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# Etnicidad, nacionalismo y el Estado en Afganistán

## Book Chapter

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## ETHNICITY, NATIONALISM AND THE STATE IN AFGHANISTAN

'The Afghan 'nation' as such still remains to be created' according to one expert (Hyman 1992:7). In spite of the successful Afghan resistance to the Soviet occupation in the 1980s, the civil wars which followed the departure of Soviet troops have strikingly demonstrated the weakness of Afghan national identity and the strength of other loyalties. The paper begins by discussing the diversity of Afghan society and the role of ethnicity at the time when the modern Afghan state was created. Focusing in particular on developments after 1880, it goes on to look at the evolution of the state, and the influence of ethnic and national identities on it, and the ways in which their nature and significance have changed over the period.

### *Historical and social background -*

To understand the modern Afghan state it is important to be aware that it did not come into existence until the late nineteenth century, though its roots lie in the empire created in the middle of the eighteenth century by Ahmad Shah, a military leader from the Abdalis, a Pashtun tribal confederacy living between Herat, Kandahar and Kalat-i-Ghilzai. At the end of the seventeenth century the areas which were to become Afghanistan were mostly subject to the Iranian Safavid and the Indian Mughal dynasties, but in the early eighteenth century Mughal power waned and the Safavid empire collapsed. The upheavals which followed left an opening for Ahmad Shah, who in the middle of the century founded a new empire with its capital at Kandahar (he assumed the title Durr-i Durran, Pearl of Pearls, and since then the Abdalis have been known as Durranis). A loose confederation of tribes and khanates rather than a centralised monarchy, his empire comprised much of modern Afghanistan, Kashmir and the western Punjab. Ahmad Shah died in 1772 and was succeeded by his son Timur Shah, whose sons contended for the succession after his death in 1793, and the empire began to fall apart.<sup>1</sup>

As a result in the early nineteenth century the population of the future Afghan state was politically divided. It was also diverse in many other ways. To begin with, although most people were sedentary farmers, there were also many pastoral nomads.<sup>2</sup> Most people were Muslims, largely Sunni, though there were important Shi'ite minorities, both Imami and Ismaili. Imamis (I refer to them in particular as Shi'ites from now on) included Hazaras, Qizilbash and some Persian-speakers in the Herat area. Ismailis lived in an area in the Hindu Kush to the north of Kabul and in Badakhshan in the north-east.<sup>3</sup> There was a small Hindu population in Kabul and Kandahar, and some of the inhabitants of the remote valleys to the east of Kabul were polytheists. Hence the area, now known as Nuristan ('land of light'), was referred to by the surrounding Muslims as Kafiristan.

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<sup>1</sup> In the early eighteenth century Herat and Kandahar were part of the Safavid empire and Kabul, the present Afghan capital, was nominally the administrative centre of a province of the Mughal empire. To the north of the Hindu Kush mountains were a number of semi-independent states ruled by Uzbek chiefs, including Kunduz, Balkh, and Maimana, while in the north-east were several small Tajik states, among them Shignan, Darwaz, and Roshan. The region of Kafiristan to the east of Kabul, and the Hazarajat to the west were virtually independent (see e.g. Caroe 1983:249, 252/9, Gregorian 1969:46/8, Noelle 1995:21, 124, R. Tapper 1983:12/17).

<sup>2</sup> There were a few important towns, but at this time, largely due to the lack of stable government, trade and the urban economy were in decline (Gregorian 1969:58/9).

<sup>3</sup> Sectarian antagonism was quite marked, and there were serious Imami Shi'ite-Sunni clashes in Kabul early in the nineteenth century for example (Noelle 1995:40).



Linguistic diversity was very marked. Traditionally the language of government was Persian, and in much of the country including Kabul it was the mother-tongue. The other principal language was Pashtu, which was spoken principally to the south of Kabul, from Ghazni to Kandahar and east to Farah, and in the mountains between Afghanistan and the Punjab.<sup>4</sup> Turkish languages such as Uzbeki and Turkmen were spoken mainly in the north. Another Iranian language, Baluchi, was spoken in parts of the south, as was Brahui, a Dravidian language. Several languages, among them Shigni and Ishkashmi, belonging to the eastern Iranian family were spoken in the north-east, and various Indo-Aryan ones, such as Pashai, in the mountainous areas to the east of Kabul (Orywal 1986:46/49, 54).<sup>5</sup> Most if not all of these were also spoken outside the territories which were to form the modern Afghan state; indeed in most cases the majority of native speakers of these languages lived outside them.<sup>6</sup> To some extent, as well as speaking different languages, different people had different customs.<sup>7</sup> Cultural distinctiveness appears to have been most apparent in Kafiristan and among the Pashtuns living on the border between Afghanistan and the Punjab (see e.g. Jones 1974, Poullada 1973:22). Often too people had myths of origin and histories by means of which they distinguished themselves from other groups (see e.g. Singer 1982).

These differences produced some sense of ethnic identity in early nineteenth century Afghanistan, and a large number of 'ethnic' terms or labels were in use, among the most important of which were Pashtun or Afghan (the terms were often used as synonyms), Tajik, Uzbek and Hazara.<sup>8</sup> However, this sense of cultural distinctiveness was stronger and more important among some groups than others. The Pashtuns are a good example. Speaking their own language, they possessed a 'pervasive and explicit segmentary lineage ideology, perpetuated not only in written genealogies but also in the territorial framework of tribal distribution' (R. Tapper 1983:43).<sup>9</sup> They usually thought of themselves as all being descended from a common ancestor, so that in their case in particular ethnicity and kinship (real or supposed) coincided and were referred to by the same term *qawm* (Barth 1969:119, Anderson 1983:125).<sup>10</sup>

At the same it is important to note that Pashtuns were also divided in various ways. There were two great tribal confederations, the Ghilzais, who lived mainly south of Kabul, around Ghazni and towards Kalat-i Ghilzai, and the Durrani, whose homeland was, as noted above, around Kandahar and between Kandahar and Herat.<sup>11</sup> Other Pashtun tribes lived in or near the mountains separating Afghanistan and the Punjab, including Mohmands, Shinwaris,

<sup>4</sup> Pashtu is sometimes transcribed as Pakhtu to reflect the fact that some dialects have harder sounds (Caroe 1983:22).

<sup>5</sup> Pashai belongs to the Dardic family of languages (Ovesen 1986).

<sup>6</sup> Thus Persian was spoken in Iran and Central Asia, Pashtu in Peshawar and in the mountain valleys to the north and south. Uzbeki and Turkmen were spoken in central Asia, and Baluch and Brahui in Baluchistan. Dardic languages were spoken in the valleys of the eastern Hindu Kush and the Karakoram.

<sup>7</sup> There were some differences in, for example, marriage arrangements and ceremonies, as well as in ways of preparing food, styles of building, music and musical instruments, and clothing and its decoration (see e.g. Dupree 1978:240, Jones 1974 passim, Sawez 1986:288, Slobin 1976).

<sup>8</sup> The most exhaustive study of ethnicity in contemporary Afghanistan lists 55 ethnic groups (Orywal 1986).

<sup>9</sup> Following Devalle we may agree that ethnicity is 'a historical phenomenon, subordinated to existing class and centre-periphery contradictions', and is not the product of 'vaguely-defined primordial sentiments'; hence there are 'a plurality of discourses of ethnicity' (1992:16). Undoubtedly the significance of ethnicity remains to be established in any particular case.

<sup>10</sup> The word *qawm* is used by most people in Afghanistan to refer not only to extended family or kindred, but to a whole range of wider groupings (see e.g. Beattie 1982:41, Shahrani 1998:218, R. Tapper 1989:242).

<sup>11</sup> It was these groups in particular, as well as some tribes living in Pakistan, Yusufzais for example, who regarded themselves as 'Afghans' (Caroe 1983:xvi/ii).

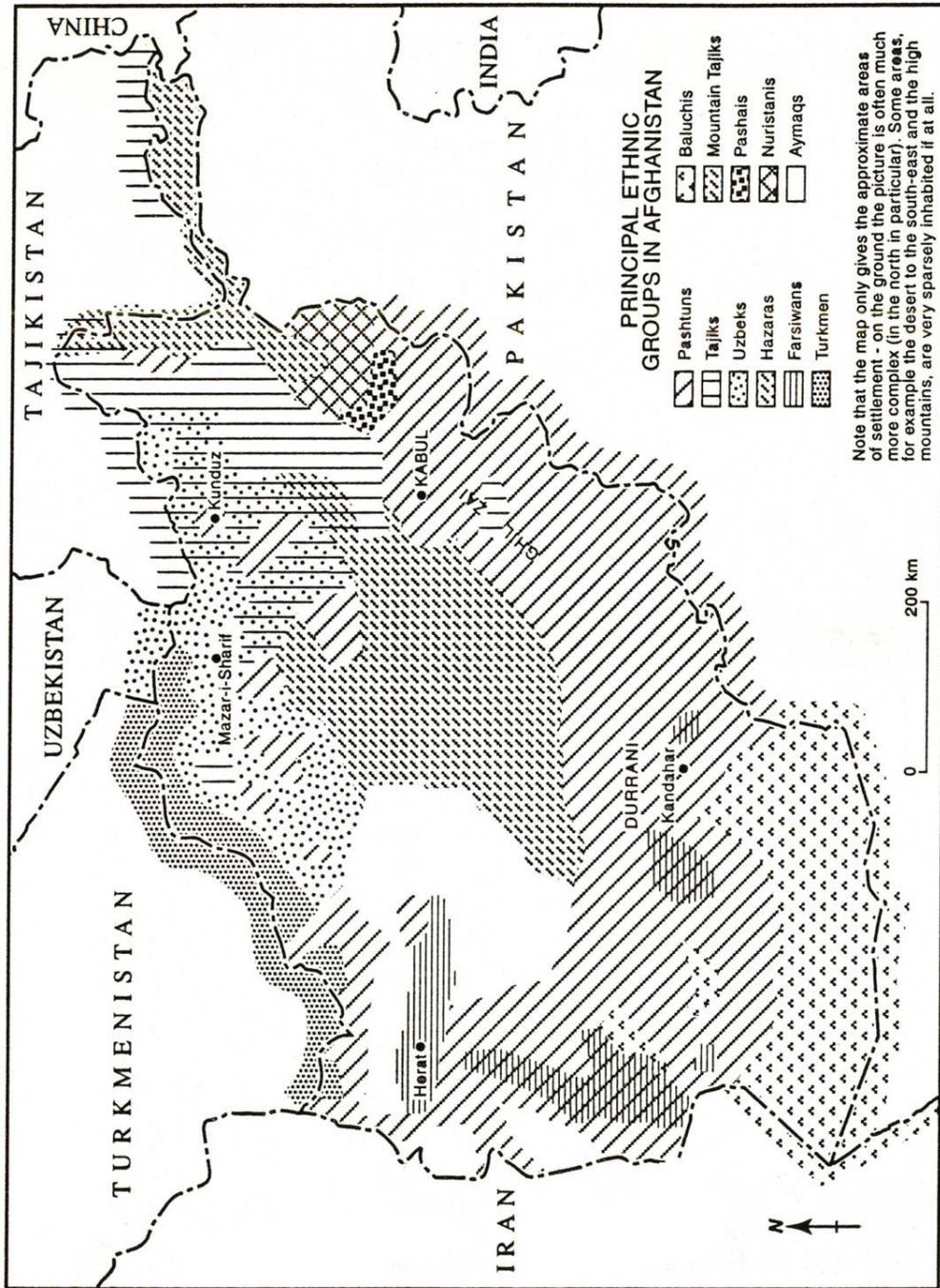
Jajis, Jadrans, Khugianis, Safis, Kakars, and Wazirs (R. Tapper 1983:16/17). There was also considerable variation in their socio-economic and political organisation. Some lived in remote, unproductive mountainous areas and were more egalitarian; others who lived in more productive ones sometimes had a chiefly class.<sup>12</sup> Not surprisingly it was the former, those living in the hills of eastern Afghanistan, who believed most strongly that to be truly Pashtun was to 'do Pakhto' in the sense of following a tribal code of conduct, *nangy pakhtana* or Pashtunwali. This has been described as a 'holistic ethic ... not merely a body of rules', activated 'through *ghayrat*, a notion of altruistic bravery and self-determination' (Anderson 1984:275/6). Distinctive expressions of it were (and are) hospitality, and an emphasis on male equality (hence decision-making by consensus in tribal council or *jirga*). It tended to be accompanied by rivalry between closely-related agnates, known as *tarburwali* (Edwards 1996:64).

Though it is often used as an ethnic label, the term Tajik is of a different order from the term Pashtun, and has quite a complex history. Initially used to refer to the Arab Muslim invaders of Central Asia in the seventh/eighth centuries, it came to mean Persian-speaking Muslims, sedentary people as opposed to nomads. Nowadays it is applied in general to Persian-speakers, both urban and rural, in Central Asia, Afghanistan and Sinkiang, and to the inhabitants of the republic of Tajikistan in particular. In Afghanistan it was used to refer to people mostly living in the north and north-east of the country who spoke Persian (or closely-related languages), were sedentary not nomadic, and had no tribal connection. These included the 'Mountain Tajiks' of Badakhshan, many of whom were Ismailis (Barthold 1982, Schurmann 1962:74, Shahrani 1984:145). Often it appears that the so-called Tajiks identified themselves by their place of origin, and did not feel they had very much in common with others identified in the same way. Other Persian-speakers living in Western Afghanistan were simply referred to as *farsiwan* (literally 'Persian-speakers') (see e.g. Orywal 1982:40).

Also in northern Afghanistan there was a substantial population of Uzbeks, who were often tribally-organised. Indeed in the nineteenth century most people in the region - the Tajiks were the principal exception - were tribally-organised insofar as they belonged to larger groupings, each comprising a number of lineages linked by a belief in shared patrilineal descent from a common male ancestor. Some, the Turkmen and Baluchis for example, possessed an all-encompassing genealogy like the Pashtuns. Others, like the Hazaras, who lived in the central mountains and spoke a dialect of Persian (Hazaragi), were divided into tribes, but did not trace their origins back to a single ancestor (Glatzer 1998:171). As noted above they were Shi'ites, as were the Qizilbash, an urban group descended from the military and administrative personnel left behind by the military adventurer Nadir Shah during his march from Iran towards India in 1739 (Noelle 1995:44). In the north-west there were other tribally-organised groups, including Taimani, Firuzkuhi, Jamshidi, and Timuri, collectively known as Aymaqs (Orywal 1986:29/34). A number of Turkmen groups also lived in northern Afghanistan (R. Tapper 1983:17). In the south and south-west were Baluchis and Brahuis. Lastly, it is worth mentioning that to the north-east of Kabul lived the Kafirs who spoke Indo-Aryan languages (Jones 1974, Orywal 1986:51/56).

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<sup>12</sup> For details see e.g. R. Tapper 1983:43/4, also Ahmed, 1980:116/125, Anderson 1983.



### *Origins of the modern Afghan state -*

It was over this highly diverse population that Ahmad Shah Durrani's successors attempted to establish their authority. As noted above, after Timur Shah's death in 1793 there was a long-drawn out contest to succeed him, in which members of another, closely-related clan, the Muhammadzai, became involved. It was a Muhammadzai, Dost Muhammad Khan,

who established himself as ruler of Kabul in 1826. Though he was defeated in the first Anglo-Afghan War (1839-42) the British allowed him to resume his throne in 1843. In the meantime the Sikh ruler, Ranjit Singh, had been absorbing the eastern Durrani territories, taking Multan in 1818, Kashmir in the following year, and in 1823 Peshawar - Timur Shah's winter capital - and the Derajat. This brought a significant Pashtun population under Sikh (and after 1849 British) rule. Dost Muhammad Khan tried to take advantage of the Sikh attempt to throw off British control in 1848 to regain control of Peshawar and the trans-Indus districts of the Punjab. Failing to do so, he turned his energies elsewhere, and with some British assistance he was able to establish his control over much of what is now Afghanistan, rounding things off with the capture of Herat shortly before his death in 1863 (Gregorian 1969:74/82).<sup>13</sup>

Although it maintained a precarious existence for the next fifteen years, Dost Muhammad Khan's kingdom fell apart during the second Anglo-Afghan war (1878-80). However, it suited the British to allow his grandson, Abdul Rahman Khan, to take control of Kabul and put it together again. Indeed with some assistance from Britain he did a great deal more than this, establishing a considerably stronger and more centralised state. Britain controlled the country's foreign relations and demarcated its borders (to the north in co-operation with Russia), while through a process of 'internal imperialism', Abdul Rahman himself built up the army and extended the government's authority into previously autonomous regions like the Hazarajat and Kafiristan (the inhabitants of the latter were forcibly converted to Islam) (Dupree 1978:417, Gregorian 1969:136). To establish his authority over such a diverse population was a major undertaking, and he encountered considerable opposition; indeed his wars of conquest were 'legendary in their brutality and oppression' (Shahrani 1988:225).<sup>14</sup> The result was nevertheless the foundation of the modern Afghan state.<sup>15</sup>

A central element of Abdul Rahman's strategy was the use of Pashtuns to subdue the non-Pashtun areas, and of Durrani to keep the Ghilzais and other Pashtun tribes in check.<sup>16</sup> Hence, although to some extent these privileges were shared by other Pashtun groups, Durrani in particular enjoyed economic and political privileges such as tax concessions and freedom from conscription, and dominated Afghan society economically and politically (Edwards 1986:205/6, Janata 1990:66, N. Tapper 1991:38).<sup>17</sup> In keeping with this, an important feature of his reign was the establishment of a substantial Pashtun presence in northern Afghanistan for the first time, amounting in some areas to a virtual Pashtun occupation. This not only helped to entrench Pashtun domination, but also split the tribes themselves and made it more difficult for them to oppose him. So more than ten thousand Pashtun families were forced or encouraged to move from the south and east to the lightly-populated lands north of the Hindu Kush mountains. The migrants comprised both Ghilzai farmers from the east - often Abdul Rahman's political opponents - and Durrani, members of

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<sup>13</sup> The last of the emirates in the north, Maimana, did not fall until 1876 in the reign of his son Sher Ali Khan (Lee 1987:116).

<sup>14</sup> According to one source (Martin 1907) he had as many as 100,000 people put to death.

<sup>15</sup> He provided Afghanistan with 'some of the forms and symbols of statehood' (R. Tapper 1983:35). Lee however suggests that the extent to which he created new administrative institutions has been much exaggerated (1996:xxiv).

<sup>16</sup> Pashtun identities had a segmentary quality too, so that although for example Ghilzai and Durrani tended to present a common front against non-Pashtuns, they were themselves rivals. In 1886 for example a rebellion by the Ghilzais led to 'an intertribal war' between them and the Durrani (Poullada 1973:7).

<sup>17</sup> Since the time of Ahmad Shah Durrani (1747-1772), Nancy Tapper suggests, 'the Durrani have constituted an interest group to which economic and political privileges ... accrued by virtue of descent' (1991:38). The non-Pashtun regions, for example, were taxed more heavily than the Pashtun ones (Gregorian 1969:6).

his own tribal confederation, pastoral nomads from Kandahar and the south-west. Pashtuns were also encouraged to exploit the summer pastures of the Hazarajat, though initially few permanent settlements were established there (Kakar 1979:131/5, N. Tapper 1973). The policy of inducing Pashtuns to settle in the north continued in the twentieth century, and where they settled in any number they became the politically and economically dominant group (see e.g. Barfield 1978:29/31, Beattie 1982:38, R. Tapper 1984:235/6).

At the same time the Amir (1880-1901) did try to create some sort of patriotic feeling among his subjects. Referring to them as one 'nation' (*millat*), he promoted the new idea that Afghanistan was a 'single undivided community unified by common obedience to a sovereign authority' (Edwards 1996:87). So, for example, he abolished the tax on non-Pashtuns (the *sarmadeh*) imposed by his uncle, Sher Ali Khan (ruled 1863/66 and 1868/79) (Shahrani 1986:38). He established a National Festival of Unity (*Jashn-i muta fiqqiyya-i milli*) in 1896 and ordered it to be observed annually (Kakar 1968:92). An important aspect of his efforts to legitimise his rule and generate a sense of a shared identity among his subjects was his appeal to Islamic loyalties. His authority came from God, he claimed, and his subjects should obey him because of the need to defend the faith as well as the nation (Olesen 1987:92/6, Gregorian 1969:130/135).<sup>18</sup> Nor was his administration exclusively Durrani or even Pashtun in character (though Pashtu did become the language of the army) (Olesen 1987:106). He did not want to give too much power to members of his own clan for he could never rely on them entirely. In 1888, for example, the governor of Turkestan, his cousin Mohammed Ishak Khan, led the Turkmen tribes in a revolt against him. So although he did use his relatives to maintain his administration, high positions in the small bureaucracy were also awarded to people who could pose no threat, members of the smaller ethnic groups or religious minorities (Qizilbash and Hindus for example, as well as Tajiks) (Poullada 1973:7, Kakar 1979:28/9).<sup>19</sup>

The difficulty of creating a nation-state in Afghanistan was compounded by the fact that the borders which were demarcated in the late nineteenth century by Britain and Russia took no account of existing social, economic and political links. As noted above, since the Sikh conquest of the Punjab in 1823, Pashtuns had lived in two different states, while the mountainous frontier zone between Punjab and Afghanistan remained more or less independent. However in the 1890s, a border (known as the Durand Line) was demarcated between the Afghan and British spheres of influence which ran through these independent tribal areas. The British regarded this as a permanent frontier, but Abdul Rahman was reluctant to do so.<sup>20</sup>

Potentially destabilising trans-border connections also existed in northern Afghanistan. As we have seen, significant numbers of people who could identify themselves (or be identified by others) as Uzbeks, Tajiks or Turkmens lived there as well as in the states to the north. Moreover there were political connections between Central Asia and Afghan Turkestan and Badakhshan, and some of the small states in Badakhshan, like Shignan and Roshan - which were conquered by Abdul Rahman in the early 1880s - actually straddled the Amu Darya (see e.g. Lee 1987:114, also 1996 *passim*). But it was convenient for the British to adopt this river as Afghanistan's northern frontier, and with Russian co-operation to demarcate a new north-western border between it and the Hari Rud. Abdul Rahman and the

<sup>18</sup> However, it should be noted that it was Hanafi Sunni Islam in particular which he promoted, and he declared jihad not only against the polytheist Kafirs but also the Shi'ite Hazaras (Olesen 1987 *passim*).

<sup>19</sup> When he took over in Kabul ten clerks supervised by one official handled the entire central government administration (Dupree 1978:420).

<sup>20</sup> It was an 'ethnological monstrosity' according to one author (Fletcher 1965:248).

Amir of Bukhara had no choice but to accept these arrangements (Alder 1963:168/90, Gregorian 1969:74, Dupree 1978:422). In this way, as happened in the east and south-east, a frontier was created which took no account of current political, economic and social relationships. Something similar happened to the west. Herat had been ruled by the Iranian Safavids from the early sixteenth to the early eighteenth century, and many of the inhabitants of western Afghanistan were Shi'ites, so that it would have been as easy for them to accept the authority of the government of Iran as the one in Kabul.

*Nationalism and ethnicity in the first half of the twentieth century –*

Efforts to reinforce the legitimacy of the Afghan state continued under Abdul Rahman's successors. During his son Habibullah I's reign (1901-1919), a group of educated 'Young Afghans' who wanted to develop national consciousness and modernise Afghanistan emerged, of whom the most influential was Mahmud Tarzi.<sup>21</sup> Extending Abdul Rahman's arguments, he maintained that Islam enjoined 'love of country within the broader Islamic community', and that it was therefore the subject's religious duty to support the state and its ruler (Gregorian 1969:360, also 159, 174, Poullada 1973:41/2).

But the contradictions remained unresolved. As noted above, the word 'Afghan' can be a synonym for 'Pashtun', so that use of the term Afghanistan suggested the domination of one group. As one Uzbek put it, 'the very name of the country is an insult to us' (Shalinsky 1994:98). There remained a strong undercurrent of opposition to Pashtun domination, particularly in the areas of northern and central Afghanistan where Pashtuns were settled from the late nineteenth century on, and sometimes the government had to use force to deal with this (Barfield 1978:30, Shalinsky 1986:300). In addition, the government remained reluctant to accept the partition of the Pashtun territories imposed by the British in the 1890s, and continued to maintain contacts with the tribes living on the British side of the Durand Line (Wyatt 1997:195).

Habibullah was assassinated in 1919 and succeeded by his son Amanullah. Amanullah fought a brief war with Britain in the same year, following which by the Treaty of Rawalpindi Afghanistan regained control of its foreign affairs and was recognised as fully independent. Commemorating Afghan resistance to British domination was a way of trying to generate support for the state, and the festival of Jashn was used to celebrate the successful outcome of this war (Dupree 1978:530). Amanullah also tried to persuade the British government to recognise Afghan suzerainty over the Pashtuns on both sides of the Durand Line. This was rejected, and he responded with 'clumsy intrigues in the tribal areas' (Poullada 1973:67). As regards developments on the northern frontier with the USSR, it is worth noting in the 1920s and 1930s significant numbers of Uzbek, Tajik and Turkmen refugees from Soviet Central Asia crossed the border into Afghan Turkestan (see e.g. Shalinsky 1994). In the 1920s anti-Soviet rebels (pejoratively referred to as *basmachi* - 'bandits'), of whom the best-known was Ibrahim Beg, sometimes used northern Afghanistan as a base for raids into Soviet territory.<sup>22</sup>

King Amanullah hoped to emulate the Turkish and Iranian rulers, Ataturk and Reza Shah, by introducing westernising 'reforms', and for a time the modernising intellectual,

<sup>21</sup> Exiled by Abdul Rahman, the Tarzi family were allowed to return to Afghanistan after his death. In exile they lived in Syria where Mahmud Tarzi was influenced by the Young Turks (Poullada 1973:36, 40).

<sup>22</sup> Ibrahim Beg was driven out of Afghanistan by Afghan forces and killed by the Soviets in 1931 (Fraser-Tytler 1967:230).

Mahmud Tarzi, was one of his most important advisors. As well as appealing to religious loyalties, Tarzi followed nineteenth century European nationalists in emphasising the importance of the links between language and national identity. Afghan nationalism, he argued, should be based on Pashtu rather than Persian. 'We possess specific customs, ethics and a national language which we call Pashto', he said, and 'every citizen of Afghanistan must learn the language, even though they (sic) may not be a Pashto-speaker, and our schools must make the teaching of this language their most important vocation' (in Mousavi 1997:158). In the 1920s the attempt officially to associate Afghan national identity with Pashtun culture and values began in earnest, and the Pashtu Tulana (academy) was established to encourage research in Pashtun history and culture and promote a national ideology. At the same time it should be noted that Pashtuns still did not monopolise the important offices. Tajiks in particular occupied important positions in the government and the bureaucracy; indeed the Tajik Muhammad Wali Khan was for a time Amanullah's Prime Minister, and acted as his regent while he visited Europe in 1927/8 (Poullada 1973:73, 201).

However, Amanullah's position was much weaker than Reza Shah's or Ataturk's. The tribes and the religious leaders continued to oppose his centralising and modernising policies, and a rising by Shinwaris in eastern Afghanistan in November 1928 spread to other areas.<sup>23</sup> A Tajik named Habibullah, usually slightly referred to as Bacha-i Saqqao (son of the water-carrier), raised a force in the Koh Daman area to the north of Kabul and took control of the city, proclaiming himself Habibullah II in January 1929 (Poullada 1973:160/178). This seizure of power reflected 'Tajik resentment of Pushtun domination', and revealed deep ethnic tensions (Poullada 1973:28).<sup>24</sup> Indeed it encouraged the indigenous inhabitants to try and drive Pashtuns out of some areas in the north where they had settled.<sup>25</sup> But Pashtuns greatly resented Tajik rule in turn, and Habibullah II's reign was a brief one. With the aid of the tribes of India's north-west frontier, Wazirs and Mahsuds in particular, a distant cousin of Amanullah, Nadir Khan, formerly Minister of War, retook Kabul in October 1929. Rather than restoring Amanullah, Nadir Khan became king himself (Caroe 1983:407, Fraser-Tytler 1967:225).<sup>26</sup>

Although Habibullah II had surrendered on promise of safe conduct, he was hanged. This caused much resentment, and led by his uncle, the Tajiks of the Koh Daman rebelled again in 1930. Indeed much of northern Afghanistan remained more or less independent, though towards the end of the following year Nadir Khan was able to bring it under control again (Fletcher 1965:228, Shahrani 1986:53, Poullada 1973:180, 195/6). In passing it should be noted that the only non-Pashtun group which had supported Amanullah in significant numbers was the Shi'ite Hazaras. This was mainly because Amanullah had allowed them to celebrate the Muharram rituals publicly (Rubin 1995:58). Nadir Khan himself was assassinated in 1933, and acting as regents for his 19-year old son Muhammad Zahir Shah, his brothers ruled the country for the next twenty years (Gregorian 1969:342/374).

So Pashtun dominance was restored, and in most areas the government went on turning 'a blind eye to the oppression of minority groups' by Pashtuns and particularly

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<sup>23</sup> Among other things he attempted to extend conscription to the tribes (Gregorian 1969:252, Poullada 1973:147).

<sup>24</sup> Members of other minority communities often resented the part Tajiks played in the government (Hyman 1992:71).

<sup>25</sup> In the Saripul area, for example, Uzbek peasants resented the domination of Pashtun khans and there was conflict between them at this time (R. Tapper 1984:244).

<sup>26</sup> He eventually left for India and exile in Italy (Dupree 1978:454).

Durrani (R. Tapper 1984:242).<sup>27</sup> There was continuing ambivalence about national identity. During the 1930s the government used the ‘Greater Aryan’ theory to try and prove that all Afghans, whatever their history, religious background or ethnic origin, were descended from Aryans and were therefore related. It was claimed that the ancient Aryans founded their first kingdom near Balkh in northern Afghanistan somewhere between 3,500 and 1,500 B.C. From there, the story went, they spread east to India and west to Iran (Gregorian 1969:345/7).

But the Aryan theory was also used to ‘consolidate the historical and cultural ties of the Pathans living in Afghanistan and the borderlands’ (Gregorian 1969:347). Not only was there a tacit policy of political and cultural discrimination against non-Pashtuns, but the government maintained the explicit emphasis on its Pashtun character which had begun under Amanullah. Even though Persian (or Dari as it is officially referred to in Afghanistan) was the traditional language of government and administration throughout the region, Pashtu was proclaimed the official language in 1937. It was taught in schools and civil servants were forced to attend special classes to learn it.<sup>28</sup> Moreover events at the end of the 1920s seemed to underline the government’s dependence on the Pashtun tribes, and some groups living near the border with India were exempted from military conscription and taxation (Rubin 1995:62). It is true that even after 1929 the government continued to make use of non-Pashtuns and was not exclusively Pashtun in character. Persian-speakers as well as Pashtuns became senior provincial administrators, for example, but the former were rarely if ever appointed to important positions in Pashtun-majority provinces (Griffiths 1967:66/7, Kakar 1995:57). In addition, arguing that the Pashtuns constituted a ‘nation’ in the modern sense, the Afghan government continued to claim that it had the right to speak for the Pashtun tribes on the British side of the Durand line, and to maintain links with them. This made it more difficult to create an inclusive ‘Afghan’ national identity which could appeal to the non-Pashtun minorities in Afghanistan itself.

#### *Afghanistan after W.W. 2 –*

Though there had been some cautious modernisation in the 1930s and 1940s, the country remained undeveloped and conservative, and many areas were still quite isolated. However after the second world war things began to change. The Soviet Union started to play a more important role, partly because of Afghanistan’s rivalry with Pakistan over the Pashtunistan issue which is discussed below. Soviet and Western aid made it possible among other things greatly to improve the road network which to some extent facilitated national integration. In particular construction of the Salang tunnel (opened in 1964) through the Hindu Kush mountains made communication between north and south much easier. Educational and health provision was extended, and conscription was made virtually universal (Newell 1986:114). A number of large-scale agricultural development projects were also inaugurated, but these were almost all in areas in which the Pashtuns were in the majority or had settled in some numbers (Griffiths 1967:66/8). The ruling elite continued to interpret Afghan nationalism in Pashtun terms, in particular the King’s cousin, Daud Khan, who was Prime Minister from 1953 to 1963 (Shahrani 1986:58/9).

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<sup>27</sup> See Edwards (1986) for details of continuing Hazara opposition to the Kabul government.

<sup>28</sup> This could be described as ‘state nationalism’, insofar as assimilation meant integration into the culture of the ruling ethnic group (Markakis 1994:225). It is interesting to note in this connection that administrative units were drawn up and named so as to avoid any reference to other identities. So, for example, Afghan Turkestan was divided into several smaller provinces, and the name Turkestan fell into disuse (Shahrani 1988:229).

In this period the Pashtunistan issue also came to the fore. As Indian independence approached, the Afghan government anticipated that British withdrawal might make it possible for Afghanistan to incorporate the Pashtun-majority areas to the east of the Durand Line, and it called for the frontier tribes to be offered the option of independence. But they were only given the choice of joining India or Pakistan, and they opted for Pakistan. The Afghan government responded by calling for the independence of the Pashtun-majority areas of Pakistan (referred to as Pashtunistan).<sup>29</sup> However, although it never explicitly demanded their incorporation into Afghanistan, this was not unreasonably seen in the rest of Pakistan at least as a stalking-horse for Afghan irredentism (Caroe 1983:436/7, Wirsig 1981:15).<sup>30</sup>

The Prime Minister, Daud Khan, was a strong supporter of Pashtunistan. With tacit support from the government in the early 1950s tribal armies several times crossed from Afghanistan into Pakistan in large numbers, ostensibly in the Pashtunistan cause, and until his death in 1960 the government intrigued with the Fakir of Ipi in Waziristan (Dupree 1978:492/3). This was much resented in Pakistan, and relations deteriorated seriously when Afghan troops as well as pro-Afghan Pashtun tribesmen crossed into the Bajaur area of Pakistan in 1960 and in 1961 into Dir. The government requested Afghanistan to close its consulates and trade agencies, provoking Daud into closing the border between the two countries in August 1961. He could not resolve the resulting crisis and resigned in 1963. Little if anything was achieved by this Pashtunistan policy; among other things it undermined the Afghan state's legitimacy in the eyes of its own non-Pashtun minorities (Hyman 1992:49/50).

Daud's resignation gave the King the opportunity to exercise his authority for the first time, and an attempt was made to inaugurate a parliamentary system of government. Elections were held in 1964 and 1969, but political parties were never officially allowed to contest them. Nevertheless from 1963 to 1973 political life was somewhat freer and more open. The King disagreed with Daud's Pashtunistan policy, and believed that minorities should be directly represented in the government. A conscious effort was made to ensure that cabinets included members of different ethnic groups, among them, it would appear for the first time, Hazaras (Harpvikan 1998:513, see also e.g. Mousavi 1997:149/50, 159, Shahrani 1986:63). There were some other minor concessions to non-Pashtuns - some minority languages were recognised as 'national' languages and radio broadcasts were made for a time in some of them. Through the programmes of Radio Afghanistan a new 'national' musical style was also developing (Bailey 1994:58). As we have seen, more and more young men were spending some time as conscripts in the army. A small but growing minority of Afghans from different backgrounds were being educated in modern schools and exposed to western political ideas, and many found employment in the expanding educational system. As a result it appears that a sense of national identity was beginning to emerge (Edwards 1986:218, Hyman 1992:71).<sup>31</sup>

However, it was still a very fragile one. Modernisation does not automatically bring integration, and when states create new institutions and begin to interfere more directly in people's lives older identities may acquire a new significance. Elections to the Afghan

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<sup>29</sup> In 1949 the Afghan government declared the 1893 Durand Agreement and subsequent Anglo-Indian treaties referring to the status of Pashtuns null and void, and refused to recognise the Durand Line as the border with the new state of Pakistan (Dupree 1978:489).

<sup>30</sup> Suspicion regarding Afghan aims arose, for example, because Afghanistan also continued to call for the revision of the Durand Line, something which would appear to have been incompatible with the creation of a separate Pashtun state in the frontier areas of Pakistan (Wirsig 1981:15).

<sup>31</sup> The opening of the military academy to non-Pashtuns in the 1960s ended the Pashtun monopoly of the officer corps (Hyman 1992:71).

parliament undoubtedly exposed ethnic rivalries in a number of areas (see e.g. Centlivres and Centlivres-Demont 1998:10).<sup>32</sup> The most pervasive division was between Pashtuns and others, and in various constituencies Pashtun candidates were challenged, sometimes successfully, by candidates representing coalitions of numerically dominant non-Pashtuns (Dupree 1978:652, Shalinsky 1986:300, R. Tapper 1984:244).<sup>33</sup> Even among the left-wing groups which emerged in the 1950s and 1960s, and included Pashtuns, Tajiks, Hazaras and Uzbeks among their members, there was a sense of ethnic rivalry, even hostility. They briefly united to form an unofficial political party, the People Democratic Party of Afghanistan in 1964. But it soon split, and one of its former members, Tahir Badakhshi (a Shi'ite Tajik), set up a party known as Sitam-i Milli ('national oppression'), which focused on ethnic issues (Anwar 1988:41, Hyman 1992:60). Maintaining that the two main factions of the P.D.P.A. (Khalq and Parcham) were 'agents of the Pashtun ruling class', Badakhshi argued that non-Pashtuns were suffering from ethnic rather than merely class oppression, and as 'oppressed nationalities' needed to be freed from Pashtun domination (Kakar 1995:55, Shahrani 1984:156/7).<sup>34</sup>

Many observers have commented on what Fletcher calls the 'ethnic pride' of the Pashtuns (1965:246). Anderson suggests that traditionally for Pashtuns difference tended to mean hierarchy, and because of this they could only envisage inter-ethnic relationships as unequal ones (1978:5). In particular they remained very reluctant to allow Pashtun women to marry non-Pashtun men because in their eyes this would suggest inferiority. All this meant that in their case especially integration was unlikely to go very far. Barriers between some other groups - Uzbeks, Tajiks and Aymaqs for example - were not as rigid. However, Hazaras in particular were usually regarded as having a lower status, partly because they were Shi'ites, and women from other groups were usually not permitted to marry Hazara men (see e.g. Centlivres 1976:12/13, N. Tapper 1991:39/41).

In areas where Pashtuns settled they did tend to own more and better land, but Afghan society was not fully stratified on ethnic lines. There were poor Pashtuns as well as wealthy ones, just as there were wealthy people from other ethnic backgrounds, so it is fair to say that political dominance was not always reflected in economic terms. However there were sometimes obvious links between ethnic identity and economic status, so that, for example, the Hazaras who moved to Kabul in search of work tended to form a class of badly-paid manual workers (see e.g. Glatzer 1998:170/1).

For various reasons the parliamentary regime became less popular in the early 1970s, and in 1973 Daud was able to use his supporters in the army to overthrow the monarchy and make himself president in a largely peaceful *coup d'etat*.<sup>35</sup> Not surprisingly his government

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<sup>32</sup> Griffiths suggests that when police (mostly Uzbek and Hazaras) fired on student demonstrators (mostly Pashtun) in Kabul in 1965, killing three and wounding many more, they were expressing ethnic hostility (1967:73).

<sup>33</sup> As far as numbers are concerned, a reasonable guess is that there are about 9 million Pashtuns in Afghanistan today, about 4 million people who could be identified as Tajiks even though they may not have seen themselves as necessarily having much in common apart from language, about 1.5 million Hazaras and about the same number of Uzbeks (see e.g. Glatzer 1998:169/172). There are probably about 750,000 Farsiwan and from 100,000 to 200,000 thousand Turkmen, Baluchis and Brahuis, Nuristanis, and Pashais.

<sup>34</sup> Left-wing ideas, it is worth noting, were not the only ones which appealed to disaffected young Afghans in this period. Some, including Burhanuddin Rabbani (later leader of the Jamiat-i Islami *mujahidin* party) were attracted by the Islamism of the Muslim Brothers and Abul Ala Maududi, and began to form an Islamist opposition (Roy 1985:94/105, Shahrani 1984:158/9).

<sup>35</sup> Among other things a serious drought began in the late 1960s and there was considerable distress in the early 1970s (see e.g. Rubin 1995:79).

had a more Pashtun character. His first radio broadcast was in Pashtu rather than Dari, the minor concessions that had been granted to non-Pashtuns in the previous decade were withdrawn, and he revived the Pashtunistan issue. He also interfered briefly in Pakistani Baluchistan. There is a significant population of Baluchis in Pakistan (and Iran) as well as Afghanistan, and when in 1973 a violent movement for autonomy broke out among Pakistani Baluchis, it received some Afghan support (Dupree 1978:756/7, Hyman 1992:69, Shahrani 1986:63). However, an Afghan national identity might still have continued to develop had it not been for the collapse of the authority of the central government which followed the overthrow of President Daud in a military coup in April 1978 (the so-called Saor Revolution).<sup>36</sup> During the coup there was some fighting, mainly in and around Kabul, in the course of which he and most of his relatives were killed, and his family's rule of Afghanistan ended.

*Developments during and after 1978 -*

As a result of the Saor Revolution a new left-wing government took power determined to modernise the country on socialist lines. A number of new laws were issued covering among things rural indebtedness, marriage expenses and land ownership (see e.g. Shahrani 1984). There was also an attempt to introduce a Soviet-style 'nationalities' policy. The country's ethnic heterogeneity was formally recognised, and limited broadcasting and publication began in some of the country's principal minority languages (Hyman 1992:85). Several non-Pashtun ministers were appointed, but Pashtuns continued to dominate the government, although now the critical positions were mostly held by Ghilzais rather than Durranis (Anwar 1988:41, 120).

The disruption caused by the reform programme and opposition to the government's close links with the Soviet Union led to the outbreak of armed revolt in various areas. This became sufficiently serious for the USSR, fearing that the government might be overthrown, to occupy the country with over 100,000 troops during the winter of 1979/80. Many were Uzbeks, Tajiks and Turkmens, as it was believed that this would make the occupation more acceptable to the Afghans. It turned out, however, that they could not be relied upon to fight against people who professed the same religion and sometimes spoke the same language, and they were gradually replaced (Dupree 1984:70/1). Inspired by religious loyalties and resentment of foreign interference, many Afghans began fiercely to resist the Soviet occupation and it proved impossible to subdue the country.

External support and the ability to base themselves in Pakistan enabled the different *mujahidin* groups to keep up the military pressure, and the USSR began to look for a way out. Eventually in 1989 Soviet troops were withdrawn leaving a puppet government led by Dr. Najibullah, an Ahmadzai Ghilzai Pashtun. During the 1980s, it should be noted, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia had acquired considerable influence among Afghans, particularly Pashtuns, many of whom became refugees in Pakistan. Most of the arms supplied by the West to the *mujahidin* were channelled by Pakistan to predominantly Pashtun groups such as Gulbudin Hekmatyar's Hizb-i Islami (Rashid 1998:74).<sup>37</sup> In the early 1990s Iran decided to try and build up its own influence in Afghanistan, concentrating on non-Pashtuns and endeavouring

<sup>36</sup> Discontent grew among in the country generally in the 1970s, particularly among the increasing number of unemployed university graduates, and communists recruited in the officer corps (for details see e.g. Hyman 1992:71/2).

<sup>37</sup> Hekmatyar is a Kharoti Pashtun from Imam Sahib, near Kunduz in northern Afghanistan (Rubin 1995:289).

to create an anti-Pashtun front. In 1991 Soviet aid to Afghanistan ceased, and this gravely weakened Najibullah's government. With encouragement from Iran, his principal military commander, the Uzbek general Abdul Rashid Dostum, deserted him. Dostum joined forces with the Jamiat-i Islami military commander, Ahmad Shah Massoud, and in 1992 their troops entered Kabul. A new government was set up, headed by a Tajik, the Jamiat-i Islami leader Burhanuddin Rabbani. But the Hizb-i Islami leader, Gulbudin Hekmatyar, refused to recognise this, and fighting continued (Ahady 1998:122/3).

At this point Pakistan was anxious to develop its trade through Afghanistan with the newly independent Central Asian republics. Deciding that it would be much easier to do so if Hekmatyar was in power in Kabul instead of Rabbani, Pakistan gave him considerable backing (Ahady 1998:122/3).<sup>38</sup> But he proved unable to bring down the Rabbani government, and in 1994 Pakistan (and Saudi Arabia) switched their support to the Taliban.<sup>39</sup> This was a movement of Pashtun religious students, many of whom had grown up in refugee camps across the border in Pakistan. With assistance from Pakistan they took control of the southern city of Kandahar in 1994, and in 1995 conquered Herat. This alarmed Iran and Russia, who themselves began to supply arms to the government in Kabul.<sup>40</sup> However, capitalising on the widespread sense of Pashtun frustration caused by the fact that Kabul was in non-Pashtun hands for the first time since 1929, the Taliban entered Kabul in 1996 (Rashid 1998:79/81, Roy 1998:208). After an abortive attempt to occupy the last major opposition stronghold, the northern city of Mazar-i Sharif, in 1997, they succeeded in doing so the following year. Nevertheless, with support from Russia, Iran and India, Massoud has continued to resist the Taliban, and much of the north-east remains independent (Ahady 1998:131/2).<sup>41</sup>

To sum up, it is clear that since the late 1970s ethnic identities have become much more politically significant in Afghanistan. At that point political allegiances were broadly determined by communist or Islamist sympathies, although even then ethnicity tended to dictate support for one religious or left-wing group rather than another. Tajiks, for example, often followed the Jamiat-i Islami, led by Rabbani, a Tajik, while Pashtun immigrants to the north tended to join the Pashtun Hekmatyar's Hizb-i Islami. But since 1978 the ideological aspect has become much less important. Political and economic disintegration, foreign occupation, and in many cases the experience of being a refugee in Pakistan or Iran, have encouraged people to fall back on older identities and give them a new significance. Markakis argues that in the Horn of Africa - another region characterised by social diversity and political instability - ethnic identities are being 'defined in the process of interaction - co-operation, competition, confrontation, even war - among groups' (1994:236). Something similar has been happening in Afghanistan, and the process appears to have accelerated with the power-struggle which followed the downfall of the Najibullah government in 1992. The

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<sup>38</sup> Following the discovery of oil in large quantities in the Caspian Sea area, in 1995 UNOCAL, an American oil and gas company based, signed agreements for the construction of two pipelines to carry Turkmenistan's oil and gas through Afghanistan to Pakistan (its partner in the project was the Saudi oil and gas company, Delta) (Hyman 1998:105, Ahady 1998:129).

<sup>39</sup> Saudi Arabia appears to have given the Taliban considerable financial assistance (Ahady 1998:132).

<sup>40</sup> Iran anticipated that if the anti-Shi'ite Taliban took power it would lose its influence in Afghanistan, while Russia feared that a militant Islamic government in Kabul would threaten the stability of Central Asia (Ahady 1998:127/31).

<sup>41</sup> The capture of Mazar-i Sharif was followed by a massacre of Shi'ite Hazaras (see e.g. *Independent* London, 29/11/98). In the summer of 1999 following the failure of an offensive against Massoud's forces in the Panjshir valley, there have been reports that the Taliban have driven most of the inhabitants of the Koh Daman area between the Panjshir and Kabul (who were predominantly Tajiks) from their homes (*Guardian* London 20/10/99).

Hizb-i Wahdat, for example, founded in the late 1980s, is exclusively Hazara. Hazaras, it should be noted, have grown in ethnic self-confidence as a result of the war and are the most politically integrated group today (Glatzer 1998:171, 181). The Shi'ite aspect of their identity appears to have acquired additional significance in recent years, partly in response to the 'visceral anti-Shi'ism' of the militantly Sunni Taliban (Roy 1994:123).

The most obvious fault line, however, is the one between the Pashtuns and the rest. On the one hand Tajiks and Uzbeks in particular have tended to unite against them, and it appears that many Pashtuns have left the north (as well as the Hazarajat) (Mousavi 1997:187, Rasuly-Palezcek 1998:221/2, Spain 1995:125/6). In 1997, for example, Uzbeks, Hazaras, and Tajiks, joined forces to drive the Taliban out of Mazar-i Sharif, and the towns on the road to Kabul (Ahady 1998:134). On the other, most Pashtuns, including people who did not share their particular interpretation of Islam, as well as former communists, have come round to supporting the Taliban (Maley 1998:15).

However, regional, tribal or sectarian loyalties often remain significant. Within the Jamiat-i Islami, for example, people from Badakhshan have tended to follow Rabbani, a fellow Badakhshi, while the Panjshiris have followed Massoud, who comes from the Panjshir (Roy 1998:206). As for the Pashtuns, it appears that the Taliban have not permanently eliminated traditional segmentation. Rather they 'embody the resurgence of a traditional phenomenon in Afghanistan: the coming together of Pushtun tribesmen, in a time of crisis, under a religious and charismatic leadership' (Roy 1998:208/9). Nor, it should be noted, have any of the parties in Afghanistan publicly committed themselves to creating a new state based on one ethnic community, or to promoting the interests of any particular group. Even the Shi'ite Hazaras are fighting for autonomy not for independence (Glatzer 1998:180/1). In Afghanistan, as in many other ethnically-divided countries, different ethnic groups want a bigger share of the resources commanded by the existing state rather than separate states (Hobsbawm 1992:154/5, Markakis 1994:154/5).

A further complicating factor has been the independence in 1991 of the political units which the Soviet Union created in Central Asia in the 1920s. There have been calls for Uzbeks, Tajiks and Turkmens living in northern Afghanistan to be incorporated into Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan respectively. In 1995, for example, Tajikistan's Minister for the Interior, Yaqubjan Salimov, appealed for Afghan Tajiks (and those living in Uzbekistan) to come under unified Tajik rule. Although this was hastily repudiated by the rest of the government, the speech did reflect 'populist nationalist undercurrents' in Tajikistan (Hyman 1998:105/6). Similarly some Uzbeks, Tajiks and Turkmens in Afghanistan are in favour of closer links with the Central Asian republics, and some Afghan leaders have built up cross-border connections. Massoud, for example, had a good relationship with the Islamist opposition in Tajikistan, and was invited to participate in the negotiations for a settlement there in 1997 in return for growing logistical support (Saikal 1998:41).

#### *Summary and conclusion -*

In the early nineteenth century, following the collapse of the Durrani empire, in the area occupied by the present state of Afghanistan there were a number of small states and principalities which had an ethnic character insofar as they were mostly ruled by members of one or other group, in particular Pashtuns, Tajiks, Uzbeks or Hazaras. Some regions, particularly along the frontier with India, were occupied by more egalitarian tribally-organised groups. People were divided in many ways, not just by regional identification and political

allegiance, but also by way of life, religion and sect (especially the latter), kinship and tribe, language and culture, and historical tradition. Some groups, in particular Pashtuns, appear to have had a stronger sense of ethnic identity than others, Tajiks for example. So ethnic diversity existed when the modern Afghan state was founded, and had some political, social and economic significance.

It was this highly divided population that with British help the Muhammadzai Durrani set about incorporating by force into the new state of Afghanistan. A recent study suggests that ethnicity - though important - has not in itself played a critical role in the development of the modern Afghan state. Rather it is the 'moral incoherence of Afghanistan itself', and the absence of a 'moral discourse of statehood shared by a majority of its citizens', which are responsible for the country's chequered political development since the later nineteenth century (Edwards 1996:3/4). Is this perhaps mistaking the effect for the cause? Cultural factors undoubtedly played a very important role (Anderson's suggestion that in traditional Pashtun society cultural difference tends to mean inequality seems relevant here for example). Although the Durrani administration was never exclusively Pashtun, it did rely on fellow-Pashtuns and fellow-Durrani in particular in various ways, for example encouraging them to move to the north so as to increase their control over it, as well as giving them various privileges. It has been suggested that Abdul Rahman created a nation state (Kakar 1979:232). In fact, given that to a considerable extent Pashtun domination was institutionalised, it may be argued that he laid the foundations of an 'ethnocentric' one, and that this was continued by his successors who, for example, tried to make Pashtu the official language and showed a tendency to favour Pashtuns when it came to taxation and the allocation of resources generally.<sup>42</sup> The difficulty was compounded by Abdul Rahman and his successors' unwillingness to accept a *kleinafghanistan* and sever their ties with Pashtuns living outside their territory. As we have seen, especially after Indian independence Afghan governments called for autonomy or independence for the Pashtuns in Pakistan. This helped to destabilise Afghan political development, on the one hand by upsetting non-Pashtuns in Afghanistan and on the other by inviting Pakistani interference in retaliation.

In spite of this, as modernisation gathered pace after 1945, and new institutions and a more powerful administration were created, it appears that some sense of Afghan national identity was beginning to spread more widely. At the same time the creation of new institutions and new outlets for political activity, for example parliamentary elections, did sometimes generate a more explicit awareness of ethnic differences. Nevertheless, had political stability been maintained, it seems likely that the sense of Afghan national identity would have continued to become stronger. However, the breakdown of the authority of the central government after 1978, the Soviet occupation, and continuing foreign interference in the 1990s, have significantly altered the pattern of development, encouraging the politicisation of ethnic identities and their violent expression.

It is difficult to predict the outcome. Although as we have seen a strong sense of national identity never really developed, even now it seems that most Afghans would like the Afghan state rebuilt so as to make it more inclusive and less oppressive rather than simply

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<sup>42</sup> 'Ethnocratic state' is a term coined by Ali Mazrui (1975). Not surprisingly amongst Afghan historians there are heated debates going on about the nature of the Afghan state and the extent to which it institutionalised ethnic inequality. The historian Hassan Kakar, whose background is Pashtun, has tended to present the emergence of the modern Afghan state in a generally positive light, although he has not tried to gloss over the harshness of Abdul Rahman's rule (1979). Other scholars from different backgrounds - such as the Uzbek Nazif Shahrani and the Hazara Sayed Askar Mousavi - have taken a different and much more critical line.

demolished. To that extent it has acquired a kind of de facto legitimacy in their eyes, even if they disagree deeply about the shape it should take. The fact that neighbouring countries continue to support different groups within Afghanistan complicates the position, but the Taliban might well be able to reunite the country if they were willing to allow some genuine local autonomy. Judging by their behaviour so far they seem unlikely to do so. Under the circumstances a fairly low-level civil war seems likely to continue, and ethnic divisions and tensions are likely to worsen, and could yet lead to the country's disintegration.

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