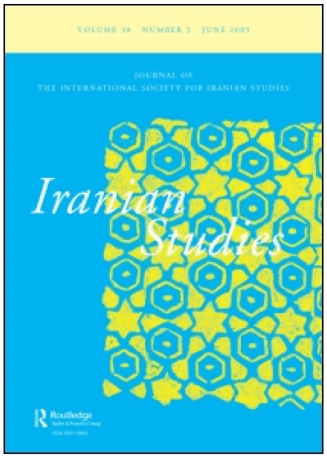

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M. Jamil Hanifi

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M. Jamil Hanifi

Editing the Past: Colonial Production of Hegemony Through the "*Loya Jerga*" in Afghanistan[1]

The central government of Afghanistan disintegrated in April 1992 setting in motion the collapse of the Afghan state apparatus that culminated in the occupation of the country by the armed forces of the United States in Autumn 2001. In the early days of the occupation Hamed Karzai, an expatriate Afghan, appeared surrounded by American soldiers on Western television screens as the man who was to become the American-appointed head of the future Afghan government. Shortly thereafter, the media carried a picture of a turbaned Mr. Karzai being presented a Holy Qur'an by Muhammad Zaher, the former King of Afghanistan then living in exile in Italy. The picture symbolically conveyed the approval by the aged ex-king of the anticipated appointment of young Karzai as head of the Afghan government.

On December 5, 2001 a conference attended by about thirty hand-picked expatriate Afghans—mostly descendants or otherwise members of the pre-1978 Afghan bourgeoisie—was convened in Bonn, Germany. The gathering was subsidized and controlled by the United States and allegedly coordinated by the United Nations. The Bonn conference produced a document titled "Agreement on Provisional Arrangements in Afghanistan Pending the Re-Establishment of Permanent Government Institutions." This "Bonn Agreement" provided for an "Interim Authority" as the government of Afghanistan and its Annex IV names Hamed Karzai as the "Chairman" of this authority. The agreement stipulated the convening of an "Emergency Loya Jirga" within six months after December 22 to establish a "Transitional Authority—to lead Afghanistan until such time as a *fully representative* government can be elected through *free and fair elections* to be held no later than two years from the date of the convening of the Emergency Loya Jirga. . . A Constitutional Loya Jirga shall be convened within eighteen months of the establishment of the Transitional Authority in order to adopt a new constitution for Afghanistan. The Emergency Loya Jirga will be opened by His Majesty Mohammed Zaher, the former King of Afghanistan."[2]

M. Jamil Hanifi is a retired professor of anthropology and independent scholar of anthropology and the history of Afghanistan. Email: hanifi@msu.edu

[1]This essay has benefited from the generous comments and suggestions of David W. Akin and Shah Mahmoud Hanifi. I thank them for this. However, I alone am responsible for its contents.

[2]Bonn Agreement, Chapter 1, APA infonet, http://www.afghanistanpeace.com/infonet.htm (January 14, 2002), emphasis added.

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With the occupation of Afghanistan by the United States in progress the global mass media disseminated unprecedented amounts of news and information about Afghanistan, Loya Jergas, the Kabul government, and Hamed Karzai. The Loya Jerga has been hailed in the West as a triumphant exercise in democracy and representative government; so much so that some United States government leaders and the international press have recommended its application to the political reconstitution of the state of Iraq.[3] Lakhdar Brahimi, the United Nations representative who produced and implemented two Loya Jergas in Afghanistan (2002 and 2003–2004), has now been assigned to construct a transitional government for Iraq. It seems as though this exotic Afghan mechanism for the production of the hegemony of the bourgeoisie has become the favorite consent-producing tool of American neocolonialism in the Middle East and Central Asia.

Euro-American scholars, local intellectuals, and politicians view the Loya Jerga as the highest source of legitimacy for the Afghan government and its policies and decisions. Other than one descriptive study of the 1941, 1955 and 1964 Loya Jergas there exists no systematic examination of this feature of the Afghan state during the past century.[4] Approached critically, the Loya Jerga has been the most important consent-producing, hegemonic prerogative of post-1919 monarchs and heads of government in Afghanistan. Antonio Gramsci's concept of "hegemony" is used here to mean generally the practices of the dominant class, including the process through which moral and intellectual leadership, nested in civil society, extracts consent from those who are dominated.[5] The Loya Jerga is viewed here as one element in the "hegemonic apparatus" of the Afghan state. The hegemonic apparatus consists of "a complex set of institutions, ideologies, practices and agents including the 'intellectuals'."[6] In addition to the Loya Jerga, other components of the Afghan hegemonic apparatus, in so far as they reflected the dominant class interests in civil society, included schools and universities, museums, libraries, public celebrations of independence and religious events, government publications (newspapers, journals, and books), radio, "representative" assemblies in Kabul and provincial capitals, and Sufi and other religious networks. Central to the idea of hegemonic apparatus is ideology, which Gramsci viewed as "a conception of the world that is implicitly manifest in art, in law, in economic activity and in all manifestations

[3]Interview with Senators Joseph Biden and Richard Lugar, NewsHour with Jim L. Lehrer, November 13, 2003.

[4]Abdul Samad Zazi, *Problemi Vneshina Politiki* v *Postanovbleniyakh Bolshoia Dzhirgi Afganistana [soziibii 1941, 1955 i 1964 gg.]* (Russian, Problems of Foreign Politics and the Staging of Afghanistan's Loya Jerga During the Years 1941, 1955 and 1964). Dissertation for Candidate in Historical Sciences, Institute of Oriental Studies, Academy of Sciences (Moscow, USSR, 1977).

[5]Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebook*, hereafter SPN (New York, 1971), 9, 57, 55–60, 160–161, 261–263.

[6]Christine Buci-Glucksmann, *Gramsci and the State* (London, 1980), 48.

of individual and collective life."[7] Western views of the Loya Jerga as a legitimizing device are largely derived from the ideology promoted by the bourgeois interests of the Afghan government and the intellectuals it patronized.

To critically understand the origin and dynamics of the Loya Jerga it is first necessary to address how European writers, and the Afghan intellectual elite and monarchy during the past two centuries, have located the Afghan state and its founder in one 1747 historical event. That event is widely viewed as the model for the structure and conduct of the Loya Jerga at the disposal of the Afghan government at times of major crises. Essentially, the Loya Jerga is a framework in which the Afghan state has adopted distortions of Western ideas of popular representation in the government and have attached to them Paxtu labels. The Loya Jerga has functioned to confirm the legitimacy of the ruler, his government, and their policies and actions. In reality, little about the Afghan monarchy was tribal or Paxtun, and nothing about the Loya Jerga was meaningfully representative of the people of Afghanistan or of free, open, and uninhibited debate about the issues facing the state. Since 1922 there have been eleven Loya Jergas convoked in Afghanistan and all nine constitutions of the country during this period have been produced by these assemblies. Only the 1924 assembly has left us a published and relatively comprehensive record of its proceedings.[8] This essay will provide a critical discussion of this record followed by an overview of how the Afghan state has continued to reinforce, promote, and manipulate this hegemonic apparatus over the last 85 years in the absence of free and democratically elected parliamentary institutions. But first, let us briefly address the ethnographic meaning and location of *Jerga*, the local Paxtun sodality for conflict resolution, from which the concept *Loya Jerga* is adapted.

The Ethnographic Locations of Jerga and Loya Jerga

Among the settled and nomadic Paxtuns[9] of central Asia, the *Jerga* (with the first vowel occurring between the short soft [a] and [e]) is a political arrangement for the resolution of local conflict. It functions as a sodality—it dissolves when the need for it disappears. It is the symbol of tribal autonomy[10] and it operates, in

[7] Gramsci, SPN, 328.

[8] *Roidad-e Loya Jerga-ye Dar al-Saltana* (Proceedings of the Capital City Loya Jerga) (Kabul, 1924), 410.

[9] There are three major phonetic variation of the noun Paxtun: Generally, Pakhtun, Pukhtun is used in the highlands straddling the Durand Line (language, Pakhtu, Pukhtu); Pashtun, Pushtun is used in the flatlands of Southwestern Afghanistan (language, Pashtu, Pushtu); Paxtun (the phone x is located between the units of sound kh and sh) in the foothills of Eastern and Southeastern Afghanistan (language, Paxtu). I am a Paxtun and speak Paxtu and have ethnographic familiarity with the Paxtu-speaking communities.

[10] The problematic of the concept "tribe" in anthropology is not pursued here. I use the label merely as a reference to Paxtu speakers of rural Afghanistan.

its traditional setting, on the margins of state government. The word Jerga in Paxtu means assembly, council, or gathering. It is occasionally interchangeably used with *Maraka*—discussion, or dialogue. The initiative for convoking a Jerga comes from local individuals or groups, and not from an external agency such as the state. Even in instances where a number of Jergas meet in one assembly, the label for a single assembly is used. There is at least one known instance where the British colonial government wished to engage the Mas'ud Paxtun tribe as a whole; the phrase "great jirga" was used by the British but the event turned into "a disorderly mob."[11] The earliest written reference to Jerga is provided during the colonial period by Mountstuart Elphinstone, a representative of the British government of India to the court of the ruler of Kabul at his summer capitol of Peshawar.[12] The earliest dictionary references to Jerga are provided by Henry George Raverty, Henry Walter Bellew, and J. G. Lorimer,[13] all colonial officers of the British government of India. Other early references to Jerga are contained in official British colonial texts about Paxtuns.[14]

Theoretically, all adult male members of the community can participate on an equal basis in the Jerga and any adult male can request its convocation. In practice, however, elders and other influential male members convene the assembly. No one officially presides over the Jerga and every male participant is entitled to speak. A local Jerga seldom has more than twenty-five members. Decisions of the Jerga are based on consensus; dissent is strongly discouraged and rarely allowed. In smaller, isolated communities the Jerga is convened adjacent to a cemetery or in a local mosque when the facility is readily accessible. Open space is preferred to space under a roof. The decisions of the Jerga are final and a person who does not abide by them risks being expelled from the community and/or having his residential property burned. The individuals who are assigned to enforce the decision of the Jerga are collectively and symbolically called *Tsalwextai*—"a contingent of forty"—but lower or higher numbers may be involved depending on the size of the community and the complexity of the task at hand. A local Jerga may negotiate with its counterpart elsewhere in matters involving intercommunity conflict. Under the colonial domination

[11]Olaf Caroe, *The Pathans*: 550 *B. C.-A. D. 1957* (New York, 1958), 401–402.

[12]Mountstuart Elphinstone, *An Account of the Kingdom of Caubul*, 2 volumes (New York, 1839 [1815]), I, 215, 222–226, II, 41.

[13]Henry George Raverty, *A Dictionary of Pukhto, Pushto or Language of the Afghans* (London, 1860); Henry Walter Bellew, *A Dictionary of the Pukkhto or Pukshto Language* (London, 1867); J. G. Lorimer, *Grammar and Vocabulary of Waziri Pashto* (Calcutta, 1902).

[14]J. S. Broadfoot, "Reports on Parts of the Ghilzi Country," Royal Geographical Society (Supplementary Papers), Volume I (1882–1885); Edward E. Oliver, *Across the Border or Pathan and Baluch* (London, 1890); Richard Isaac Bruce, *The Forward Policy* (London, 1900); H. C. Wylly, *From the Black Mountain to Waziristan* (London, 1912); T. L. Pennell, *Among the Wild Tribes of the Afghan Frontier* (London, 1914).

and during the postcolonial period[15] in Afghanistan a local Jerga, alone or together with other Jergas, negotiated with agents of the government. Within this general framework, specific instances of Jerga are noted in the available ethnographic accounts dealing with political processes in Paxtun communities.[16]

Although the word Jerga is familiar to non-Paxtuns of Afghanistan and the surrounding region, it is not their preferred label for local assemblies or councils for conflict resolution. The popular term in non-Paxtun areas of Afghanistan for a local assembly, a deliberative, or advisory body was *Shura-ye Mahali* (Persian: local assembly or council during 1919–1929) or *Majles-e Mashwara* (Persian: consultation council, attached to provincial governments). During the reigns of Amir Habibullah (1901–1919) and Amir Amanullah (1919–1929) the government instituted a *Shura-ye Dawlat* (Persian: state assembly) composed of high-ranking members of the central government and the inner circle of the king. But this practice was dropped after the fall of Amir Amanullah in 1929. Starting in 1930, *Majles-e Shora* (Persian: consultative assembly) was introduced. The adjective *Meli* (Persian: national) was occasionally added as a suffix to signify national assembly, *Majles-e Shora-ye Meli*. In 1933 a *Majles-e A'yan* (Persian: assembly of nobles, grandees) was introduced. During 1964–1978 the Majles-e Shora and Majles-e A'yan were changed to *Wolusi Jerga* (Paxtu: Peoples' Assembly) and *Da Meshrano Jerga* (Paxtu: Elders' Assembly) respectively. In Iran, Jerga refers to a ring, group, coterie, or clique, and the use of the label for tribal or other local mechanisms for conflict resolution in that country is unknown. Among the Marri Baluch the term Jerga applies to a relatively structured arrangement in which "the hierarchy of tribal leaders, the organs of external administration, and the framework of sections meet and articulate in a manner that is decisive to the function of each."[17]

The available pre-1922 ethnographic and historical record dealing with tribes and states in Afghanistan and the surrounding region does not contain specific

[15]The following time periods are used in this essay: Precolonial, 1747–1809; Colonial, 1809–1919; Postcolonial, 1919–2001; Neocolonial, 2001–present.

[16]Akbar S. Ahmed, Pukhtun Economy and Society (London, 1980), *Religion and Politics in Muslim Society* (London, 1983); Fredrik Barth, *Political Leadership among Swat Pathans* (London, 1959); Hugh Beattie, *Imperial Frontier: Tribe and State in Waziristan* (London, 2002); Jeffrey H. P. Evans-von Krbek, "The Social Structure and Organization of a Pakhto Speaking Community in Afghanistan" (Ph. D. thesis, University of Durham, 1977); B. Glatzer, "Political Organization of Pashtun Nomads and the State," in *The Conflict of Tribe and State in Iran and Afghanistan*, ed. Richard Tapper (New York, 1983), 212–232; Richard Tapper, "Introduction," in *The Conflict of Tribe and State in Iran and Afghanistan*, ed. Richard Tapper (New York, 1983), 1–82; M. Yapp, "Tribes and States in the Khyber, 1838–42," in *The Conflict of Tribe and State in Iran and Afghanistan*, ed. Richard Tapper (New York, 1983), 150–191; Alef-Shah Zadran, "Socio-Economic and Legal-Political Processes in a Pashtun Village, Southeastern Afghanistan," (Ph. D. diss., State University of New York at Buffalo, 1977).

[17]Robert N. Pehrson, *The Social Organization of the Marri Baluch* (New York, 1966).

reference to the concept or apparatus of Loya Jerga. However, Afghan nationalist writers like Mir Gholam Mohammad Ghobar[18] and Mohammad 'Alam Faiz-zad.[19] insist that the Loya Jerga, as a feature of central government in Afghanistan, dates back to pre-Islamic times. An intellectual of the Afghan diaspora in North America claims that a "great Afghan Loya Jirga [was] convened by Emperor Kanishka a little less than two thousand years ago."[20] There is no historical or archaeological evidence in support of these claims, however. There is no record of assemblies or councils or other specifically named representative bodies that the government convened or with which the rulers of Afghanistan consulted prior to 1922. Ghobar, the most prominent twentieth-century Afghan historian, writes that Amir Sher Ali (r.1863–1866 and 1868–1879) convened a "Loya Jerga"[21] in 1866. But the source he quotes mentions a "*majles*" (gathering),[22] not a Jerga or a Loya Jerga. And Hasan Kawun Kakar, a British-trained Afghan historian of nineteenth-century Afghanistan writes of the convening of three Loya Jergas during the reign of Amir 'Abd al-Rahman (r.1880–1901).[23] He offers no documentation in support of this claim. Likewise, Louis Dupree claims that 'Abd al-Rahman "appointed a General Assembly (*Loya Jirgah*) which included three groups of the Afghan citizens: certain Sardars (princes) of the royal family; important khans or *khawanin-i mulki* in the rural power elite, from different parts of the country; the religious leaders from whom, however, he brooked no opposition."[24] Like Kakar, Dupree does not offer any evidence in support of this important assertion. Similarly, Barnett R. Rubin, an American political scientist who has written extensively on Afghanistan writes, without any supporting evidence, that Amir 'Abd-al Rahman "modified [the] tradition of tribal representation by establishing the Loya Jirga."[25] Ludwig W. Adamec, an American political scientist, claims that in 1915 Amir Habibullah (r.1901–1919) had convened a "Loya Jerga" for the purpose of deciding Afghanistan's position in World War I and to compose a reply to the British demand for Afghan neutrality. He offers a British archival document as his source.[26] Ghobar, on the other hand, without documentation, cites a 520-member "*Jerga-e 'omom-ye rah-*

[18]Mir Gholam Mohammad Ghobar, *Afghanistan dar Maseer-e Tarikh* (Afghanistan in the Course of History) (Kabul, 1967).

[19]Mohammad 'Alam Faiz-zad, *Jergaha-ye Buzurg-e Meli-ye Afghanistan* (The Great National Jergas of Afghanistan) (Lahore, 1990).

[20]G. Rauf Roashan, "Loya Jirga: One of the Last Political Tools for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan," www.institute-for-afghan-studies.org, June 30, 2001.

[21]Ghobar, *Afghanistan dar Maseer-e Tarikh*, 595.

[22]Mirza Ya'qub Ali Khan Khafi, *Padshahan-e Muta'akher-e Afghanistan*, 2 Volumes (The Recent Kings of Afghanistan) (Kabul, 1953), I, 95.

[23]Hasan Kawun Kakar, *Government and Society in Afghanistan: The Reign of Amir 'Abd al-Rahman Khan* (Austin, 1979), 25.

[24]Louis Dupree, *Afghanistan* (Princeton, 1973), 421.

[25]Barnett R. Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan: State Formation and Collapse in the International System* (New Haven, 1995), 51.

[26]Ludwig W. Adamec, *Afghanistan*, 1900–1923 (Los Angeles, 1967), 91.

baran-e ehtemali-ye jehad" (Persian: general assembly of the leaders of the impending jehad)[27] that Amir Habibullah had assembled in Kabul for this purpose.

Although constructed out of Paxtu language elements, there is no application of the Loya Jerga label to any social mechanism among the tribal Paxtuns in the region. In Paxtu the noun is gendered, and an adjective precedes the noun and must reflect its gender. Thus, *Loya* (feminine adjective), grand, large; *Jerga* (feminine noun), assembly, gathering—*Loya Jerga*, grand assembly, grand council. The earliest use of the label is in reference to the proceedings of an assembly convened in 1922 by the order of Amir Amanullah in Jellalabad to discuss and approve the first constitution of Afghanistan. This reference is contained in the published proceedings of the 1924 Loya Jerga. The label Loya Jerga as invented by the governments of Afghanistan in 1922 is derived from the colonial reconstruction of events in 1747 surrounding the rise of Ahmad Khan Abdali (r. 1747–1772) to political prominence–the foundational moment of the Afghan monarchy. These events are originally variously described in several local Persian chronicles of the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries. Ahmad Khan was a former officer in the court of Nader Shah Afshar, who, subsequent to the latter's assassination, found himself ruler of an extensive territory from which Afghanistan was later carved out in the late nineteenth century. A succession of lineal and collateral descendants of Ahmad Khan governed Afghanistan until 1978.

Ahmad Khan, the legendary founder of the Afghan state, was allegedly elected by consensus and crowned king of Afghanistan in 1747, according to texts produced by the Afghan government and intellectuals and popular ideas about the tribal assembly in which the event occurred. These accounts are inspired by various whimsical European representations of local Persian chronicles. The earliest and most comprehensive pre-colonial account of Ahmad Khan's rise to political power is provided in a chronicle written during 1753–1774 by Mahmud al-Hosaini al-Munshi ibn Ibrahem al-Jami, the court historian of Ahmad Khan Abdali.[28] This account makes no mention of an organized assembly in which the election and coronation of Ahmad Khan took place. Nor is there any mention of the acts of election or coronation per se. Hosaini's narrative clearly states that during a gathering in Qandahar in 1747, Saber, a mendicant, placed blades of green grass, *giyah-e sabz*[29] on Ahmad Khan's cap and proclaimed him king. This mendicant had earlier foretold that Ahmad Khan would become king after Nader Shah Afshar's death. Hosaini writes, not of consensus, but of much violence surrounding the accession of Ahmad Khan including armed conflict between his supporters and opponents and the trampling to death by elephants

[27]Ghobar, *Afghanistan dar Maseer-e Tarikh*, 739.

[28]Mahmud al-Hosaini al-Munshi ibn Ibrahem al-Jami, *Tarikh-e Ahmad Shahi* (History of Ahmad Shah) 2 Volumes (Moscow. 1974 [1753–1774]).

[29]Hosaini, *Tarikh-e Ahmad Shahi*, I, 23a.

of his major detractors.[30] There are several variations of Hosaini's account of Ahmad Khan's rise to political leadership in late eighteenth, nineteenth, and early twentieth-century chronicles. Like Hosaini's narrative, these accounts do not mention coronation, election, consensus, Afghanistan, Paxtuns, or Loya Jerga.[31]

As mentioned above, European colonial writers have converted these local narratives of the event of Ahmad Khan's accession to power into a variety of whimsical, orientalist portrayals. Here are a few samples of these representations. Mountstuart Elphinstone, the earliest of these colonial authors, writes that "[I]n October 1747 [Ahmad Khan] was crowned: Dooraunee, Kuzzulbaush, Beloches, and Hazaurah chiefs are mentioned as assisting at the coronation."[32] Writing in 1852 James Fraser repeats Elphinstone's distortion: "Ahmed . . . assumed the ensigns of royalty at Candahar, in the month of October, 1747, the Dooranee, Kuzzilbash, Beloches, and Hazara chiefs assisting in his coronation."[33] Joseph Pierre Ferrier, a French traveler who visited Afghanistan during 1844–1845 states that the mendicant "took a handful of barley from an adjoining field, and having formed it into a wreath, placed it on the head of Ahmed Khan, adding, 'and may this serve as your diadem' . . . Ahmed Khan, who took the title of Shah, was crowned in the mosque at Kandahar towards the end of 1747. The ceremony of his coronation was of the most simple kind: the Mollah of the highest rank poured a measure of wheat on the head of the new monarch, announcing to the assembled Afghans that he was the chosen of God and the nation."[34] Henry George Raverty, the most prolific English colonial writer on Afghanistan, confirms what his predecessor's have invented: "In October of the same year (1747), Ahmad, . . . assumed the title of Shah or King of Afghanistan, and was crowned at Kandahar, with great pomp, the different chiefs of the various Afghan tribes, with but few exceptions, and the Kazalbashes, Baluchis, and Hazarahs, assisting."[35] Other European colonial writers have followed suit: Ahmad Khan was "crowned King of the Afghans at Kandahar in October 1747";[36] the mendicant produced "a tiny sheaf of wheat, and placing it in

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[30]Hosaini, *Tarikh-e Ahmad Shahi*, I, 30a–330b.

[31]See for example these Persian chronicles: Gholam Hosain Tabatabai, *Siyar al-Mutakherin*, (Calcutta,1789 reprint of 1780–1781 publication); Abol Hasan bin Mohammad Amin Golestana, *Mojmal al-Tawarikh* (Tehran,1965 reprint of 1782 publication); Imam al-Din Hosaini, *Tarikh-e Hosain Shahi* (1793); 'Abdul Kerim Boukhari, *Afghanistan, Boukhara, Khiva, Khoqand* (Paris, 1876 reprint of 1818 publication); 'Abd al-Karim 'Alawi, *Tarikh-e Shahan-e Dorani* (1826); Sultan Mohammad Khales, *Tarikh-e Sultani* (Bombay, 1881 reprint of 1865 publication); Sher Mohammad Khan Gandapur, *Tawarikh-e Khorshaid-e Jahan* (Lahore, 1904, first written in 1894); Mohammad Yusuf Riyazi Haravi, '*Ain al-Waqayi*' (Tehran, 1990, first written in 1904); Fayz Mohammad Kateb, *Seraj al-Tawarikh* (Kabul, 1913–1915).

[32]Elphinstone, *An Account of the Kingdom of Caubul*, II, 281.

[33]James B. Fraser, *Historical and Descriptive Account of Persia* (New York, 1852), 325.

[34]J. P. Ferrier, *History of the Afghans* (London, 1858), 69–70.

[35]Henry George Raverty, *Selections from the Poetry of the Afghans* (London, 1867), 288.

[36]G. B. Malleson, *History of Afghanistan From the Earliest Period to the Outbreak of the War of 1878* (London, 1879), 272.

Ahmad Khan's turban, declared that no one in that assembly was so fit for the kingship as Ahmad Khan, the flower of the Duranis."[37]

These European inventions have had a profound impact on how Afghans and others have constructed the history of Afghanistan and how they have addressed the genesis of the Afghan state and the Durrani dynastic rule in Afghanistan. The reference to barley and wheat in these European accounts of Ahmad Khan's "coronation" (on the authority of Ganda Singh)[38] led the archaeologist Louis Dupree, in describing Ahmad Khan's career, to state that "[a]s an anthropologist, I cannot resist speculating that this fertility symbol must have an ancient prehistoric root in Afghanistan."[39] The Afghan monarchs have used European embellishments of this legend as the source of their legitimacy and the basis of their hereditary right to the kingship of Afghanistan. Addressing the Loya Jerga of 1924, Amir Amanullah exclaimed "the crown made of a cluster of wheat that this nation bestowed on our dynasty—a dynasty whose descendants rule to this day—makes them [the descendants] proud."[40] Starting with Amanullah's rule, clusters of wheat have had a prominent place in the official state emblems, insignias, and banners of Afghanistan.

Following these distortions and adding to them, Louis Dupree, who is known as a "specialist" on Afghanistan, refers to the Loya Jerga as the "Great National Assembly—partly elected, partly appointed."[41] Leon Poullada, an American political scientist, views the Loya Jerga as the "Great Tribal Assembly."[42] M. Nazif Shahrani, an American-educated Afghan anthropologist, considers the Loya Jerga as the "National Grand Assembly."[43] Another American-educated Afghan anthropologist, Ashraf Ghani, states: "The power elite of the country was given a voice in the determination of state policies through the convening of *loya jergas* or grand assemblies. Such an assembly had elected Ahmad Shah Dorrani king of Afghanistan"[44] Ghani's assertion is puzzling since he apparently had access to Hussaini's text as it is listed in his bibliography.

The British anthropologist Richard Tapper writes that "Ahmad Khan . . . was elected leader by a jirga assembly of Nadir's Afghan generals, as something of a compromise . . . and his leadership among the tribal chiefs indeed remained that of *primus inter pares*."[45] The American anthropologist Robert L. Canfield,

[37]G. P. Tate, *The Kingdom of Afghanistan* (Calcutta, 1911), 67–69.

[38]Ganda Singh, *Ahmad Shah Durrani: Father of Modern Afghanistan* (Bombay, 1959), 25–27.

[39]Dupree, *Afghanistan*, 333n.

[39]*Roidadha-ye Loya Jerga-ye Dar al-Saltana*, *1303*, 410.

[41]Dupree, Louis, "The Marxist Regimes and the Soviet Presence in Afghanistan," in *Revolutions and Rebellions in Afghanistan*, ed. M. Nazif Shahrani and Robert L. Canfield (Berkeley, 1984), 58–73.

[42]Leon Poullada, *Reform and rebellion in Afghanistan*, *1919–1929* (Ithaca, 1973), 69.

[43]M. Nazif Shahrani, "Introduction: Marxist 'Revolution' and Islamic Resistance in Afghanistan," in *Revolutions and Rebellions in Afghanistan*, ed. M. Nazif Shahrani and Robert L. Canfield (Berkeley, 1984), 3–57.

[44]A. Ghani, "Afghanistan: Administration," *Encyclopaedia Iranica* I: 561.

[45]Tapper, "Introduction," in *The Conflict of Tribe and State in Iran and Afghanistan*, ed. Richard Tapper (New York, 1983), 13.

however, with implicit caution, asserts: "The 'founder' of the country, Ahmad Shah Abdali, took a religious title after he was 'crowned' amir by a notable religious authority, and every other ruler after him similarly claimed a special Islamic title (at least until 1973)."[46] The French sociologist Olivier Roy notes that: "War was a short-lived affair and decided upon by the council of clan chiefs [a limited *jirga*].[47] Of Ahmad Khan Abdali, Roy writes: "He was first and foremost a warrior chief, with whom his followers entered into a contract. His right to lead was based upon the fact that he had been enthroned by a great tribal *jirga* [an assembly of all the warriors]. The great *jirga* was the founding myth of the Afghan state and was to be re-enacted in periods of crisis [as for the enthronement of Nadir Khan in 1929]."[48] D. Balland, a French social scientist, states that "Ahmad Khan was thus *elected* king of the Afghans by a *jerga* or tribal council of Pashtun chiefs; in October of the same (1747) year he was crowned at a location not far from Qandahar."[49]

Yu. V. Gankovsky, a prominent Soviet historian of Afghanistan, wrote extensively during the Soviet era. He published a comprehensive account of the Durrani Empire[50] and the Paxtuns.[51] In the 1958 publication he says nothing about how Ahmad Khan rose to power. However, in a more recent publication, after Ghobar's book on Ahmad Khan (see note 91 below) was translated into Russian, Gankovsky writes "No mean role was played also by the backing rendered to Ahmad Khan by Sabir Shah, an outstanding Muslim theologian and a leader of the large Sufi order of the Chishtiye [the Sadozais had long-standing ties with it]. Sabir Shah had suggested Ahmad Khan for the post and himself crowned him."[52] Finally, here are the views of Barnett R. Rubin whose ideas about Afghanistan are widely used by academics, United States policy makers, and the media: "[T]he jirga of the tribes was simultaneously a representative institution, a sort of electoral college for the Shah, and a military force. Just such a jirga had chosen Ahmad Shah as leader of the Abdalis . . . Afghans referred to previous large jirgas, such as the one that elected Ahmad Shah, as Loya Jirgas, but the term had never been given a legally codified meaning."[53] Referring to the 1955 Loya Jerga, Rubin states: "The Loya Jirga showed the encapsulation of the tribes, not their continuing power";[54] the 1964 Loya Jerga was "probably the freest and most effective such body ever convened by the state."[55] "At a con-

[46]Robert L. Canfield, "Symbol and Sentiment in Motivated Action," in *Language and Life: Essays in Memory of Kenneth L. Pike*, ed. Tom Headland et al. (Dallas, 2003), 345–346.

[47]Olivier Roy, *Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan* (London, 1985), 13.

[48]Ibid.

[49]D. Balland, "Afghanistan: Political History," *Encyclopaedia Iranica* I: 547, emphasis added.

[50]Yu. V. Gankovsky, *Imperia Durani* (The Durani Empire) (Moscow, 1958); Paxtu translation (Kabul, 1978).

[51]Yu. V. Gankovsky, *The People of Pakistan* (Moscow, 1971).

[52]Yu. V. Gankovsky, *A History of Afghanistan* (Moscow, 1985), 121.

[53]Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, 51.

[54]Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, 72.

[55]Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, 73.

trolled Loya Jirga in 1977 he [Mohammad Daud] promulgated a new constitution."[56] "[T]he institution of the Loya Jirga developed out of the state's attempt to modify Pashtun tribal tradition in order to create a tribal-nationalist legitimation for state power."[57]

According to Rubin, in trying to mediate the Afghan conflict in the 1980s, the United Nations considered "the creation of Afghan groups that had a realistic chance of gaining the needed authority. The procedure drew on certain Afghan traditions (in particular the 'emergency Loya Jirga') described to the United Nations by exiled officials of the old regime, including the former king and his advisors."[58] "For the Islamists and the opponents of Pashtun domination, the Loya Jirga represented political forces they opposed, not a primordial tradition."[59] Rubin's report and observations clearly illustrate how conflated the processes of domination and hegemony were in Afghanistan and how removed postcolonial intellectuals and the popular ideology and consciousness of the people of Afghanistan were from the realities of the Loya Jerga, "a basic hegemonic lie [that] says, to rulers and the ruled alike, that only the elite are fit to govern."[60] This elite, nestled in the Afghan government, determined the structure, process, and membership of the Loya Jerga in Afghanistan.

The distortions and misrepresentations contained in the colonial constructions of Ahmad Khan's "election" and "coronation" in a participatory "tribal" context—the founding legend of Afghanistan, the Afghan monarchy, and the legitimizing basis of the Loya Jerga-have been reproduced virtually intact by the Afghan government and by local and Western postcolonial writers interested in political processes and leadership in Afghanistan. The Afghan government portrayed the Loya Jerga as an arrangement derived from Paxtun social and symbolic elements when in fact, as we will see from the record of the first Loya Jerga in 1924, there was virtually nothing (except the label) Paxtun in practice about this hegemonic apparatus. The Afghan monarchy's claim to Paxtun identity has little ethnographic and historical validity. The royal lineage had been Persianized; its members neither spoke Paxtu nor exhibited other behavioral and cultural features of Paxtun identity. By identifying themselves with the Paxtun label "Loya Jerga" the monarchy attempted to boost their own dubious claim to Paxtun identity, coopted the Paxtun tribes, and intimidated the non-Paxtun population with the alleged numerical majority of Paxtuns and the latter's historical reputation as brave warriors. The Paxtun numerical majority was a mere speculation and notions about their bravery were a matter of interpretation valid only in the framework of their long-standing opposition to state structures. Western academic writers have uncritically accepted the Loya Jerga as a primordial and legitimate

[56]Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, 75.
[57]Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, 193.
[58]Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, 268.
[59]Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, 193.
[60]F. G. Bailey, *The Prevalence of Deceit* (Ithaca, 1991), 81.

fixture of the Afghan polity. While these writers virtually unanimously promote the invalid thesis of Paxtun domination of Afghanistan, none have critically addressed or acknowledged the transparent, non-Paxtun character of the Loya Jerga in practice. These uncritical views portray the Loya Jerga as the framework for popular participation in the affairs of the Afghan government. These views of the Loya Jerga and the idea that this assembly was the mechanism through which political leadership was produced and legitimated through tribal participation are widely shared by Western academic writers who view the Afghan state as an amalgam of Paxtun tribes and the Afghan monarchy as a Paxtun tribal construction. Most academic writings on Afghanistan convey the impression that there are no non-Paxtun tribal and non-tribal communities in Afghanistan. These perceptions of Afghanistan, the Loya Jerga, and the Afghan monarchy evaporate when confronted with ethnographic and historical facts. Although there has never been a systematic headcount in Afghanistan, it is likely that non-Paxtuns comprise the majority of the people of the country. Non-Paxtun communities have played prominent roles in the affairs of the country.

Postcolonial Construction of Loya Jerga, 1919–2001

The first quarter of the twentieth century in urban Afghanistan ushered in the confluence of a number of important social, political, and ideological developments. During this period the Afghan political elite was exposed to heavy doses of Western political ideas as contacts with the outside world increased. British subsidies were withdrawn after Afghanistan gained its political independence in 1919. The loss of subsidies was, in part, offset by revenue from the expansion of Afghan merchant capital.[61] Not only did the Afghan government become dependent on merchant capital but the Afghan intellectual elite was and continues to be located in this small merchant class. In the first twenty years of post-1919 Afghanistan, this small group of intellectual elites produced numerous texts that strengthened the legitimacy of the Loya Jerga, which enabled the government to exert direct hegemonic control over the nascent Afghan civil society. During this period, the domination of Afghanistan by the central government was steadily enhanced through the government's ever-increasing coercive power achieved primarily through the acquisition of large quantities of modern weapons from Europe and Russia. Consent was procured through a number of hegemonic apparatuses, chief among them the Loya Jerga. Other hegemonic devices included state-produced mass media (newspapers, journals, and Kabul Radio, established in 1940), literature, and school textbooks. Two additional government-controlled nominal assemblies—one ostensibly representing the people of Afghanistan, the other appointed by the king—were also initiated.

[61]Maxwell J. Fry, *The Afghan Economy: Money, Finance, and the Critical Constraints to Economic Development* (Leiden, 1974), 216–267.

During Amir Habibullah's reign Mahmud Tarzi, a prominent member of the Muhammadzai lineage, started publishing a biweekly newspaper, *Siraj al-Akhbar* (1911–1919). Tarzi, whose family was exiled earlier, had lived in Syria and had traveled through Turkey and North Africa. He used this paper as a platform for promoting the modernization and Westernization of Afghanistan in a framework that emulated Turkey's adaptation of Western ideas and material achievements. However, he was a staunch opponent of British colonialism and a proponent of the removal of British control over the political affairs of Afghanistan. Inspired by Mahmud Tarzi and his newspaper, a small number of Afghan intellectuals became increasingly active. What seems to have sparked this development was Habibullah's decision, under British pressure, that included an increase in his subsidy, to remain neutral in World War I despite an official request by Turkey and Germany for Afghanistan to side with them. These intellectuals were mostly self-educated, literate employees of the Afghan government and members of a budding merchant class that called itself *Mashruta Khwahan*, constitutionalists, or *Junbesh-e Mashsrutiyat dar Afghanistan* (Persian: the constitutionalist movement in Afghanistan).[62] Ghobar calls it *Nuhzat-e Demokrasi* (Persian: democracy movement) and lists its forty-five members.[63] They opposed British domination of Afghanistan and wanted a greater role for themselves in state affairs in the framework of a constitutional monarchy. The group was composed mostly of writers with urban merchant roots, government employees, landowners, and a few Indian nationals working for the government. Ghobar describes them, as a group, *Bourgeoisie-ye Meli wa Zamindar-e Lebral*, (Persian: national bourgeoisie and liberal landowners) and divides them into three categories: liberal members of the court, a secret nationalist party whose members were radical students of the newly established Habibiya High School, and those outside of these groups.[64] Amir Habibullah was assassinated in 1919 and his son Amir Amanuallah succeeded him as amir of Afghanistan. After a limited military confrontation with the amir's forces, the British government of India surrendered its control over the foreign affairs of Afghanistan in 1919 and terminated its annual subsidy to its ruler.

During the rule of Amanullah the constitutionalists became known as "*Roshan Fekran*" (Persian: intellectuals, or literally, enlightened minds) and "*Jawanan-e Afghan*" (Persian: Afghan Youth).[65] Ghobar states that Amanullah, "from the beginning of his rule, approached the Afghan intellectuals with sincerity and sympathy and released all constitutionalists who had been imprisoned by his father, and together with the other young intellectuals, gave them a role in the affairs of the state."[66] Ghobar was a member of the Enlightened Minds and had participated in the conferences in which Amanullah encouraged and promoted discus-

[62]'Abd al-Hayy Habibi, *Junbesh-e Mashrutiyat dar Afghanistan* (Qum, 1994)
[63]Ghobar, *Afghanistan dar Maseer-e Tarikh*, 716, 718–719.
[64]Ghobar, *Afghanistan dar Maseer-e Tarikh*, 716–717.
[65]Ghobar, *Afghanistan dar Maseer-e Tarikh*, 797.
[66]Ghobar, *Afghanistan dar Maseer-e Tarikh*, 797.

sions about Afghanistan's foreign relations and internal reforms. The idea of the Loya Jerga was hammered out at these discussions. The progressive amir and his Afghan intellectual elite subjects saw in the Loya Jerga a framework in which both sides could promote their objectives; the amir, by using a Paxtu label, could portray himself as a Paxtun to gain popular support for his reforms and modernization programs; the intellectuals would have a real opportunity for participation in the affairs of the government, influencing both the amir and the Loya Jerga proceedings.

The first Loya Jerga was convened in 1922 by the amir in Jellabad, his unofficial winter capital. Predictably, the Loya Jerga discussed and ratified the first constitution of Afghanistan, something the Afghan intellectuals earnestly desired. The constitution was formally approved in April 1923. This constitution provided for direct input from ordinary people but only to the extent that people could "make suggestions" and submit "petitions" and "complaints" to the government.[67] The state and provincial councils were to include two categories of members: those allegedly chosen by the people and those appointed by the monarch. The 1923 constitution made no explicit provision for the Loya Jerga. Leon Poullada suggests that this constitution was originally drafted in Paxtu.[68] This is possible but not likely since, even though the Loya Jerga that approved the constitution was held in a Paxtun setting, it is doubtful that Persian was dropped on this occasion as the official language of the Afghan state bureaucracy. Apparently relying on Poullada, Ashraf Ghani, referring to the 1923 constitution, states that "[t]he original text is in Pashto, while a Persian translation is also provided."[69] To my knowledge no one else makes this claim and there is no known evidence to support such an assertion. In any event, only the Persian text of this constitution has survived—there is no record of the transactions of the 1922 Loya Jerga that adopted this document.

Partial or sketchy records are available for all twelve Loya Jergas, but they are difficult to access because they have been either destroyed or circulated only on a limited basis. Only the 1924 and 1964 Loya Jergas have generated a relatively comprehensive, accessible record. The partial, written Persian record of the proceedings of the 1964 constitutional Loya Jerga is available in a typescript of 826 pages, from which pages 1–219 are missing.[70] However, the available pages lack, among other things, information about the active role of the king, his government, and biographical data about the participants.

[67]S. Fida Yunas, *The Constitutions of Afghanistan, 1923–1990* (Peshawar, 2001), 1–15.

[68]Poullada, *Reform and Rebellion*, 93, n1.

[69]Ghani, "Afghanistan: Administration," 564.

[70]Untitled typecript of the 1964 Loya Jerga. To my knowledge only one copy of this document is in circulation at the library of Bochum University, Germany. I purchased a copy through the facilitation of Mir Mohammad Amin Farhang.

The 1924 Loya Jerga

Amanullah's second Loya Jerga was convened during 1924 in Paghman, the amir's summer residence, about twelve miles west of the city of Kabul. This is the only Loya Jerga for which there is an officially issued, published, comprehensive record.[71] One thousand lithographed copies containing 451 pages were published. The purpose of this Loya Jerga was to modify some of the amir's reforms, and to review the internal and external policies and activities of the government. The Loya Jerga was envisioned by Amir Amanullah and his advisors as a mechanism through which consent in civil society could be produced by manipulation and deceit. The Loya Jerga was proclaimed in a royal decree in early 1924. In this proclamation the amir recalled the 1922 assembly as having been narrow since it represented only the eastern region and parts of Kabul province. The protocol that accompanied the memorial medal issued to each participant at the completion of the 1924 assembly refers to this gathering as the first Loya Jerga.[72]

The proclamation instructs the provincial governors to arrange for one-half of the representatives to local assemblies to participate in the Loya Jerga and orders these officials to remit the representatives' expenses for food and travel to Kabul. The other half of the local representatives were to remain in their posts to perform their routine duties.[73] Simultaneously, the amir issued an order to every representative selected for the Loya Jerga informing them of his desire that they come to Kabul, participate in the Loya Jerga, and consult with him and his government. He assured the representatives that when in Kabul they would be his guests, and their return travel expenses from Kabul would be paid for by the Ministry of Interior.[74]

As can be seen in Table 1, the 1924 Loya Jerga consisted of 1,054 participants from nine provinces and the central government in Kabul. Two hundred thirty-one or about 22 percent consisted of members of the central government bureaucracy, all chosen by the amir. This group included all civil servants with the rank of chief clerk (*Sarkateb*) and above, and all military officers with the rank of major (*Kandakmeshr*) and above.[75] The remaining 823 participants consisted of the following six categories: '*Ulema* (plural of '*Alem*, religious authority):75 members (7 percent); *Sadat* (plural of *Sayid*, one claiming sacred descent, definitionally non-Paxtun):111 members (10.5 percent); *Mashayekh* (plural of *Shaykh*, generally *Sufis*, mystics who claim sacred descent, definitionally non-Paxtuns—prominent members are the *Naqshbandi* Sufi networks whose main group is locally called the *Mujaddidis* and the *Qaderiya* Sufi network who are locally known as the *Naqibs*. Other important Shaykhs in attendance were the Mullah of Chaknahwar, Mawalawi of Kama, and the Shaykh of Karakh):33 members (3 percent); *Khawanin*

[71] *Roidad-e Loya Jerga-ye Dar al-Saltana*, *1303*.
[72] *Roidad-e Loya Jerga-ye Dar al-Saltana*, *1303*, 420.
[73] *Roidad-e Loya Jerga-ye Dar al-Saltana*, *1303*, 9.
[74] *Roidad-e Loya Jerga-ye Dar al-Saltana*, *1303*, 11.
[75] *Roidad-e Loya Jerga-ye Dar al-Saltana*, *1303*, 46, 422–427.

Table 1. Composition of the 1924 Loya Jerga

	CG	KP	HP	QBP	TP	MmP	QP	MP	FP	JP	Total	[%]
CG	212	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	212	[20.1%]
Sayids	19	17	13	14	13	8	12	7	5	3	111	[10.5%]
Sufis	–	8	17	3	–	–	–	5	–	–	33	[3.1%]
'Ulema	–	10	5	10	11	4	16	14	5	–	75	[7.1%]
Khans	–	96	37	13	6	15	65	–	8	–	240	[22.7%]
Reprs.	–	96	32	36	42	8	44	–	8	36	272	[26.0%]
K&R	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	91	20	–	111	[10.5%]
Total	231	197	104	76	72	35	137	117	46	39	1054	[100.0%]
[%]	[21.9]	[18.7]	[9.9]	[7.2]	[6.8]	[3.3]	[13.0]	[11.1]	[4.4]	[3.7]	[100.0]	

CG = Central Government; KP = Kabul Province; HP = Herat Province; QBP = Qataghan and Badakhshan Province; TP = Turkestan Province; MmP = Maimana Province; QP = Qandahar Province; MP = Mashreqi (Eastern) Province; FP = Farah Province; JP = Jonubi (Southern) Province; Reprs. = Representatives; K&R = Khans and Representatives.

Source: *Roydad-e Loya Jerga-ye Dar al-Saltana*, *1303* (Proceedings of the 1924 Loya Jerga at the Capital [of Kabul]), pp.422–451.

(plural of Khan, local leader and landowner):240 members (22.7 percent); *Wokala* (plural of *Wakil*, representative, usually landowner or merchant):272 members (26 percent); and *Khawanin wa Wokala* (Khans and Representatives):111 members (10.5 percent). The three Islamist groups ('Ulema, Sadat, and Mashayekh) combined had 219 members (26.6 percent) in the 1924 Loya Jerga. All three predominantly Paxtun provinces (Mashreqi [Eastern], Qandahar, Jonubi [Southern]), and identifiable Paxtun areas of Kabul Province (44 [4% percent]) contributed about 337 members (32 percent). The identifiable non-Paxtun areas of Kabul Province (153 [14.5 percent]) and the provinces of Herat, Qataghan and Badakhshan, Turkestan, Maimana, and Farah were represented by about 486 members (46 percent).[76] The 22 percent members representing the central government in the assembly were from Kabul, a non-Paxtun city. Thus, the combined numerical strength of participants from non-Paxtun areas in the 1924 assembly was about 717 (68 percent).

As we can see, even if we allow a sizeable margin for error in my calculations, the number of participants in this assembly from predominantly Paxtun areas is significantly less (32 percent) than those from non-Paxtuns areas (68 percent) and substantially less than the majority of participants. I believe we can assume these figures to represent a reliable approximation of the distribution of the population of Afghanistan in 1924. Has this distributional profile changed significantly in subsequent Loya Jergas? How and why? I do not have the answers to these questions. But this is a meaningful start for addressing the complex questions of the numerical size and distribution of ethnic and regional groups in Afghanistan.

The participants in the Loya Jerga were first received in Kabul with royal pomp and ceremony in early July 1924 during the elaborate festivities for the celebration of 'Eid al-Adha, hosted by the amir. They were later housed (with their servants, and in some cases, with their camels and horses) at the private residences of the royal family and members of the government in Paghman, the summer residence of Afghan political elite, and for the three-week duration of the assembly the participants were feted with the most desirable selections of Kabuli comfort and cuisine.[77] They were given free access to the best modern medical care available while in Paghman. Free tickets for admission to the cinema were provided to participants from the provinces. They were also promised that after the conclusion of the assembly they would have their personal petitions efficiently attended to by the various departments and ministries of the government. The amir promised that if a petition was to be directed to him personally, he would immediately reply.[78] Before the start of the Loya Jerga in Paghman, participants from the provinces were individually received at a reception by the amir

[76] *Roidad-e Loya Jerga-ye Dar al-Saltana*, *1303*, 422–451. (Further analysis to be published elsewhere).

[77] *Roidad-e Loya Jerga-ye Dar al-Saltana*, *1303*, 28–30.

[78] *Roidad-e Loya Jerga-ye Dar al-Saltana*, *1303*, 359.

at his gardens, embraced and, upon departure, given packages of sweets.[79] A comprehensive critical analysis of the practical consequences and symbolic meanings of these dramatically imbalanced (one way) transfers of gifts from the amir to the participants is beyond the scope of this essay. However, if we consider the Loya Jerga as a hegemonic process through which consent is extracted by the ruler, there is no doubt of the outcome—the guests' consent to what the amir asked even though, at the outset, Amanullah clearly told them to speak their minds freely.[80] The record of the discussion and debate bears this out.

The 1924 Loya Jerga was clearly inspired by localized understandings of parliamentary processes in the West. Every participant was furnished with elaborate written rules for the proceedings. The ritual observances for the start and conclusion of daily sessions were spelled out. Procedures for voting and rules for debate and discussion were provided. Eating and drinking anything but water, were prohibited in the assembly. The Loya Jerga was convened in a theater where seating arrangements on chairs for the various categories of participants, the amir—in a raised platform surrounded on three sides by officials of his government—and his secretariat were drawn out in a chart. The amir was the presiding officer. Those wishing to address the amir or the assembly had to step up to a microphone. Participants were not allowed to speak over a person addressing the assembly; use of harsh language and profanity was not permitted; personal matters could not be discussed in the assembly.[81] The proceedings of the Loya Jerga were transcribed in Persian only.

The government first presented to the Loya Jerga for review the issue of foreign relations, including treaties it had signed with various countries. The remainder of the assembly was devoted to internal matters, especially the various laws and regulations Amanullah had initiated since he had come to power. Revisions in some laws were proposed by the amir or high-ranking officials of his government and, after discussion and some debate, considered approved without balloting. With regard to such issues as the laws regarding marriage, the 'Ulema were invited to provide input to make sure the laws were consistent with the Hanafi school of jurisprudence. The assembly established a *Dar al-'Ulum-e Islamia* (a school for Islamic studies), a *Maktab-e Hefaz* (school for memorization of the Qur'an), and a *Jam'iyat al-'Ulema* (Society for Religious Authority). The amir used every opportunity to lecture the participants about social and moral issues such as the virtue of wearing clothing made of locally made cloth, of savings, and of educating children. In the last formal session of the Loya Jerga the amir delivered a passionate condemnation of the Paktia rebellion.[82] Several delegations volunteered to participate in subduing the rebels. But the amir counseled restraint. On the eighteenth day of the assembly the amir

[79] *Roidad-e Loya Jerga-ye Dar al-Saltana*, *1303*, 30–35.
[80] *Roidad-e Loya Jerga-ye Dar al-Saltana*, *1303*, 24.
[81] *Roidad-e Loya Jerga-ye Dar al-Saltana*, *1303*, 48–49.
[82] *Roidad-e Loya Jerga-ye Dar al-Saltana*, *1303*, 378–418.

received the participants from the provinces, greeted each member individually, and gave him a medal commemorating the 1924 Loya Jerga. At the conclusion of the Loya Jerga participants attempted to present the amir with a medal, a rifle, a sword, and the title *Amir al-Mu'minin* (Commander of the Faithful). The amir declined all but the rifle. The text of the proceedings uses the Paxtu construction *Tol-Wak* (Supreme Commander) as the equivalent of Amir al-Muminin; Amanullah, in rejecting the title, makes a revealing observation: "I know what Tol-Wak means, when the Afghani [Paxtu] language spreads in all parts of Afghanistan and among state officials, I will then accept the (Paxtu) title."[83]

In reflecting on the composition and proceedings of the 1924 assembly, Mir Gholam Muhammad Ghobar,[84] a member of the 1924 and 1928 Loya Jergas concludes that, "in a country where there were no legal and open political parties, and no written, secret ballots available, the vast majority of the members of the Jerga were composed of religious leaders, big businessmen, and landowners who represented and defended their class interests, not the interests of the masses of farmers, nomads, and workers. The handful of enlightened individuals who supported the people were condemned to defeat by this majority."[85] In stating this and consistently emulating the agency of the Loya Jerga and its patronage by the state, Ghobar manifests an ideology that contains the tensions inherent in combining the roles of organic and traditional intellectuals—a pattern of contradictions discernable in the intellectual products of the Afghan elite to this day. The amir's third Jerga was convened in 1928 where he announced the recall of most of his radical reforms. Ghobar notes that in this Jerga no one was allowed to speak about mismanagement by ministers and governors or to suggest ways for improvement.[86] Despite this, Ghobar offers a staunch defense of the substance of the monarch's radical Westernization programs.

From 1929 to 2004, ten additional Loya Jergas were convened in Afghanistan. In October 1929, Mohammad Nader, after driving the forces of Habibullah Kalakani from Kabul with the material support of the British government of India, was declared king of Afghanistan. In September 1930, Nader decreed that a Loya Jerga be convened and presided over by his brother,Prime Minister Mohammad Hashem. The Jerga approved, by consensus, a new constitution and five other items on its agenda: regulations for creating a national assembly, regulations for provincial consultative councils, matters dealing with medals and titles, colors of the Afghan flag, and the request (by Mohammad Nader) for the confiscation of the properties of the previous king.[87] Nader's constitution remained in force until 1964. Two Loya Jergas were held in the interim period.

[83]*Roidad-e Loya Jerga-ye Dar al-Saltana*, *1303*, 412.
[84]For a biographical sketch of Ghubar see Habibi, *Junbesh-e Mashtutiyat dar Afghanistan*, 193–196.
[85]Ghobar, *Afghanistan dar Maseer-e Tarikh*, 810.
[86]Ghobar, *Afghanistan dar Maseer-e Tarikh*, 813.
[87]Faiz-zad, *Jergaha-ye Buzurg-e Melli-ye Afghanistan*, 143–144.

In early 1931 Mohammad Nader instituted the *Anjuman-e Adabi* (Persian: literary society) which, in one form or another, became home to the core of the Afghan intellectual elite during much of the next fifty years, its influence spanning to the present. The Anjuman was under the supervision of the king's secretariat and housed in the northern tower of the royal palace in Kabul. Its basic aim was "to reform (improve) and promote the literature of the country and to adopt fine (humanistic) methods or methods from the humanities."[88] The Anjuman-e Adabi, with thirteen charter members, published the influential monthly journal *Kabul* starting in June 1931. Most members of the society could translate from English, French, or Urdu. Many of the writings of the members of the Abjuman-e Adabi were published in *Kabul*, or as individual titles, translations of texts from foreign languages into Farsi. Mir Gholam Muhammad Ghobar was a charter member of the literary society. As one of the most prolific writers of Anjuman-e Adabi, Ghobar contributed numerous texts dealing with the history of Afghanistan to virtually every issue of Kabul during its first year. His 1943 publication *Ahmad Shah Baba-ye Afghan* (Persian: literally, Ahmad Shah, the Afghan Father or Ahmad Shah, the Father of Afghan[s]) was his major work until his 1967 *Afghanistan dar Masir-e Tarikh* (Persian: Afghanistan in the Course of History). The latter book is probably the most widely circulated work published in Afghanistan.

Inspired by Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony, in discussing the texts produced by intellectuals of the Pacific Islands, Roger Keesing writes that there seems "a gulf between the authenticity of actual pre-colonial societies and cultures and the inauthenticity of the mythic pasts now being invented."[89] As we will see below, in their representations of the past the Afghan intellectual elite provide a corollary to Keesing's observation. In the texts relevant to the Loya Jerga the Afghan intellectuals produced images of the past that were dramatically inconsistent with local historical accounts but similar to the distorted colonial representations of the Afghan past. These texts supported the rulers' claims to legitimacy and facilitated access to the hegemonic process of the Loya Jerga. Among the Afghan intellectual elite, as in the Pacific Islands, although intended as nationalistic and anti-colonial, the

> counter hegemonic discourse pervasively incorporates the structures, categories, and premises of (colonial) hegemonic discourse. In part this is because those who are dominated internalize the premises and categories of the dominant . . . in part, because it defines the semiology through which claims to power must be expressed."[90] In other words, "the discourse of the dominant shapes and structures the discourse of the dominated.[91]

[88]N. A., "Maram-e Mujala" (Persian, purpose of the journal), Kabul, 1 (1931): 5–6.

[89]Roger M. Keesing, "Creating the Past: Custom and Identity in the Contemporary Pacific," *The Contemporary Pacific* 1, no. 1–2 (1989): 23.

[90]Keesing, "Creating the Past."

[91]Roger M. Keesing, "Colonial and Counter-Colonial Discourse in Melanesia," *Critique of Anthropology* 14, no. 1 (1994): 41.

The Afghan intellectual elite employed by the government of Afghanistan wrote extensively in support of their employer, the Afghan monarchy, and its sources of legitimacy. The government was regularly depicted as Islamic, and the king, as the "shadow of God." The government's most important source of hegemonic and ideological domination, the Loya Jerga, was memorialized and promoted by the Afghan intellectuals as primordially Afghan. As noted earlier, the Afghan intellectual elite saw in the Loya Jerga a realistic hope for a constitutional monarchy and for their participation in the affairs of the state. Paralleling the emergence of the Loya Jerga, but especially after 1930, various texts appeared in Afghan government official publications about a legendary assembly in 1747 in which the alleged founder of the Afghan state Ahmad Khan Abdali was portrayed as having convened a Loya Jerga or large assembly composed of various Afghan groups in which he was, by consensus, "elected" and "crowned" king of Afghanistan. As mentioned earlier, Amir Amanullah had alluded to this in passing during the 1924 Loya Jerga. Ghobar is the first Afghan historian who attempted to establish a relationship between the Afghan monarchy and the Loya Jerga as the basis and context of its legitimacy, and the prominence of Sufi networks in the civil society and government of Afghanistan. He is the author of the first local contemporary work on Ahmad Khan Abdali.[92] The book was awarded the "Second Order of Aryana" prize by the Afghan government and was translated into Russian in 1959 under the title "Ahmad Shah, the Founder of the Afghan State" and published in Moscow that year. This was the first work by a contemporary Afghan writer to be translated into a European language.

Chapter 16 (pages 82–90) of Ahmad Shah Baba-ye Afghan is titled "How Ahmad Shah Becomes King of Afghanistan." The following is a freely translated summary of relevant portions of Ghobar's text: After the death of Nader Shah Afshar in 1747, Ahmad Khan (one of his Afghan court attendants) had ideas about ruling Afghanistan and without further involvement in Persian affairs, he, together with his Afghan military contingent, headed for Qandahar. On arriving at Qandahar, he proposed to the Afghan leaders to select a king for Afghanistan. Since this was a "national" issue, the leaders agreed to convene an "important assembly." After a few days the "Afghan Jerga" was convened at the shrine of Sher-e Sorkh (Persian: Red Lion) and began the process of selecting a leader. The decision of the Jerga had to be unanimous. Ahmad Khan was the only person who was silent throughout the proceedings of the Jerga. In the ninth gathering, a member of the Jerga spoke about the good moral constitution and administrative abilities of Ahmad Khan and proposed that he deserved to be king. This advocate of Ahmad Khan was none other than Saber Shah Kabuli, the son of *Master laikhwar* (on the authority of *Siyar al-Mutakherin*, note 30 above).

[92]Mir Gholam Mohammad Ghobar, *Ahmad Shah Baba-ye Afghan* (Ahmad Shah, the Patriarch of Afghanistan) (Kabul, 1941).

Figure 1. "Coronation" of Ahmad Khan Abdali. Translation of captions at top: No. 6. Drawing by Breshna, the famous contemporary Afghan artist. Sher-e Sorkh: The cluster of wheat is being placed on Ahmad Shah's turban.

Source: Mir Gholam Mohammad Ghobar, *Ahmad Shah Baba-ye Afghan*, facing page 90.

Since Saber Shah was a Sufi, he was respected by all leaders. Thus, Ahmad Khan was declared king of Afghanistan and the National Jerga of Sher-e Sorkh was adjourned after it accomplished an important historical task. Ahmad Khan left the Jerga as the king, wearing a gold-colored crown made of a cluster of wheat. This historic natural crown was placed on the corner of Ahmad Khan's hat by Saber Shah. Ghobar's text is accompanied by a colorful drawing by 'Abd al-Ghafur Breshna, a member of the royal lineage and a charter member of the Anjuman-e Adabi.

This version of the accession of Ahmad Khan to the kingship of Afghanistan was included in many government cultural productions including the history textbook written by M. Osman Sedqi for grade 12 of Afghan high schools.[93] The Persian language textbook was first published in 1949 and was in use, at least through 1954, when I graduated from Ghazi High School. Sedqi was a member of Anjuman-e Tarikh (Persian: Historical Society), one of two successors

[93]M. Osman Sedqi, *Tarikh Baraye Senf-e 12* (History for 12th Grade) (Kabul, 1949).

to Anjuman-e Adabi. The other being Paxtu Tolana (Paxtu: Paxtu Society). The textbook presented the following account of Ahmad Khan's rise to power:

> After the assassination of Nader Shah, Ahmad Khan Afghan, who was one of his companions, arrived in Qandahar. There he organized a Jerga-ye Bozurg (Persian: Great Assembly) at Sher-e Sorkh for the purpose of electing a king. During the eight meetings of the assembly all Afghan leaders were promoting their own candidacy. Ahmad Khan was the only one who did not speak on his own behalf. Finally, a respected Sufi, Saber Shah Kabuli, proposed Ahmad Khan for the kingship. Ahmad Khan was unanimously chosen by the Jerga. Saber Shah Kabuli prepared a crown from a cluster of wheat and placed it on Ahmad Khan's head and addressed him as king. Ahmad Khan Afghan Durrani is the founder of the national government in Afghanistan.[94]

This representation of the Jerga and of Ahmad Khan's ascension to the kingship of Afghanistan was found not only in textbooks, but was also widely circulated in government-sponsored publications, including *Aryana, Kabul*, and *Afghanistan*—the three major serials produced by the government-and in topical books of history and literature.

Writing in 1957, 'Abd al-Rauf Baynawa, a prominent Paxtun member of the Paxtu Tolana and the Afghan intellectual elite, writes that "from ancient times onward, Afghans have had special assemblies called Jerga ... [E]very *Afghan* considers it his obligation to act according to its decisions and they even consider this a national duty. Today the Afghan Jerga has the status of a legislative, judicial, and executive body."[95]

Ever since its invention in 1922, the Loya Jerga has been a fixture of political life in Afghanistan. Starting with the 1920s, every decade except the decade of the 1990s has seen the convening of at least one Loya Jerga. In 1941 the British government demanded that the German and Italian citizens working in Afghanistan for the Afghan government leave the country. A Loya Jerga was convened and, without discussion or debate, it approved the Afghan government's decision to expel the Germans and Italians.[96] In November 1955 the Afghan government convened another Loya Jerga which approved the decision to support the independence of Paxtuns in Pakistan—the so called "Paxtunistan" issue. As in earlier cases, there was no meaningful discussion or debate of the issue. The government presented its case and received unanimous approval for its policies and decisions. In 1963 King Muhammad Zahir (r. 1933–1973) established a commission to draft a new constitution for Afghanistan. The commission included several members of the Afghan intellectual, business, and religious elites. The draft of the constitution was presented to a Loya Jerga in 1964 and was approved unanimously. Section 4,

[94] Sedqi, *Tarikh Baraye Senf-e 12*, 133–135. My translation.
[95] 'Abd al Rauf Baynawa, *Hotakiha* (Persian: The Hotaks) (Kabul 1857), 41, n. 1.
[96] *Da Kabul Kalanay* (Paxtu: The Annual of Kabul) (Kabul, 1941–1942), 280–285.

articles 78–84 of this constitution institutionalizes the Loya Jerga. It states that the Loya Jerga consists of the two houses of parliament (Wolusi Jerga and Meshrano Jerga) and the chairmen of the provincial "Jergas." The Loya Jerga was to be summoned by the king and, when in session, the president of the Wolusi Jerga would preside over it. If the king died or abdicated, his successor would be chosen by the Loya Jerga, "the government," and the justices of the Supreme Court. The decisions of the Loya Jerga were to be based on a majority vote. Sayid Qasem Reshtiya, a participating intellectual elite, provides a brief personal account of the proceedings of the constitutional commission and the 1964 Loya Jerga.[97]

The next Loya Jerga was convened in 1977 by Mohammad Daud, "President of the Republic of Afghanistan," to approve the draft of a new constitution. This constitution abolished the Elders Assembly of the previous governments and instituted the "*Meli Jerga*" (Paxtu: National Assembly) in place of the Peoples' Assembly of the 1964 constitution. Chapter 6, articles 65–74 of this constitution incorporates the Loya Jerga as "the supreme manifestation of the power and will of its people" to be composed of the Meli Jerga, members of the Central Council of Daud's political party, members of the government and the High Council of the Armed Forces, members of the Supreme Court, five to eight members from each province, and thirty members appointed by the President of the Republic. The president was to convene the Loya Jerga and be its presiding officer. Daud was removed from power in 1978 in a military operation organized by the Peoples Democratic Party of Afghanistan. In April 1985 the revolutionary government convened a Loya Jerga to offer new alternatives for pacifying wide-scale opposition to its earlier policies, much like what Amir Amanullah was attempting in 1924. In 1987 the government of President Najibullah convened a Loya Jerga for the purpose of approving a new constitution. Chapter 4, articles 66–70 of this constitution deal with the Loya Jerga. The assembly was to be convened and presided over by the president. In this articulation, the Loya Jerga consisted of members of the National Assembly; ten "people's deputies" from each province; the governors of provinces; the mayor of Kabul; the prime minister, deputy prime ministers, members of the Council of Ministers; the chief justice, deputy chief justices and judges of the Supreme Court; the attorney general and his deputies; chairman and members of the Constitution Council; a minimum of fifty persons from among prominent political, scientific, social, and spiritual figures to be appointed by the president on the basis of the recommendations of the secretariat of the National Front (party).

The 1987 constitution was amended in 1990. Chapter 4, articles 65–70 of the new constitution dealing with the Loya Jerga states that "[the] Loya Jerga is the highest manifestation of the will of the people of Afghanistan in accordance with the national historical traditions." The Loya Jerga included the president

[97]Sayid Qasem Reshtiya, *Khaterat-e Siyasi-ye Sayid Qasem Reshtiya, 1932–1992* (Persian: The Political Memoirs of Sayid Qasem Reshtiya) (Printed by American Speedy Printing in Virginia, USA, 1997), 177–210.

and vice presidents; members of the National Assembly; the prime minister, deputy prime ministers and members of the Council of Ministers; the chief justice and deputy chief justices; the attorney general; the chairman of the Constitution Council; the chairman of the Council of Provinces; from each province, equivalent to the member of their deputies to the *Wolusi Jergas*, "elected by the people"; a maximum of fifty persons from amongst the political, scientific, cultural, social, and religious figures to be appointed by the president. In both the 1987 and 1990 constitutions the Loya Jerga has the power to approve and amend the constitution, to elect the president and to accept his resignation, to consent to the declaration of war and armistice, and to adopt decisions on the most important questions regarding the destiny of the country.

Neocolonial Production of Loya Jerga

When the United States and its supporters occupied Afghanistan, the emergency Loya Jerga which the exiled king and his courtiers had discussed with Barnett R. Rubin was used as the central device with which to legitimize the colonially-appointed government of Kabul. The internationalization of the 2002 and 2003–2004 Loya Jergas made this hegemonic assembly transparent and open to critical scrutiny by outsiders. For the first time in its history this tool of deception was exposed for what it really is—a consent-producing machinery constructed out of colonial misrepresentations unrelated to the Paxtuns, Afghan tribes, or tribalism, and independent of the wishes and aspirations of the people of Afghanistan. Like its predecessors, the affair in the German tent was nothing but a charade cleverly staged by the American-controlled bourgeois government of Kabul. No scholarly writings about these Loya Jergas have yet appeared and no reliable information is available about the names and identities of the participants. These realities are accurately captured in the following sample of titles from the media reports and the Internet. "Nothing Good Ever Came of the Loya Jergas";[98] "Loya Jirga Disaster: Stifled in the Loya Jirga";[99] "Nothing Left to Chance in Rigging the Loya Jirga";[100] "US Casts a Shadow on Afghan Assembly";[101] "Loya Jirga Could Become a Sham";[102] "Afghanistan's *Loya Jirga*: A Cynical Exercise in Neo-Colonialism";[103] "The Loya Jirga: Transcending the Past With a 'Pseudotradition'."[104] But those who wield power in Kabul and their Afghan intellectual collaborators have either succumbed to the local ideology of this hegemonic device or, more likely, have chosen to

[98] *Montreal Gazette*, June 20, 2002.
[99] *Washington Post*, June 16, 2002.
[100] *Financial Times* (London), June 13, 2002.
[101] *The Times* (London), June 12, 2002.
[102] *Washington Times*, May 30, 2002.
[103] www.Afghaniyat-Yahoogroup.com, May 19, 2002.
[104] *New York Times*, April 28, 2002.

implement the colonial project without due consideration of legitimate means and the prospects of dire consequences for associative life in Afghanistan.

The "Bonn Agreement" called for the convening of a "*Loya Jerga-ye Ezterari*" (Persian: Emergency Loya Jerga) to be held in June 2002 in Kabul to approve the colonially-appointed government of Kabul and to consider other issues placed before it. The European and American occupying military forces (with the facilitation of the United Nations) persuaded the former Afghan king to move back to Afghanistan and to preside over the Emergency Loya Jerga. The Bonn Agreement had stipulated that the king will "open" the Emergency Loya Jerga; it is plausible to assume that the aged king was assured that, once he returned, he and his courtiers would be in a position to manipulate the emergency Loya Jerga for their own devices, including Muhammad Zaher's return to the kingship of Afghanistan. The Emergency Loya Jerga, convened in a massive tent donated by the German government, initially produced an agreement that would allow Zaher to re-assume the kingship. But this was thwarted by the United States's special representative, Zalmay Khalilzad, an American-educated Afghan whose father had worked for King Zaher. The Americans apparently preferred Hamed Karzai at the head of the Kabul government. However, as a consolation, it was proposed by the American representative and approved by the Emergency Loya Jerga, that the ex-king would be given the title "*Baba-ye Melat*" (Persian: father of the nation) and allowed to reside in his old palace if he would share it with Hamed Karzai. The assembly appointed a commission to prepare a draft constitution for Afghanistan to be presented to a Constitutional Loya Jerga to be held in late December 2003.

The December 2003 Loya Jerga was convened in Kabul in the same German tent. The assembly was presided over by a Sufi, Sebghatullah Mujaddedi, a well-known figure in the American-sponsored, assembly-line "jehad" of the 1980s. There were reports of the expulsion of a woman member from the 2003 Loya Jerga for condemning some members of the Loya Jerga as criminals.[105] The assembly approved a draft constitution in which the Loya Jerga was proclaimed as the "highest manifestation of the wishes of the people of Afghanistan."[106] Here are some media headlines about the 2003–2004 Constitutional Loya Jerga: "Loya Jirga Dances to Karzai's Tune";[107] "Afghanistan's Loya Jirga Convened to Rubber-Stamp an Anti-Democratic Constitution";[108] "Loya Jirga Delegates Dispute Afghanistan's New Constitution";[109] "The Constitution

[105] www.wsws.org, January 8, 2004.

[106] The Constitution of Afghanistan (www.Afghaniyat-Yahoogroup.com, January 5, 2004), section 6, articles 110–115.

[107] *Financial Times* (London), December 23, 2003.

[108] www.wsws.org, December 18, 2003.

[109] www.Afghaniyat-Yahoogroup.com, January 28, 2004.

has been Signed with Some Distortions";[110] "Afghan Leader Accused of Signing Changed Charter";[111] "US-Imposed 'Democracy' in Afghanistan."[112]

Conclusions

In addition to providing a brief description and analysis, the purpose of this essay has been to raise questions and issues that highlight the need for critical and theoretical framing of the available ethnographic and historical data dealing with the Loya Jerga as a powerful hegemonic process that has, for a century, produced the appearance of legitimizing consent in civil society for the rulers of Afghanistan. Antonio Gramsci's idea that the state is fundamentally a conflation of "a political society and civil society, in other words hegemony protected by the armor of coercion,"[113] is starkly confirmed by the total penetration of the nascent Afghan civil society through the framework of the Loya Jerga by those who dominated the Afghan state. Through the agency of the Loya Jerga the Afghan government effected the co-optation of Paxtuns and intimidation of the non-Paxtun inhabitants of Afghanistan by identifying itself with the former and by promoting the alleged Paxtun domination, their historical reputation and tribal symbols. Western writers have uncritically accepted these claims and have perpetuated the thesis of Paxtun domination of Afghanistan and the democratic tribal character of the Loya Jerga. The facts, however, as we have seen from the 1924 Loya Jerga, contradict these assertions.

The template of the 1924 Loya Jerga was woven out of Western colonial distortions of local categories by the Afghan rulers and their intellectual collaborators in civil society to produce the appearance of consensus through blatant manipulation and deceit. We have come full circle. The falsehood of the 1747 assembly, the "coronation" of Ahmad Khan Abdali, and his "election" as king in a borderless context subsidized by external resources is reenacted in the 2002 neocolonial government of Kabul, imposed by outsiders on a handpicked assembly of Afghans, guarded by international armed forces, all underwritten by international donations. The myth of the selection of Ahmad Khan as ruler by an alleged Sufi is structurally similar to the designation of Hamed Karzai as the governor of Kabul. The former is subsidized by external resources Ahmad Khan appropriated from Nader Shah's treasury and from plundering expeditions to India, and from international Islam—the latter, by international capital and neocolonialism. The Loya Jerga has disguised the chasm between the people of Afghanistan and their rulers and has perpetuated the falsehood of a representative assembly engaged in the legitimization of political power.

[110] *The Kabul Times*, January 28, 2004.
[111] www.Afghaniyat-Yahoogroup.com, January 28, 2004.
[112] www.wsws.org, January 8, 2004.
[113] Gramsci, SPN, 263.

The prospects of a stable, independent, and democratically reconstituted Afghan state depend on how successfully loyal and devoted daughters and sons of Afghanistan can dissociate its architecture from the falsehood of its democratic past. The Afghan people need to be informed about the reality of the colonial construction of their political past and the hegemonic device of the Loya Jerga with which their consent was extorted from them by the Kabul government. They need to become conscious of the fact that their rulers have been the facilitators of the profound dependence of their country on others. Foremost, Afghans need to know that they have inherited a past that has been heavily edited by colonial ink and capital. The fragility of the Afghan state is directly related to its dependence on outside resources, the whimsical portrayals of others, and to the way Afghans themselves have been deluded by these fabricated representations. The twelve Loya Jergas and nine different constitutions over the last 85 years are symptoms of extreme instability. Outsiders have played a profound role in the construction of the Afghan state. They have constructed the very labels "Afghan" and "Afghanistan"; in essence, the Loya Jerga is a colonial and neocolonial construct imposed on the people of Afghanistan by rulers who were and continue to be undisputed puppets of outsiders.