

an ideological combat against those who would radically challenge the pre-established ideas which you have “domesticated”.

That’s how it all relates to your own investigation into the role of knowledge creation.



Ford Foundation Center for Social Justice in New York. In his book, Parmar explores the role of big US philanthropic foundations in creating knowledge networks which advance US government interests.

Yes. My work has primarily been on elite knowledge networks: Their whole function and purpose is the construction of orthodoxy. They make sure that the visible spectrum of ideas remains within respectable boundaries: They decide who gets the money, who is able to get the media voice, and who gets access to a larger public. They will often buttress certain prestigious institutions with very large grants so that their people, academics, and scholars will be the ones who get the media coverage in the peak time viewing. I don’t mean to say that someone like me may not get to be on screen at 11pm, when most people are asleep in London. I don’t mean to say that you never get a voice. You, of course, do. But you’re not never anywhere near the sun, the center of the solar system; you’re rather somewhere near Pluto,

■ ■ You just play your game with “the audience” being distracted.

Yeah, because they’re asleep! If you question, say, CNN, they’d say “no, no, we have this or that person.” But they don’t tell you that at 6pm or 8pm when 50 million people are watching, the people they have on screen are the very mainstream. And that’s the way to buttress and foster and perpetuate the mainstream. So that is a form of coercion, because you effectively are being excluded from a whole wide range against your will.

■ ■ So, if I may, you consider yourself to fit that description, being on the fringe, not getting the spotlight, right?

Yes, I would say so.

■ ■ Then, why do you do the thing you’re doing? What’s your hope?



Many people lost their jobs in developed countries due to the economic crisis which began in 2008.

Well, let me emphasize again that there is a battle of ideas. However little influence one might have, one should try to do what one can to combat that orthodoxy, whether it’s writing some commentaries, running a website, publishing a book, or going on to CNN or BBC. When they give me the opportunity, I tend to take it because it is a chance to reach at least some people, rather than give up and just throw my hands up. The fact is that I’m in a very privileged position, with a good job and a good salary, and so on and so forth. But there are a lot of people who suffer from the whole system, and they are at the bottom end of that system. Not as lucky or as privileged, they have even less access to everything. My own view is that one should do what one can in their own way to try to bring their daily struggles and the system which generates those struggles to light, and to be critical of that system. That’s why I do it.

■ ■ Are you really hopeful that an alternative might emerge?

Yes, I think so.

■ ■ In what way?

Ideological hegemony just requires a very large amount of continuous effort over a long period of time. The fact is that the system is not stable. And ideological hegemony is not entirely stable, either. That’s because the underpinning system, which the ideological hegemony tries to protect and defend, goes into periods of illegitimacy and crisis. So you have financial crises, when lots of people lose their homes. You have economic crisis, when people lose their jobs, or their jobs become more insecure.

■ ■ Or disposable.

Exactly. They can become obsolete. If you’re a car worker, in Britain for example, your job could be exported somewhere else. Ordinary life is generally impacted by the economic-financial systems in which we live. And that automatically creates the basis of discontent.

■ ■ Which direction does that discontent take?

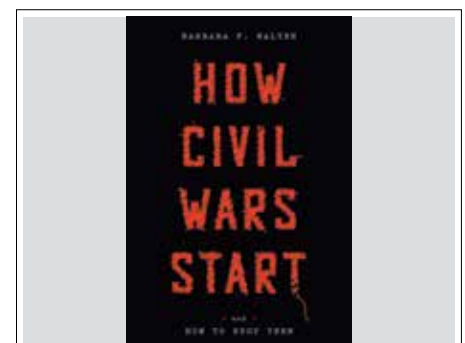
The fact is the discontent, and the illegitimacy of the system, is felt very acutely at certain point. And in those times, you’re not just discontent in a silent way, but you also protest. A lot of people can take economic hardship for a long time but what they tend not to be able to take is police violence and brutality. And that especially applies to the poorest people and those who would object to the system. And now, there are a lot of those people. Therefore, we are now in what Gramsci would call ‘organic crisis’, a structural crisis of confidence in the system itself in the West.

The alternative will emerge as a result of structural discontent and, also, the emergence of new ideas. There was a greater coherence, say, 30 years ago, around socialism which has dissipated although there are still some movement in that direction. But many people are now looking at climate change and global warming as a new philosophy of how to run an economic system: They take notice of the racial and class effects of climate change, for example, on the global South, and the refugee crises and so on that are occurring. That’s to say the alternatives, or at least objections to the status quo, are kind of structurally built-in because the system goes into crisis, especially now that the crisis seems to be structural, or organic. It’s like an endemic in the system; it can’t simply get up. And the COVID-19 pandemic has shown exactly who is favored in the system in terms of job protection or health services or living conditions or simply being more likely to die. All these factors combined constitute a kind of groundswell of discontent.

■ ■ How is the current situation of that ‘structural crisis’?

At the moment, it’s in a kind of peak: The illegitimacy of the American state, you can see it in the last five years or so. There was an attempted coup on January 6, 2021. There was a “peaceful transfer of power” because there were 20,000 troops protecting Biden on the operation. How is that a peaceful transfer of power? That’s the true depth of the crisis.

A popular book, one of the bestselling books in America today, is called ‘How Civil Wars Start’. Its question is, ‘Is America on the brink of civil war?’ That’s when you know that there is an organic crisis of the state in the system which causes hardship for people. The Republican Party is busy restricting the vote, in particular among minorities and the youth. They want to rig the next election. That’s the half of the political system in America giving up on democracy. And that is going to cause a huge amount of discontent in November, when the next set of elections are on. The reason that alternatives can bubble up for change is because there are all these deep, enduring, and structural systemic crisis.



“How Civil Wars Start” by Barbara Walter, published in 2022, is now a bestselling book in the US.

