Constructivism meets critical realism: Explaining Pakistan’s state practice in the aftermath of 9/11

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Abstract
This article investigates the theoretical added-value of critical realist incursions into International Relations constructivism. While constructivism focuses on providing multi-causal explanations, its conceptual horizon and subsequent methodological framework fundamentally obscure and limit the opportunity to conceptualize social dialectic and multi-causality in world politics. In this respect, a critical realist meta-theory can provide constructivism with a greatly expanded conceptual framework that transcends material–ideational divisions, and a framework that is able to envision more clearly the process of social dialectic. Second, critical realism affords a methodological diversity that can withstand simultaneous constructivist investigations into the material, agential, ideational, or structural. Using the synthesis of critical realism and constructivism, I illustrate by way of example by employing Pakistan’s participation in the ‘war on terror’ as a case study. While constructivism can show that Pakistan’s role in the war on terror was preceded by a legitimizing narrative, it is a critical realist depth analysis that sheds new light on how a complex social reality was achieved through the convergence of multi-causal explanatory factors.

Keywords
Agency, constructivism, critical realism, discourse, meta-theory, multi-causality, Pakistan, social dialectic, structure, war on terror, world politics

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Introduction

The study of how discourses produce the social world has become an increasingly popular mode of inquiry. Within International Relations (IR), the study of identity, norms and culture is broadly divided into two camps. On the one hand, post-structuralists are marked by a strong ontological and epistemological prioritization of discourse as the singular most important unit of analysis. On the other, ‘conventional’ constructivism (Hopf, 1998) (henceforth, constructivism) represents an approach which although affording conceptual space to discourse, does not, however, entirely abandon the analysis of structures, and agency. This work is broadly located within this latter IR constructivism camp. It seeks to argue that while a constructivist approach to world politics has much explanatory potential vis-a-vis post-structuralism, nevertheless, the constructivist project is seriously hindered by its theoretical inconsistency and ambiguity. More specifically, I suggest that constructivism, by epistemologically straddling between rationalism and reflectivism, and by occupying its ‘middle position’ (Adler, 1997), has failed to develop a strong theoretical foundation for its multi-explanatory approach to world politics. Intervening at this juncture, the focus of this article is to suggest that constructivism’s theoretical development is dependent on its movement away from its current obsession with the via media (Wendt, 1999), and the ‘building of bridges’ between epistemologies.

In drawing on a select group of critical realist IR theorists — Colin Wight (2006), Milja Kurki (2008), Jonathan Joseph (2007) and Heikki Patomaki (2002) — I argue that a constructivist approach can redress some aspects of its theoretical ambiguity by critically examining its underlying meta-theoretical framework. Remarkably, while constructivism envisions a multilayered reality, its current meta-theoretical framework resists ontological and methodological diversity. There is, for instance, no easy and clear way to simultaneously incorporate the ideational, material and agential into constructivist analyses, nor space to theorize outside of Humean science. The argument proceeds in the following way: the first part of the article begins with a brief exploration of post-structuralism vis-a-vis a constructivist approach. I then move to a discussion of the theoretical ambiguity and inconsistency arising from constructivism’s ‘middle’ position between rationalism and reflectivism. Suggesting a move away from an epistemological focus, I argue that constructivism’s theoretical development is more likely to take place at the level of ontology. In discussing the relationship between ontology and theoretical landscapes, I draw on the work of IR theorists for whom a critical realist philosophy offers IR the ‘depth’ it needs to comprehend the complex issues at stake in world politics. On this account, I suggest specific junctures at which constructivism in particular can draw on critical realist insights in order to develop a more consistent theoretical framework and mode of analysis.

In the second part of the article, the focus shifts from abstract (meta-)theoretical discussion to a concern with demonstrating how a critical realist-inspired constructivist framework, developed in the first part of the article, can illuminate the study of world politics. In this context, the article takes as its case study Pakistan’s participation in the global ‘war on terror’ (henceforth, WoT) commencing in 2001, and examines how that participation was made possible. The case study analysis begins with a
broadly constructivist examination of the role of identity in the production of Pakistan’s policy action in the post-9/11 time frame. The discussion notes that despite the rhetoric, constructivism’s apparent multi-explanatory approach affords a limited understanding of the connections between discourse, structure and agency. Instead, by applying a critical realist-inspired constructivist lens, I demonstrate some ways in which the analysis of the case study can be further deepened.

Post-structuralism and the cult of discourse

Post-structuralism’s focus on discourse has undoubtedly spawned rich and vibrant incursions in the IR literature. A plethora of studies (Campbell, 1992, 1998; Doty, 1993, 1996; Hansen, 2006; Weldes, 1999) have convincingly demonstrated how constructs such as identity, ‘otherness’, security, development, sovereignty and so on are productive, and connected to foreign and domestic policy outcomes, the conditions of war and peace, and the general ordering of the international system. Arguably, however, the prioritization of discourse leaves unaddressed two key issues. In the first instance, there is the issue of why particular discursive representations and articulations emerge in the first place, as opposed to alternative ways of representing or understanding. For instance, why is it that some discourses, become hegemonic and not others? In this context, it is important to note that while post-structuralism is undoubtedly unparalleled in examining the regulatory effects of discourse, nevertheless, the approach cannot quite explain why constructions are the way they are, why some ways of constructing are more readily available than others, why a particular discourse or ‘regime of truth’ emerges in the shape and form that it does, and why alternative constructions are marginalized. Thus, a purely discursive analysis can tell us, through Foucauldian-inspired genealogical studies, how certain ways of representation and construction emerge, and it can also help us deconstruct and understand the regulatory and productive effects of discourse structures. However, in relation to the why questions, post-structuralism has limited answers, and tends to reduce everything back to the discourse.

This problematic maps closely onto the second issue. Despite post-structuralist concerns with the impact of discourse on material practices, a similar exploration is much less explored, that is, the impact of material organization, structures and practices on the discursive realm. Post-structuralism’s epistemological inflexibility and the suggestion that what exists, exists because of language alone, arguably leads to a flat view of ontology. Consequently, while the strength of post-structuralism is precisely its intense focus on discursive articulation, this focus becomes a weakness when it closes off all other conceptual avenues, and insists on reducing the social world to the operation of discourse alone.

Constructivism: Theoretically inconsistent?

A constructivist approach, in contrast to post-structuralism, tends to incorporate and acknowledge material structures and the role of human agency alongside an analysis of norms, representations and discourses. For many, this ‘middle’ position between rationalist concerns and a reflective focus is theoretically inconsistent (Fierke, 2007), and
lacking in clarity (Guzzini, 2000). Clearly, in placing one foot in the rationalist camp and the other in the reflectivist tradition, constructivism has exposed itself to attack from both quarters. Writers of a critical orientation, for instance, have criticized constructivism’s apparent selective and inconsistent ‘borrowing’ of ideas from post-structuralism (Hopf, 1998), its leanings towards rationalism (Zehfuss, 2002), and fears of being marginalized if language is accorded more attention (Fierke, 2003). On the other side of the debate, many problematize an excessive attention to ideas and norms (Brooks and Wohlforth, 2000; Krasner, 2000; Moravcsik, 2001). To be clear, however, there is abundant difference amongst constructivists themselves, for instance between systemic constructivists and unit-level constructivists (Reus-Smit, 2009). However, it is important to understand that much of the wider critique is couched within wider epistemological divisions, with constructivism’s ‘suspect’ position being its straddling between two opposing traditions by being neither ‘too positivist’ nor too ‘radically post-structuralist’ (Patomaki and Wight, 2000: 214).

However, while constructivism purports to occupy a ‘middle’ position between rationalism and reflectivism, a corresponding theoretical framework justifying this multi-explanatory project is severely lacking, and at best poorly theorized (Checkel, 1998). Indeed, in its current form, constructivism, by drawing eclectically on both rationalism and reflectivism, gives rise to confusion and ambiguity, rather than clarity and theoretical transparency (Zehfuss, 2002: 6–9). For instance, in conceptualizing the relationship between the material and discursive, Adler (1997: 324) rather vaguely observes that the material world ‘offers resistance’, but also that the social world is ‘not entirely determined by physical reality’. Moreover, while constructivism is characterized by its acknowledgement of the dialectical relationship between the material and discursive (Barkin, 2010), nonetheless, most constructivist analyses avoid a discussion of the extent to which materiality plays a role in social production.5 While this reluctance may partly reflect a desire to eschew any semblance with political realism’s overdetermination of structure, it is more likely a consequence of constructivism’s lack of theoretical clarity on the precise relationship between the material and discursive. Consequently, only a handful of theorists, under the banner of constructivism, have taken steps to incorporate wider concerns of material contexts (e.g. Risse-Kappen, 1995).6

Similarly, while constructivism pays lip service to acknowledging the role of human agency in social production, a closer inspection reveals theoretical vagueness (see, e.g., Carlsnaes, 1992; Dessler, 1989). The consequence, again, has been an eclectic take-up of agency within constructivist writings. Constructivists such as Finnemore and Sikkink (1998) conceptualize agency as a powerful vehicle of change, others, such as Wendt (1999), prefer to focus on a more distant ‘corporate’ agency, while writers such as Hopf (2002, 2010) move away from notions of a rational, conscious agent. Arguably, then, constructivism’s theoretical ambiguity has led to significant diversity in the extent to which different analysts incorporate materiality, discourse and agency into their explanations.7

If theoretical ambiguity is constructivism’s most pressing problem, then the single largest obstacle to its theoretical development has been constructivism’s fixation with providing a via media between rationalism and reflectivism. Given the entrenched and dogmatic stances of the epistemologies that constructivism aims to be the ‘middle of’, it
is unlikely this is a battle constructivism can win anytime soon. Wight (2006: 228–229) for example, refers to the conceptual rigidity of rationalism and reflectivism as an ‘epistemological shield’ which:

serves as a defence mechanism to safeguard one’s chosen theoretical approach, as well as providing a useful supporting argument against engaging with alternative views. As such, it is potentially the most damaging of positions since it stifles debate and fosters a form of gang mentality with little or no need for members of particular epistemological sects to engage with alternative views.

In the face of such rigidity, constructivism’s desired epistemological synthesis seems a rather utopian idea. On the other hand, it is questionable whether a rationalist–reflectivist synthesis is even desirable for constructivism given the meta-theoretical underpinnings of both traditions. Patomaki and Wight (2000) and Wight (2006), for instance, convincingly argue that despite the seemingly polarized positions of rationalism and reflectivism, both share a common positivist meta-theoretical framework. This framework, characterized by its anti-realism, and Humean stance, has been consequential in defining the theoretical parameters of both positivist and post-positivist approaches. However, the positivist underpinnings of post-positivist approaches have largely gone unchallenged in the social sciences. For Wight (2006), despite ontological reflection representing a key intellectual activity that must precede epistemological questions, it has largely been neglected in favour of prioritizing epistemological concerns. In this respect, constructivism also unwittingly subscribes to this trend by locating itself and its energies within the epistemological debate, rather than sequentially beginning first and foremost with ontology, and later moving to appropriate epistemologies.

In taking a critical realist perspective, Wight (2006: 25) suggests that the anti-realist and empiricist orientation of a positivist meta-theoretical framework is problematic in the way that it gives ‘priority to the epistemological question of what we can know over the ontological question of what there is to know’. A positivist orientation thus, at the outset, limits the space for theorization by tying ‘existence’ and explanation to human perception and regularity. From a critical realist prism, this positivist straitjacketing fundamentally limits deeper ontological understanding of the social world. An important question for constructivism, then, is whether a multi-explanatory project seeking to uncover the complex dialectic involved in social production is suited to the rigid confines of empiricism and Humean regularity. Constructivism has largely bypassed such deep reflection, and instead, in line with dominant trends, engrossed itself in the epistemological debate over the relative significance of the material versus the ideational.

For Colin Wight and others (Joseph, 2007; Kurki, 2008; Patomaki, 2002), challenging the epistemological stranglehold in the field of IR can be achieved through advancing a critical realist meta-theory. This approach encourages a general realignment away from an a priori concern with epistemology, and movement towards understanding first the object domain that underlies the social world, and only then proceeding towards appropriate epistemologies and methodologies to understand that world. This position is the antithesis of the ‘epistemological shield’ discussed earlier. In particular, critical realism views social reality as emerging from a complex interaction between a multiplicity of
factors, including discourse, agency and structures. For critical realism, since these multiple factors are, at once, relevant to the object domain, the thorny epistemological issue of whether a simultaneous study of discourse and material structures is possible does not arise. Critical realism offers constructivism the conceptual space to theorize more clearly the process of social dialectic, and the multiple factors relevant to an emergent social reality. A concise clarification of critical realism is warranted at this point.

**Explaining social reality: The realist stratified ontology**

Critical realism is a philosophical position with its development most commonly associated with the work of Roy Bhaskar (1978, 1979, 1989). In its simplest terms, critical realism contends that an external world exists is independent of our representations of it, and is not necessarily given in experience. Bhaskar divides social reality into three inter-related yet distinct layers: the ‘Real’/‘Deep’, the ‘Actual’ and the ‘Empirical’. For critical realism, the purpose of science is the identification of the properties of the three layers, their interaction and their causal significance to an emergent social reality. Within this stratified ontology, the Real dimension is composed of ‘generative’ mechanisms and processes, both physical and social, which cause things to happen in the world. Crucially, however, the existence of these mechanisms in the Real is not rigidly tied to either empiricism or regularity; rather, for critical realism, ‘existence’ is inferred through a careful theoretical reconstruction method which engages with transcendental argumentation. Theoretical reconstruction involves a consideration of those conditions and/or contexts which are intrinsically connected to the emergence of social phenomena, but which may not be immediately given in experience. As Joseph (2007: 354) notes, a transcendental stance raises questions such as, ‘why do things get constructed in the way they do?’, ‘why are some constructions more powerful than others?’, ‘what are the conditions of possibility for social construction?’ This thought process seeks to reveal those underlying ontological structures which potentially impact empirical patterns that we observe in the world.

For critical realism, a deeper ‘generative’ dimension of social reality is connected to, but simultaneously distinguished from, the ‘Actual’ level of reality and the Empirical stratum of social reality. While critical realism endorses the significance of experience and observation, nevertheless, it insists on in-depth ontological inquiry that identifies the potential links and dialectic between empirical patterns and a deeper, possibly unobservable, reality. Since an underlying reality provides the conditions of possibility both for actual events and perceived phenomena, recognizing and teasing apart the different layers of reality is a key ingredient for plausible and comprehensive social analysis.

**Providing constructivism with theoretical ‘teeth’?**

Critical realism’s meta-theoretical claims and its strong ontological stance hold much promise for constructivism. First, by schematically putting ontology before questions of epistemology, critical realism moves beyond the epistemological fixation with what is ‘ideational’ and what is ‘material’. Joseph (2007: 351) argues that critical realism ‘tries to get past this material–ideational question by insisting instead that a variety of
structures — as underlying processes — are ontologically “real” and have causal effects’. Taken from this perspective, it is of little consequence whether a structure is ‘material’ or ‘discursive’; instead, if the process or structure has the potential to enable and constrain social reality, then it is deemed generative and is given ontological status. By couching the ideational–material question in ontological terms, critical realism changes the parameters of the debate. Instead of an a priori debate over what is ideational/material, a critical realist meta-theoretical framework allows the analyst to subscribe ‘ontological status’ to a variety of contextual structures, both material and ideational. As Patomaki and Wight (2000: 235) argue:

critical realism suggests that the material and ideational have to be viewed as a whole. A whole that it is necessary to investigate as an integral system with all its necessary interconnections, not as isolated fragments torn out of context.

In many ways, a critical realist lens also moves constructivism away from the tendency to merely supplement broadly realist explanations with ideas, norms and interests; Johnston (1996: 217), for instance, in investigating Maoist China, is concerned with ‘how far ideational arguments can go in accounting for realpolitik behaviour’. Conversely, for critical realism, the social is a necessarily relevant ontological condition. Moreover, a theoretical reconstruction makes redundant even the division between systemic and unit-level constructivisms (see Reus-Smit, 2009); both analysis are relevant and necessary if a theoretical reconstruction envisages them so.

On a second level, critical realism’s ontological stratification is an important analytical tool that can potentially aid constructivism’s conceptual clarity in envisioning social dialectic. For critical realism, surface empirical regularities are not the only valid criteria for social explanation; rather, a deeper, underlying and often unobservable ‘generative’ reality has an effectual relationship with observable phenomena. By detaching itself from empiricist orthodoxies, critical realism is, for instance, able to make a distinction between discourse operating at the empirical level and those underlying (often unobservable) causal conditions that facilitate the emergence of the discourse. This stratification of ontology allows not only for the identification of the distinct properties of different generative mechanisms, but also affords conceptual space for envisaging causal connections between the different ontological layers. While a constructivist project is similarly interested in how (antecedent and contemporary) material and discursive structures interact with agential influence in producing social reality, its ontological conflation limits the potential to theorize the dialectic productive of social reality. Moreover, while constructivism seeks to explain the causal and constitutive effects of unobservable structures and processes on world politics, its lukewarm subscription to anti-empiricism is, for critical realism, insufficient (Wight, 2006). Conversely, critical realism’s ‘theoretical reconstruction’, an intellectual exercise that reconstructs the likely underlying and ontological conditions that must exist in order for an empirical regularity to exist in the first place, takes a much stronger anti-empiricist position than constructivism (see, e.g., Parker, 1992; Willig, 1999). For critical realism, then, a robust anti-empiricist stance is essential in order to adequately theorize both ontological stratification and dialectic in the social realm.
The third contribution that critical realism can make to a constructivist approach is at the level of understanding the role and relative significance of agency and structure. In the case of agency, for instance, actor identities and interests have been important concepts within constructivist thinking (see Finnemore, 1996; Hopf, 2002; Katzenstein, 1996; Risse et al., 1999). As opposed to rationalist beliefs that individual and state interests are predetermined, constructivists have placed far more emphasis on the social identity of actors in defining interests and preferences (Reus-Smit, 2009). Despite the agential focus, constructivism’s reliance on Giddens’s (1984) structuration model has had the effect that the significance of agency is somewhat lost on the constructivist approach. This is primarily due to Giddens’s infusion of agency and structure in a way that makes them analytically indistinguishable and inseparable (Wight, 2006). Consequently, discerning the effectual powers, liabilities and properties of agency, as separate from structural influence, becomes an almost impossible task within the amalgam of Giddens’s ‘mutually constitutive’ framework. Structuration theory, in denying both agency and structure their distinctiveness, leads to a hazy conceptualization of the agency–structure interaction (Archer, 1998; Joseph, 2007). For constructivism, this has led to diversity in the extent to which analysts accrue significance to either agency and/or structure.16 As Kolodziej (2005: 266) notes, ‘depending on the constructivist under examination, this chicken–egg problem [of which is more important, either agency or structure] is typically resolved more by stipulation than by compelling or persuasive proof advanced by the analyst’.

Critical realism, on the other hand, in fundamentally rejecting a complete fusion of agency with structure, views both as interrelated but nevertheless ‘different kinds of things’, irreducible to each other, and possessing distinct causal powers (Bhaskar, 1979: 33). The distinct role of agency and structure is conceptualized within Bhaskar’s (1979) Transformational Model of Social Activity (TMSA), and Margaret Archer’s (1995, 1998) subsequent development of this model. Within the TMSA model, while social reality emerges as a consequence of the complex interplay between agency and structure, nevertheless, maintaining an analytical distinction between structure and agency is imperative to understanding the different liabilities, tendencies and powers of both structure and agency, and their respective transformational effects on each other.17 In the context of agency, this implies that while human agency is constrained and enabled by existing structures, nevertheless, agency exercises some degree of choice by virtue of its inherent properties and powers.18

The purpose of the preceding discussion has been to suggest a number of things. To the extent that constructivism’s theoretical development has been hampered by its involvement in a defensive exercise of its ‘middle’ position, critical realism’s meta-theoretical framework has much to offer constructivism in the way of an expanded conceptual horizon, as well as theoretical consistency. By beginning with ontology as opposed to epistemology, critical realism does a number of things; first, in bypassing the material–ideational question and thus by default the rationalist–reflectivist divisions, it allows for a simultaneous focus on both the material and ideational; second, its ontological stratification encourages analysts to dig deeper by identifying causal connections between empirical phenomena and deeper generative conditions; and, lastly, critical realism’s TMSA model, in contrast to Giddens’s structuration model, deals with the
agency–structure question in a way that does not reduce one to the other. A critical realist meta-theory, in legitimizing the simultaneous analysis of the material, the ideational, structure and agency, offers the potential to expand constructivism’s conceptual horizons and subsequent power of explanation.

Having suggested some ways in which a critical realist meta-theory can contribute to a constructivist approach, the remainder of the article will seek to demonstrate the explanatory strength of this expanded conceptual horizon. Taking as our case study Pakistan’s willingness to cooperate with the US in its WoT, the discussion will begin by focusing on how Pakistan’s political narrative operated as a regulatory and productive force in the context of the WoT. Next, by envisioning the regulatory discourse within a stratified ontology, the analysis will engage with the deeper question: ‘What conditions make this articulation of identity and subsequent actions more readily possible?’ In addressing this question through a theoretical reconstruction, the analysis infers a matrix of ontological conditions that must have been in place in order for the empirical observation to exist. As the discussion will demonstrate, this approach offers a more holistic social account of Pakistan vis-a-vis the WoT.

Pakistan and the war on terror

Undoubtedly, the 9/11 attacks on the US had far-reaching consequences for world politics. The events triggered the initiation of a US-led ‘global’ WoT focused on bringing the alleged perpetrators of the attacks, the al-Qaeda organization and their Taliban hosts, to task. Following the devastating attacks, and in chorus with the rest of the international community, Pakistan vociferously condemned the attacks on the US. However, in contrast to the rest of the international community, the WoT posed an enormous predicament for Pakistan. Quite apart from the shared ethnic, tribal and religious ties with Afghanistan coupled with a notoriously porous border, memories of the damaging fallout for Pakistan of the nine-year CIA-backed Soviet–Afghan war during the 1980s was still fresh in the public psyche (Lodhi, 2011). However, despite reservations, and in response to US insistence following the attacks, Pakistan almost immediately provided ‘logistical support’ in the shape of access to its Jacobabad and Shamsi airbases. In addition, the US sought closer cooperation with Pakistan’s intelligence agencies to support their military actions. In the years following the Soviet expulsion from Afghanistan in 1989, while the West had largely disengaged with the region, Pakistan’s intelligence agencies had been continually involved in and had acquired considerable expertise and understanding of the dynamics and power play within Afghanistan, and the Taliban in particular (Rashid, 2008). Thus, in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, Pakistan, by providing logistical support and important intelligence information, became a ‘key player’ in the international coalition against the Taliban and al-Qaeda (Hussain, 2007).

There is now a large body of literature providing many detailed accounts of Pakistan’s actions and responses in the context of the WoT. However, it is notable that much of this writing is overwhelmingly embedded within a realist paradigm (see, e.g., Jones and Shaikh, 2006; Rashid, 2008; Synnott, 2009). Often, these analyses parsimoniously explain Pakistan’s actions as the outcome of superpower diktat without examining
Pakistan’s responses as a problematic break in its domestic and foreign policy. It is, for example, often overlooked that Pakistan had, up until 9/11, remained one of the strongest allies of the Taliban regime, and had helped the group consolidate power from the mid-1990s onwards. Although this policy had invited much criticism from the international community, Pakistan refused to abandon the pro-Pakistan Taliban, whose support was perceived as providing important strategic depth. Moreover, at a domestic level, Pakistan’s official support of the Taliban had been buttressed by a political discourse that painted a favourable picture of the fanatical regime. Given this context, from a Pakistani perspective, an abrupt withdrawal of support for the Taliban was indicative of a distasteful submission to US diktat.

Second, despite domestic contestation concerning the precise Islamic character of Pakistan and the extent to which religion should inform state apparatus (Shaikh, 2009), there existed, nevertheless, a general understanding that Pakistan’s support of the Taliban constituted an extension of Muslim brotherhood. From this point of view, supporting military strikes in Afghanistan effectively represented an alliance with a non-Muslim state in attacking a fellow Muslim nation. In addition, since the long, porous Afghan–Pakistan border had hindered any stringent separation of the two countries, the WoT risked bruising tribal and ethnic affiliations (Lodhi, 2011).

Further, Pakistan vis-à-vis the WoT must be viewed in the wider context in which relations between the US and Pakistan had become alarmingly strained (Gould, 2010; Kux, 2001). During much of the 1990s, prompted by Pakistan’s support for the Taliban, and its alleged nuclear proliferation, the US had imposed wide-scale economic and military sanctions on Pakistan. These sanctions were later reinforced following Pakistan’s nuclear tests in 1998 and the installation of President Musharraf’s military regime in 1999. Pakistan was also expelled from the Commonwealth, and effectively became a ‘pariah’ state. For their part, the Pakistanis were extremely unhappy with the non-delivery of F-16 fighter jets by the US, despite having paid for them. Indeed, this became a particularly sore point widely discussed across the country. The Pakistani public had a general antipathy towards the US, and a feeling that Pakistan had been ‘used’ by the US during the 1980s to deter the threat of Soviet expansion, and then duly abandoned. The explicit surfacing of these strained relations was realized when in 2000, after a lapse of 22 years, the US officially reinstated its ties with Pakistan’s arch-rival India. At the time, President Clinton conducted a five-day official trip to India followed by a visit to Pakistan, where he only cared to stay for a short five hours.

Given these complexities vis-à-vis Pakistan’s relationship with both the Taliban and the US, it is remarkable that the bulk of the writing on Pakistan favours simplistic analyses. Ali’s (2008: 146) somewhat blatant account accurately sums up the kind of analytical position that much of the literature takes. He argues that, following the attacks:

[US Deputy Secretary of State] Armitage handed the ISI boss a seven-point list of U.S requirements from Pakistan for waging the coming war in Afghanistan. Without even looking closely at the printed sheet, Mahmud Ahmad put it in his pocket and said he accepted everything.

While such analysis may not be entirely incorrect, it nevertheless represents one aspect of how Pakistan came to participate in the WoT. Arguably, such realist readings
constitute a mere ‘scratching of the surface’ in terms of exploring the convergence of multiple variables producing the social reality under question. In contrast, a constructivist lens, in focusing on the politics of identity and the role of structure and agency, can offer an alternative understanding of how events were produced. For instance, in exploring the role of social identity, a constructivist study would reveal the pivotal ‘framing’ role that Pakistan’s official political discourse played in generating a broad domestic consensus (Fiaz, 2010). From a constructivist point of view, the politics of identity was productive of Pakistan’s actions.

**Pakistan and the war on terror: Viewed through a constructivist lens**

*Constructing the threat from India*

The first official high-level Pakistani communication following the attacks took the shape of President Musharraf’s widely communicated televised address to the nation on 19 September 2001 (Musharraf, 2001a). The address was critical on a number of accounts. It was overwhelmingly concerned with articulating the relevance and meaning of the attacks for Pakistan. Second, it focused on themes of national identity and purpose. For instance, in locating the ‘meaning’ of the attacks for Pakistan, Musharraf (2001a) argued that:

> Pakistan is facing a very critical situation and I believe that after 1971, this is the most critical period. The decision we make today can have far-reaching and wide-ranging consequences. The crisis is formidable and unprecedented. If we make the wrong decisions in this crisis, it can lead to the very worst consequences. On the other hand if we make the right decisions, the results will be good. The negative consequences can endanger Pakistan’s integrity and solidarity. When I say critical concerns I mean our strategic assets and the cause of Kashmir.

The reference to ‘1971’ was a powerful strategy that drew a historical comparison to what is popularly perceived to be one of the most shameful incidents in Pakistan’s history, when arch-rival India managed to successfully dismember the state by supporting the secession of East Pakistan. But more importantly, the language and tone of the text taps into one of the most persistent and historically over arching meta-narratives embedded within the Pakistani psyche concerning the ever-present threat of annihilation at the hands of India. The language worked to inject fear and urgency, and the need to make the ‘right decision’. Thus, while conceding the retaliatory mood of the US, Musharraf is keen to articulate the ‘real’ source of threat emanating from a more familiar enemy. Musharraf (2001a) makes this clear:

> Let us now take a look at the designs of our neighbouring country [India]. They have offered all their military facilities to the United States. They have offered without hesitation, all their facilities, all their bases and full logistic support. They want to enter into any alliance with the United States and get Pakistan declared a terrorist state. They want to harm our strategic assets, and the Kashmir cause … we have to frustrate the evil designs of our enemies and safeguard national interests.
The rhetorical significance of highlighting the malevolent intentions of India vis-a-vis Pakistan is an important point. Historically, this narrative has been consequential on many levels, ranging from the justification of mistrust and war with India (Cohen, 2005; Racine, 2002), the development of a nuclear arsenal (Nizamani, 2000), to the legitimacy of military expenditure and political incursions (Siddiqua, 2007). Moreover, the India–Pakistan narrative plays an important role in the articulation of Pakistani nationalism amongst a disparate population (Jaffrelot, 2002; Ziring, 1997). At the critical juncture brought forth by 9/11, the political elite of Pakistan, in assigning ‘meaning’ to the events, reverted to familiar arguments centred on a belligerent India. For instance, reiterating this theme, Pakistan’s foreign minister argued that ‘the September 11 terrorist attacks provided India with a heaven sent opportunity to drive a wedge between Pakistan and the West and to use anti-terrorism as another important tool of its foreign policy’ (Kasuri, 2004). For the Pakistani population, the underlying message was clear: in the event that Pakistan refused ‘cooperation’ in the WoT, the door would then be left open for India to step in and ‘cooperate’ while also scheming against Pakistan’s interests (Government of Pakistan, 2004; Kasuri, 2007; Musharraf, 2002).

**Islam, Pakistan and the Taliban**

In addition to the ‘India threat’, the political narrative began to slowly but surely reorient Pakistan’s policy towards the ‘Islamic’ Taliban. While the role of Islam in Pakistan had long been a source of debate (Shaikh, 2009), nonetheless, Musharraf’s coup of 1999 had relied little on Islamic justification or imagery. Instead, the coup focused on notions of good governance and economic prosperity as the main rallying tactic (Musharraf, 1999, 2001b; Sattar, 1999). Indeed, Musharraf’s entrance into the political foray in the late 1990s, dressed in his Western attire and sporting pet poodles, promised to avert national bankruptcy and repair Pakistan’s image as an international pariah. What is remarkable, then, is the extent to Which an Islamic discourse began to enter the political arena in order to explain, justify and normalize state responses in the aftermath of the attacks.

The injection of Islam into the political narrative took two forms. First, given that Pakistan had supported the Taliban prior to the events of 9/11, outright rejections of the Taliban regime were notably absent. Instead, the political narrative began to gradually represent Pakistan as the legitimate and authentic custodian of Islam, as opposed to the Taliban regime. Musharraf (2001a), for instance, emphasized that, ‘Pakistan is consid- ered a fortress of Islam. God forbid, if this fortress is harmed in any way — it would cause damage to the cause of Islam.’ As these constructions of Pakistan, as the legitimate custodian of Islam, became more widely articulated, the narrative began to more clearly juxtapose good/Pakistan Muslim with extremist/bad Taliban. Senator Syed (2004a), for example, points out that ‘by and large our people are good and moderate Muslims and good human beings … their natural instincts reject extremism … there is a popular revulsion to extremism’. Moreover, in contrast to earlier conciliatory stances, Musharraf was by 2005 stressing that, ‘it is our responsibility to take Islam out of the claws of these ignorant people and take it towards its true essence’ (Musharraf, 2005).

On a second level, the de-linking of Islam with the Taliban was partly achieved by the construction of Musharraf as a legitimate figure of religious authority (see Musharraf,
God has [deliberately] brought me to this [leadership] position. This position, this authority, has been bestowed by Allah and as long as I hold this authority and whatever work I am doing, all Pakistanis should have confidence … because this is our faith.

The construction of Musharraf as a divinely guided Muslim leader functioned in the sense that it afforded him particular speaking rights. This is an important point, given that, as Milliken (1999: 229, emphasis in original) notes, ‘discourses define subjects authorized to speak and act (e.g. foreign policy official, defence intellectuals, development experts)’. The construction of Musharraf as a legitimate Islamic figure assigned social power and enabled him to challenge the authenticity of the Taliban (Fiaz, 2010). The significance and pervasiveness of the narrative was that despite the Western media’s insistence that mass agitation was imminent, in reality, opposition to Pakistan’s post-9/11 policy of military cooperation was muted and quickly fizzled out (Lavoy, 2005; Synnott, 2009).

While a much fuller constructivist account of Pakistan vis-a-vis the WoT is available elsewhere (Fiaz, 2010), the point is that a constructivist lens draws analytical attention to aspects overlooked by a realist prism. Thus, within a constructivist framework, Pakistan’s political narrative in articulating an ‘India threat’, by de-linking Islam and authenticity from the Taliban, and by constructing Musharraf as a legitimate figure of religious authority was effectual in justifying a rejection of the Taliban and a simultaneous alliance with the US. However, a constructivist analysis need not stop here; the approach is also willing to incorporate the analysis of agency, as do Finnemore and Sikkink (1998). Proceeding along the same lines, we may theorize the importance of President Musharraf as a ‘norm entrepreneur’ in terms of playing a vital role in bringing a normative change in Pakistan vis-a-vis the Taliban. However, the problem here is the way in which a constructivist rendering of agency would either accord it too much significance, by largely divorcing it from its embeddedness in antecedent structures, or, owing to Giddens’s model, would find it difficult to untangle the distinct role of agency from structures. Similarly, while constructivism would not theoretically be opposed to considering the material preponderance of the US as an explanatory factor, in practice, the fear of structuralism can mitigate against a thorough analysis of materiality.

Thus, while constructivism is good at drawing on post-structuralist theorizations of identity, its own multi-explanatory approach remains indecisive as to whether it should, and to what extent and depth it should, include and explore the role of agency and materiality. It is precisely here that a critical realist reasoning can interject. By necessitating theoretical reconstruction, it forces the analysis to ‘move backwards’, to think about the conditions that are necessarily connected to the discourse in question, and without which the discourse would not exist in its current shape and form. This reasoning moves beyond the ideational–material divide and stifling questions of whether to include or not include agency or materiality. By placing Pakistan’s post-9/11 narrative at the empirical level within a stratified ontology, the analysis is able to begin a theoretical reconstruction. This exploration is able to reveal a matrix of antecedent conditions connected to the
emergence of the narrative. A critical realist reasoning thus draws analytical attention to US material preponderance, domestic ideational structures, material organization and agency as causally connected to Pakistan’s political narrative. These are explored below.31

Critical realism and the expansion of constructivist horizons: Pakistan and the WoT

US hegemony as an ontological structure

Without rehearsing a lengthy debate as to the nature and extent of US hegemony and dominance (see Saull, 2008; Stokes, 2005), the discerning point to note here is that Pakistan’s political narrative emerged in the context of an overarching structure in which the US enjoys a preponderant and hierarchical relationship vis-a-vis other states. This enduring structural context has, at least since 1945, been inescapable and potentially consequential. Here, ‘consequential’ refers not to a mechanistic cause–effect relationship, but to an acknowledgement of causal potentiality.32 Importantly, this structural ‘consequentiality’ is not limited to overt and explicit manifestations, such as the open use of force, coercion and threat. Rather, the causal powers of the US exist and are effectual whether empirically operationalized or not. It would be useful to unpack this idea by drawing on Porpora’s (1998) study of social structures. For Porpora, relational and hierarchical social positions within structures have inbuilt causal powers whether these are realized and manifested in experience or not. Importantly, the power to potentially ‘effect’, ‘cause’ or ‘shape’ exists as an inbuilt attribute or liability of the spatial position itself. In this context, Porpora (1998: 349), for instance, notes that a boss, ‘by virtue of his or her social position has certain prerogatives over the life of the person in the social position of subordinate’ (to fire, to decide workload, pay and promotion). These liabilities and properties of the social position ‘boss’ need not be directly observed or realized in experience; nevertheless, they exist, and are causal and productive, for example, in encouraging the subordinate to act in particular ways, such as being docile and non-confrontational.

Extrapolating Porpora’s observations to the international realm has important consequences; it allows for the conceptualization of the potentiality of the US exercise of power, without it being directly linked to explicit manifestations. From a critical realist perspective, the spatial location of the US within the international system constitutes an ontological and causal condition, whether realized in experience or not. Therefore, the US exercises causality without it necessarily being empirically observed. In theoretically reconstructing the contingent conditions relevant to Pakistan’s post-9/11 narrative, it is apparent that US causality operated through a largely hegemonic discourse articulated by the Bush administration. This discourse focused on constructing international subjects along the oppositional and hierarchical dimensions of ‘good’ and ‘evil’ (Jackson, 2005), and drew on an amalgam of orientalist33 and ethnocentric34 narratives to articulate the events as signifying an attack by ‘them’, the ‘evil’ and ‘uncivilized’, on ‘us’, the ‘good’ and ‘civilized’ (Collet and Najem, 2005). The singular most productive capacity of the US WoT narrative was precisely the delineation of the either ‘us’ or ‘them’ groupings
and its explicit invitation for states to vociferously define their subject-position in relation to these categories. In responding to this, Pakistan by taking up the specific position of ‘US ally’, was thus not taking up the category ‘bad’, ‘evil’, ‘irresponsible’, ‘irrational’, as defined by the hegemonic narrative. A critical realist theoretical reconstruction does not allow for Pakistan’s political discourse to be conceived as divorced from the potential effects of this causal and antecedent social structure.

**Pakistan’s domestic power structure as an ontological condition**

A further engagement with a theoretical reconstruction of contingent conditions can reveal that specific domestic conditions within Pakistan were causally relevant to the emergence of the political narrative. Perhaps the most important aspect here is the fact that Pakistan’s domestic power structure is marked by the centralization of socio-economic power in the hands of the politico-military elite (Nawaz, 2008; Talbot, 2007; Waseem, 2002). Given the centralization of power, the Pakistani military have traditionally monopolized and censored all communication mediums and controlled discursive space within Pakistan. Consequently, the military has largely directed and ‘framed’ Pakistan’s issues in the context of a belligerent India, and justified the military’s preferential position in society. Given this domestic organization of power, it became relatively easier for President Musharraf, who was simultaneously serving as the Head of State and Chief of Army Staff, to proliferate a particular interpretation of the WoT.

Alongside this organization of power, the pervasiveness amongst Pakistan’s political elite of a ‘regime of truth’ institutionalizing the ‘India threat’ means that we may talk of the existence of an epistemic community (Haas, 1992) sharing particular values and worldviews, loosely termed a strategic culture. Lavoy (2005) suggests three enduring elements of Pakistan’s strategic culture: first, a deep-seated opposition to Indian regional hegemony; second, given the India threat, the primacy and budgetary priority of defence requirements; and, third, Pakistan’s identification with conservative Islamic causes and Muslim nationalism. For Pakistan’s epistemic community, threat and danger emanating from India overshadow all domestic and foreign considerations. Indeed, the endurance of this ‘regime of truth’ explains the continuity in Pakistan’s foreign policy despite numerous regime changes (Nizamani, 2000).

The anti-India ‘regime of truth’ is not limited to the political elite but pervades all levels of Pakistani society and is largely a reflection of the power of the military in Pakistan. In the post-9/11 time frame, for the vast majority of Pakistanis, an exceptional threat from India was easily comprehensible, compared to notions of threat from the US. Doty’s (1993: 303) observation that ‘the reception as meaningful of statements revolving around policy situations depends on how well they fit into the general system of representation in a given society … [statements] must make sense and fit with what the general public takes as “reality”’ is particularly apt. A theoretical reconstruction thus makes it necessary to draw causal connections between this antecedent cultural context and the post-9/11 narrative. Thus, Pakistan’s domestic arrangement of power and the existence of a peculiar cultural system in which the India threat is prioritized are important causal contexts connected to the emergence and success of a hegemonic discourse that sought to build social consensus.
The causal role of agency

A critical realist exposure of the links between depth ontological structures and the political narrative in question would also draw attention to the causal role of agency, specifically Musharraf. Sayer (1992: 105) argues that:

People have the causal powers of being able to work … speak, reason, walk, reproduce, etc., and a host of causal liabilities, such as susceptibility to group pressure, extremes of temperature, etc. Often the causal powers inhere not simply in single objects or individuals but in the social relations and structures which they form.

While critical realism does not reduce agents to being simply bearers of structure, nevertheless, it does insist that we define clearly what the possibilities and limits of human action are, given the confines of antecedent social contexts. Bhaskar’s TMSA model offers constructivism the space to theorize, in a more meaningful way, the significance of agency and its dialectic role in the production of reality without reducing agency to the effects of structure. Following a critical realist logic, if we hypothesize the absence of Musharraf, and assume that all other explanatory factors remained unchanged, it is highly likely that Pakistan’s political narrative would have differed in its substance and direction. For instance, had a democratically elected government been in place in Pakistan, as opposed to a military dictatorship, it then becomes possible to hypothesize that the responses by Pakistan’s political elite may have been different. Processing foreign policy issues through a parliament is not only time-consuming, but subject to rigorous examination. Seen from this perspective, and in the absence of democratic institutions, Musharraf’s agency was intimately connected to shaping the emergent social reality. While the wider social context was effectual in limiting the array of choices, nevertheless, state action does not, as Wight (2006: 199) notes, ‘just happen but is made to happen by active human agents, and what goes on in the heads of these agents makes a difference (which is not to say that it is all that matters)’. Thus, Musharraf, in responding in particular ways, was causal in the sense that he played a transformative role by being able to successfully realign Pakistan’s domestic and foreign policy away from the Taliban. Consequently, we may posit Musharraf as a ‘condition of possibility’, or a causal condition connected to the emergence of the discourse. While this transformatory role is distinct, nevertheless, it cannot be conceived in isolation from wider structural contexts: the peculiar organization of power in Pakistan, Musharraf’s membership of the military institution, the persistence of an insecurity culture vis-à-vis India and the social power of the US.36

Discourse, structure and agency

The preceding discussion has suggested that, taken from a constructivist logic, the politics of identity following the 9/11 terrorist attacks was consequential in legitimizing and normalizing Pakistan’s participation in the WoT.37 This analysis was further deepened through a critical realist lens. First, in transcending the material–ideational straitjacketing, the analysis was able to ask more probing questions such as ‘why the discourse
emerged in the shape and form it did’, ‘why the particular narrative was more readily available, and alternative discourses marginalized’, and ‘why the discourse became hegemonic’. The conceptual freedom afforded by the transcendence of the material–ideational confines allowed the subsequent theoretical reconstruction to investigate multiple explanatory factors, without resort to whether these were material or ideational. Such a line of reasoning was able to reveal a range of explanatory factors or generative mechanisms connected to the emergence of Pakistan’s political discourse. The analysis sought to suggest that the narrative was shaped, in part, by the existing system of representation within Pakistan, the hegemonic narrative of the Bush administration, Pakistan’s spatial location vis-a-vis the US in the international system, and some level of reflective activity on the part of Musharraf. It became the dominant narrative in Pakistan owing to the peculiar domestic organization of power, and the fact that Musharraf was at the time simultaneously not only the Head of State, but also the Chief of Army Staff, thus affording him wide-ranging powers. Musharraf’s position within the social structure, as well as the existence of discursive space in which religion is a dominant feature, allowed Musharraf to distance the WoT from US association. Instead, the narrative focused on moralizing Pakistan’s role in the WoT by representing the events as a conflict between authentic Pakistani Islam and a blasphemous distortion by the Taliban.

A critical realist-inspired constructivist account emphasizes the convergence of multiple ideational and material explanatory factors productive of Pakistan’s participation in the WoT. While a constructivist approach, despite the rhetoric, is somewhat timid both theoretically and analytically in exploring a multilayered reality, a critical realist orientation has no such qualms. Thus, the exploration of multiple factors (US material preponderance, the domestic organization of power, representation systems, specific agency, etc.) becomes indispensable as they are revealed through a critical realist reasoning. Ultimately, however, critical realism is, first and foremost, a meta-theoretical lens and not a theory of world politics per se. The gist of the argument here has been to suggest that this meta-theoretical lens is useful in that it more clearly theorizes a multilayered reality, and eschews reductionism in social explanation. On this account, it holds much promise for a constructivist approach to world politics. The article has sought to demonstrate this potential by demonstrating some ways in which a constructivist explanation of Pakistan vis-a-vis its participation in the WoT can be further deepened. Indeed, as opposed to accounts that reduce Pakistan’s policy actions to either identity, materiality or agency, a critical realist orientation offers a more holistic and multilayered constructivist explanation of Pakistan vis-a-vis the WoT.

Conclusion

Constructivism has been occupied for too long with a defensive exercise that attempts to make acceptable the reconciliation of opposing epistemological stances. This fixation has led to constructivism’s theoretical ambiguity, and a hazy, rudimentary conception of a multilayered reality. On the other hand, the pluralistic ontology and subsequent methodological diversity of critical realism can contribute to constructivism on a number of levels: in developing ontological, theoretical and methodological clarity, and in deepening constructivist explanations of a complex and multilayered reality. Critical realist
incursions into a constructivist approach to world politics represent not only the opportunity for new ways in which to engage with constructivist questions, but also offers constructivism the foundations upon which it can build a more secure and consistent theoretical framework. While it has been impossible, given space constraints, to present an exhaustive critical realist-inspired constructivist analysis of the case study, nevertheless this work presents an opening towards thinking about new ways in which to engage with constructivist understandings of a multilayered world.

Notes

1. Post-structuralism is varyingly also referred to as ‘critical constructivism’ (Hopf, 1998), and ‘post-modern constructivism’ (Reus-Smit, 2009).
2. The relationship between critical realism and constructivism is conceived here in terms of meta-theory and theory, respectively. Although some writers have been reluctant to explicitly categorize constructivism as a ‘theory’ (Onuf, 1989), nevertheless, as an approach, it is informed and underpinned by particular meta-theoretical considerations.
3. Notwithstanding constructivism’s internal variations, I use the term ‘multi-explanatory’ to acknowledge that the approach affords the conceptual freedom to presume the world as something that is in the process of ‘becoming’ through a complex dialectic between multiple explanatory factors, namely: materiality, ideas and agential activity.
4. While not entirely denying the existence of a physical world ‘out there’, the post-structuralist argument is that the world only becomes meaningful through the operation of discourse and therefore it is language that must be interrogated to meaningfully access even the physical world. For an excellent post-structuralist statement, see Edwards et al. (1995).
5. For example, Reus-Smit (2009) while characterizing constructivism as an approach that pays attention to both normative and material structures, does not then clarify the dialectic between materiality and norms, or how constructivist work can incorporate materiality.
6. Risse-Kappen’s focus on the interaction between transnational ideas and domestic political structures vis-a-vis the end of the Cold War is a good example of the attempt by constructivists to incorporate materiality into their analyses. Arguably, however, the account is reflective of the via media concern to provide an all-round material–ideational explanation. For instance, Risse-Kappen’s epistemological starting point can be contrasted to a deeper ontological examination uncovering a range of material (and ideational) factors causally connected to the end of the Cold War; the ‘material’ therefore would not be limited to only domestic political structures.
7. Arguably, constructivism’s reliance on Giddens’ (1984) structuration theory contributes to its hazy understanding of the dialectic between structures and agents. See Wight (2006) for an excellent critique of structuration theory.
8. Anti-realism denotes the belief that ‘existence’ of an entity is necessarily tied to human observation or experience. Consequently, in the absence of human perception, entities are not deemed to exist.
9. Flowing from this anti-realism is a second commonality between positivism and post-positivism that relates to an adherence to a basic Humean background knowledge concerning science. For both, there is a deep-seated acceptance concerning the necessity of empiricism and regularity to valid science. For a critique of Humean science, see Kurki (2008), Sayer (1992) and Wight (2006).
10. See Bhaskar (1978) for a discussion on the pitfalls of anthropocentrism, or the tying of ‘existence’ to observation.

Emergence refers to the notion that social reality arises out of an ongoing, dynamic and complex interaction between a multiplicity of causal factors; however, the crucial point here being that the resultant whole (social reality) is greater than, and irreducible to, its constituent causal properties.

Theoretical reconstruction is embedded within a transcendental philosophy and involves a form of reasoning or mode of scientific inference not confined by empiricism. The primary purpose of theoretical reconstruction is to infer the conditions and connections that must exist as prerequisites if we are to comprehensively understand social phenomena. It often begins with the question: ‘What makes X possible?’ Danermark et al. (2002: ch. 4) offer an excellent introduction to the methods of theoretical reconstruction.

A transcendental argumentation goes beyond the empirical, observable realm and seeks to clarify the basic prerequisites or conditions for social action. Typically, a transcendental argument begins with an empirical phenomenon and then proceeds to theorize those conditions or circumstances without which the action cannot exist. This theorization may involve inferring unobservable structures and mechanisms as causally connected to the empirical pattern observed. A transcendental philosophy is strongly opposed by empiricism. For a very readable introduction to transcendental argumentation, see Danermark et al. (2002: 96–98). Relevant here also is Sayer (1992).

In an interesting paper, Gruffydd-Jones (2008) applies a critical realist lens to the study of the unequal wealth distribution between the global North and South. By theoretically reconstructing underlying causal connections, Gruffydd-Jones concludes that the history of colonization is relevant to the extent that it has entrenched, on a global level, racialized structures of social power. These underlying configurations have endured and have a ‘generative’ relationship with contemporary social realities in which the South remains poor and underdeveloped.

It is perhaps for this reason that Reus-Smit (2009: 225) feels the need to warn constructivism against allowing human agency to ‘drop out of the story’.

In Archer’s (1995) development of Bhaskar’s TMSA model, agency possesses transformational liability. This means that agency not only reproduces existing social structures, but can potentially change structures, or transform them. For Archer, this transformative capacity of agency is often revealed after the lapse of some time when it becomes evident that structural change has occurred.

In IR, Wight’s contribution (2006: 177–225) makes major inroads into this complex issue by clarifying the different levels of agency implicated in accounting for emergent state action.

Access was based on the condition that these bases were to only play supportive roles rather than act as launch pads for US military attacks into Afghanistan. Instead, American and British warships lying off Pakistan’s coast were used to launch aircraft and missiles over Pakistani airspace and into Afghanistan (see Synnott, 2009).

Pakistan’s support of the Taliban regime had less to do with the regime’s alleged ‘Islamic’ credentials and more to do with Pakistan’s long-standing policy to provide ‘strategic depth’ on its western border. Flanked by a hostile Indian neighbour on its eastern front, the Pakistanis have always been interested in the installation of a ‘friendly’ government in Afghanistan. See Roy (2002) and contributions in the Ali (2001) volume.

In October 1990, sanctions were imposed on Pakistan under the Pressler Amendment, a country-specific amendment that singled out countries suspected of conducting nuclear activities. The Amendment triggered a crisis era in US–Pakistan relations.
22. One of the consequences of the Pressler Amendment was that the US withheld the delivery of military equipment to Pakistan that had been contracted and paid for prior to 1990.

23. For many in Pakistan, the fact that the sanctions coincided with the end of the Cold War was not accidental. The abrupt exit of the US from Afghanistan following the expulsion of the Soviets meant that Pakistan was left alone to deal with the wreckage of the war in the shape of 2 million Afghan refugees, and the proliferation, into Pakistan, of weapons and narcotics from uncontrolled areas of war-torn Afghanistan. This set of events had a deep-seated impression on the public psyche. See contributions in the Lodhi (2011) volume.

24. Pakistan was created in 1947 as an outcome of the division of Greater India into two sovereign states by the departing British colonial rulers. Since partition, India and Pakistan have, for much of their history, been locked in bitter inter-state rivalry, having fought three wars, mostly pertaining to the territory of Kashmir, which both lay claim to.

25. During the Cold War, India enjoyed close relations with communist USSR. This invited US antipathy and for much of the Cold War, Indo-US relations were far from cordial. Consequently, President Clinton’s five-day visit in 2000 represented a significant step in that it signalled a growing friendship with Pakistan’s arch-rival India.

26. Pakistan’s premier intelligence agency, Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI).

27. The dominance of the realist lens means that often the literature fails to even acknowledge wider contextual factors within which Pakistan’s decision was embedded, such as a broader acknowledgement of the international coalition that sprang into existence following the terrorist attacks (see Askari-Rizvi, 2004).

28. Hopf (1998: 184) notes that one of the key differences between post-structuralist and constructivist rendering of discourse and representation is that the former tends to focus on ‘exploding the myths associated with identity formation’, whereas the latter is concerned with treating ‘those identities as possible cause of action’. See also Debrix (2003: 7).


30. For the India–Pakistan rivalry, see Nasr (2005) and Wirsing (1994).

31. Given the confines of space, the theoretical reconstruction of contingent conditions explored in this article is not exhaustive. The point here is to demonstrate how a critical realist orientation would proceed to deepen the analysis.

32. For Kurki (2008), Humean ‘cause–effect’ is an inadequate model to employ in the social sciences where ‘causes’ are often multiple and intertwined. In the case of Pakistan, the inadequacy of a strict application of the cause–effect model (the US as a causal power) is demonstrated if we consider that during much of the 1990s, Pakistan faced growing US criticism for its support of the Taliban government in Afghanistan. Nevertheless, and despite US opposition, Pakistan continued its commitment to the Taliban regime despite the adverse reputation this invited.

33. Said (1978) uses the word ‘orientalism’ to refer to a set of discursive practices employed within Western Anglo-European cultures to construct the ‘orient’ (the East) as an inferior other of the occident (the West) — such discursive practices then justifying and legitimizing occidental control over the region of the world categorized as orient. In this context, Jackson (2007) has argued that the contemporary discourse of Islamic terrorism, as articulated by ‘terrorism experts’, unproblematically draws extensively on a long tradition of orientalist scholarship and a tradition of hostile cultural stereotyping of Muslims.

34. Jackson (2005: ch. 2) notes that we may see the response to 9/11 as ethnocentric, in the sense that the tragedy occurring in the US on 11 September 2001 was interpreted as ‘supremely catastrophic, the day everything changed, the pinnacle — arguably the Hiroshima explosion of 1945 was far more horrific’.
35. For strategic culture and decision-making, see Rosen (1995) and Snyder (2002).
36. This conception of distinctive yet embedded agency differs both from rationalist accounts which theorize agency in terms of the effects of structures, and those constructivist analyses for which action is shaped by the agent’s reflective interpretation of his/her environment.
37. This constructivist logic is distinguished from critical or post-structuralist accounts for whom ‘exploding myths’ and unmasking power relations are given analytic preference (Hopf, 1998).

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