Cultural and Political Hegemony in Abawi's *The Secret Sky*

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Abstract: Hegemony is the domination of a governing class over the values, beliefs and perceptions of a culturally diverse society. Cultural conflicts between various tribes of a community wherein the dominant tribe claims its authority either by imposing its own ideologies or by demeaning the cultural values of other tribes. When a dominant group fails to acquire consensual control over another group, which it considers inferior, it loses its hegemony. This study delimits Abawi's *The Secret Sky* and Antonio Gramsci's theorization of the hegemon to argue how hegemonic powers in Afghanistan operate on political and cultural levels. This study is significant for its (con) textual approach to highlighting the purpose of foreign invasions to hegemonies and the culture of the Afghan locale.

Keywords: Abawi, Afghanistan, Culture, Hegemony, Politics

Introduction

The idea of hegemony helps us understand how power is established, preserved, and contested (Ashcroft et al., 2007). This study uses Italian Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci's theorization of hegemony to understand Afghanistan's war politics. The phrase ruling class was used by Gramsci to explain how the ruling classes retain their control over society not just by coercion but also through the propagation of their own cultural norms and ideas, which are hence widely accepted as normative views. This course of acceptance, which occurs when the beliefs and values of the dominant group are thoroughly imprinted in people's awareness, affects the social values and people's perceptions about their surrounding world. Institutions like education, media, religion and the arts frequently become part of this propaganda and promotion of the prevalent ideology. The development of a dominant worldview that is presented as natural, universal, and indisputable is one of the fundamental features of cultural hegemony. This technique effectively marginalizes other viewpoints and upholds the preexisting power structures. Upholding and legitimizing the position of the ruling class requires manipulating symbols, discourses, and narratives in addition to imposing certain cultural practices.

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Cultural hegemony, nevertheless, is neither a universal nor constant phenomenon. It is a place of dialogue and contestation where oppressed or marginalized people struggle for social change, mount resistance, and confront prevailing beliefs. Alternative cultural expressions and counter-hegemonic practices that provide various viewpoints, values, and ways of social organization might arise to challenge the existing system. To investigate power dynamics, social inequities, and cultural processes, the notion of cultural hegemony has been frequently employed in disciplines including sociology, cultural studies, political science and media studies. It offers a paradigm for comprehending how social hierarchies are shaped and reproduced by cultural practices, discourses, and institutions, as well as how social groups negotiate, resist, and change these power systems. Cultural hegemony describes the influence that dominant groups have over societal cultural norms, values, and practices. It entails the institutionalization of prevailing ideas and the creation of a dominant worldview that is commonly regarded as the standard. However, resistance and counter-hegemonic practices also appear to question and modify the current power relations; thus, cultural hegemony is not unopposed.

One major element that is sometimes neglected is that hegemony is commonly depicted as being formed and maintained by a state as an actor, which can be observed in more recent studies of Afghan politics. This study highlights Afghan politics in relation to the theoretical examination of Atia Abawi's *The Secrets Sky* ([2014](#)). Throughout its history, Afghanistan has been under different types of hegemonic rule by outside parties. The United States and its Western allies have recently exerted enormous influence over the nation's political and cultural institutions, subjecting it to their cultural and political hegemony. It is important to understand how foreign players have tried to influence Afghanistan's political and cultural environment by tracing the country's cultural and political predominance. For instance, one may look at how foreign aid influenced the nation's development plans or how Western cultural values were imported and propagated there. Tracing Afghanistan's political and cultural hegemony can also help in showing the strategies used by foreign parties to preserve their dominance and influence.

Research Question
How do the political invasions in Afghanistan agitate its cultural values and vice versa?

Significance of the Study
Tracing cultural and political hegemony is an important area of study because it has serious consequences for social justice and equity. This study will reveal how dominant groups uphold their privilege and power by regulating the creation and dissemination of cultural artifacts while influencing dominant narratives and cultural traditions. It will highlight the diversity and representation in cultural and political spaces by emphasizing how diverse perspectives and experiences play a role in forming a society.

Literature Review
In his research investigations of how cultural hegemony and international relations are related, Walter D. Mignolo ([2010](#)) argues that the spread of Western cultural forms and values as a result of globalization has strengthened Western cultural hegemony. He relates this investigation to the examination of international relations concerning the case of Western cultural imperialism, which has significantly impacted the world's political and economic order. Krishna (2006) also argues that prevalent Western knowledge and

discourses frequently serve to maintain power relations and differences. The dominant culture that rules a society and influences its members' values, norms, and beliefs is referred to as cultural hegemony. Those in positions of authority frequently create and uphold this dominant culture, and they do so by employing a variety of strategies to make sure that their point of view and priorities are accepted as the norm. According to Mignolo (2010), cultural hegemony has a big impact on how nations interact with one another. He contends that dominant cultures impose their values, worldviews, and interests on subordinate cultures through their strength and influence. This process is frequently carried out through a variety of cultural and economic practices, such as the imposition of language, education, and media, as well as through economic laws that benefit the powerful. A study was published in 1990 by Cynthia Enloe' who argues that the context of feminist international relations is used to examine how race and gender intersect with political and cultural hegemony. Although Enloe's research does not primarily focus on cultural hegemony, she has looked at power relationships and how culture affects international politics. The significance of critically analyzing gender, power, and cultural norms within international relations is frequently emphasized in Enloe's writing. Enloe (2014) investigates the relationship between gender, sexuality, and imperialism in her book, *Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*; she looks at how cultural representations like travel accounts, media portrayals, and tourism support the upkeep of power systems in international relations.

According to Enloe, cultural hegemony contributes to the reinforcement and normalization of dominant ideas and behaviors that support disparities. It is important to remember that Enloe's work is merely one viewpoint within the larger area of political science and cultural studies. The understanding of cultural hegemony has benefited greatly from the contributions of other academics, like Antonio Gramsci, Stuart Hall, and Edward Said, who used a distinct theoretical perspective. Every academic contributes distinctive perspectives on the complexity of power, culture, and resistance. In this study, Matthew, P. (2011) investigate how national and global responses to environmental governance and climate change are influenced by cultural and political hegemony. Moreover, Newell (2010) frequently emphasizes how participants in international politics have uneven access to power and influence. He investigates how powerful individuals, particularly those from industrialized nations, shape international negotiations, the formulation of public policy, and the perception of global environmental challenges. These power relations may be viewed as a type of political hegemony in which a few key players have a substantial influence over how decisions are made and how the dominant discourse is shaped.

Williams (1983) examines the connection between culture and society in his book *Culture and Society: 1780-1950*, focusing on how culture shapes social connections and power systems. In order to explain how dominant beliefs and values are developed and upheld within a society, he offers the idea of "hegemony" as a conceptual framework. Williams (1983) contends that cultural hegemony is a sort of consent-based authority in which the dominant class or group exerts control over the attitudes, ideals, and behaviors of the larger population. In this research, the idea of cultural hegemony emphasizes how the creation and transmission of cultural artifacts like literature, art, journalism, and education help the ruling class retain its hold on power in addition to economic and political methods. According to Williams, these cultural forms frequently conceal social injustices and stifle opposing ideas while acting as vehicles for forming and reaffirming prevailing beliefs. Williams (1983) also recognizes the difficulties and conflicts that come with cultural and political power. He focuses on the idea that cultural practices are arenas of

conflict where oppressed or marginalized people may contest and oppose hegemonic rule by developing counter-hegemonic discourses and cultural manifestations that question or undermine prevailing ideas. During this process, a mass culture was developed with the aim of appealing to the largest possible audience while simultaneously advancing the goals and ideals of the ruling class. Williams (1983) addresses politics' significance in the world as well. He observes that political power has frequently been used to influence the media and other cultural institutions in order to advance a specific set of values and beliefs. As a result, there are now a number of dominant narratives and symbols that support the status quo and silence critics. Williams (1983) also looks at how ideology contributes to the development of a hegemonic culture.

Theoretical Framework

Gramsci (2010) used the concept of hegemony coupled with ideology to consider the non-coercive rise of social classes in society. Gramsci (2010) argues that to properly analyze social order and non-state actors, this study looks beyond the state and the economy. Barrett (1994) argues that Gramsci used the idea of hegemony to organize politics and ideology. Gramsci uses the example of American hegemony to highlight features of the transition from British hegemony to American hegemony. Gramsci emphasizes the importance of not only the existence but also the particular type of hegemony through his analysis of various historical examples of hegemony. Furthermore, the idea of hegemony seeks to explain why revolutions fail despite continued class conflicts and to counter-hegemonic activity in society (Morton, 2007). On the other hand, an agency consisting solely of domination is never legal. Hegemony is a form of power that combines authority and legitimacy. The hegemonic theory, according to which legitimate power can only be established and maintained through a combination of coercion and consent, is based on the relationship between power and legitimacy. The dissemination of ideology by organic intellectuals is how class-specific ideas become common sense. A subordinate ideology that can be seen as counter-hegemonic or inspired hegemony provides the basis for resisting the status quo. A subordination ideology reinforces the interests of a social class by rearranging the balance of power through a number of interconnected processes that coalesce into a struggle for supremacy that leads to a passive revolution (Howson/Smith 2008).

Political action and military force can only be used to consolidate the hegemonic position further once the social class has acquired legitimate power in the field of civil society. According to Gramsci, domination is obtained through consent, and cultural hegemony claims that power is equally exercised through material force and cultural writing. The "hegemonic process" involves persuading other classes of the universality of their interests in order to exercise domination by consent in order to advance the interests of the ruling class in society (Steans et al., 2010). The ruling class can control the economy and many state institutions, such as education and the media (Ashcroft et al., 2007). To challenge current hegemony, a new ideology understood as common sense must be created by shaping the intersubjective forms of consciousness in civil society, as argued (Morton, 2007).). If a new historical bloc has emerged that accepts the ideology of subordinates as common sense, the current hegemony can only rely on coercion, political action, and military force of the state to maintain its existence. According to Gramsci, this is not enough to maintain dominance, whether in a national or international environment. Conversely, if a hegemon loses political influence, it does not necessarily

mean that the period of rule of that particular hegemon has ended (Gramsci, 2010). Hegemony was created in the national context, which served as the basis for the formation of a historical bloc. In addition to operating within a state form to create cohesion and social unity as a historical bloc, hegemony extends this particular mode of production internationally to further shape world order (Morton, 2007). (Gramsci, 2010) notes that an international class must be nationalized to a certain extent.

Text Analysis

The Secret Sky tells the tale of the unalterable Afghan spirit of love and hope. The author makes a distinction between the numerous young adult and adult literature based in Afghanistan. The Secret Sky contains references to the sexual abuse of young boys as well as murder, beatings, and torture; thus, it is not a book for the faint of heart. It's not terribly explicit, but if, as Abawi claims, she bases her work on actual people and genuine events, it adds to the tragedy of the narrative (Abawi, 2014). It is a superb effort that offers a realistic image of civilization in the midst of a fundamental shift in thinking that is hindered by traditional customs centred on honour and longstanding biases between two ethnic groups, Hazara and Pashtun. The Hazara are an ethnic group in Afghanistan's central highland area of Hazarajat. They have been oppressed by Pashtuns, who believe they should be slaves and labourers. *The Secret Sky* provides a broad overview of how the Taliban gradually began to dominate Afghanistan.

This novel masterfully depicts Afghanistan's charm and tragedy in a way that only someone immersed in its mystery can (Abawi, 2014). A must-read for anybody interested in the paradoxes of the Afghan spirit, "The Secret Sky is an amazing blending of brutally honest and tenderly romantic. It was similar to reading The Kite Runner, a fascinating novel that provided insight into this terrible yet wonderful society. The Amelia Bloomer Project included The Secret Sky on its 2015 list of books that provide a "glimpse at the diverse experiences of girls and women globally. Even if it isn't physical, such interaction is seen to tarnish a woman's reputation. These young people returned to their communities, carrying with them an extreme brand of Islam that was progressively imposed on the surrounding rural villages. It was exacerbated by cultural traditions based on a warped sense of family honour, which argues that even the slightest interaction with an unrelated male might contaminate a woman. Previously, families may have dealt with these issues and possibly married off the pair, but extremist Islamic theology now demands that they be punished with death. In addition, many of these young men returning from Pakistan's madrassas formed a type of Afghan mafia and went around demanding security money from farmers, villagers, and shopkeepers.

Genesis of Afghan Culture

The history of the Afghan region is extensive and intricate, spanning thousands of years. Here is an overview of its historical progression: The Afghan region has been inhabited for a very long time. The Indus Valley Civilization had settlements in what is now Afghanistan when it was in its prime, around 2500 BCE. Alexander the Great conquered the area in 330 BCE, and it was still a part of the Persian Empire in the sixth century BCE. In the Islamic Period, Arab conquerors brought Islam to the area in the seventh century CE. Major cities like Herat and Balkh developed into academic hubs, helping Afghanistan to become a centre of Islamic civilization and culture. In the 13th-century Mongol Invasion, Genghis Khan's

Mongols invaded the area. The Mongols significantly harmed the region's cultural heritage by destroying many of its major cities and cultural hubs. In the 16th century, the Mughal Empire encroached on Afghanistan. Up until the 18th century, when the Persians overthrew the Mughals, the area was ruled by them. Ahmad Shah Durrani founded the Durrani Empire in the 18th century, which included a large portion of contemporary Afghanistan, Pakistan, and parts of Iran and India. The empire was a significant regional power, but due to internal strife and outside pressures, it started to wane in the 19th century.

The British Empire started to have an impact on Afghanistan in the 19th century. The Great Game, a series of wars and negotiations between the British and Russians over control of the area, came to be known. Afghanistan became a constitutional monarchy after gaining its independence from Great Britain in 1919. But in the modern era, the nation has seen a great deal of political unrest and conflict, including a civil war in the 1990s and the still ongoing war in Afghanistan, which started in 2001. Overall, interactions with adjacent civilizations and powers, as well as a complex interplay of cultural, political, and economic forces, have shaped the historical development of the Afghan region. The ideology and movement that aim to advance the harmony, independence, and sovereignty of Afghanistan and its people are referred to as Afghan nationalism. As a reaction to colonialism and foreign dominance, it first emerged in the early 20th century and has since been influenced by a wide range of cultural, religious, and political factors. The idea of Pashtunwali, the traditional moral code of the Pashtun people, who make up a sizable portion of the Afghan population, has been frequently associated with Afghan nationalism. Pashtunwali has been used to foster a sense of cohesion and solidarity among Afghans by placing an emphasis on ideas like honour, hospitality, and loyalty. King Amanullah Khan, who ruled Afghanistan from 1919 to 1929, was one of the key figures in the growth of Afghan nationalism. Amanullah promoted a secular and forward-thinking vision of Afghan nationalism in his efforts to modernise and westernise Afghanistan. He enacted several changes, such as the abolition of slavery, the creation of a constitution, and the right to vote for women. Amanullah's reforms, though, encountered a lot of opposition, and he was ultimately deposed in a coup in 1929. After that, Afghanistan went through a period of political unrest and conflict, and the idea of Afghan nationalism started to be linked to different political movements and factions. Afghan nationalism continues to be a significant force in Afghan politics and society today.

Politicians and activists who want to support national unity and oppose foreign meddling in Afghan affairs frequently invoke it. However, the idea of Afghan nationalism is still debatable, and discussions about its implications for the future of the nation are still going on. The idea of a common Afghan identity, which includes a sense of belonging and a shared past among the many ethnic, linguistic, and religious groups living in Afghanistan, is the foundation of Afghan nationalism. It draws attention to the shared linguistic, cultural, and historical heritage of Afghans. Afghan nationalism places a strong emphasis on preserving Afghanistan's sovereignty and geographical integrity. In order to preserve the integrity and stability of the Afghan state, it promotes the defence of the nation's borders as well as the harmony of its numerous distinct areas. Afghan nationalism, which expresses a desire for independence and self-determination, has frequently been linked to anti-colonial and anti-imperialist sentiments.

It aims to reaffirm Afghanistan's independence in the political, economic, and cultural domains while fending against outside meddling or hegemony. The goals of Afghan nationalism are to advance the needs and general well-being of the Afghan people. This encompasses the creation of a just and inclusive

society as well as political stability, human rights preservation, and socioeconomic progress. Afghanistan's old culture, contributions to global history, and resistance to foreign invasions are frequently emphasized in Afghan nationalism, which typically depends on a sense of historical pride. It promotes a shared memory that highlights the Afghan people's tenacity and bravery throughout history. Afghan nationalism, like all other forms of nationalism, may be understood and expressed in a variety of ways, and its connotations may change through time. The essence and objectives of Afghan nationalism may be seen from different political, ethnic, and intellectual viewpoints inside Afghanistan, giving rise to many interpretations and disputes over its tenets.

Components of Afghan Nationalism

Afghan nationalism has a number of particularities that reflect the country's unique history and culture. Here are some key aspects of Afghan nationalism: Ethnic and linguistic diversity: Afghanistan has a wide variety of ethnic groups and languages, making it a highly diverse nation. The majority ethnic group is Pashtun, but there are also sizeable populations of Tajiks, Hazaras, Uzbeks, and other groups. As a result of tensions and conflicts among various groups, this diversity has been both a strength and a hindrance to Afghan nationalism.

- **Islamic identity:** As a symbol of unity and a source of cultural identity, Islam has played a significant role in Afghan nationalism. Islam has played a significant role in influencing Afghanistan's history, politics, and society. Afghanistan is a country that is predominately Muslim.
- **Resistance to foreign influence:** Afghan nationalism is frequently defined as a reaction against foreign hegemony and sway. A strong sense of national pride and identity has been shaped by the nation's long history of defending itself against foreign invaders and occupiers.
- **Traditional values:** The Pashtunwali law of dignity and hospitality, which places an emphasis on loyalty, respect, and bravery, is one traditional value that Afghan nationalism is frequently linked to. These ideals are considered crucial for fostering a sense of pride in one's country.
- **Political instability:** Throughout its history, Afghanistan has experienced significant political unrest and conflict, which has had a significant influence on the growth of Afghan nationalism. Nationalist rhetoric has been used frequently by political movements and factions to gain legitimacy and support, but this has also caused division and fragmentation within the nation.

In general, the idea of hegemony is helpful for comprehending the intricate power dynamics at work in Afghanistan's past and present. It emphasizes the need for a more inclusive and equitable distribution of power and resources and highlights the ways in which both internal and external forces have worked to maintain and exercise control over the nation.

Conclusion

It is hard to identify cultural and political hegemony without a thorough understanding of the historical, cultural, and political contexts. Hegemony is a term used to describe how power is exercised and maintained in societies and the effects that this has on social, cultural, and political dynamics. The concept of hegemony helps to highlight the ways in which power is exerted and maintained in societies and the impact that this has on social, cultural, and political dynamics. Tracing cultural and political hegemony in the case of Afghanistan reveals a complex site of power relations that have been shaped by historical occurrences and outside influences. The social, cultural, and political development of Afghanistan has

been significantly impacted by colonialism, neocolonialism, and various forms of political and cultural hegemony. To encourage the development of more equitable and just societies, it is crucial to understand these power dynamics. In order to promote more inclusive and democratic systems that give all members of society more power, we must first trace the history of cultural and political hegemony. By doing this, we can see how power is concentrated and marginalized in various spheres of society. Significant problems in the field of international relations include the development of world order and the allocation of power within the international system. To comprehend the intricate changes in global politics, international relations studies require tools.

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