Managing Identities in Fragile States: The Case of Afghanistan

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Introduction

1.1 Background

"...a new and transitional administration leading to the formation of a government, both of which should be broad based, multi-ethnic and fully representative of all the Afghan people..."[1]

"...The ethnic balance we have tried to work out here is, I think, 11 for the Pashtuns, eight for the Tajiks, five for the Hazaras, three for the Uzbeks and one or two for the others, the smaller groups."[2]

(Lakhdar Brahimi, *Special Representative in Afghanistan of the Secretary General of the United Nations,* in response to questions concerning the 'ethnic' balance in the new government at a Press Conference)

The above statement by Lakhdar Brahimi as well as the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1378, adopted soon after the collapse of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan was reflective as much of a desire on part of the international community to put in place a more inclusive political arrangement as an acknowledgement of ethnicity as the key determinant for the ordering of a new political structure. Interestingly, while ethnicity did in many respects emerge as a key fault-line over the course of the three decade long conflict in Afghanistan- for instance the stark fact that the constituency of most major parties is closely tied to an ethnic base- however it seldom finds explicit mention in the discourse of any of the major political players[3]. Addressing the ethnic dimension of the identity discourse has emerged as one of the most daunting challenges in taking forward the process of state building and 'reconciliation' in Afghanistan. The potential of ethnicity as a polarizing factor is vividly illustrated by four recent instances: first, angry protests by Hazara parliamentarians at the rejection of two Hazara ministerial nominee's.[4] Second, the reaction of Uzbek leader Rehman Oghly to President Karzai's plans to 'reconcile' with the largely Pushtun dominated Taliban. Oghly, echoing fears of ethnic minorities opined: "Karzai is giving Afghanistan back to the Taliban, and he is opening up the old schisms...we will go back to the civil war and Afghanistan will be split."[5] Third, the way the *Kuchi*[6]-Hazara

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[1] United Nations Security Council Resolution 1378, 14 November 2001, http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N01/638/57/PDF/N0163857.pdf?OpenElement

[2] The following question was poised to Mr. Brahimi by a journalist *"A question for Mr. Brahimi. Can you confirm how many posts each group gets and could you elaborate about the ethnic balance?",* Press Briefing by Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi , SRSG for Afghanistan and Mr. Joschka Fischer, Minister of Foreign Affairs osf the FR of Germany, 5 December 2001, http://www.institute-for-afghan-studies.org/AFGHAN%20CONFLICT/Bonn%20Meeting/UN/Press%20briefing%20by%20Mr.%20Lakhdar%20Brahimi.htm

[3] A notable exception being inflammatory speeches delivered throughout city mosques by the then Taliban governor Mulla Manon Niazi who explicitly blamed Hazaras for the killing of Taliban fighters in the course of their first bid to capture the city of Mazar-i-Sharif. For further details refer to The Massacre in Mazar-i-Sharif, *Human Rights Watch,* November 1998, Vol. 10, No. 7 (c), http://www.hrw.org/reports98/afghan/Afrepor0-03.htm#TopOfPage

[4] Abdul Waheed Wafa- 5 Confirmed for Cabinet in Afghanistan, *New York Times,* 28 June 2010, http://www.nytimes.com/2010/06/29/world/asia/29kabul.html

[5] Bret Stephens- Afghanistan: Eyes Wide Shut, *The Wall Street Journal,* 29 June 2010, http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748703964104575335103325554236.html

land dispute has acquired increasingly strong ethnic overtones, often leading to violence. Fourth, particularly telling was the reaction of former legislator Daud Sultanzoy elected in 2005 to the controversial parliamentary elections: "unfortunately a Hazara MP cannot represent Pushtuns- and vice versa."[7]

Any meaningful engagement with the dynamics of the conflict in Afghanistan and a search for ways to quell the ongoing cycle of violence will inescapably have to grapple with the ethnic question. Thus far much of the discourse at the popular level and to a considerable extent even within the academia and policy circles has tended to categorize Afghan society into more or less neat, fixated and territorialized ethnic categories. Categorization of such nature not only betrays the operational reality of these categories on the ground but it has also led to the formulation of disturbingly un-informed policy propositions at the highest level. Instructive in this regard are certain proposals to sort out the Afghan quagmire, forcefully put forth by a distinguished former US diplomat, Robert D Blackwill. Using the platform of the influential US think tank *Council for Foreign Relations* Blackwill has formulated a case for partitioning Afghanistan along ethnic lines:

> "De facto partition of Afghanistan is the best policy option available to the United States and its allies... We would devote nation-building efforts to the north and west region where, unlike the Pashtun, people are not conflicted about accepting U.S. help... Washington should not wait to change its objective and strategy in Afghanistan until even more U.S. blood and treasure have been lost in a fruitless quest among the Afghan Pashtun. "[8]

Partition as a solution to endemic violence and conflict is based on weak moral foundations. Blackwill's partition argument infact appears to be subtly premised on a degree of ethnic stereotyping which ascribes a certain fundamentalist pre-disposition as inherent among the Pushtuns. Furthermore, the

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[6] Kuchi refers to Pushtun tribal nomads. For further details refer to David Nakamura- Karzai names panel to look into rising ethnic Afghan violence, *The Washington Post*, 14 August 2010, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/08/14/AR2010081402121.html . Following violent clashes between the Hazara and the Kuchi over land, members of the Hazara Diaspora in the United Kingdom and Australia came out strongly in support of their ethnic kin in Afghanistan and protested 'ethnic discrimination' of the Hazara by the Afghan state. For further details refer to *'An Open letter from the Hazara people around the world to international human rights organizations, international authorities and well known personalities'*, *Hazara People*, http://www.hazarapeople.com/openletter/. Also refer to dedicated online archive created by *Hazaristan Times* on the Kuchi's http://hazaristantimes.wordpress.com/category/kuchi/

[7] 'Unfortunately a Hazara MP Cannot Represent Pushtuns', *Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty*, 14 December 2010, http://www.rferl.org/content/gandhara_on_the_waves_of_freedom_elections_corruption/2247791.html

[8] Robert D Blackwill- A de-facto Partition for Afghanistan, *Council on Foreign Relations*, 7 July 2010, http://www.cfr.org/publication/22920/de_facto_partition_for_afghanistan.html. In private conversations the author had with Afghan friends and colleagues, many candidly supported the idea of partition, were the country to revert back to control of a Talibanisque regime, which many fear would not be sensitive to aspirations of ethnic minorities. However, positions articulated by them in the public were understandably in confirmation with the stated line of a united Afghanistan.

argument is based on the empirically flawed belief that ethnic groups are more or less neat, geographically bound frozen cultural units. The futility of such an analysis is powerfully underscored on two counts: first, the social-cultural history of the region now known as Afghanistan does not affirm categorizations of such a nature[9]. Second, recent trends in the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan point to a spread not just of the Taliban insurgency itself into what were considered to be the impregnable areas of Northern Afghanistan- populated largely though not exclusively by ethnic minorities comprising Tajiks, Uzbeks and Turkmens- but a steady rise in the recruitment of non-Pushtuns in Taliban ranks.[10]

Engagement with the issue of ethnicity in the Afghan context within academia has been somewhat limited in scope and understanding. Works by eminent scholars such as Rasul Baksh Rais for instance, portray the Afghan civil war as symbolizing "the two opposite struggles in Afghanistan, one by the Pashtuns to re-establish their dominance, and the second by the Hazara, Tajik and Uzbek minorities to seek adequate representation in political power at the centre and autonomy of their respective areas."[11] Thus Rais seeks to explain the civil war essentially in terms of a simplistic power struggle between a Pushtun supported Taliban and an array of rival commanders from amongst ranks of the Northern ethnic minorities. Juxtaposing the recent history of Afghanistan in such simple binary terms seems a case of gross over simplification. Recent works of scholars such as Gilles Dorronsorro[12], Antonio Guisstozzi[13], Conard Schetter[14], the late Bernt Glatzer[15] and Sippi Azerbaijani Moghaddam[16] provide a

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[9] Mountstart Elphinstone- Account of the Kingdom of Cabul and its Dependencies in Persia, Tartary and India; Comprising a view of the Afghaun Nation and a History of the Duooranee Monarchy, *Starhan*, London, 1815
Henry Walter Bellew- The Races of Afghanistan: being a brief account of the principal nations inhabiting that country. *Thacker, Spink & Co.*, Calcutta, 1880
Ludwig W Adamec ed. - Historical and Political Gazetteer of Afghanistan, Vol. I-V, *Akademische Druck-u. Verlagsanstalt*, Austria.

Donald N Wilber- Afghanistan: its people, its society, its culture, *HRAF Press*, 1962, New Haven

[10] Antonio Guistozzi- The Taliban Beyond the Pushtuns, The Afghanistan Papers, No.5, July 2010, *The Centre for International Governance Innovation* and Sippi Azerbaijani- Northern Exposure for the Taliban in Antonio Guistozzi ed.- Decoding the New Taliban: Insights from the Afghan Field, *Foundation Books*, 2009
[11] Rasul Baksh Rais- Conflict in Afghanistan: Ethnicity, Religion and Neighbours, *Ethnic Studies Report*, Vol. XVII, No. 1, January 1999, p.2
[12] Gilles Dorronsorro- The Taliban's Winning Strategy in Afghanistan, *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 2009 http://carnegieendowment.org/files/taliban_winning_strategy.pdf

[13] Antonio Giustozzi- Taliban Beyond the Pushtuns, The Afghanistan Papers, No. 5, July 2010, *The Centre for International Governance Innovation*, Ontario, Canada http://www.cigionline.org/publications/2010/7/taliban-beyond-pashtuns

[14] Conrad Schetter- Ethnicity and Political Reconstruction in Afghanistan, *ZEF Working Papers*, Series 3, Bonn 2005, http://www.zef.de/fileadmin/webfiles/downloads/zef_wp/WP3_Schetter.pdf

The ethnicization of Nationality

The role of history & memory in d shaping of one's conception of other.

more nuanced understanding of the discourse on ethnicity in Afghanistan. But even these scholars – with the exception to some extent of Schetter and Glatzer -have not examined closely the historical evolution of identity discourse in Afghanistan. Instead, ethnicity is presented as a sudden eruption of the identity discourse on to the center stage simply as a consequence of the civil war. Undoubtedly the civil war was a major contributor to the ethnicization of conflict. But to see it entirely and exclusively as the consequence of civil war would limit and distort our understanding of the deeper social processes that have been at work over a long period. More significantly, most major works dwell on the ethnic character of the conflict in Afghanistan and often castigate the failure of 'the West' as a failure in 'nation building'. However with little or no reflection on the application of these fundamental theoretical formulations, often policy formulations and critiques informing them are intellectually impoverished and conceptually flawed.

Furthermore, while interventions on this thematic do to an extent engage with certain factors that shaped the trajectory and politics of the identity discourse at the regional and local level in the country, however they do so in a limited sense by confining their frame of reference to state actors at the regional level and elites at local level. They overlook in particular the role of certain other key players, namely: trans-national criminal networks which often have an interest in keeping conflicts alive and the role of lonely and anxious Diaspora communities. Finally, none of the works have sought to engage with the significant role played by two factors: first, while most works on Afghanistan dwell upon the Islamic character of Afghan society none have attempted to examine the role played by religious networks of *madarssas* and sufi orders who posses strong religious, moral and social capital and are thus potentially poised to play the role of both spoiler as well as peacemaker. Second, the role played by history and memory in shaping the image of the 'other' merits careful consideration, especially significant in pre-dominantly non-literate societies like those of Afghanistan where oral tradition retains a seminal role.

The attempt over the course of this doctoral research would be to try and address the gaps elucidated above in the existent literature. The research proposes to engage with the processes at work which have shaped the contours of identities and also propelled ethnicity to the very center stage of identity discourse in Afghanistan. Also, the attempt would be to identify the underlying and proximate causes that seem to have steadily pushed the country towards sharp divisions along ethnic lines. Finally, based on an engagement with and understanding of the above two processes, the attempt would be to put forth potential mechanisms, particularly at the social level, which could help build a more inclusive order.

1.2 Objectives

[15] Bernt Glatzer- Afghanistan on the brink of ethnic and tribal disintegration?, p.167-181 in *William Maley ed.- Fundamentalism Reborn: Afghanistan and the Taliban, Hurst & Company London, 1998*
[16] Sippi Azerbaijani Moghddam- Northern Exposure for the Taliban in *Antonio Guisstozzi ed.- Decoding the New Taliban: Insights from the Afghan Field, Foundation Books, 2009.*

The foremost concern is to engage with theoretical reflections on questions of nation and ethnicity which is seminal for any serious and critical reflection on the evolution of the identity discourse in Afghanistan. Specifically, the attempt is to engage with the question as to whether identities are a natural phenomenon, or essentially a historical human construct? The intent is to demonstrate that identities are not static but are constantly in the process of being re-negotiated. Historically ethnicity has not been the primary trope through which Afghans have identified themselves. Instead, clan, tribal affiliation and geography have traditionally played a key role in defining Afghan identity. It has been argued that although the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979 and the ensuing civil war by unsettling the old hierarchical social arrangement of ethnic groups[17] proved to be a decisive turning point in propelling ethnicity as the primary marker of identity, this process itself was grounded in already existent strands of ethno-nationalism[18]. The introduction of democracy and mass media in the post 2001 dispensation have further contributed to a crystallization and mobilization of ethnic identity in the public arena on a pan-Afghan scale[19]. Engagement with the question posed above is of seminal significance. It would provide the basis and reference for a critical appraisal of conventional studies that engage with the Afghan conflict through the trope of ascriptive categories which tend invariably towards distorted inferences and policy recommendations.

The first question thus seeks to address and clarify the changing contours of the identity formation and discourse over time and space. And that would furnish a crucial explanatory variable for addressing the second question i.e.; could the Afghan conflict be categorized as an "ethnic conflict"? Or, is it the case that ethnicity has been deployed by the elites as a tool for mass mobilization to attain political ends? In this context the question as to what prompted the masses to respond with such intensity to the call of ethnic solidarity merits careful consideration.

The attempt is to pursue the argument that the conflict in Afghanistan has not been per se an ethnic conflict arising from 'ancient hatreds' and/ or irreconcilable clash of ethnic differences. Instead

[17] Barnett R Rubin- The Fragmentation of Afghanistan, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol.68, No.5, Winter 1989, p. 153
Anthony Hyman- Nationalism in Afghanistan, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol.34, No.2, Special Issue: Nationalism and the colonial legacy in the Middle East and Central Asia, May 2002, p. 199-315
Ahmed Rashid- Taliban: The Story of the Afghan Warlords, *Pan Books*, Oxford, 2001, p.97-98 and p. 196-206
Oliver Roy- Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan, *Cambridge University Press*, 1986, p.223-226
[18] Thomas Ruttig- Islamists, Leftists- and a void in the center. Afghanistan's Political Parties and where they come from (1902-2006), *Konard Adenauer Stiftung*, Afghanistan Office, p. 1-47
[19] Noah Coburn- Afghan Election 2010, Alternative Narratives, *Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit*, September 2010, p.5.

Donald L: Horowitz- Ethnic Groups in Conflict, p.291-442, *University of California Press*, 2000
A large number of privately owned media outlets have proliferated across Afghanistan, many of which are backed by former warlords and that often colours their reportage of events. For instance Rabbani owns *Noor TV*, while Gen Dostum's brother owns *Aina TV* which apart from airing Turkish and Central Asian shows frequently airs footage of the General fighting the Taliban while Haji Muhammad Mohaqiq's *Rah-e-Farda* (Future path) which advocates for Hazara rights and recounts Mohaqiq's past heroic encounters with the Taliban. For further details see Katherine Brown and Tom Glasiyer- Warlord TV: But Overt Political Propaganda is hardly the only problems with Afghan TV, *Foreign Policy*, 24 September 2010.

If identities are fluid & constantly renegotiated, then why make static laws, policies &/or build institutions based on how they've been defined per time?

Identity Politics & Rent Economy: Re-inforcing influences

discrimination and deprivation (both perceived and real) determined by ethnic differences[20] created a receptive niche for what Edward Azar famously referred to as 'Protracted Social Conflict' (PSC)[21]. Azar identifies a certain 'disarticulation between the state and identity groups' as constituting the core of such conflicts. And that in turn leads to deprivation-denial of basic human needs: security, recognition, sense of dignity and equal access to political and economic institutions-entitlements in turn creating space for PSC to take root.[22] Azar's argument is that the trajectory of conflict is shaped in decisive measure by the crucial role of state in satisfying or frustrating a group's identity needs.[23]

The argument proposed herein is that the role played by elites dominant in the state structure amidst the collapse of an established socio-political order, along with the widely prevalent desire and opportunity for change in the existing order has served to deepen a niche for PSC to take roots in Afghanistan. The attempt would be to examine and consider the implications of the raw details of the dynamic of the conflict as it increasingly gets pushed towards an ethnic trajectory. It seems that this push towards an ethnic trajectory was also shaped in considerable measure by a multitude of other factors: ranging from memory and history, entrenched local political-economic interests to the role of powerful external players. This line of argument directly challenges the somewhat simplistic proposition put forth in the influential and otherwise fairly cogent Ahmed Rashid's narrative of the Taliban formulated through an ethnic prism. Consider for instance Rashid's pithy summation: "… the heavy fighting that followed through the summer only further widened the ethnic divide in Afghanistan between the Pushtun Taliban and the non-Pushtuns. The country was now virtually split along North-South lines and also along Pushtun and Non-Pushtun lines."[24]

Thus far the conflict in Afghanistan has been understood by recourse to certain oversimplified and standardized cultural frames with very little effort made to understand the dynamics that led the conflict to be framed largely in ethnic terms. The works of Stephan van Evera[25], Ted Gurr[26], Barry Posen[27], James Fearon[28], Michael E Brown[29] and V.P Gagnon[30] to name a few, provide useful frameworks

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[20] Karl Cordell and Steffan Wolff- Ethnic Conflict: Causes, Consequences and Responses, *Polity Press*, Cambridge 2009, P.53

[21] Edward E Azar- The Management of Protracted Social Conflict: Theory and Cases, *Dartmouth Pub. Co.*, April 1990.

[22] Oliver Ramsbothan, Tom Woodhouse and Hugh Miall- Contemporary Conflict Resolution: The Prevention Management and Transformation of deadly conflicts, *Polity* Press, Cambridge 2005, Second Edition, p. 85-87.

[23] *Ibid*

[24] Ahmed Rashid- Taliban: The Story of the Afghan Warlords, *Pan Books*, 2001, p. 63

[25] Stephen Van Evera- Hypotheses on Nationalism and War, in Michael Brown, Owen Cote, Sean Lynn Jones and Steven Miller eds.-Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict, *MIT Press*, Cambridge, 1997, p.3-25

[26] Ted Robert Gurr- Minorities at Risk: A Global View of Ethno-Political Conflicts, *United States Institute of Peace Press*, Washington D.C, 1993, p. 1-27

[27] Barry Posen- The Security Dilemma and Ethnic Conflict, in Michael Brown ed.- Ethnic Conflict and International Security, *Princeton University Press*, Princeton, 1983, p.103-124

[28] James D Fearon- Commitment Problems and the spread of Ethnic Conflict, in David Lake and Donald Rothchild eds.- The International Spread of Ethnic Conflict: Fear, Diffusion and Escalation, *Princeton University Press*, Princeton, 1998, p.107-216.

[29] Michael E Brown ed.- Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict , *MIT Press*, 2001

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for analyzing ethno-political conflicts. Each of these works touch upon a range of specific factors that allow conflict to acquire strong ethnic dimensions leading to endemic violence and break down. Such factors take several forms; ranging from ethnic conflict as merely a façade for the pursuit of factional interests of political elites, as a cover for the abridgment-abrogation of rights of minorities, virtual erasure of civil society, the invariably ambivalent stance of the geographically proximate ethnic neighbor, and sheer cynical mobilization of history to intensify fears of anarchy by projecting a 'commitment problem' on part of the majority. The works cited above have all made invaluable contribution towards understanding the complex phenomenon of identity conflicts centered on ethnicity. But despite that they seem marked by certain limitations. First, much of this literature was written in reference to the collapse of Yugoslavia and the ensuing conflict. Clearly that is inadequate for understanding the dynamics of the conflict in Afghanistan. Second, given the multitude of factors at play any attempt to fruitfully engage with the question at hand requires looking at the problem in Afghanistan from a multi-dimensional perspective. Third, given the involvement of a multitude of players, operating at several different levels with their often competing-conflicting agendas point to the need for an enquiry on a much broader canvas.

 A particularly instructive framework in this regard is provided by Karl Cordell and Steffan Wolff's level of analysis model.[31] It essentially draws and builds upon three images (level of analysis) first propounded by Keneth Waltz (1959) in his work *'Man, the State and War'.*[32] Kordell and Wolff propose a framework for analyzing conflict at four levels: local level: state or national level, regional level and global level. Each level is characterized by a set of diverse actors and structures, both at the state and non-state levels. Given the immense diversity of state structures and actors (elites, established institutional arrangements, socio-economic structures, as also relations with external international state and non-state actors) and non-state actors generally (NGO's, interest groups, criminal networks, rebel forces, Diaspora groups, transnational corporations and varied other formations of civil society)[33]. Hence, the result and impact of actions and events at each level has to be seen in terms of their linkage and implications for all the four levels: national, local, regional and global. The intent is to use this framework to look closely at the interplay between these various levels and its imprint in shaping the contours of the identity formation and discourse in situations of endemic conflict.

The imperative requirement is to uncover the underlying triggers of conflict and identify the factors that impart to it a strong ethno-political direction. That would help in formulating potentially sound mechanisms both at the institutional as well as the social level to help stem the cycle of violence. The primary focus of this research would be with mechanisms at the social level since they have received little attention in academic literature.

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[30] V.P Gagnon Jr. - Ethnic Nationalism and International Conflict: The Case of Serbia, *International Security*, Vol. 19, No.3, Winter 1993-1994, pp.130-166.

[31] Karl Cordell and Steffan Wolff- Ethnic Conflict: Causes, Consequences and Responses, *Polity Press*, Cambridge 2009, p. 10

[32] Kenneth Waltz- Man, the State and War, *Columbia University Press*, New York, 1959

[33] Cordell and Wolff, op.cit, p. 8-9

The third and final question that this research proposes to engage with concerns the possibility of putting an end to the endemic cyclical violence. Specifically this would entail examining whether by supplementing and linking institutional arrangements with certain initiatives-mechanisms at the social level can help stem cyclical violence?

The underlying proposition in this research is that violent conflicts can be managed, even if not completely resolved, through putting in place certain effective mechanisms at the institutional and social levels. A range of institutional arrangements from shared sovereignty[34], ethnic federalism[35], consociationalism[36], power sharing[37] to cantonization and/or federalism have been advocated as a way to eventually put an end to violent conflict.

Institutional arrangements of the kind outlined above are crucial in settling endemic conflicts. But such arrangements in the absence of effective initiatives at the societal level would remain fragile. Hence, the imperative need to address the social dimensions of conflict. Very often social perceptions, psychological dispositions, subjective experiences and emotions serve as a mobilizational force to enhance the sustain conflicts.[38]

A useful frame of reference in this regard is provided in reference to the Menonite tradition, by John Paul Lederach. Drawing upon earlier works of Harold Saunders and Randa Slim, Lederach convincingly argues in favor of addressing what he describes as the 'relational dimension' of conflict (engaging with the emotional and psychological dimension of conflict) as the critical step towards social reconciliation and dialogue.[39] In order to achieve sustainable peace the rebuilding relationships at the community level, damaged by years of incessant fighting[40], constitutes the key to engineering socio-cultural transformation of the kind that facilitates a re-imagining of identities particularly in reference to the 'external other'.

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[34] Stephen Krasner- Sharing Sovereignty: New Institutions for Collapsed and Failing States, *International Security*, 29, 204, p.85-120

[35] Kidane Mengisteab- Ethiopia's Ethnic Based Federalism: 10 Years after, *African Issues*, Vol.29, No. ½, Ethnicity and Recent Democratic Experiments in Africa, 2001pp.20-25.

[36] Arend Lijphart- Non-Majoritarian Democracy: A Comparison of Federal and Consociational Theories, *Publius*, Vol 15, No 12, 1985, p.3-15

[37] Arendt Lijphardt- The Power Sharing Approach in Joseph Montville (ed.)- Conflict and Peacemaking in Multiethnic Societies, *Lexington Books*, Lexington, 1990, p. 491-509

[38] John Paul Lederach- Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies, *United States Institute of Peace Press*, Washington DC, 1997, P.14-15.

[39] John Paul Lederach, op.cit, p.26-27

[40] In the context of Afghanistan Pushtun communities settled in the North of the country for over a century often became the targets of revenge violence by fellow villagers following the collapse of the Taliban regime. Incidents of this kind further strengthen the case for peace initiatives from below, especially in reference to relational dimensions highlighted by Lederach. For more details on abuses against ethnic Pushtuns see '*Paying for the Taliban's Crimes: Abuses against Ethnic Pushtuns in Northern Afghanistan*', Human Rights Watch, April 2002, Vol.14, No.2 (c). Also refer to *All our Hopes are Crushed: Violence and repression in Western Afghanistan*, Human Rights Watch, Vol.14, No.7 (c), November 2002

Peace building from below as envisioned by some its pioneer proponents - Lederach and Adam Curle - requires building capacities to draw upon the resources of local communities and cultures as the main sustenance of peace initiative.[41] The works of scholars like Lederach, Curle and Judith Large are primarily based upon experiences in Africa, Latin America and the Balkans. But clearly their works also holds a sharp relevance for any endeavor towards building sustainable peace in the Afghan context. Much of the literature on that subject tends to see the process of reconstruction from a narrow perspective predicated upon grandiose political and institutional arrangements.[42] The attempt in the proposed research would be to address this lacuna by directing attention towards the need to link institutional structures and political arrangements at the top with peace building efforts initiated from below[43].

The proposed research would for instance examine community based approaches to conflict resolution through mechanism such as the *Jirga* (council comprising all chiefs known as *mullicks*), *Shura* (village council) as well as regional mechanism for dispute resolution such as the *Jalsa* in Bamiyan. In addition, it would also examine the potential role that Sufi orders[44] and madarssas – invariably regarded as regressive and fundamentalist – could play in bringing peace and reconciliation. The deep and enduring role such institutions could play has been succinctly articulated by Jamal Malik: "…these traditional institutions have to be integrated appropriately since they are very important for the transmission of information. They comprise the traditional sector of society and being opinion makers to a considerable degree they enjoy mass support and thus can guarantee broader participation."[45]

The thesis attempts to engage with the questions raised above under the following five chapters. The second chapter reflecting on theoretical conceptions of 'nation' and ethnicity while acknowledging the conceptual fuzziness that characterizes these concepts yet underscores the necessity and importance of retaining a distinction between the two concepts.

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[41] Oliver Ramsbothan, Tom Woodhouse and Hugh Miall ed.- Contemporary Conflict Resolution: The prevention, management and transformation of deadly conflicts, *Polity Press*, Cambridge, 2007, p. 222-223.

[42] Cornard Schetter, opc.cit

Sven Gunnar Simonsen- Ethnicising Afghanistan?: inclusion and exclusion in Post Bonn Institution Building, *Third World Quarterly*, Vol.25, No.4, 2004, p. 707-729

Thomas H Johnson- Afghanistan's Post-Taliban Transition: the state of State building after war, *Central Asian Survey*, March-June 2006, p. 1-26

[43] *Jirga* or assembly of tribal elders has long been a traditional dispute resolution mechanism in Afghanistan. Apart from the *Jirga* there exist numerous local traditions that could possibly facilitate and support peace initiatives at the social level.

Deborah J Smith and Shelly Manalan- Community Based Dispute Resolution Processes in Bamiyan Province, *Afghan Research and Evaluation Unit*, December 2009, p. 1-61.

[44] The three principal Sufi orders in Afghanistan are the *Naqshbandi, Chisti* and *Jilani*. For further details see Donald L Wilber- Afghanistan: its society, its people, its culture, p. 74-75, *HRAF Press*, New Haven 1962

[45] Jamal Malik- Development Through Tradition. The Case of integrating traditional Structures in Development planning in Pak-German IRDP, Mardan, NWFP, Pakistan, October 1989, Heidelberg, P. 21. Although Dr. Malik's study focuses on areas that fall within the geographical boundaries of Pakistan, its observations and insights retain sharp relevance in the Afghan context., since the area of study has long been part of a shared cultural realm characterized by strong cross ethnic linkages between the Pushtun population in Afghanistan and NWFP (now re-christened as Kyber-Puktunwa)- Mardan in Pakistan.

The third chapter dwells on the state-society dynamic in Afghanistan from the period of the founding of the Afghan state in 1747 up till the period of Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. This chapter highlights the discourses both at the official and popular level, which it is argued provide crucial insights of the processes at work which allowed ethnicity to acquire the intensity and salience it did during the civil war. Chapter four examines the dynamics at play during the period of the civil war and the subsequent period following the ascent of the Taliban to the political center-stage. It is argued that both these events played a crucial role in reframing of the struggle from a *jihad* or holy war to one which polarized political and social affiliations pre-dominantly along ethnic lines. The fifth chapter accounts for reasons which allowed the conflict to be framed in ethnic terms; specifically it seeks to draw out the deployment of memory and history in informing the political and social discourse, particularly during the period of the civil war. Furthermore, this chapter argues that identities as they were shaped and crystallized over the course of the civil war have been institutionalized in the Post Bonn period. The sixth chapter examines the measures at the societal level which hold the potential to break cyclical violence in deeply divided societies like Afghanistan. In this context it specifically seeks to explore the role of: religious networks (Madarssas and Sufi orders) , which if used intelligently can provide unparalled social and moral capital; which can play a constructive role in societies such as Afghanistan where religion has a cross ethnic legitimacy and appeal. Second, it looks at the role of community based dispute resolution mechanisms which it is argued provide effective and locally acceptable mechanisms for conflict management. The chapter concludes by building a case for framing a national strategy, predicated on the pivotal role played by these two structures in order to transform/ manage the conflict in Afghanistan.

1.3 Utility

The proposed research would address the existing gaps outlined in the preceding section on the state of current literature on the subject. Academic literature on the subject remains limited and somewhat fragmentary. Also, discourses at the policy level in particular, seem to lack depth. The proposed research would contribute towards a clearer and more informed recognition of salient ground details and their complex connections with what is often perceived and represented as the big picture of grand narrative. May I at this point clarify that the proposed research makes no claim to being the final word on understanding the conflict dynamic at play in Afghanistan. But it would contribute towards a more informed understanding of endemic conflict, its implications, and possibilities of finding a way out of the conflict

The failure to end the cycle of violence nearly a decade after the intervention of the West in Afghanistan and recent American moves to extricate itself from the Afghan quagmire make it imperative that the state of our current understandings is critically re-assessed. The proposed research intervention seeks to do that in a small but constructive manner. Thus this research while providing a more informed academic discourse on the subject at hand would also address some of the existent gaps

Re- examining our current
understandings;

in the literature on the subject, provide a clearer and deeper referent and   resource for informing policy formulation on the Afghan conflict.

1.4 Methodology

The proposed research would draw upon a variety of source materials ranging from published academic works (books, articles, reports and journals) to journalistic dispatches, folklore, reports of human rights organizations and policy papers. Available primary source materials are scarce since no systematic documentation effort was undertaken by Afghan governments (the only exception being the 1979 census which also could not be completed). Also, there has been considerable destruction of records in the course of the three decade civil war and authenticity of the few surviving sources remains deeply contested.

This research would seek to supplement available primary sources with field research in Afghanistan, proposed to be conducted over a period of two months each year in the summer of 2011 and 2012. Fieldwork in the latter part would be crucial for addressing gaps identified from the first year of field research.

The research would also draw upon the author's experience of working in Afghanistan in 2007, and more recently in 2010, as a humanitarian aid worker .That experience provides an unusual window, especially in exploring the role of memory and history in a context largely defined by oral tradition. The attempt in particular would be to weave into the research discourse subaltern voices which often tend to get cast aside in favour of the grand political narrative.

The research would be of a qualitative nature as distinct from an exercise in quantitative measurement. Given the complexity and scale of the problems involved - political and logistical – and the sheer diversity that prevails in Afghanistan, the author's clear sense is that while quantitative analysis is useful in its own right, however, the exceedingly fragile security situation and the endemic contestation around numbers and measurement render quantitative exercises unviable. Furthermore, while numbers do reveal certain broad trends they also tend to conceal certain critical details which can only be adequately recognized and marked through human observation in the field. The proposed field research would involve the use of semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions during field interactions with a broad spectrum of people.