to the other consultants recruited by the US government as they all make their way to Iraq for the very first time. He writes,

I glanced around at my new colleagues. Those who were awake were reading intently. When I saw what they were reading, though, a chill crept over me, too. Not one seemed to need a refresher on Iraq or the Gulf region. Without exception, they were reading new books on the American occupation and reconstruction of Germany and Japan….Iraq was nothing like postwar Germany and Japan…if there was any hope of handling the situation effectively, the first step was surely to immerse oneself in what information was available about the country. The task felt classically orientalist, in the sense of experts in charge, or those familiar with the region and its political history, fluent in Arabic, or even experienced in post-conflict statebuilding. (p.1)

Although the situation was somewhat different in Afghanistan because of a greater UN presence, the absence of a solid country analysis can also be detected at the level of national policies directing the country’s political future. Matthew Hill’s (2010a) detailed study of USAID’s promotion of democracy in Afghanistan, for example, supports the findings of this study. He concluded that USAID failed to support substantive democracy in the country because the focus has been on a short-term framework that merely implants a set of American-style institutions, routines and procedures, without due attention to the specific Afghan context nor
any efforts to recognize or handle internal Afghan political dynamics. Although USAID states that they design their programs specifically for each country and insist they are case-specific, former USAID consultants reveal that the “one size fits all” model best describes the agency’s support for democracy abroad. Hill (2010b) further reveals that the policies in Afghanistan echoed those in Bosnia despite the profound differences between the two countries. USAID focused on its own goals and visions of what a democracy should look like (read: American style) and this western template was detached from the specific Afghan context nor were Afghans invited to modify the template or re-conceptualize its design so it resonates with Afghanistan’s political reality. Since only a ‘cookie cutter’ model for democracy was implemented, 80% of the subcontractors hired by USAID were American NGOs and organizations because, as Hill (2010b) writes, they “operate from the same set of base assumptions on what projects are needed to develop democracy and how they are implemented” (p. 113). Therefore, promoting democracy in Afghanistan became the preoccupation of foreign consultants and advisors, placing them in the driver’s seat of Afghanistan’s political future. As Tadjbaksh and Schoiswohl (2008) note, the international community’s paternalistic attitude have rendered Afghans “recipients of democracy and not the driving force behind it”(p. 264).

USAID and the promotion of democracy is only one example of the tremendous foreign technical and intellectual occupation of Afghanistan. There is a cadre of foreign expatriates that are overseeing almost every aspect of reform from gender and human rights to economic and rural development, and their pervasive presence extends from within the top levels of government through civil society networks across the country. As Johnson and Leslie (2008) write, “The dominance of the USA on policy can be seen at many levels….a handful of US and European consultancies monopolize the lucrative business of advisory services and capacity-
building to the Office of the President and his cabinet” (p. 12). Since January 2009, U.S. aid agencies tripled their civilian presence based on President Obama’s call for more U.S personnel to help build the capacity of the Afghan government and provide essential services to Afghans. The situation in Afghanistan echoes that of many other post-conflict contexts (Kosovo, East Timor) which for at least the first few years is marked by a flood of foreigners that literally dominate the capital city, and they are, as Rostami-Povey (2004) notes, perceived by Afghans as overcrowding the capital, hiking rent prices and using up scarce resources.

The international aid apparatus operates in what Donini (2004) calls the “Kabul Bubble”, which is a superimposed, almost superficial and highly transient layer of civil society that is comprised of foreign experts, many of whom have come directly from Kosovo or other post-conflict countries, to once again become the masterminds of post-war recovery. The political, economic and social blueprints they use for reforms enable them to navigate across Afghanistan on familiar terrain so that they, and not Afghans, can be the administrators, program planners, implementers and evaluators of interventions. As I have demonstrated in the previous chapters, whether the focus is on promoting liberal democracy (Chapter Three), a neo-Weberian modern state bureaucracy (Chapter Four) or a neo-liberal market economy (Chapter Five), the function of post-conflict interventions is to embed a resemblance and proximity to western models, processes, structures and values, thus disavowing local or indigenous frameworks and strategies that may validate, accommodate and legitimate alternative worldviews that the international community does not know, and thereby, cannot control and manage. It is a process of carving out the familiar and expunging the unfamiliar and this project is validated through using terminologies like “capacity building” which essentially means accepting only specific types of capacities, that resemble ‘our’ way and ‘our’ values. As Francis Fukuyama (2004) notes,
modern statebuilding can only be successful if there is a transfer of new habits, values, attitudes and professional ethics. He is essentially calling for the transformation of non-western governments to act, behave and become like the west in terms of organizational habits and culture. In recognizing that changing values, norms and cultures takes more time, Fukuyama therefore recommends that expatriates must work closely with nationals to support this transitioning into a new culture.

This worldview that expects Afghans to gain new sets of values, ethics, attitudes and culture is predicated on the assumption that Afghanistan is ‘tabula rasa’ – a blank slate – requiring training and education because fundamentally they are perceived to have no genuine experience, no innate ideas, no original or creative capacities and structures to conceptualize and design the path to their own recovery. Couched in the language of low ‘absorptive capacities’, one can easily detect the ‘emptying out’ of Afghan skills, experience and expertise, thus warranting the running and reform of entire government ministries by foreign expatriates (Chauvet & Collier, 2008; OECD, 2010b; World Bank, 2009b; Feeny & McGillivray, 2009). Low Absorptive capacity generally refers to an aid recipient’s stifled ability to utilize foreign aid flows effectively, due to limited administrative, management and procurement skills and capacities (Feeny & McGillivray, 2009). As described in Chapter Four, the Afghan state is rendered ineffective because it lacks sufficient capacity and thereby cannot carry out basic public management tasks, which as Patrick and Forman (2002) note, is one of the main obstacles the international donor community faces when approaching any post-conflict society. They write that insufficient human resources are among a list of inadequacies that the international community must quickly correct and fulfill. There is also an understanding that weak absorptive
capacities, particularly in government, means that these societies are unable to recognize strategies that would best serve their interests (Chauvet & Collier, 2008; OECD, 2010b).

The heavy foreign expatriate presence (mentioned earlier) is thereby justified because insufficient capacity means no national level progress, efficacy of aid disbursements or service delivery to benefit Afghans. To redress this issue, the World Bank supported a number of mechanisms to fill in the gaps, such as setting up parallel project implementation units that are exclusively administered and run by donor governments, attaching technical assistance units to Afghan ministries and hiring foreign NGOs and private contractors to offer quick results for service delivery (OECD 2010b). One of the key reasons why foreign technical assistants were privileged over Afghans was because of English language proficiency. The absence of English skills, more so than technical and management skills, was considered to be a key obstacle for aid disbursements. According to a report published by the World Bank, government staff must know English and if they do not than this hinders their ability to access procurement documents (World Bank, 2009b). The report further adds, “This creates difficulty in clearance of documents at various stages and affects both quality and timely output of line ministries” (p. 27). Although many other limitations were listed, such as the inability of Afghans to read through manuals and handbooks, what is important to note is that the report concludes by recommending a constant presence of international expertise and supervision that must be brought in from Washington or other field offices of the World Bank (World Bank, 2009b).

What is particularly disturbing in the above report is the expectation that Afghans be literate in English in order for them to run the affairs of their country. Since Afghanistan was never formally colonized by the British, English was obviously never taught in schools nor an official language. Therefore it is absurd to assess the capacities of Afghans to lead, manage and
implement programs in their own country based on proficiency of the English language. Furthermore, the discourse on absorptive capacities used to declare Afghans as incompetent in the running of their own affairs, rarely turns the table to identify or measure the lack of capacities on part of western expatriates working in Afghanistan. Expatriates are neither evaluated on language skills and cultural competencies nor an understanding of basic demographics, such as the ethnic makeup, religious diversity or political history of the country they are working in. Most troubling, however, is that this study is premised on the crisis in current post-conflict statebuilding, that is, the substantiated evidence that points to the limitations and failures of those very policies and implementation strategies that foreign expatriates are responsible for administering. However, international agencies, foreign NGOs, financial institutions and donor governments are never held accountable for failed or faltering policies and interventionist strategies.

In fact, any errors on part of the international community are never taken to task, there is almost a sense that internationals have an unaccountable and invincible presence. Despite the list of failed international interventions spanning decades from across the world, the discourse of ‘failure’ that Chapters Four and Five outline in relation to third world states, and Afghanistan in particular, is never applied to international actors. This is despite the weight of scholarly research that has brought attention to the matter. Instead, there is a general sense among scholars and practitioners alike, that despite the failures and shortcomings, the international community must still carry on in doing what it does because for it to do nothing is far worse (see Paris 2010). David Chandler (2006) is among the very few critics of peacebuilding that challenges this impunity, stating how international administrators rarely take any responsibility or are held accountable for the policies they pursue or the outcomes of their interventions. Rather, they
understand the failures to be difficulties of bringing democracy to a non-western context, and all shortcomings are understood to be “the responsibility of local actors rather than international overseers” (Chandler, 2006, p.70). It is evident in the writings on peacebuilding (see for example Barnett & Zürcher, 2009; Paris, 2004; Paris, 2010) that international actors are always projected as wanting to do the right thing, trustworthy, altruistic and having to mediate between belligerents. This generous and forgiving spirit skews the very question about who then should be held accountable for failed policies and how would greater accountability shift the practice of peacebuilding? Surely, if the international community was held accountable by domestic populations than perhaps the unchallenged western models would be subject to greater scrutiny. The likelihood that the west would hold itself to higher standards, transparency and accountability is not likely as Chandler (2006) reminds us. That is because the meaning and purpose of interventions has little to do with statebuilding and more to do with facilitating western dominance and direct political control in ways that “deny the power which they wield and to evade accountability for its exercise” (Chandler, 2006, p.1).

1.2 Cows that Drink Their Own Milk: The Distance and Disillusionment of Aid

Based on the previous discussion, it is evident that westerners are in fact never made to feel ‘out of place’ in Afghanistan, rather, a ‘known’ environment is created so that whether internationals are engaged in emancipatory projects (gender and human rights) or supporting neo-liberal marketization, they can easily work with authority using their own discursive frameworks, paradigms and tool box of approaches that they typically implement from one country to another. On the other hand, the majority of Afghans are sidelined from the post-conflict apparatus and many have to work with policies conceived from outside an Afghan-specific context, in a foreign language (English) and through the lens of a distinct (western) set
of ideas, assumptions, modalities and approaches that most in the country are unfamiliar with and must learn. The process of rebuilding Afghanistan, therefore, can be a peculiarly distant and inaccessible project for the majority of Afghans, yet be proximate and accessible for internationals.

Interestingly, however, is that aside from westerners, the only other category of people trusted and hired to steer the recovery of the state are western-educated, and western-oriented Afghans. Certain government ministries, for example, are staffed exclusively with western educated Afghans, foreign consultants and advisors, which as Goodhand and Sedra(2007) note, has created rivalries between the different ministries because of donors who prefer to work with the ‘like-minded’ and avoid the ‘unlike-minded’” (p. 52). Certainly the ‘like-minded’ are Afghans who speak and write English fluently and have graduate degrees from European or North American Universities. In his study of local perceptions of aid in Afghanistan, Donini (2007) argues that the “baggage, modus operandi, technique and personal behavior of aid workers” (p.158) have led to a perception among Afghans interviewed that aid is only a ‘northern enterprise’ whereby Afghans must replicate western values, appearances and behaviors and align their work to the priorities of distant lands rather than Afghan communities. Donini (2007) argues that indigenous organizations are pushed to act ‘northern’ in their organizational culture, behavior and structures which leaves little room for indigenous approaches which may not fit northern dogma. This he adds obfuscates local coping mechanisms and the role and potential for a distinct non-western humanitarian tradition in the country to co-exist, which as Rubin and Hamidzada (2007) stress, not only exists but has helped Afghans survive in periods of violence and no state.
According to Astri Suhrke (2008), Afghans very quickly started to resent the international presence, perceiving foreigners as “cows that drink their own milk” (p. 634). This brazen statement speaks to the overall perceptions and sentiments among Afghans about international actors, considered to be the primary beneficiaries of aid operations in the country. Having interviewed Afghans from across the country, Antonio Donini (2007) reveals that there is a deep malaise among Afghans about foreign aid. He sums up their responses as revolving around the 3 D’s, “disillusionment, disempowerment and disengagement” (p. 163). Aid efforts were seen to be mainly benefiting outsiders more so than Afghans, and Donini (2007) writes how a common perception was that “Aid agencies turn up unannounced, make an assessment and then disappear without result” (p. 166). This skepticism and distrust of foreign NGOs is also echoed in Rostami-Povey’s (2007) research. Many Afghans she interviewed believed that NGO workers come to Afghanistan to work because they cannot find jobs at home. They expressed frustrations around the high rates of unemployment among Afghans yet their country is a workplace for foreign specialists who receive generous salaries at their expense. She writes how Afghans wonder “…why don’t they employ and train us?...they are helping themselves” (p. 52). These sentiments are further reinforced by another major survey conducted whereby Afghans wanted fellow Afghans and not foreigners to run their government and direct the affairs of their country (Cordesman 2010).

In Rostami-Povey’s (2004) study there was a widely held view that an “alien imperialist culture” has been imposed on Afghans and that many Afghans felt that the west only came to change their culture and to deny Afghans the agency to construct their future. In a similar vein, Alvi-Aziz (2008) reveals thoughts shared by Afghans about foreign NGOs not intending to help Afghans, but that they were only in Afghanistan to be “image promoters”.

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The sentiments expressed by Afghans is not just that foreign actors are the primary beneficiaries of aid allocated to Afghanistan but that outsiders remain out of touch about their real struggles, concerns and needs (Donini, 2007; Abirafeh, 2009; Cordesman, 2010; Alvi-Aziz, 2008; Rostami-Povey, 2004; Larson, 2011). The tremendous discontent with aid activities is made clear in Larson’s (2011) extensive two year study, noting how for many Afghans, 10 years of international involvement in their country has done very little and that aid is merely an imposition of Western values. Afghans have expressed frustration with aid failures and insist they want fellow Afghans and not foreigners to now run their government and direct the affairs of their country (Cordesman, 2010). A noteworthy example of the ways ordinary Afghans are left out of aid priorities is The Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS) initiative, which is the government of Afghanistan’s official and formal development roadmap. This document was conceived through a two-year consultation process with Afghan communities across the country. However, according to Johnson and Leslie (2008) the final ANDS document did not accurately reflect the needs of Afghans and even went so far as to omit negative experiences and perspectives raised by Afghans. Johnson and Leslie (2008) note, the focus group discussions were often only quick one-day meetings that were actually not very substantive. They write “teams flying in from Kabul for a day to preside over meetings of local officials who simply table shop lists of needs, has hardly helped to build wider confidence in the process” (Johnson & Leslie, 2008, p. 7). It became evident for many working on the ANDS project that the document was entirely penned by external consultants albeit it masqueraded as a document written by Afghans. As Goodhand and Sedra (2010) reveal, ANDS reflected donor goals and priorities for Afghans and a perception of what needed to be done in the country (neo-liberal market-centered policies) more so than what Afghans actually identified as their priorities.
To conclude this section, the following is an excerpt of an open letter written to the expatriate community in Afghanistan which was widely circulated across various distribution lists and is arguably one of the most poignant critiques against the international presence across the country. The letter was written by a woman named Sanjar Qiam and it very succinctly captures her sentiments and frustrations about foreign aid interventions in the country,

Organizational oligarchy has brought about societal oligarchy. Just like everything else a society can absorb certain dose of foreigners over a certain period of time. Afghanistan can take a very small dosage of foreigners as they are allergic to them. Every page of history witnesses the low “absorption capacity”—if I may borrow the term from EU.... I am making a reference to the history of a proud and individualistic man who defends his way of life.... My point is for one reason or another we are all protective. Except the difference is in your network everyone should play by your rules, which is fine. But you play by your rules in my network too. You don’t have the faintest idea of my network and you even don’t try to acquire some. You never think of shifting your stand, and redesigning your aims and your way of work. You tend to make Afghanistan feel like home. But Afghanistan is not your home. The more you try to live “your life” the more Afghans would hate you. Yours truly, Sanjar. (as quoted in Abirafeh, 2009, pp. 177-178)
2.1 Confronting Colonial Mistruths and Disavowals

This study maintains that arguably one of the greatest obstacles to post-conflict interventions in Afghanistan, are those that are the least addressed, that is, the continuity of colonial worldviews, specifically racism, ethnocentrism, exploitation and the relentless desire by the western world to only want to ‘see’ and celebrate itself in its most distant Other. A post-colonial analysis made it possible to expose the varied forms of western privilege and power over Afghans, whether political, economic, ideological, material or intellectual. By mapping out the contours of western neocolonial domination, the findings of this study infer that achieving an equitable process and just outcomes for post-conflict interventions in Afghanistan, or in fact anywhere in the world, are likely not possible so long as what is essentially a colonial worldview undergirds modern post-conflict interventions. Good intentions aside, this study infers that the mere occurrence of neocolonial relations and modalities make it impossible for interventions to break away from the legacy of colonial and imperial conquests and relations.

Therefore the intellectual and political project to decolonize post-conflict reconstruction and statebuilding must be prioritized. Following Fanon (1963) and Nandy (1983), the starting point towards decolonizing relations must first begin as an intellectual exercise because colonization begins in the minds of men and women and so it must end there. Although neither Fanon or Nandy offer specific insights into how this is exactly to be done, Sandra Halperin (2006) provides a helpful starting point by prioritizing the need to rupture Euro-America’s “profoundly erroneous, highly ideological representation of its own history” (p.45). The point to be emphasized here is that the west’s imperialist domination of other lands is justified by a sense
of superiority over others and hierarchal relations are built upon a distorted, misinterpreted, mystified and myopic vision of the west’s own history and accomplishments, particularly as the champions and vanguards of Enlightenment ideals (Halperin 2006). The clearest example of this is the aggressive promotion of liberal democracy in the third world, which Chatterjee (2004) identifies as the new empire’s means to influence and control third world political and economic structures. As discussed in detail in Chapter Three, the expectation and tremendous pressure for Afghanistan to transform into a mature democracy within a few years does not reflect the pace nor the process by which the west established liberal democratic statehood across Euro-America. Mature democratic states appeared in the west only by the middle of the twentieth century (1945 onwards) after hundreds of years of struggle and violence. Halperin (2006) further notes that Europe much like the contemporary third world “experienced partial democratization and reversals of democratic rule” (p. 57), and it was only until after World War II that in many parts of Western Europe did women, for example, finally gain the right to vote.

This long and tumultuous history of establishing democratic institutions in Europe is conveniently absent from the transition theory-inspired democratization policies that are implemented in Afghanistan (Hill 2010a). Perhaps a more realistic and historically honest and accurate understanding of how democracies form and last would help mollify some of the negative implications of existing top-down policies. To do so would radically change the political agenda of post-conflict statebuilding that continues to prioritize and commit billions of dollars to democracy promotion. Perhaps the greatest challenge to this fundamental shift is, as Albert Memmi (1965) points out in his influential work, The Colonizer and the Colonized, changing the mentality of colonizers who must always remain ideologically isolated from the colonized and require that their ideas and ways of approaching things have to always be right, be
glorified and be upheld.

Albert Memmi’s point is significant, particularly to the project of decolonizing statebuilding which is saturated with the west’s preoccupation with itself and its desire for the third world to traverse through the west’s political history to adopt the exact version of a rational, industrial and democratic capitalist state (Jones, 2006), which is, as Saurin (2006) notes, reflective of the west’s desire to universalize its own story as a self validating endeavor. This narcissistic gaze has meant that the international community fails to ‘see’ Afghan-led initiatives and efforts, making no concerted effort to understand what Afghans are actually doing in their communities nor in identifying successful and promising local efforts and aspirations for change and betterment (Bezhan, 2006). In failing to acknowledge and legitimize what actually is present and is working, Riley and Inayatullah (2006) insist that the aid community has arrogantly undermined local and regional efforts and struggles that could have very possibly supported and sustained an indigenous-led democratic process.

The focus, rather, remains on disciplining Afghans on the path of (western) liberal political modernity, and in doing so, disavowing the rich network of Afghan civil society, including many formal and non-formal groups, that actively partake in community based participatory governance. These groups have been politically active and engaged for decades during the years of conflict, yet they are not recognized, understood or reconciled with the international community (see Bezhan, 2006; Nixon & Ponzio, 2007; Alvi-Aziz, 2008; Chopra & Hohe, 2004). These non-formal institutions are considered hard to ‘decode’, and the international community is generally uncomfortable with engaging them (see Smith, 2011; Nixon & Ponzio, 2007; Chopra & Hohe, 2004). As Smith (2011) argues, these groups and institutions cannot be easily understood by the “modern political mind” nor can these traditional entities be organized
by modern political institutions. He adds that by being “formalistic and institution-based” post-conflict interventions have remained remote from the daily realities of the people. This is largely because the organizational cultures of international agencies share common values and ideas and are used to only talking to one another and rarely engaging with local communities (Chopra & Hohe, 2004).

This is not to suggest that post-conflict interventions need to go entirely ‘local’ or even to romanticize indigenous structures. Indeed they too are fraught with problems and limitations, but irrespective of how these particular structures function, they do, nevertheless, constitute the reality of social and political life for a sizeable majority of the population in Afghanistan and, therefore, cannot be ignored. As Chopra and Hohe (2004) remind us,

There is never a vacuum of power on the ground. Even when there is the complete absence of an identifiable state government or any semblance of governing institutions….traditional structures evolve, social organization is redefined, people continue to survive, filling the space, if it was ever there in the first place. (p. 252)

What perhaps poses as one of the greatest challenges to ‘seeing’ and accepting non-western traditional institutions and Afghan-led strategies is once again the colonial mindset. Ashis Nandy (1983) states that for relations to change between the colonizer and colonized this requires expunging the infantilization of Natives in the colonial mindset, where entire societies are rendered childlike and immature until they learn and adopt liberal capitalist modernity under the guidance and direction of colonizers. This perspective is expounded by Immanuel Kant who insisted that Enlightenment offered societies a way out of immaturity where men can acquire the status and capacities of a rational and adult being (see Ghandi, 1998). In this sense, the international community in the current context of post-conflict interventions, sets itself up as the ‘mature’ and infallible knower, maintainer and enforcer of state maturity. In his reading of
colonial hierarchies, Nandy (1983) argues in his intriguing book, *The Intimate Enemy*, that colonialism operates through a modernist worldview wherein hierarchal relations are established between the adult over the child, the masculine over the feminine, the human over the non-human, the historical over the ahistorical and the modern or progressive/scientific over the traditional. Following this logic, Nandy (1983) argues that the ‘child’ formally emerges in the western world as a being in need of direction and supervision into adulthood and maturity, around the same time as colonial pursuits construct much of the non-western world as the primitive, childlike and childish.

### 2.2 Reciprocity and Transformation

I argue that this structural arrogance, paternalism and dismissal of others informs the relationship between western aid actors and Afghans. Bypassing and disavowing Afghan lived realities is only possible if aid actors fundamentally believe they are better than Afghans – morally, ethically, culturally, politically and intellectually – otherwise there would be greater reciprocity and a mutuality. I am convinced that equitable relations rest on exchanges from both directions and learning from both sides. There is something peculiar about a relationship wherein westerners do all the giving, doing and knowing; and wherein there is no genuine exchange in encounters with rich and diverse societies from around the world. How is it even possible to interact with diverse cultures and traditions and not gain anything from them? Decolonization requires transformations to happen on both sides; nothing can remain the same (Loomba, 2005). The institutional apparatus of development and post-conflict interventions, however, is set up only to project thoughts, ideas, policies and approaches *out*, but it rarely accepts other (non-western) approaches *in*. The project to decolonize statebuilding, therefore, must mean greater movement of ideas and transformations on both directions. As Achille Mbembe (2001)
proclaimed, all human societies participate in the shaping of their world and the very idea of a humanity implies a mutual sharing and learning across boundaries; an idea which still poses a problem for the western consciousness. Further, Mahatma Ghandi asserted that the starting point must begin with a universal understanding that there is no inherent incapacies for self-government in any part of the world, and likewise no inherent capacities for governing other nations (Dalton, 1996)

In order for a genuine bidirectional learning process to thrive, there must be an internalization of another’s intellectual tradition into one’s own. Similarly in aid interventions, there should be space for the promotion of hybrid, or synthesized interventions. This possibility is explored by David Roberts (2009), who has written extensively on post-conflict interventions in Cambodia and makes a strong argument for “hybrid plural-indigenous systems” which can lead to desirable outcomes. He insists that indigenous societies and their politics are resilient and that hybridity takes that into consideration as opposed to current approaches that he argues, and this study supports, are ideologically driven. The possibility of synthesis across approaches and a profound new way of envisioning partnership is also echoed by scholars writing in the field of development studies. In their article on participatory peacebuilding, for example, Jarat Chopra and Tanja Hohe (2004) propose a way forward that is principled on mutuality and integration of local and global approaches. They suggest,

What may be feasible is a longer term transition, in which space is provided for local voices to be expressed and communities to get directly involved in the evolution of their own cultural or political institutions, as part of a gradual integration in the national state apparatus. This means giving time for an indigenous paradigm to coexist with and gradually transform during the establishment of modern institutions. (p. 242)
The project for mutual learning and transformation is mandatory for decolonization. However, as Gayatri Spivak states, in order for real learning to take place, those with power and privilege must be vigilant in hyper self-reflexivity and engage in the act of ‘unlearning’ their privilege so that they can establish ethical relationships (Kapoor, 2008). For Spivak, what is needed is a moratorium on western institutions from providing any more global solutions (Spivak & Harasym, 1990). This study echoes Spivak’s recommendation because our silence in the west, which Spivak would perhaps suggest should be accompanied by active learning, will likely open up new spaces for knowledge production and enable subjugated knowledge forms to be situated as counter discourse and even non-western ways of knowing and interpreting social and political realities to surface and be heard. This approach could then open up the spaces for hybrid or synthesized frameworks to develop without being overridden and predetermined by western authorities. To put it plainly, by not doing, by not imposing and by not producing, conceptualizing or planning, the west stands to gain considerably from listening, receiving, learning and reflecting. This “conscientious pause” will perhaps illuminate possibilities for mutual betterment. As Slater (2004) rightly points out, all that is rendered absent and invisible is just as significant as what is made central and present. He argues that by making known what has been silenced is the beginning of positioning alternative views. George Dei and Alireza Asgharzadeh (2001) echo this perspective by affirming locally produced knowledge that reflects people’s moral and spiritual values, cultural history and diversity in the way diverse people and cultures understand, interpret and make sense of their own realities. By centering indigenous knowledge systems, therefore, one can rupture dominant humanitarian/development discourse by re-claiming other equally valid forms of knowing that disrupt western constructs of development and growth (Sardar, 1999a).
According to Nandy (1983), however, other than the west, many societies in the world, such as India, can accommodate multivocality and the plurality of ideologies, knowledge systems and worldviews side by side. He argues that the survival of the world’s cultures are incompatible with western modernity and that non-western cultural subjects must have the right to distance themselves from the dominant discourses and be accorded the space to have discursive control in order to practice difference. In the context of aid, the challenge for pluralism is formidable because the aid establishment does not adequately engage difference, whether epistemological, cultural or political. Differences are poured into the framework of western rationality that cannot reconcile the reality of multiple and overlapping political forms and the salience of cultural and religious traditions. How would the international community address non or anti modern worldviews? What methodologies are needed? And most critically, what if these forms further entrench western notions of inequality and oppression? These are some questions to pose for further research. At the risk of suggesting that societies are inherently irreconcilable and there is no grounds for the universal, Ashis Nandy (1998) critiques this looming fear in the west that pluralism will erode universal values. He positions three arguments to mollify this concern. The first, is that no civilization has a monopoly on goodness, humane values and justice. Second, all civilizations share basic values and lastly, all are imperfect and so can, and often do, produce imperfect solutions. In further anticipation of a critique that non-western knowledge systems will somehow unravel all of modernity’s perceived progress, he reminds us that the shortcomings of other cultures, whatever they might be, does not warrant silencing entire peoples and cultures. Nandy (1998) argues for the fundamental necessity for all non-western societies to define their own future, “in terms of their own categories and concepts and to articulate their visions in a language that is true to their own Self” (p. 23).
This epistemological pluralism supports intellectual autonomy, so that the postcolonial subject can bargain in what Achille Mbembe (2001) identifies as the “international marketplace” of ideas. However, this autonomy is fundamentally absent in Afghanistan, as Afghans rarely have the opportunity to debate, construct, create, dismantle, resist, modify or synthesize ideas and frameworks in their encounter with the international community. Ashis Nandy (1998) places tremendous emphasis on intellectual autonomy as a gateway to liberation. He quotes Srinavasa Ramanujan, a 19th century mathematician from India, who in defining intellectual autonomy suggests that it entails, “a continuous search for new elements of identity which could be integrated within an indigenous frame, without humiliating the recipients, to allow the pursuit of a culture’s distinctive version of universal knowledge” (as quoted in Nandy, 1998, p. 143).

I end this study on the poignant writings of Mahatma Ghandi, who shares one of the most profound and unique insights about oppressive and hegemonic relations and practices. Mahatma Ghandi argued that the ultimate goal of decolonization and liberation was not only to free the colonized but to emancipate the colonizer from the history and psychology of colonialism (Nandy, 1983). He believed that colonialism produced a cultural and psychological pathology within both the colonizer and colonized and that decolonization meant that the colonizer, and in this case, the west, would be held to the very ideals of liberty, freedom and democracy that it so vehemently espouses (Young 2001).
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