

## 8. The Ethnicisation of the Conflict

As the result of regionalisation each of the parties was inevitably driven to recruit from a constituency which increasingly comprised a single ethnicity. Between 1994 and 1998 the political disposition on the ground and that of the major ethnic groups largely coincided. Hezb-i Wahdat was entirely Hazara, Jombesh was predominantly Uzbek, Jamiyat-i Islami was for the most part Tajik, and the Taliban drew its membership essentially from the Pushtuns. In this situation some parties used the rhetoric of community to mobilise support; the appeal to the *jihad* was no longer sufficient to guarantee support for a group. The situation of Hezb-i Islami exemplified this transformation. To offset its marginalisation Hekmatyar increasingly turned to the argument that Pushtun interests must be defended, an argument presented at first in less formal contexts but in due course more overtly, as in the party's daily newspaper *Shahadat*.

This appeal to community solidarity was logical in view of the much increased tension between communities manifested in massacres targeted against particular communities. The towns, and in particular the capital, had ceased to be ethnic melting-pots. In pre-war times inhabitants of different ethnic origins had made their homes in their own particular areas of Kabul, but the existence of the governing class and the effects of the urban way of life served to foster the emergence of a Kabuli identity. This tendency lost its momentum when the war began. In Mazar-i Sharif in the 1990s recurrent clashes had weakened the urban identity, so that relationships between ethnicities deteriorated. Even in Herat, which continued to typify the urban melting-pot where intercommunal tension was low, the situation in the outskirts of the town steadily worsened. The collapse of the state and of the educational system caused linguistic frontiers to become more marked than before. In Kandahar, for example, the Pushtuns spoke less Persian, while it became rare for Pushtu to be

taught in the north. These processes were reinforced by the media; on the radio the ethnic affiliation of the leaders was, at least implicitly, presented as a factor explaining their political positions. Such leaders as Rabbani, who came from Badakhshan, and Masud, from Panjshir, began to be described as 'Tajik'.

Although the war certainly gave ethnic affiliation a political significance, this was a process with implicit limitations. Within the operations of the parties the ideology of ethno-nationalism never dominated, while local solidarities were always the determining factor. In any case two different processes, between which it is important to distinguish, were subsumed under the idea of ethnicisation. In the case of Hezb-i Wahdat and Jombesh-i Melli, although ethnic rhetoric was openly employed, the official party line remained ambiguous. Shi'ism and not Hazara nationalism remained the ideological foundation of Hezb-i Wahdat, while Jombesh maintained somewhat vaguely that its doors were open to all the 'northern communities'. On the other hand, neither Jamiyat nor the Taliban based its strategy on ethnic affiliation but set itself instead the goal of reunifying the country. Ethnicisation was therefore an unintended and counter-productive result of regionalisation, rather than a strategy of mobilisation.

### *Ethnicisation as a strategy*

Although Hezb-i Wahdat and Jombesh claimed respectively to represent the Hazaras and the 'Turks', the ethnic strategies of these two parties were validated in two different ways. Hezb-i Wahdat was constituted as a movement for the unification of the Hazara parties, and reflected a strong popular demand for autonomy. However, for Jombesh ethnic mobilisation was largely a political stratagem by the Parchami communist functionaries wanting to survive the collapse of the regime.

*Hezb-i Wahdat.* The launching in 1990 of Hezb-i Wahdat (Party of Unity) was an event of critical importance not only for Hazarajat, whose political aspect it profoundly altered, but also for the Afghan political landscape as a whole. The ethnicisation of politics and the process of regionalisation were already implicit within it.

At the close of the 1980s popular discontent over the endless war between the Shi'ite parties prompted the notables and religious leaders to call for a general ceasefire. The palpable loss of confidence in the parties created a climate propitious to political change, but the crucial impetus came from Iran. The reason was that its leaders, not having taken part in the Geneva negotiations, feared marginalisation in the context of a Soviet-Pakistani agreement and had decided, to make every effort to create a Shi'ite front able to exert its influence in the field of politics. It was therefore no accident that the initial preparatory meeting was held at the precise moment when the Soviet withdrawal became a certainty, taking place at Panjao between 12 and 16 July 1988. At this meeting the decision was taken to set up a *Hasta-yi Wahdat* (Nucleus of Unity), whose task would be to prepare the way for the unification of the parties. On 1 September 1988 delegates meeting at Lal o Sarjangal issued a twelve-point declaration which ratified the union between Sepah and Nasr and specified Bamyan as seat of the future movement. Hezb-i Wahdat was officially inaugurated on 16 June 1990 in Teheran, with the participation of Shura, Nasr, Sepah and other smaller groups. Only *Harakat-i Islami* persisted in staying outside the new party.

Hezb-i Wahdat set up its headquarters at Bamyan. Its leadership consisted of representatives from Nasr, Sepah, Shura, Niru, Nehzat and Dawat, the parties which had united. This council was unelected, its members holding their positions *ex officio*. There was also a *shura* with a membership of several hundred, delegated by the parties, some of whom were elected by popular vote. With the exception of Sayyed Hasan *jaglan*, who took charge of military affairs, all the leading figures were *ulema*, notably the president Abdul Ali Mazari, a former Nasr leader; Muhammad Akbari, a former leader of Sepah; and Muhammad Karim Khalili, the movement's spokesman. Hazarajat was administratively divided according to the various pre-war provinces and districts. From 1988 onward the old regime's buildings were gradually rebuilt. In general the organisation recalled the early days of the Shura. In theory there was military service, and taxation was raised.

The creation of a Hazara party capable of overcoming partisan divisions and presenting a united front against the Pushtuns and the Sunnis in general was greeted in many places by a wave of nationalist

fervour. There was no doubt that popular support sprang from the nationalist agenda rather than support for revolutionary Shi'ism. Notwithstanding its religious rhetoric, the formation of Hezb-i Wahdat was primarily an expression of the Hazara community, as was demonstrated by the failure of attempts to expand the movements to all the Shi'ites, in particular the Qizilbash. Hezb-i Wahdat never succeeded in enlarging its membership beyond its original constituency of Hazaras, run by clerics;<sup>1</sup> for example, Harakat-i Islami refused to become part of Hezb-i Wahdat because its leader *ayatollah* Mohseni was non-Hazara, as were many of its activists, and Harakat-i Islami's relations with Iran were difficult. After fruitless negotiations over a merger with Harakat-i Islami, Hezb-i Wahdat's leadership attempted to recruit Harakat's commanders individually. This strategy was of limited effectiveness, although it met with some success in Ghorband and Behsud, and the two parties contrived a *modus vivendi*. In addition Hezb-i Wahdat never really succeeded in recruiting cadres other than Hazara clerics.

*Jombesh.* Jombesh-i Melli (National Front) was established and developed very differently from all the parties previously discussed, since its basis was an alliance between the northern militias and the Parchami cadres who had supported Babrak Karmal. In fact Dostum remained close to Karmal up till his death in 1996. Fifteen years of war had given a distinctive political personality to the northwest provinces, where the policy of national reconciliation had met with some success. The region was structured on a framework of positions where the government was well represented, while its political and to some extent its economic centre was the town of Shibergan rather than Mazar-i Sharif. The region was the only one to offer a haven to which the militias and the members of Hezb-i Watan could withdraw after the collapse of the government.

The militias of Rashid Dostum and of Rasul Palawan at Maymana comprised the military basis of Jombesh.<sup>2</sup> The Ismailis, who con-

<sup>1</sup> However, some of the *khans'* sons, with little political background, had some success in joining Hezb-i Wahdat, where their technical abilities made them welcome.

<sup>2</sup> A list of the main leaders of Jombesh, with their ethnic affiliations is given by Esedullah Oguz in *Afghanistan*, Istanbul: Cep Kitaplari, 1999, p. 26.

trolled a crucial position on the road between Mazar-i Sharif and Kabul, also gave their support to Rashid Dostum, but were inclined to maintain their autonomy politically. In addition to the regional militias, groups which had been militarily defeated tended to rally to Jombesh. This was the case particularly with the militiamen of Herat after their expulsion by Ismail Khan at the end of 1992. Numerous *mujahidin*, in particular those from Hezb-i Islami, also joined. After the disappearance of Harakat-i Enqelab in the north-west, the *mujahidin* mainly regrouped into the two opposing parties, Hezb-i Islami and Jamiyat-i Islami. This polarisation encouraged Hezb-i Islami's commanders to join Jombesh, although in Kabul these two parties were in opposition. This was probably due more to the disintegration of Hezb-i Islami in the north than to a strategy of infiltration prompted by Hekmatyar. Some Harakat-i Enqelab commanders, especially in the province of Samangan, rallied to Jombesh for financial reasons. For example *rais* Abdul Rahman, who was appointed governor of Faryab in 1992 without real power, was a former Harakat-i Enqelab commander. A splinter group such as that of Azad Beg, who proclaimed his allegiance to Uzbek nationalism, also saw fit to join Jombesh, although it had probably been created originally by the Pakistan secret services to destabilise Soviet Uzbekistan. Jombesh also attracted figures 'independent' of the parties, in a direct continuation of the policy of National Reconciliation, particularly after the fall of the Kabul government. Finally, in certain instances when offers of membership failed, Jombesh undertook political assassinations, like that of the responsible Jamiyat-i Islami figure in Almar, Afizullah Fateh, while he was negotiating with Rasul Palawan at Maymana in 1992.

Jombesh was an amalgam between the state administration and the militias. The militia commanders were integrated into the army: Rashid Dostum was a general, although he had no formal military training. Within Jombesh any boundary between the regular army and the militia lost its meaning, since the militia leaders were in the midst of regular army officers and organised their men on the same lines. Jombesh commanders were also established locally and in the countryside. In practice the militia chiefs retained close links with their villages of origin, where they had built up a clientele. There was a sense of distance from the towns as a result of the militia com-

manders' local roots. This was naturally more true of *mujahidin* recruits such as Rasul Palawan than of Dostum himself, who regarded Shibergan as his base more than he did his native village.

From the ideological point of view Jombesh was formally organised as an Islamic movement. However, the attitude of the party officials left little doubt about their real beliefs: their acceptance of Islam was entirely pragmatic and tactical, within the continuation of the policy of National Reconciliation. Their alliance with the Ismailis was another measure of the sincerity of their affiliation to an Islamic ideology. In reality Jombesh's Islam was non-political, and was restricted to law and to religious ritual. In the government *madrasas* the *mullahs* wore western dress—suits and overcoats—and Soviet Islam inspired the approach of the official clergy. In these *madrasas* future *ulema*, entirely identified with officialdom, were under the strict control of the authorities.

Although official announcements avoided all reference to any particular ethnic group, propaganda emphasised the 'Turkish' personality of Rashid Dostum, the party's principal leader, and Dostum's travels in Uzbekistan and Turkey were represented as the result of ethnic solidarity.<sup>3</sup> Was such nationalism behind Uzbekistan's support for Jombesh? Uzbekistan's support is explained rather, in terms of the search for a reliable ally to guard its southern frontier and not as ethnic solidarity between Uzbeks, which seems to have been a marginal factor. The construction of an Uzbek nationalism such as Jombesh envisaged was certainly not encouraged by Uzbekistan, which would not have considered any challenge to its frontiers with Afghanistan. In practice, however, part of the armaments received by Jombesh's forces came from the Uzbek army's arsenal; the frontier was relatively open and trade was lively. In addition Turkmenistan had opened a new road to Andkhoy. Dostum's aircraft sometimes made use of the airbase at Termez, but Uzbekistan's assistance had its limits: for example fuel deliveries were not adequate.

In any case, ethno-nationalist mobilisation clashed with the complexity of communal affiliations, whence the ambiguous expression

<sup>3</sup> In 1992 Rashid Dostum began a series of trips to Turkey which would put him in touch with various Turkish politicians, such as the parliamentary deputy Ayvaz Gökdemir, a former *ülküçü* (ultra-nationalist) then supporting Tansu Ciller, as well as officials of the regime. See Esedullah Oguz, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

'Peoples of the North' found in some Jombesh documents. For example, because of the presence of a Turkmen minority it was the broader 'Turkish' rather than the 'Uzbek' aspect on which stress was laid. In addition Tajiks and Hazaras were represented in Dostum's militias, and this, added to the alliance with the Ismailis, necessitated a degree of rhetorical prudence. The region of Turkestan, from Faryab to Balkh, had never been politically unified, although the attempt at secession made in 1888 by Ishaq Khan, governor of Turkestan, seems to have been welcomed by the population.<sup>4</sup> Ethnic distribution on the ground in northern Afghanistan was extremely complex, and did not lend itself to nationalist mobilisation.<sup>5</sup> In essence the north-west provinces of Faryab, Jozjan and Sar-i Pul might be seen as predominantly Uzbek, with strong Turkmen minorities in Andkхой and along the frontier as far as the province of Kunduz. Pockets of Uzbek population were also found in the eastern provinces of Takhar and Badakhshan. However the idea of an Uzbek identity as such was less of a mobilising force than the multiple tribal identities of peoples of widely different origins and characters, making sense only in relation to a contrasting overall identity. For example, Turkish and Mongol groups pronounced themselves to be Uzbeks when in contention with Tajik or Pushtun neighbours.

For the Jombesh functionaries the problem was therefore to initiate nationalist mobilisation in a context where only local identities existed. The intention was to move from communal solidarity, based on *qowms*, to a more abstract loyalty oriented towards a 'macro-ethnicity' identified with Jombesh's para-statal apparatus. This transition required both an ideological framework and methods of mobilisation. In the urban context the party continued to mobilise using methods reminiscent of those of Hezb-i Demokratik-i Khalq-i Afghanistan. Although the subject-matter might have changed, the style of propaganda was still that of the former regime, especially as its officials had mostly continued to carry out their functions. Jombesh systematically used nationalist symbolism: in Shibergan the street-

<sup>4</sup> Jonathan Lee, 'The History of Maymana in Northwestern Afghanistan, 1731–1893', *Iran* 35, 1987. Ishaq had a Pushtun father and an Armenian mother, but he had been able to enlist the support of the northern population by promising independence for Turkestan.

<sup>5</sup> Pierre Centlivres, 'L'histoire récente de l'Afghanistan et la configuration ethnique des provinces du nord-est', *Studia Iranica* (Paris) 5 (2), pp. 255–68.

names were changed to demonstrate affiliation to 'Northern Afghanistan'. The Pushtun village of Pushtun Kot was re-named Imam Saheb, a sign of rejection of the Pushtun presence in the north. The new street-names referred to Uzbek personalities or reverted to historical nomenclature, as in Khorasan. In education Central Asian languages—Uzbek and Turkmen—were adopted, which posed the problem of converting to the Cyrillic alphabet, to open the door to Uzbek and Turkmen literature. Pushtun was abandoned.

To strengthen its position Jombesh attempted to enlist the Uzbek and Turkmen regions in northern Afghanistan to boost its 'ethnic sphere' and strengthen its control over the frontiers, especially in the province of Kunduz. In this region the commanders were affiliated mainly to Hezb-i Islami, and to a limited extent to Jamiyat-i Islami.<sup>6</sup> Political activities such as the forging of alliances and transfer of allegiance from one party to another were undertaken for local community reasons connected with the village or the clan, without reference to any solidarity to a 'macro-ethnicity'. From 1992 relations with Jombesh were established on the basis of material considerations such as gifts of petrol, vehicles and money; the commanders maintained their link not for ideological reasons but rather to bolster their local power with the help of a powerful ally. What led to the emergence of an ethnic ideology was the reaction of other parties in the province who were unsettled by the ascendancy of Jombesh. From this point of view the clashes of the autumn of 1993—when Jombesh's new recruits, rapidly reinforced by Dostum's forces who arrived from Mazar-i Sharif, clashed with the commanders of the provincial *shura*—solidified the communal boundaries. The attacks mounted by the other parties and the looting which followed created tensions between the Turkmen communities on the one hand and the Pushtuns and Tajiks on the other, which justified their affiliation to Jombesh after the fact. The Turkmen commanders were in any case not taken in by this blackmail, which drove them somewhat against their will into the arms of Jombesh, with which they had few ideological affinities. Thus ethnically motivated enlistments to Jombesh apparently concealed other processes more complex than nationalist fervour.

<sup>6</sup> In Imam Saheb Hezb-i Islami sought Uzbek rather than Pushtun recruits. Allegiance was based here on social rather than communal proximity.



Jombesh's nationalist mobilisation nevertheless ran up against a series of obstacles. First, it was not able to draw on popular demands as strong as those of the Hazaras. Even among its own functionaries, Jombesh's nationalist rhetoric was a matter of expediency since the majority were former Parchamis who were unlikely to have been Uzbek nationalists by conviction. However, with the passing of years tensions appeared, since ethnic affiliation became a determinant of access to power. Secondly, even within Jombesh the motivating force of the *qowms* continued to be stronger than either the language of nationalism or party solidarity. The assassination of Rasul Palawan, the Jombesh leader at Maymana, mobilised the solidarity of his *qowm*, rather than strengthening Dostum, who has ordered it, so that Rasul Palawan's brother Malik entered an alliance with the Taliban which led to the first fall of Mazar-i Sharif in 1997.

#### *Ethnicisation as an unintended consequence*

In contrast to Hezb-i Wahdat and Jombesh, the influence of the Taliban and Jamiyat-i Islami was never intended to be limited to a single geographical region or community. At the outset these two movements sought to restore a central state, but political developments restricted them to recruitment in practice from a single ethnic community, with consequences for their activities.

*Jamiyat-i Islami.* Although it was the most firmly entrenched party at the point of the Soviet withdrawal, Jamiyat saw itself progressively driven back into the northeast quarter of the country. Its decline began with the agreement between Masud and Jombesh, which had the effect in the northwest of marginalising Jamiyat, led by *mawlawi* Alam in Mazar-i Sharif. In 1994 the arrival of the Taliban in the south led to Jamiyat's loss of its Pushtun commanders, and the loss of Herat in 1995 completed the regionalisation of the party. In addition the establishment of Hazara and Uzbek nationalist parties meant that in reaction some Tajiks were liable to identify themselves politically with Jamiyat.

On the other hand, a number of factors militated in practice against Jamiyat's slide towards Tajik nationalism. The preponderance of Tajiks within Jamiyat did not lead to a neglect of local identities in

favour of a Tajik identity, which continued to be elusive. The leaders themselves rejected ethnicisation and turned instead to identities which were either more local or broader. During the war Ismail Khan refused to admit his ethnic identity precisely to avoid the interpretation of his actions in this light.<sup>7</sup> Until the fall of Kabul, Rabbani relied during his presidency on a clientele based on a province rather than on an ethnic group, and surrounded himself with Badakhshis rather than with Tajiks in the wider sense. Masud regarded himself more as a Panjshiri than as a Tajik, and the war reinforced the identity of the inhabitants of the Panjshir valley to the point where it virtually became an ethnicity.

Further, the creation of a coherent political region was never possible, and indeed would not have responded to a demand, as in the case of Hazarajat, since the complexity of the distribution of ethnicities in fact made the formulation of a demand for a Tajik territory impossible. The Tajiks, in the event of a demand for a federal structure, would not have been able to lay claim to a homogeneous and viable territory. In any case the principal leaders of Jamiyat-i Islami refused to contemplate a federal state; rather, despite the Tajik presence, most of the larger towns tended to favour attachment to the Afghan state rather than to any ethnic loyalty. In the last resort Jamiyat was constructed by Islamist networks established in the pre-war period on a political rather than a communal basis. What was seen in the end was a reinforcement of local solidarities, which guaranteed both loyalty and access to resources, rather than a Tajik ethno-nationalism. The effectiveness of these networks was balanced by a progressive exclusivity of Jamiyat-i Islami which, at any rate in Kabul, seemed increasingly to be in the hands of the Panjshiri *qowm*.

*The Taliban.* The initial success of the Taliban was astonishing, but after the south of Afghanistan had fallen into its hands it encountered structured organisations that controlled mainly non-Pushtun populations, for example in Herat. As a result it recruited only among the Pushtuns, and although it never identified itself as such, it was seen

<sup>7</sup> In fact Ismail Khan, like his deputy Allauddin, was a Persian-speaker from the region of Shindand, but having lived in a Pushtun environment he spoke both languages fluently.

by many as enabling a return to the traditional Pushtun domination of Afghanistan's national territory.

In this sense the Taliban is sometimes described as a 'tribal' or 'nationalist' Pushtun movement, two concepts which were not always distinguished from each other. However, it was a movement dominated by a group of religious individuals, who established their authority with no reference to tribal institutions, which in any case barely existed in the region of Kandahar where the movement had its base. Taliban law was greatly at variance with tribal customs. The hypothesis that it was a tribal movement cannot be sustained, since neither tribes nor clans were represented in their own right within it.

In addition the Taliban movement was founded on a fundamentalist ideology opposed to all nationalist pretensions. Its official goal was the reunification of all Afghans under an Islamic government. It rejected all national or tribal justifications and took satisfaction in drawing attention to the presence within the movement of non-Pushtuns such as *mullah* Ghaysuddin Agha, who was a member of the *shura* of Kabul and came originally from Badakhshan. On two occasions ideological tendencies alien to the Taliban attempted to appeal to a putative Pushtun solidarity in an attempt to make use of the movement, and its failure is in itself informative. Former communists believed at one point that they could insinuate themselves into the Taliban movement on the basis of Pushtun solidarity. At first the Taliban accepted them since their officers were particularly important for a relatively unstructured movement without military experts other than some Pakistani officers. After the capture of Kabul, however, most of the former communists were ousted or even physically eliminated. Also, the royalists wanted to make use of the Taliban to put the king or his heir back on the throne, making their appeal to the origins of the Afghan dynasty in Kandahar. Here again harsh disillusionment followed since the religious and charismatic nature of the Taliban was incompatible with the royalist project.

Within the movement local solidarities were a stronger mobilising force than affiliation to a Pushtun ethnicity as such. For example, *mullah* Omar is from Tarin Kot in the province of Uruzgan, and a strong representation of his countrymen was to be observed in positions of authority, e.g. *mullah* Abbas. In addition, *mullah* Omar was a Ghilzai Pushtun Hottak, a group which Pierre Centlivres has estab-

lished was over-represented in the Taliban government.<sup>8</sup> Other solidarity networks existed, such as that between *mujahidin* who had previously served under the same commander, such as *mawlawi* Jala-luddin Haqqani, formerly of Hezb-i Islami (Khales). On a more personal level the ministers and the governors surrounded themselves with members of their own families—e.g. *mullah* Muhammad Abbas and his family in the Ministry of Health.

Still, the Taliban retained a distinct Pushtun sensibility, especially in cultural affairs, tending to reject the Persian culture which was the basis of the training of *ulema* in pre-war times. Teaching in the *madrasas* of the North-West Frontier Province was traditionally carried out in Pushtu and Arabic. The Pushtuns had also continued to nurture the desire once more to achieve domination within Afghanistan's national territory. This attitude did not necessarily demonstrate the existence of a nascent—or re-nascent—nationalism, but rather the wish to perpetuate an ethnic hierarchy dominated by Pushtuns. Further, the Taliban did at some points employ ethnic arguments to mobilise support. For instance, in 1995 as Ismail Khan advanced towards Kandahar, it appealed to Pushtun solidarity against a Tajik aggressor. Similarly in the north its preference for alliances with Pushtun minorities gave credence, with hindsight, to the ethnic prejudices of both sides. The Taliban was also led by confrontation and suspicion to institute discriminatory practices, for example against the Panjshiris of Kabul who were suspected of assisting Masud.

### *The challenge to the ethnic hierarchy*

The civil war and the collapse of the state undermined the informal ethnic hierarchy according to which relations between groups had been organised. Such political transformations had as their consequence that the pre-war ethnic hierarchy no longer appeared 'natural', i.e. it was not accepted by all sides. The Pushtuns had in fact lost the leverage of the state, which had once given them a considerable advantage, while the other communities armed themselves for the struggle against the Soviets and in the process acquired their autonomy. Several groups underwent a change of status during the war, in particular the Hazaras and the Uzbeks who in the past had often

<sup>8</sup> Personal information, March 1999.

been mistrusted and excluded from the army and political authority. These changes had tangible effects on relations between ethnicities: examples were a ban on Pushtun nomads from pasturing their flocks in Hazara territory, and pressure on Pushtun minorities in the north due to competition for land. There was an asymmetry between ethnicities and regions which should not be overlooked. The Pushtun south was ethnically homogeneous, and tensions were therefore centred on the north. In these provinces the Pushtun minorities were often subjected to pressure by their neighbours and therefore generally supported the Taliban. In particular the tensions arising from this challenge to the position of communities caused a number of massacres. Few of these explicitly targeted an ethnic group, and the majority were directed against the Hazaras. On 11 February 1993 Sayyaf and Masud's troops launched an attack on the Shi'ite party Hezb-i Wahdat, which lost control of Afshar, a district west of Kabul. The victorious troops were given their head, and perhaps as many as 2–300 civilians were massacred by Sayyaf and Masud's men in an episode which continued till 14 February. Witnesses claim the *mujahidin* went into houses and carried out various atrocities, including rapes, killings and the mutilation of bodies.<sup>9</sup> In 1998 during the second capture of Mazar-i Sharif the Taliban massacred hundreds of Hazara civilians. Witnesses agree on the facts: the Taliban took the town and during the following three days slaughtered the Hazaras, going into houses to uncover and kill men of fighting age. There were probably several hundred victims. The bodies were left in the streets for several days, after which the Taliban made members of the public pick up the bodies and bury them in the common graves used the year before for the bodies of Taliban prisoners massacred by Malik's forces after the first capture of the town in 1997.<sup>10</sup> On the evidence of eye-witnesses, the executions were carried out on the basis of ethnic and religious affiliation, since in the north Hazaras were not easily distinguishable. It is possible that Pakistani fundamentalists—who are also supposed to have been responsible for the death of the Iranians who were in Mazar-i Sharif—may have played a role

<sup>9</sup> See Etienne Gille, 'Crimes à Afchar', *Les Nouvelles d'Afghanistan*, no. 60, 1993, p. ii.

<sup>10</sup> Eye-witness accounts collected in Mazar-i Sharif, April 2000, and in Pakistan in 1999.

in these killings. This would explain why the Shi'ite Hazaras, who did not bear the main responsibility for the massacres of 1997, should have been the sole targets. Nothing on a similar scale took place in relation to the Uzbeks.<sup>11</sup> There were to be no further massacres on this scale, but various operations in Hazarajat were notable for their brutality, including on several occasions the killing of civilians and in particular old men. In June 2001 the Taliban took and destroyed the town of Yakaolang, Hezb-i Wahdat's fief in the heart of Hazarajat.<sup>12</sup>

How does one explain such massacres? The first point to emphasise is that they cannot be accounted for by a desire to exterminate a particular group or carry out ethnic cleansing of the kind seen in the Balkans. There was in fact no ethnic cleansing on a major scale in Afghanistan in the 1990s, although local minority groups were the victims of pressure from neighbours who coveted their lands. The survivors of victim groups were able later to return to the same spot, since there was no systematic attempt at the transfer of populations.<sup>13</sup> For example, after the clashes in Bamyan, the Hazaras returned to their villages, and similarly there was no flight of Hazaras after the massacres in Mazar-i Sharif.<sup>14</sup>

The Taliban rebuilt a centralised authority at a local level, exploiting its alliances with local solidarity networks, a circumstance which militated against the politicisation of identity construction on the base of local ethnicities. In November 1998 Muhammad Akbari joined up with the Taliban, on the grounds of its recognition by the Shi'ite *ulema*; the Taliban in turn recognised them as legitimate *ulema*, with the aim of making use of them as arms of the central state.<sup>15</sup> In Bamyan

<sup>11</sup> However, the Uzbek village of Zari (Balkh) suffered a massacre after being re-taken by the Taliban in May 2001.

<sup>12</sup> 'Afghanistan, Paying for the Taliban's Crimes: Abuses Against Ethnic Pushtuns in Northern Afghanistan', *Human Rights Watch*, April 2002, vol. 14, no. 2.

<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless mention might be made of at least two places, the Bangi valley (Takhar) and Robatak (Samangan), where Pushtun or Gujjara populations moved in after the eviction of Hazaras, Tajiks or Uzbeks.

<sup>14</sup> The Taliban took responsibility for a number of war crimes at Bamyan, including cutting the throats of several dozen old men, and the summary execution of dozens of civilians.

<sup>15</sup> This was in striking contrast to the Pakistani Deobandis, who were violently anti-Shi'ite.

the Taliban made a local alliance with the Tajiks in order to overcome the Hazaras. Their standpoint was in practice a return to the pre-war ethnic hierarchy, which was incompatible with ethnic cleansing. There was no wish to put a halt to multi-ethnic coexistence, but such tolerance was only made possible because the communities stood in a hierarchical relationship, a situation which offers a brutal explanation of the massacres to which the Hazaras were subjected. The Hazaras were not recognised as equal interlocutors, since this would have breached the ethnic hierarchy. The massacres can therefore be seen as in essence part of a move towards internal reconquest, and were not without echoes of the campaigns conducted by Abdul Rahman Khan at the close of the nineteenth century.

In contrast, as developments that followed the fall of the Taliban confirmed, the parties in the north—Jombesh, Hezb-i Wahdat and Jamiyat-i Islami—tended in the direction of driving the Pushtuns out of the north. The conflicts brought about a transformation of national feeling, by way of a new connection between national identity and communal affiliation. In exile the only Afghan national identity acknowledged by the Pakistani government and the humanitarian aid agencies manifested itself paradoxically to the detriment of regional and tribal identities.<sup>16</sup> Exposure to a quite different way of life also gave rise to a feeling of common identity between exiled Afghans, who at least shared similar interests if not the same opinions. In the same sense the presence of hundreds of thousands of Pushtuns in Pakistan often gave rise to tensions between the newly-arrived population and the host country, which tended to reinforce the feeling of being Afghan to the detriment of a trans-border Pushtun identity. Although 70% of the refugees came from the Afghan provinces bordering Pakistan, there was no general integration between the local population and the refugees.<sup>17</sup> The settlement in the frontier regions of several hundred thousand Afghans with Pakistani identity cards had not up to that point resulted in assimilation.

<sup>16</sup> Pierre Centlivres, Micheline Centlivres-Demont, *Afghanistan Info*, 29, March 1991.

<sup>17</sup> Richard English, 'The Economic Impact of Afghan Refugee Settlement on the Tribal Areas of North-West Pakistan', UNHCR, unpublished, 1989, p. 35.

## 9. The Clerical State

The Taliban regime can be interpreted in several different ways.<sup>1</sup> The hypothesis defended here is that its power was of a religious or, more precisely, a clerical nature. A comparison with revolutionary Iran in terms of three key factors will help to illuminate the unique nature of the Afghan situation. These factors are (1) the identity of the actors; (2) the institutional model adopted; and (3) the plan of social organisation.

(1) While in Afghanistan it was a group of *ulema* which took power, the political actors who emerged from the revolution in Iran were much more varied. The Iranian clergy had been largely inactive during the twentieth century except at certain moments of crisis, and were far from unanimous in their backing for Khomeini.<sup>2</sup> The urban population, who were the major agents of the revolution, did not regard Khomeini solely or even principally as a cleric. **A further element of difference here was that the relationship between the *ulema* and the Islamists was different in Iran and Afghanistan. In Iran the *ulema* and the Islamists acted in collaboration, while in Afghanistan the opposition between these two groups was deepening.** In the Iranian revolution also the mobilisation of urban groups was a crucial factor, in contrast to the rural origins of the Taliban's rank and file.

(2) As for the institutional model, although the Iranian regime is authoritarian and the constitutional principle of the *wilayat al-faqih* placed serious restrictions on the freedom of the administration, the government nevertheless emerged from contested elections. In con-

<sup>1</sup> See in particular William Maley (ed.), *op. cit.*

<sup>2</sup> On these issues see Farhad Khosrokhavar, *L'utopie sacrifiée. Sociologie de la révolution iranienne*, Paris: Presses de la Fondation nationale des sciences politiques, 1993; and Paul Vieille, 'L'orientalisme est théoriquement spécifique? A propos des interprétations de la révolution iranienne', *Peuples méditerranéens* 50, Jan.-March 1990, pp. 149-61.



trast to the situation in Afghanistan, Iranian political life was complex, with opportunities for the exercise of liberty.

(3) Although religious puritanism was a consideration in both countries, the social models in the two cases were very different. The Iranian revolution was primarily a phenomenon of modernisation, while the aims of the Taliban were reactionary. We consider these issues further in relation to the Afghan case by means of a sociological study of the personnel of the revolutionary movements, an examination of state structures, and an analysis of the puritanical order imposed by the regime.

### *The party functionaries*

The Taliban was not a political party in the classic sense, since the movement had no clear structure and soon became indistinguishable from the state.<sup>3</sup> The social origin of its officials showed a high level of uniformity, and this consistency of membership was the source of the movement's unity. The party functionaries were generally Push-tuns, poor and of rural origin, with no education except what they had received in the *madrasas*. Brought up during the war—*mullah* Omar was born around 1961—they had fought as members of various parties, but had seldom held positions of responsibility since they had little in the way of education, religious charisma or notability to recommend them. The new ruling class was therefore entirely alien to the bourgeois and urban world from which Afghan élites had hitherto emerged. Their status as 'outsiders' partly explained their coherence as a group.

Their rise to power, the result of a collective mobilisation, enabled them to occupy positions of prestige and authority out of proportion to what they could have expected within the Afghan society of the 1970s, when the prestige of the *ulema* had been in decline. *Mullah* Omar himself, the son of a poor family, did not complete the studies which would conventionally have given him the right to the title of *alem*. His position as head of the Taliban represented a new departure in the political and religious field. Under the Taliban the

<sup>3</sup> Membership of the movement was signified by the fact of having fought in Taliban groups or of carrying out administrative duties. This is the conclusion from the decrees of *mullah* Omar, where he calls for the expulsion of corrupt members of the movement (Decree 49, *Gazette* 788).

great families lost most of the prestige on which they relied both as *ulema* and as brotherhood leaders.<sup>4</sup> They were not absorbed into the Taliban, although the *ulema* linked to the Mujaddidi family in the Ghazni region did join it after having already installed locally a fairly similar fundamentalist political system themselves. The ousting of the dominant families was the result of a twofold process. Although the heirs of these families combined religious knowledge as *ulema* with hereditary charisma as *pirs*, they were too implicated in political manoeuvres, corruption and the associated violence to appear as a credible alternative. An instance of this phenomenon was the erosion of the legitimacy of the two great family networks, the Gaylani and the Mujaddidi, both directly linked to political parties whose influence was waning and which were notorious for their nepotism. Subsequently, without competent officials and lacking support from Pakistan, these parties were unable to play a significant role on the ground.

Positions of authority were held entirely by *ulema* belonging to the closed circle of 'historic' Taliban—those who had joined in the early days. The social homogeneity of the Taliban leadership and the unchallenged authority of *mullah* Omar may explain why there were never internecine armed clashes or moves towards defection as a result of internal tensions, even after resounding defeats such as that at Mazar-i Sharif in 1997. In this the Taliban differed from all other Afghan parties. However the opacity of its administration has meant that it is difficult to analyse its internal decision mechanisms.<sup>5</sup> For instance, there was never any serious basis for the supposition of hostility between *mullah* Omar and *mullah* Rabbani, to which attention was once regularly drawn. There were probably some disagreements between leaders who were keen to achieve international recognition, such as that between *mullah* Abdul Muttawakil (Minister for Foreign Affairs) and *mullah* Muhammad Abbas Istanekzai (Minister of Health), on the one hand, and certain commanders, including

<sup>4</sup> In addition, *ulema* who emerged from the government *madrasas*, who if they were politicised were in general modernisers and Islamists, tended to take the side of Masud's opposition, where they were not given positions of authority within his organisation.

<sup>5</sup> An informant in Kabul in 2000, who was himself a judge and an *alem*, verified that information on the workings of the Taliban government was unavailable except to a few hundred Taliban *ulema*.

Dadullah, on the other. However, *mullah* Omar continued to be the unchallenged arbiter.

Although the Taliban movement was coherent it was not monolithic, and the networks of which it consisted may be differentiated, in the first instance geographically. Under more detailed analysis three groups of *ulema* can be distinguished: first, those from the region of Kandahar, who were directly aware of *mullah* Omar; secondly, the *ulema* of Ghazni and Logar, south of Kabul, who were historically close to the Mujaddidi family and enlisted in 1995 and 1996; and finally the *ulema* in the east of the country, such as *mawlawi* Haqqani. The significance of local solidarities, sometimes of tribal, has already been examined. The existence of separate networks did not imply ideological differences, and there is nothing to suggest irreconcilable tensions. The reality was that access to the resources of the administration was shared, an outcome achieved through compromise.

The key experience shared by the group was the education of its members in the Pakistani *madrasas* in the 1980s.<sup>6</sup> Most of the *ulema* at the level of the leadership had emerged from the *madrasas* of the North–West Frontier Province and Baluchistan, for example the Dar ul–Ulum Haqqaniya *madrasa* at Akora Khattak in NWFP.<sup>7</sup> From this *madrasa* came *haji* Ahmad Jan, Minister of Mines, *mawlawi* Qalamuddin, head of the religious police, and *mawlawi* Arefullah Aref, deputy Minister of Finance. One of the few former commanders to become a leader of the movement, *mawlawi* Haqqani from Hezb-i Islami (Khales), spent several years at the *madrasa* Dar ul–Ulum Haqqaniya, first as a student and then as a teacher. An address by *mullah* Omar was read from the platform at the ceremony marking the

<sup>6</sup> When considering the following facts one must bear in mind that membership of the Taliban was different in 2001 from what it had been on its first appearance in 1994. The Taliban was at first made up of a few hundred theology students, but their numbers were substantially boosted by the membership of *mujahidin* from the former parties, and from the government itself, as well as by the recruitment of young men with no prior experience at a time when many of the Taliban ‘old guard’ had been killed in the fighting of recent years. In addition, the opportunistic adherence of former officials complicates the analysis. Finally, Pakistani nationals sometimes played a significant role in the expansion of the movement, although the leadership was undisputedly Afghan and stable from 1994 onwards.

<sup>7</sup> Kamal Matinuddin, *The Afghan Phenomenon: Afghanistan 1994–1997*, Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 17.

graduation as *ulema* of Afghan and Pakistani students at this *madrasa*. Also three close advisers of *mullah* Omar were graduates of the *madrasa* Jamiyat ul-Ulum ul-Islamiyah, so that it was no surprise when he sent a message of support after the assassination of two of its teachers in November 1997.

The numbers of Afghans at the Pakistani *madrasas* was a phenomenon related to two considerations: first, religious institutions in Pakistan were anyway increasing in size and numbers, and secondly the substantial influx of Afghan refugees meant that more Afghans were available as students. From the 1960s both the number of *madrasas* in Pakistan and the number of students (*taliban*) had expanded dramatically. Between 1960 and 1983 the number of *taliban* increased tenfold, from 7,500 to 78,500, and of teachers from 321 to 2,217.<sup>8</sup> There was no slackening in this increase, which was much more rapid than that of the population. In 1988 there were 1,320 *madrasas* in Punjab, but by 1997 there were 2,512 with 220,000 students.<sup>9</sup> In Karachi there were twenty-nine *madrasas* which educated an average of 2,000 students each year.<sup>10</sup> The acceleration in the 1980s was partly a consequence of the policy of Islamisation undertaken by the regime of Zia ul-Haq (1977–88). Two particularly important measures taken by Zia were the recognition of diplomas from the *madrasas* by the universities and the introduction of obligatory *zakat*, of which part was given to the *madrasas*.<sup>11</sup> Zia also encouraged *madrasas* to open in the NWFP in order to sustain the Afghan *jihad*, which explains a larger increase in the number in this province than the national average.

The *madrasas* were attached to different religious tendencies: Deobandi, Barelwi and Ahl-i Hadith. The teaching of the Deobandi and Barelwi *madrasas* was generally very conservative. One of the fundamental texts, the *Dars-i Nizamiyya*, dates from the eighteenth century, and Aristotle's logic was still taught. Some Deobandi *madrasas* exerted their influence on the national scale, in particular the Jamiyat al-Ulum al-Islamiyah, founded by Yusuf Binari at Binari Town close to Karachi, which had 8,000 students, including those at its twelve affiliated mosques. Though fewer students are at present

<sup>8</sup> Jamal Malik, *op. cit.*, p. 178.

<sup>9</sup> *The News International*, 28 May 1997.

<sup>10</sup> *The Herald*, December 1997.

<sup>11</sup> However, some *madrasas* refused the *zakat* to preserve their independence.

taken by the *madrasa* Dar al-Uum Haqqaniyah at Akora Khattak in the Peshawar district, founded in 1947 and now run by *maulana* Sami al-Haq, in the past it produced a third of the Deobandi *ulema* in Pakistan. Other *madrasas*, attached to the Ahl-i Hadith tendency or linked to Jamaat-i Islami, displayed aspects of a more modernising tendency, for example in their teaching of information technology and English. Jamaat-i Islami opened a significant number of *madrasas*; especially in NWFP, where its forty-one, including nineteen set up after the Soviet invasion, made up more than a third of the new foundations in this province. Elsewhere Saudi Arabia financed the construction of the Jamiyat Imam Bukhari *madrasa* at Peshawar, which was opened in June 1999 at a ceremony addressed by a representative of the Saudi Ministry of Religious Affairs, Muhammad Abdul Rahman.<sup>12</sup> It was in the Ahl-i Hadith tradition and headed by an official of the Jamaat al-Dawa lil-Quran wa lil-Sunna, a movement which before the arrival of the Taliban had a presence in Afghanistan in the province of Kunar.

What was the position of Afghan students in these *madrasas*? When the war began, the proportion of Afghan students rose markedly. After 1982 some 9% of the students of religion in NWFP were Afghans.<sup>13</sup> For example Afghans made up the vast majority of the 750 students of the Jamiyat Imam Bukhari *madrasa* mentioned above. In the 1960s, 15 per cent of the students at the *madrasa* Dar ul-Ulum Haqqaniyah were Afghans, but by 1985 this proportion had risen to 60 per cent.<sup>14</sup> Afghan students mainly attended Deobandi *madrasas*, since these were in the majority in the frontier region and since the Afghan *ulema* had historic links with the *madrasa* Dar al-Ulum Deoband in India, though the links between this institution and the Pakistani *madrasas* which claimed to follow the same teaching had weakened. Under the generic term 'Deobandi' there are in fact movements of sometimes quite varied tendencies, and neither the coherence of this school of thought nor the level of education of its *ulema* should be over-estimated.<sup>15</sup> Education at these *madrasas* had

<sup>12</sup> *The News International*, 25 June 1999.

<sup>13</sup> Jamal Malik, *op. cit.*, p. 206.

<sup>14</sup> Jamal Malik, *op. cit.*, p. 207.

<sup>15</sup> Concerning the penetration of the reformist movements in Afghanistan and Central Asia, see the special issue of *La lettre d'Asie centrale* 2, autumn 1994.

two major consequences for their Afghan graduates: the cementing of strong solidarities, emerging from a shared experience and a common world view; and (an issue to which we return) the appearance of transnational networks.

### *State structures*

The idea that the Taliban was not interested in the state and left it to decay can be dismissed. Between 1996 and 2001 it gradually reconstructed various institutions, especially the administrative structure and the judicial system. Still, Taliban ideology limited the remit of the state to security, justice and the observation of religious regulations. It intervened little in economic matters, since there were few taxes and little investment, or in the social sphere, which was largely reduced almost entirely to the action of religious charities. Analysis of state structures under the Taliban begins with the position of the *ulema*, and continues with the administration and finally the judiciary.

*The position of the ulema in state institutions.* The legitimacy of the new Afghan state was based neither on nationalist ideology nor on popular sovereignty. In particular, the Taliban rejected political parties and the idea of democratically contested elections as a foundation for political legitimacy. This is a theme common to many Islamic or fundamentalist movements, which take issue with the idea that it is not within the scope of a majority of electors to alter the law of God. The *shariat*, interpreted by the *ulema*, was seen as the only legitimate source of law, while religious scholars dominated the judiciary, the executive and legislative activity, with distinctions drawn in practice between these three functions. The members of *shuras* were mostly *ulema*, since religious qualification was preferred to technical expertise or being socially representative as a criterion for membership. In addition, several of *mullah* Omar's decrees tended to reinforce the special role of the *ulema*, in particular the preservation of 'Muslim heritage' through religious education. The *ulema* maintained vigilance over morals and identified transgressors, for whom reform was compulsory.

For the individual, religious affiliation was a determining factor in political status. This was tantamount to a return to the form of legitimation of the Afghan state at the time of its establishment at the end

of the nineteenth century, before nationalist ideology came into play. A consequence was that non-Muslims, which meant in practice some thousands of Hindus, were obliged, at least in theory, to wear distinctive marks and were subjected to the status of *dhimmi* (those under protection), a provision which rested on a 1924 amendment to the 1923 constitution.<sup>16</sup> As for the Shi'ites, the Ismailis and the Twelver Shi'ites faced different situations. The Ismailis were not regarded as Muslims, and were subjected to forcible conversion to the Sunni creed. Many were driven into exile, but they were not numerically important. In contrast, despite some localised incidents, mainstream Shi'ites were not forcibly converted and were able, for example, to observe *ashura* in public in Kabul, including self-flagellation, which was nevertheless criticised by many Sunnis.

*Mullah Omar* was the cornerstone of the political structure, since he brought together the legislative, executive and judicial powers. His decrees, signed '*amir al-mu'minin mujahid mullah Muhammad Omar Akhund*', covered all issues, including the status of women, the treatment of prisoners, the obligation to say prayers, and the appointment of administrative officials and judges. The authority of the various *shuras*, including the government in Kabul, did not exceed what was delegated to them, and their power was entirely advisory.

The charismatic authority of *mullah Omar* did not arise from the depth of his religious knowledge but was seen as a gift from God, and his dreams were interpreted by his disciples as signs of the divine will.<sup>17</sup> Accounts of him convey the stereotypical image of a man of religion with an inclination towards mysticism. He was said to be

<sup>16</sup> This measure, which the Taliban promulgated, was later abandoned.

<sup>17</sup> For a biography of *mullah Omar* see Kamal Matinuddin, *op. cit.*, p. 223. He was born in 1961 in the village of Naudeh (in the district of Panjwai, Kandahar province). His father afterwards lived at Dehrwut (in the district of Tarin Kot, Uruzgan province), where he was the *mullah* of a small mosque. *Mullah Omar* fought as a member of various parties (Harakat-i Enqelab, Hezb-i Islami (Khales) with Nik Mohammad and Jamiyat-i Islami) and was wounded a number of times. He speaks Persian and had studied theology, but did not officially hold the title of *alem*. After the Soviet withdrawal he continued to live in Nashke Nakhud, in the village of Sinsegar in the district of Maywand, Kandahar province, rather than move to Pakistan, in contrast to many other future officials of the movement. There have been very few interviews with *mullah Omar*; however see 'L'Islam au bout du fusil ... Entretien avec Mohammad Omar', *Politique internationale* 74, winter 1996-7, pp. 135-43.

humble and soft-spoken, and to derive his authority from an ability to listen, from lack of personal ambition, and from the rigour of his application of the *shariat*. His election as *amir al-mu'minin* (commander of the faithful) in Kandahar in April 1996 by an assembly of 1,527 *ulema* from Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran was the first step in the 'routinisation' of his charisma. At the moment of his election the cloak of the Prophet was displayed at a public gathering in Kandahar. This cloak was a relic preserved at a *zariat* in Kandahar and had last been displayed in 1935 during a cholera epidemic. This ceremonial, reflecting the ritual previously used by Abdul Rahman Khan, was an indication that the *amir* was regarded as God-sent rather than elected in the usual sense. *Mullah* Omar, incidentally, had been criticised by the Gaylani and the Mujaddidi who correctly perceived him as challenging the established religious hierarchy.<sup>18</sup> Official recognition by the body of *ulema* enabled a link to be established between the charisma of the leader and the governmental institution.

*Administrative structures.* *Mullah* Omar did not personally head the government in Kabul, which he delegated to his faithful followers while himself remaining in Kandahar. However, his keeping a deliberate distance from the capital and from the government institutions did not detract from his absolute authority. The structures of power evolved after the capture of Kandahar. In the initial phases *mullah* Omar was supported by *shuras*—advisory councils—whose membership was made public on a number of occasions, but once the Taliban had strengthened its grip, following the capture of Kabul in 1996, the failure to distinguish between the structures of the state and the Taliban movement became more marked.

A number of phases may be distinguished as a simplified account of events will show. In the first place, *mullah* Omar was backed up by a ten-strong *shura* mainly concerned with military activities. After the capture of Herat the *shura* was expanded in size, rising from thirty members in 1995 to 100 at the time of the capture of Kabul.<sup>19</sup> The *shura* then established in the capital progressively became the

<sup>18</sup> This appellation had, already been applied to *mullah* Omar, see *The News International*, 27 January 1995. Rabbani had also received it from the Shura Ahl-i Hal wa Hakd in 1994, as had Jamil ur-Rahman in Kunar, from a local religious assembly.

<sup>19</sup> According to the *Frontier Post* of 24 February 1995, the *shura* of Kandahar included *mawlawi* Muhammad Rabbani, *mawlawi* Esanullah, *mawlawi* Abbas, *mawlawi*



effective government of the country, led by *mullah* Rabbani, who was known as the Ra'is-i Shura-yi Sarparast (director of the council of guardianship). Another *shura* continued to function in Kandahar with some ten *ulema* who made up *mullah* Omar's immediate entourage. Some members of this *shura* were also members of the *shura* of Kabul. The consolidation of the military situation and the seizure of the capital created the opportunity for more elaborate formal structures to be set up. In October 1997 Afghanistan was renamed the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, and the administrative divisions which had existed under Daud were mostly re-established.<sup>20</sup>

At the beginning the Taliban did not have sufficient numbers to occupy the countryside in depth and controlled only the towns and the principal roads. The outcome was basically the establishment of a limited level of control. For instance, in Logar and Ghazni *ulema* from Kandahar took over the posts of district officials (*uluswal*) while the rest of the administration remained in place. Later the Taliban did set up a local administrative system. In the towns, especially Kandahar, each of the various sectors was placed under the authority of a commander responsible for security and respect for 'Islamic morals'. There were also local *shuras* which provided liaison between the Taliban and the population, and looked after the details of everyday life such as the organisation of the bazaar and the supervision of traffic. These councils were in principle elected by villagers. The guardians of the bazaars were elected in an analogous way.<sup>21</sup> Similarly the local *mullah* was normally chosen by the inhabitants rather than by the *uluswal*.<sup>22</sup> In practice the *mullahs* had a decisive influence over these councils, tending to exclude the *khans* and the educated class.

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Muhammad, *mawlawi* Pasaband, *mawlawi* Muhammad Hasan, *mawlawi* Nuruddin, *mawlawi* Walik Ahmad, *mawlawi* Shir Muhammad Malang, *mawlawi* Abd al-Rahman, *mawlawi* Abd al-Hakim, *mawlawi* Sardar Ahmad, *haji* Muhammad Ghaus and Masum Afghani. The *shura* of Kabul included *mullah* Muhammad Rabbani, *mullah* Muhammad Hasan, *mullah* Muhammad Ghaus, *mullah* Seyyed Ghaysuddin Agha, *mullah* Ghazil Muhammad and *mullah* Abdul Razaq.

<sup>20</sup> See decree no. 12 of 7 March 1996, Official Gazette no. 783, 1997, p. 21, which sets up the same ministries which existed under Daud. The original date of this decree is given as 1375/12/16, but it is noteworthy that from 1999 the Taliban applied the lunar Islamic calendar (under which 1999 coincided broadly with 1419) abolishing the solar calendar where 1999 was equivalent to 1378.

<sup>21</sup> Decree no. 1981 of 20 March 1995 (1374/12/29).

<sup>22</sup> Undated decree, Ministry of Justice, Kabul.

To avoid rivalry between communities, the Taliban administrative system was organised on the principle of a rapid rotation of officials, and their appointment in principle outside their home regions, except in Kandahar. The provincial governors (the *walis*) were generally changed over within a few months, and brought their own teams of officials, often drawn from their own *qowm*, together with their own equipment, including vehicles. This avoided the establishment of strong regional powers, and prevented internal struggles from developing into armed clashes. Rotation became less rapid as the regime became more stable, but the principle of appointing governors from outside any given province remained the rule. The same considerations resulted in the efficient and swift collection of weapons, since the authorities gave the appearance of being external to local conflicts. Apparently the Taliban used fragmentation as a means of conflict management, and situated itself in the position of a referee. Retribution against former party activists was not pursued on condition that they refrained from further political activity; this meant an escape from the cycle of vendetta.

The principal ministers, who took up office one by one, were able only with difficulty to carry out their responsibilities since some 100,000 educated Afghans had fled the country, creating a crucial lack of officials. A further difficulty was the lack of money, resulting from the war and from the effects of the international embargo imposed in 1999. After a cut in staff of 40% in April 2000, 130,000 staff were employed by the regime. The reduction in staff numbers was concentrated in Kabul, with women particularly affected. With a personnel and an outlook which scarcely fitted it for government, the Taliban made the discovery that it was in practice dependent on humanitarian aid. Although there were moments of strain, especially when the NGOs temporarily withdrew in 1998, NGO activity was perceived by the authorities as vital. The reality was that in 1998 the NGOs spent \$113 million in Afghanistan, and provided work for around 25,000 Afghans.<sup>23</sup> One of *mullah* Omar's edicts decreed five years' imprisonment for anyone attacking foreigners working in Afghanistan.

In some parts of the country humanitarian aid was essential to stave off famine and avert a further popular exodus. In the district of

<sup>23</sup> United Nations, *Afghanistan Outlook*, December 2000.

Bamyan, in Bamyan province, around a quarter of the income of the population in 2000 was derived from humanitarian programmes.<sup>24</sup> This was an exceptional situation, but the drought in 2001 caused malnutrition and even famine. There was a general deterioration in relations between the NGOs and the Taliban, who seem to have wanted to increase the level of participation of Islamic NGOs.

*The judiciary.* In theory at least the judicial system was independent of the executive. The *qadis* did not answer to the provincial governors (the *walis*) or to the district officials (*uluswal*), although all ultimately fell under the authority of *mullah* Omar. There were judges in all districts and three levels of jurisdiction were in place in each province.<sup>25</sup> In principle no punishment or sentence of imprisonment could take effect without the sanction of a *qadi*.<sup>26</sup> An edict was published by *mullah* Omar which decreed that detainees should not be beaten—torture had been widespread under all Afghan regimes—and that their money should not be taken.<sup>27</sup> However, the conditions of prisoners were not improved while the Taliban was in power, and ill-treatment remained widespread, especially when the secret police were involved.

All laws were subject to the approval of a *shura* of *ulema* which scrutinised their conformity with the *shariat* and with Hanafi jurisprudence. The existing constitution, as well as a section of the criminal and civil law, was declared to be in conflict with the *shariat* and was consequently abolished. Over criminal law and personal rights Hanafi jurisprudence was applied, especially in the case of punishments such as amputation and stoning. An examination of juridical texts issued by the Taliban shows that these generally followed the precedent of the most traditionalist Afghan *ulema*, with no notable

<sup>24</sup> This estimate is based on the reports of the NGO Solidarité Afghanistan.

<sup>25</sup> Decree no. 105 of 10 September 1999 (1419/5/18), which distinguished between the lower courts (*eptedai*), then the court of appeal (*monafea*) and finally the higher court (*tahmiz*).

<sup>26</sup> See in particular the decrees of *mullah* Omar no. 4265 of 4 March 1999 (1419/11/16) and no. 234 of 29 January 1999 (1419/10/11), available at the Ministry of Justice, Kabul.

<sup>27</sup> Decree no. 141 of 27 April 1997 (1376/6/7), available at the Ministry of Justice, Kabul.

innovations. Most of the measures promulgated derived from the *hadith* collected by Ismail al-Bukhari (who died *circa* 870), which served as the basis of Islamic law in Afghanistan. There was therefore little novelty except for the re-adoption of certain punishments and other judicial measures which had fallen into disuse in Afghanistan and in the majority of other Muslim countries. Thus amputations for theft became frequent, although this practice had been abolished in the 1950s. A number of women were stoned for adultery in spite of the disapproval of many of the *ulema*. The practice had been abolished before the war and been infrequent since, with only one reported case in Badakhshan.

Finally, the judgements of the *qadis* frequently went against tribal customs, particularly with the outlawing of vendettas. In a case of murder, the relatives of the victims were invited themselves to kill the murderers, although a financial settlement was also provided for. In all cases vendetta was forbidden.

#### *The social backlash: the puritan order and social resistance*

The intention of the Taliban was to institute a moral order such as it imagined had existed before the modernist reforms of the 1950s. It also largely readopted the measures taken in 1929 by Habibullah Kalakani, who prohibited the wearing of European clothes, banned the cutting of beards, and forbade women to move about without the permission of their *wali* (male representative).<sup>28</sup> Although the media apparently discovered these measures only in 1996, they were not radically new since most of the commanders had already implemented them during the war, including such measures as bans on music and cigarettes and the compulsory wearing of beards. Such fundamentalist parties as Ettehad and Hezb-i Islami (Khaless) were perfectly in sympathy with this aspect of Taliban policy.

On this basis the religious police, *al-Amr bil-Ma'ruf wal-Nahi* 'an *al-Munkar*, became a feature of the mechanism of social control.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>28</sup> On the measures adopted in 1929 see Muhammad Naser Kemal, *op. cit.*, p. 152. For comparison with the Taliban, see for example decree no. 3409 of 25 December 1996 (1375/10/4), *Official Gazette* no. 783, 1997, p. 9.

<sup>29</sup> The name refers to a verse in the Quran (*sura* 3, verse 104) which enjoins the 'enforcement of virtue and the suppression of vice'.

This institution was organised at the national level with the status of a ministry, and was especially active in Kabul, although a force probably numbering no more than 2–3,000 was unable to control the population. It was to some extent a re-invention of a former institution, the *muhtaseb*, whose members were appointed by the local *qadi*, with the responsibility of preventing petty crime, checking weights and measures in the markets, and maintaining public morality through such matters as attendance at the mosque. Under Nadir Shah the *muhtaseb* had the power to demand the recitation of prayers from passers-by, whipping them if they did not know the words. The Taliban reintroduced this practice, and in addition made absence from daily prayers punishable by up to ten days' imprisonment.

In daily life the implementation of the *shariat* implied a degree of puritanism hitherto unknown in Afghan society, as well as an intrusive police presence.<sup>30</sup> Personal appearance was regulated. The beard was to be of a precise length—a fist's width below the chin—and those failing to comply were jailed until their beards reached the appropriate length. In contrast, hair was to be kept short. As a general rule all entertainment was forbidden. The festival of *Nawruz*, the New Year, on 21 March, customarily marked by parties and picnics, was declared unlawful because of its non-Muslim origin. Similarly music-making was banned. To this end houses were searched, usually as the result of a denunciation, and those in contravention were arrested and sometimes beaten. This brought radical change to the atmosphere of a town such as Kandahar. Those caught selling audio cassettes were liable to several days in prison and a lashing. The ownership of pigeons and other birds was no longer allowed as a hobby. Pictures of living beings were forbidden,<sup>31</sup> so that decorative designs on lorries were erased, while television and the cinema were prohibited. In common with the rest of the press, the Taliban newspaper *Zarb-i Mu'minin* (The Onslaught of the Faithful) strictly adhered to this prohibition. School textbooks were censored to ensure the removal of pictures of people and animals.

Although fundamentalism had been increasing in Afghanistan for twenty years, the Taliban regime, because of its radicalism, clashed

<sup>30</sup> See Peter Marsden, *The Taliban: war, religion and the new order in Afghanistan*, London: Zed Books, 1998.

<sup>31</sup> The sole exception to this rule seems to have been identity photographs for official documents.

head-on with a significant section of the Afghan people. However, the people had no way of giving direct expression to their discontent, since all demonstrations were ruthlessly suppressed. In early December 1998, medical students protesting at the lack of resources at the University of Jalalabad were brutally dispersed by the *Qita-i Muntazeri* (Forces of Intervention), with the deaths of two demonstrators. Sometimes the Taliban was obliged to withdraw minor measures. For example, after the ban on *Nawruz* celebrations at Mazar-i Sharif, it made a number of concessions in the light of popular dissatisfaction. A further consideration was that there were no independent media or other independent organisations which could act as a channel for discontent.

In such a situation, where open protest had become impossible, the only alternatives were exile, for those who had the financial means to leave, or oblique forms of popular resistance. In a city such as Kabul discontent with the agents of the Taliban system was clearly evident, with remarks sometimes being made even in their presence when they were unable to understand Persian.<sup>32</sup> Dissidence was also expressed through humour and through pressing aspects of physical appearance to the limit of legality. In the towns the beard might be worn a little short, with haircuts longish and romantic. Such popular inertia and resistance meant that the regulations were far from being applied to the letter. Music was still heard in private and even in shared taxis once out of town, while birds were bought and sold in spite of the ban. Books were sold under the counter in a trade which was illegal in theory but tolerated in practice. Prostitution flourished in spite of official puritanism since many women, especially widows, were unable to carry on working. Street children were, and still are, also easy prey.

Resistance to the regime was not unanimous. The degree of dissidence varied in different social groups and communities. The Taliban enjoyed a certain level of support in the Pushtun countryside, where the moral code was largely that of the local people, and because the Taliban regime was a guarantee of security. Another factor was that the *ulema* gave unstinting support to the new regime, which had spec-

<sup>32</sup> On this kind of phenomena see in particular James Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990. See also Michel de Certeau, *L'invention du quotidien*, Paris: Gallimard, 1990.

tacularly enhanced their prosperity and raised their social standing. A further issue was that the rise of the Taliban gave expression to the desire of rural people to avenge themselves on the towns. Many young unemployed peasants from the south had joined the Taliban both to earn a living and to obtain social status. Finally, some members of the merchant class had been favourable to the Taliban from the start. The early operations on the Pakistan frontier in 1994 had been partly financed by Kandahari merchants whose aim was to secure freedom of movement. In this sphere the Taliban's attitude was permissive; roads were kept open, while controls and taxes on trade were minimal. The bazaars were also rebuilt, particularly in Kandahar.

As a general rule, however, the non-Pushtun population and the Shi'ites were opposed to the new authorities. Communal affiliation was not a determining factor; membership of the educated class was more prescriptive of a person's attitude to the Taliban than his ethnic origin. To illustrate in practice the diversity of reactions towards the regime, we now examine in detail the circumstances of three very disparate social groups—men of religion, the educated class and women.

*The official role of the Ulema.* The transformation of the *ulema* into state officials had already been a long-term trend in most Muslim societies, for example in Turkey and Pakistan. For more than a century the Afghan state had attempted to gain control of the *ulema* by bringing them into the administration. Paradoxically the Taliban regime, which was infested with *ulema*, succeeded in divesting them of their autonomy. The great majority of the *ulema* willingly came over to the new regime, which provided them with a highly effective means of exerting influence over Afghan society. The process of 'officialisation' took place by way of the establishment of an administrative hierarchy, so that *ulema* were ranked on a salary scale according to their qualifications. The *madrastas*, in common with all teaching institutions, were henceforth controlled by the Ministry of Education.

Another issue was that the role played by the *mullahs* in the administrative process reinforced their relationship with the state apparatus. In particular, they were entrusted with the evaluation of those taxes which were obligatory on the citizens (*ushr* and *zakat*);<sup>33</sup> they appropriated part of the revenue for their own needs, forwarding the rest

<sup>33</sup> See decree no. 32, Official Gazette 788 and Official Gazette 789, p. 42.

to the Ministry of Finance. Clearly such responsibilities placed a village *mullah* in the position of a representative of the state, playing a role which had hitherto been the prerogative of functionaries or local notables. The only circumstance which in theory allowed relative autonomy to the religious establishment in its relations with the authorities was the election of the *mullah* by the local community. Still, although events observed in Wardak and Kabul might lead to contrary conclusions, continuity tended to prevail. The available choices were restricted, and the identification of the *mullahs* with the machinery of state was not in reality called into question by this procedure.

Therefore, in contrast to the previous situation the *ulema* wielded an authority which depended on their relationship with the state. This was a total reversal, since the *ulema* had been bastions of opposition to the state throughout most of the twentieth century, especially to measures of modernisation. However, under the Taliban they were assimilated to the state and therefore subject to criticism on the grounds of their inefficiency and sometimes their corruption.

*The alienation of the educated class from the state.* Discontent was concentrated in the towns, especially Kabul, since the Taliban, in common with rural Pushtuns in general, particularly detested the urban culture which it saw as anti-Islamic; in the town, they believed, they were in danger of assimilation and therefore loss of identity.<sup>34</sup> The Taliban's seizure of power was among other things a class struggle, in which the urban bourgeoisie were for the moment the losers.

The urban élites, who valued modernity and their personal liberties whatever their communal affiliation, were unanimously critical of the Taliban. Although their social influence was significant, they were numerically in the minority and were politically marginalised after the fall of Kabul in 1996. The privileged triangular relationship which had existed between the state, the process of modernisation and the educated class disappeared with the clericalisation of the state. The educated class depended for its position on access to state-legitimised educational resources, while the state was at the same time been its main employer. In consequence the majority of the edu-

<sup>34</sup> Jon. W. Anderson, 'Social Structure and the Veil: compartment and interaction in Afghanistan', *Anthropos*, 77, 1982, p. 416.



cated class fled Afghanistan in successive waves.<sup>35</sup> Those who remained were obliged to find jobs outside state institutions in either humanitarian organisations or private institutions.

It is difficult to estimate the number of educated individuals working for NGOs in Afghanistan under the Taliban, a total to which may be added these doing similar work in Pakistan who frequently return to Afghanistan. On the basis of figures provided by the NGOs themselves, an initial estimate might be some 10,000, taking into account that job descriptions were relatively fluid and that many employees were over-qualified in relation to the positions they occupied.<sup>36</sup> More than 250 NGOs were officially registered, which at least enabled enterprising educated individuals to find niches in the humanitarian sphere. The numbers were relatively limited, but the NGOs were probably as significant an employer as the Afghan state itself for the educated class. The state actually employed its officials only part-time and paid extremely low salaries—less than \$10 per month for a teacher, including bonuses—and dismissed between a quarter and half of its employees in 2000. Additionally, the most motivated and highly qualified graduates tended to prefer working in NGOs, for both financial and ideological reasons.

In fact parastatal organisations such as NGOs offered an organisational model and an ideological framework which were compatible with the preconceptions of the Afghan educated class. The modernising role was thus transferred from the state to the NGOs, which operated in a decentralised style, maintaining contact directly with local circumstances. A further factor was that the NGOs constituted a template for organisational modernity and bureaucratic rationality, so that posts within them were much sought after by the educated.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Research at a number of private schools at Mazar-i Sharif in April 2000 revealed that between one-third and half of the boys aged 8–12 who were asked about their future said they wished to go abroad. Though without statistical validity, these results probably show that emigration was the predominant goal for those seeking education.

<sup>36</sup> This rough estimate is based on the 2001 handbook of organisations working in Afghanistan produced by ACBAR, which serves as a coordinating body for the NGOs and is available at the headquarters of ACBAR in Peshawar.

<sup>37</sup> The evidence suggests, however, that the relations between Afghan-educated individuals and expatriates were not without complications. The growing distance between the expatriates and the Afghan population had ramifications. Issues

Consequently, because of their ethos, they became in practice a focus of opposition to the Taliban government. The Taliban was not unaware of the situation, and the ambiguity of its attitude revealed the two constraints under which it operated: there was its need to collaborate with the NGOs, but on the other hand it wished to keep them under control, especially over issues relating to women's right to work or education.

In the educational sector itself the evident deficiencies of the regime led the educated class to break free from the state. Educated Afghans attached particular importance to schools, since education provided a field for the transmission of their values and resources. At the same time the *ulema*, themselves taught within the *madrasas*, displayed overt mistrust of the educational system. During the war fundamentalists frequently accused schoolteachers of being leftists, and many schools were destroyed for this reason.

The state's dereliction of this key sector resulted in a proliferation of private classes, and those for girls were conducted in secret. Although there seem to be no figures relating to this phenomenon, it was of real significance and showed a failure by the state to respond to an urgent social demand which extended far beyond the educated class itself. However, because of the lack of financial resources the level of teaching was low. There was one exception: five Turco-Afghan schools of a very good standard operated in Afghanistan. Though *mullah* Omar had issued a decree that banned foreigners from running schools and required strict monitoring of financial donations, these schools were nevertheless tolerated, since their personnel were Turkish, and hence Muslim, and they were ideologically close to Fethullah Gülen, a disciple of the Islamist Nurcu movement in Turkey.<sup>38</sup> This movement's objective was to provide a basis of training for the entire educational system—just as the schools funded by the western countries had done in the past—and to produce an Islamist élite open to ideas of modernity.

The confrontation between these two social groups was not confined to Afghan territory. The *ulema* and the educated class both

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included the influential role of educated Afghans as intermediaries, as well as tensions between 'locals' and 'expatriates'.

<sup>38</sup> Bayram Balci, *Missionnaires de l'islam en Asie centrale*, Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 2003.

operated transnational strategies for the mobilisation of support. Associations run by educated Afghans, not all of whom were necessarily favourable to Masud, opted for transnational strategies based on human rights, and were thus able to link up with a vibrant international network. In particular Afghan feminist groups, whose ability to organise inside the country had always been limited, succeeded in obtaining publicity for their cause.

*Women.* Why has the status of women become a central issue in the west's perception of Afghanistan? This question may well appear either naïve or provocative, since self-evidently the oppression Afghan women have suffered from the Taliban is a justification for international solidarity. Without wishing to ignore these arguments, one should place in perspective a number of other issues which may lead to some modification of this point of view. First, the degradation of women's status did not originate with the Taliban, but dates back to the fall of Kabul in 1992 or even to the beginning of the civil war. Nevertheless, western public opinion—or at least the media (a valid distinction)—was hardly interested in Afghan women before 1996. There was some study of the issue before the Soviet invasion, but Afghanistan was seen primarily as a 'traditional' society, living by time-honoured principles which were not conducive to critical analysis of the position of women. Further, following the Soviet invasion arguments relating to the liberation of women were appropriated by the Kabul regime, and these lessened their legitimacy in western eyes.

In this context the fall of Kabul came as a turning-point because of the visibility of the Taliban's actions in an urban environment relatively well covered by the media. However, revulsion towards the 'monstrous Taliban' did not lead to a better understanding of local issues. The veil was probably the clearest example of the perverse nature of media coverage. Before the Taliban the wearing of the *chador* (the Iranian-style veil) was widespread in the countryside, while the *burqa* was worn both in the towns and everywhere in the south of the country. Social pressures ensured the continuation of this practice, including in Panjshir, where Masud wished to present himself as more modernised. In Herat the *mujahidin* had already threatened to attack unveiled women in the towns. The *burqa* became obligatory from 1992 onwards.

The imposition of the *burqa* by the Taliban thus mainly affected the educated class, particularly in Kabul, where it had been in disuse for a generation. Despite the relative marginality of this question in comparison with such issues as economic difficulties, violence against the person and access to education and medical care, it nevertheless became basic in international campaigns of mobilisation, which for the first time included mass-circulation women's magazines. It was symptomatic that there was little media coverage of the report of 'Physicians for Human Rights' in 2001, a considerable modification of its report of 1998 which had caused a considerable stir.<sup>39</sup> This may have been because, counter-intuitively, it pointed out that the veil was not a central issue for most Afghan women, emphasising instead the obstacles which limited access to health care. The fall of the Taliban has led to the virtual disappearance from the media agenda of the issue of the veil, and indeed of Afghan women in general.<sup>40</sup> Thus the situation of Afghan women in its diversity and its development needs to be presented in a broader historical perspective.

*Masculine domination and the diversity of women's situations.* A number of social norms serve to legitimise the subservient position of women in Afghan society. The dominant values are male—namely activity, strength and independence. These are set in opposition to such feminine characteristics as physical weakness; susceptibility to influence, especially from magical spirits; and impurity, connected with menstruation. The differentiation of tasks by gender is extremely marked, with a clear separation between men's and women's spheres of activity.<sup>41</sup> Inequality is difficult to challenge since it is seen as originating in biology or the 'natural' order, and inextricably linked to the religious principle by way of interpretations of the Quran which 'confirm' the weakness of women. Boys are celebrated from birth, while the birth of a girl is perceived as a problem. The

<sup>39</sup> Physicians for Human Rights, *The Taliban's War on Women: a health and human rights crisis in Afghanistan*, Boston, MA, 1998, p. 27.

<sup>40</sup> In captions to newspaper pictures the *burqa* was once more being described as a 'traditional veil'.

<sup>41</sup> Many points of similarity may be observed with Kabyle society; see Pierre Bourdieu, *Le sens pratique*, Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1980.

hyper-mortality of female infants is a result of the lower level of care accorded to them by their mothers. However, the marriage of boys is an expensive matter, which symmetrically entails the fact that girl children may bring substantial sums to their families. For instance, the dowry of young women of the Turkmen community, who weave carpets, may be the equivalent of several years' income.

This inferiority, which is socially constructed and interiorised by both sexes, has legal implications. In tribal custom, especially among the Pushtuns, women have no inheritance and under Islamic law their inheritance is half that of men. Marriage is arranged in almost all cases, including among the bourgeoisie, and in most cases is an expression of family strategies and economic interests. A further factor is that polygamy is a legitimate practice, although, being for the rich only, it is relatively rare, involving only some 5% of marriages. Consequently the 'couple' is not a basic element in social life, and for a woman her husband is not necessarily the most important man. Despite relatively egalitarian legislation from the 1960s, divorce is practised solely at the man's initiative, but the importance of the dowry and the risks of conflict between family groups act in general as a barrier.

Women have very restricted access to public space, since they are the repository of the honour of the group.<sup>42</sup> In this matter—where the dictates of honour often run counter to Islamic law—Afghanistan resembles the pattern of Mediterranean societies, as in southern Italy and Spain. Women's behaviour is monitored by the men of the household, their husbands or brothers, a social obligation which is a source of psychological tensions to individuals of both sexes. What is prohibited is not merely adultery in the strict sense—although this would in theory entail the death penalty—but any act that allows the slightest suspicion to fall upon a woman and therefore on the family honour. This is a system very different from that of the *shariat* which demands proof of individual culpability. Another issue is that the women do not necessarily perform only a passive role in the

<sup>42</sup> In the view of some authors the veil, rather than providing protection for women, safeguards men against feminine sexuality, which is unconsciously perceived as uncontrollable and anti-social. On this issue see Inger W. Boesen, 'Women, Honour and Love: some aspects of the Pushtun woman's life in eastern Afghanistan,' *Afghanistan Journal*, no. 2, 1980.

protection of the honour of the group. They also play an important role in the vendetta as bearers of the memory of the insult. A man who refuses to take vengeance runs the risk of being openly despised within his own house.

Children or older people may serve as intermediaries for women in the public sphere, in the transmission of news, making purchases and so on.<sup>43</sup> A woman exercises a certain degree of economic autonomy over the disposal of her own property, but employs a representative (*wakil*) to manage her affairs. In general women's freedom of movement is very restricted, except among nomadic groups where they go unveiled, a special status which they would lose if they become sedentarised. There are noticeably few women in the bazaars, and many have never been outside their villages except for brief visits to their relatives or to *ziarats*. Contact with strangers is not generally feasible, and guests do not normally meet women. Children serve at table and the guest is received in a special room which is only an ante-chamber to the truly private areas where only relatives in whose presence the women are not obliged to be veiled are permitted to enter.

Finally, there is the issue of the specific influence of Islam in the pre-war period. Rather than the 'Middle Ages' with which it is fashionable to draw comparisons when discussing Afghanistan, rural France of the nineteenth century may provide a more meaningful parallel.<sup>44</sup> Which religion is in play is not crucial, so that Catholicism could in reality serve as well as Islam as a justification for classifying women as inferior in terms of either biology or religion.

Other than in the these general aspects, women are not in any case a homogeneous group, and three principal dichotomies can be observed. First, they live in markedly different circumstances in the town and in the country. In the villages women make up communities which work and seek their entertainment together. When the men have left for the fields they are often alone in the village and

<sup>43</sup> Women do not pray at the mosque but, in principle at least, do so at home. A woman does not therefore have access to the basic location for village sociability. Meetings at the well or work jointly undertaken are their main opportunities for social exchange.

<sup>44</sup> Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The modernization of rural France 1870–1914*, Stanford University Press, 1976, esp. chapter 11.

enjoy great freedom of movement.<sup>45</sup> In the towns women are much less free to move about; they are easily confined to the house and have no independent economic activities and hence no separate source of income. The wearing of the *burqa*—apparently introduced during the nineteenth century—is a symbol both of social superiority and of a stricter seclusion.

Secondly, age and especially maternity is one decisive factors in a woman's situation within the family. The young wife is transferred from the authority of her father to that of her mother, and falls under the domination of her mother-in-law, for whom she in effect becomes an assistant or even a servant. Only if she bears male children is she gradually able to acquire some degree of authority. As she grows older she comes to occupy a position of power and influence within the household, since she often chooses wives for her sons and, although usually illiterate, she plays a decisive role in the management of goods and in financial decisions. In some cases the sons will ally themselves with her against their father, especially if he is persuaded by his children to divide up the land.<sup>46</sup> Finally, as an older woman she is more easily able to speak in public, sometimes with considerable authority.

Thirdly, the status of women differs from one community to another. The main distinction is that between the Pushtuns, situated mainly in the south, and the rest. Among the Pushtuns the code of manners and honour is extremely strict, and the separation between men and women is especially rigid.<sup>47</sup> In the Uzbek, Turkmen and Hazara communities, mostly in the north of Afghanistan, relations between men and women follow more flexible rules.<sup>48</sup> Among the

<sup>45</sup> See Michelle Robin, 'La société des femmes dans un village afghan', *Communautés*, no. 79, January–March 1987, pp. 95–101.

<sup>46</sup> On this issue see Cherry Lindholm, 'The Swat Pukhtun Family as a Political Training Group' in Charles Lindholm (ed.), *Frontier Perspectives: Essays in comparative anthropology*, Oxford University Press, 1996, pp. 17–27. The author analyses the structures of Pushtun families, bringing out in particular the often violent nature of family relationships.

<sup>47</sup> Jon W. Anderson, 'Social Structure and the Veil: compartment and interaction in Afghanistan', *Anthropos* 77, 1982. The author particularly stresses the point—not well grasped in the west—that the veil is 'reciprocal' and acts as an organising principle in the avoidance behaviour of both men and women outside the family circle.

<sup>48</sup> Among the Aymaqs of central Afghanistan relations between men and women are relatively egalitarian. See Bernard Dupaigne, 'La femme dans l'économie

Uzbeks nocturnal visits by a fiancé to his future bride are accepted. Among the Hazaras women go outside the house without difficulty and are able to speak to guests. A traveller may thus take tea with a couple, the wife participating in the conversation on an equal footing with the husband, which would be wholly unthinkable among the rural Pushtuns. Women's economic situations or, to be more precise, their occupations also vary according to the community in question. For example, Nuristani women cultivate crops, while the men devote themselves more exclusively to pasturage. In areas where weaving is a significant activity, especially in the north, it is the women who weave carpets.

*Apprenticeship to modernity.* The status of women is a symbolic issue which arouses political and religious passions and becomes a kind of testing-point for the authorities. Amanullah's government (1919–29) was the first to attempt to modernise or westernise it, especially through such dramatic measures as the unveiling of women at court, and the establishment in 1921 of the first school for girls. In the same year the reaffirmation of the abolition of slavery, a measure which had already been proclaimed at the beginning of the century, set free hundreds of women who had been kept as concubines in Kabul.<sup>49</sup>

Some decades later, between 1953 and 1963, Daud reintroduced a similar reformist project when he decreed—or, more precisely, allowed—the unveiling of women. This was pushed through in the face of protests from conservatives, who mobilised forcefully against it. His initial measures were followed by others, particularly in education. In 1960 co-education was established in higher education. Female students and scholarship-holders were still very few, with only 7% of the scholarships in higher education allocated to women in 1970, but from then onwards a trend towards modernisation was firmly established. The obligation placed on both boys and girls to wear uniform at secondary schools in effect introduced western dress.

It was a decisive factor that these decisions were taken mainly by the political authorities, with no significant support from the popu-

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rurale' in *La femme afghane à travers l'histoire de l'Afghanistan*, Actes du colloque Unesco, Paris 11 December 1998, p. 22.

<sup>49</sup> Aman-i Afghan, Kabul, Dalwa 18, 1299/7 February 1921, quoted in 'Afghan Women and Women in Islam: parallels and divergences' in *La femme afghane à travers l'histoire*, Actes du colloque Unesco, Paris, 11 December 1988, p. 45.



lation, and this factor determined the direction of future developments. In the countryside women did not openly challenge the patriarchal order. Although some established values, such as arranged marriages, were challenged by the traditional Pushtun women's songs (*landais*), these also celebrated the dominant code of behaviour, particularly honour and virility. Reforms were initiated from above, and their failure to take root explains why women remained largely excluded from the public sphere, even in bourgeois circles. There were no women's associations—leaving out of account for the moment the feminist movement—which could have lobbied effectively for legislation, and few women were members of political movements. Only the Maoist groups and the communists, with certain exceptions, took notice of issues relating to women.<sup>50</sup> Even in the towns the presence of women in public was frowned on. As late as the 1970s a women's demonstration was attacked by men who threw acid over the demonstrators.

In contrast to the communist regimes in China and the Soviet Union, which at certain points envisaged the abolition of the conventional family, the communist regime in Afghanistan showed no wish, or was not able, to intrude into private life. It adopted progressive policies concerning women, but also took traditional values into account, recognising in particular the role of the *shariat* as complementary to state law. The continuity between the communist regime in Kabul and previous projects of modernisation was marked. The regime maintained the proportion of women members of the party at around 15% although many of these were the wives or daughters of militants since many marriages took place within the party. In addition, there were women members of the party militias, especially in Kabul and in some of the northern towns. The most marked changes were in public education, especially at the middle and lower levels. In Kabul half of the holders of public teaching posts were women, as were the majority of the staff of the Ministries of Education and Health. Similarly, 55% of the students were girls.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>50</sup> In Herat in the spring of 1989 an informant recalled the agitation of the Maoist groups in favour of women, and the unenthusiastic response to these efforts from the highly conservative local population.

<sup>51</sup> See Micheline Centlivres-Demont, 'Les femmes afghanes aujourd'hui', *Afghanistan Info*, Neuchâtel, no. 23, November 1998, pp. 17–18.

Finally, especially in Kabul where the regime was relatively well established and able to guarantee a degree of security, the wives of the middle class carried on the modernising tendencies of previous regimes. For instance, dress codes showed the beginnings of a break with traditional practices, although these innovations were mostly restricted to the modern areas of the capital and to a lesser extent of Jalalabad and Mazar-i Sharif. This process of modernisation contrasted with the situation in the countryside, where the *mujahidin* imposed an order of a kind that was much more conservative or even fundamentalist.

*The confrontation with fundamentalism.* The *mujahidin*'s prohibition of women's participation in public activities became stricter. The resistance parties had generally not called on women to mobilise, although there were some women's groups, particularly within Harakat-i Islami and Hezb-i Islami. The collapse of the structures of the state brought education more or less to a halt, while opposition from fundamentalists, including those among the population at large, considerably restricted the educational opportunities for girls. In some areas the commanders who controlled the countryside continued to permit education for girls, for example in Herat and in a large part of the north, but this happened less in the Pushtun regions.

Women were a majority among the refugees (28% of women against 25% of men were refugees).<sup>52</sup> The seclusion to which refugee women were subject was even stricter than that prevailing in the villages, because of their exile in an unknown situation, where they were under the sway of the rigid conceptions of honour of the tribal Pushtuns among whom they found themselves. Because of overcrowding, it was difficult in the camps to protect private space. On the other hand, the health conditions were an improvement, so that infant mortality fell substantially to a level even lower than that among the rural Pakistani population. The Islamist parties attempted to improve the education of girls in the refugee camps, although they were separated from the boys, while at the same time the fundamentalist movements continued to discourage the education of girls. Women's lack of political influence, without recognised representation, obstructed

<sup>52</sup> Micheline Centlivres-Demont, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

them from struggling for recognition of their rights when the Kabul regime fell and movements of the most fundamentalist type gradually took hold of the reins of power.

The arrival of the *mujahidin* in 1992 inaugurated a range of restrictions, from the wearing of the veil to the ban on women appearing on television. In August 1995 Afghan women were refused authorisation by Rabbani's government to go to the fourth World Women's Conference in Beijing, which was viewed as un-Islamic. The representation of women in those areas of the administration still functioning fell markedly. The practices of different political groups varied, but the fundamentalist influence was universally felt. Some commanders had a more open attitude regarding women's education and kept the secondary schools open, for example in Herat and in the north. The former communist militias in the north, which remained in power till 1998, altered few features of the day-to-day operation of the administration. Other commanders ordered the girls' schools to be definitively shut and insisted on the strict application of the *shariat*. Finally, in some regions insecurity and fighting reached such a pitch that the schools were shut anyway, while widespread violence had particular consequences for women: for example, at the time of the capture of Jalalabad in 1992, the nomadic tribes carried women off and enacted 'marriages' which were no more than enforced prostitution. In Kabul all the armed groups, especially Dostum's militias, were guilty of rapes and kidnapping, leading sometimes to the suicide of young girls who had been dishonoured. The very few women who dared to dress in the western style in the modern part of Kabul were harassed by the *mujahidin*. All this was a new departure, and a contrast, since Afghan women had seldom before been threatened with deliberate acts of violence, and certainly not with rape.

In this respect the Taliban's victory represented the triumph of the most fundamentalist tendency. The status it imposed on women was above all a rejection of urban and bourgeois culture, which stood opposed to the idea of women held by the rural and fundamentalist Pushtuns. Its earliest victims were educated women, who were mainly in Kabul and numbered around 165,000.<sup>53</sup> Aggression against women

<sup>53</sup> See Carol Leduc, 'The Impact of Conflict on Women's Lives post-1992' in *La*

was one of the major factors which led to the reluctance of the urban bourgeoisie to cooperate with the regime and their flight into exile. The situation was different in the towns, in which the religious police were especially strict, from the countryside where daily life was little changed. Outside the towns women continued to wear the *chador*—a veil over the head—rather than the *burqa*. For country women, who for practical or other reasons did not have access to schools or paid work, the principal effect of the arrival of the Taliban was an end to insecurity.

Taliban legislation installed the *shariat* as the basis of both civil and criminal law, and the status of women declined, especially in the towns. However, in some cases the measures put in place by the Taliban were more benign than the tribal customs normally enforced among the Pushtuns. For instance, a decree issued by *mullah* Omar<sup>54</sup> forbade the frequent tribal practice of obliging a widow to marry a brother of her deceased husband, as well as outlawing the ‘gift’ of a woman as a compensation for a killing.<sup>55</sup> These measures marked an advance over Pushtun tribal law, but a step backwards compared to the positive legal situation before the war.

The separation of the sexes, which was already the rule in many situations, was carried to the extreme. Women were obliged to sit at the back in buses, where they were henceforth separated from the men by a screen, while the fare collector had to be under ten years old.<sup>56</sup> The Taliban also required the inhabitants of Kabul to paint over windows to a height of 1.80 metres and forbade women to wash clothes at the riverside. Women were also obliged to wear the *burqa*, while white socks and noisy heels were banned. They were officially allowed out only in the company of a *mahram*, a male member of their family who acted as their representative and protector—although groups of unaccompanied women were in fact to be seen in

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*femme afghane à travers l'histoire de l'Afghanistan*, Actes du colloque Unesco, Paris, 11 December 1998, p. 63.

<sup>54</sup> Decree no. 103, 10 September 1999 (1419/5/18).

<sup>55</sup> See especially Pierre Centlivres, who sets out in detail the contradictions between Taliban law and tribal custom regarding the rights of women. Pierre Centlivres, ‘Le mouvement Taliban et la condition féminine’, *Afghanistan Info*, March 1999, pp. 11–14.

<sup>56</sup> See Choong-Uyun Paik, *Final Report on the Situation of Human Rights in Afghanistan*, United Nations, 1997 ([www.reliefweb.int](http://www.reliefweb.int)).

the bazaar in Kabul during the Taliban regime. The Taliban also banned women from working outside the home, particularly in international organisations, a measure which had been in place in Jalalabad since 1994, though an exception was made for hospitals. The major defeat for women was their dismissal from all state administrative posts and their exclusion from the universities, where they had achieved virtually equal status during the war.

The issue of education and access to health care reveals the inability of the Taliban to include women in the educational and health services. The Taliban was not formally opposed in principle to the education of women, but wanted to set up an 'Islamic' system whose details were never clarified, although it was to be based on the separation of men and women. While there had sometimes been provision on a local basis, women had no access to education after the age of ten or twelve. Their use of hospital services was not forbidden in principle, contrary to what has sometimes been alleged, but was strictly supervised. In principle, women were to be examined only by women. In this area the crucial obstacles were economic, and were also related to the attitudes of male family members. There were significant differences between regions in the way these measures were applied.

### *The radicalisation of the Taliban*

The installation of the Taliban government should have effectively removed the barriers to its international recognition, thus depriving the opposition of the last element of leverage it might have had.<sup>57</sup> The Taliban earnestly desired such a development, which would have entrenched its regime. The United States was initially in favour. The capture of Kabul in 1996 was described as a 'positive step' by the State Department, which however gradually shifted its position after the appointment of Madeleine Albright as Secretary of State, and as a result of the influence of campaigns for women's rights. Oil companies, especially UNOCAL, also attempted to engage positively with the Taliban up to 1998–9 in the hope of exploiting Afghanistan as a channel for the export of Turkmenistan's energy resources. Initially

<sup>57</sup> Only Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and the United Arab Emirates recognised the Taliban regime.

Zalmay Khalilzad, who was close to Paul Wolfowitz and a consultant to UNOCAL, gave his blessing to a dialogue with the Taliban, but he later fell in with the majority view and declared himself in favour of their destabilisation.<sup>58</sup> Finally, the split with the United States was precipitated more by the presence of radical groups on Afghan soil rather than human rights violations or drugs.

The Taliban had inherited the networks and training camps which had been established in the 1980s, when collaboration between Islamic movements and the Afghan parties had been actively encouraged by the United States.<sup>59</sup> The majority of the Afghan factions, including those which belonged to the Northern Alliance, were at that time in contact with groups based in Peshawar which provided financial assistance and a flow of volunteers for the Afghan *jihad*. For thousands of militants, who afterwards returned to their own countries, their stay in Afghanistan was a significant or even decisive experience. The militants were progressively radicalised, and dozens of the splinter groups based in Peshawar took up increasingly anti-western positions towards the end of the 1980s. In due course the Gulf War offered the pretext for an open break with the United States, especially over the presence of its troops in Saudi Arabia.

The fall of Kabul in 1992 deprived the commitment of foreign militants of much of its point, but also opened the door to various organisations to install themselves on Afghan territory, particularly in the east, thus enabling them to escape the influence of Pakistan. In particular, some Pakistanis set up camps in Afghanistan to train their *mujahidin* for service in Kashmir.<sup>60</sup> This applied particularly to Hezb ul-Mujahidin, the military wing of Jamaat-i Islami, and to Harakat ul-Ansar, which was still known by this name after it officially re-entitled itself Harakat ul-Mujahidin. The Harakat ul-Ansar militants, led by *mawlawi* Jabbar in Afghanistan and Qari Fazlur Rahman Khalil in Pakistan, came mainly from the Punjab and underwent a six-month military course, usually at Darwanta near Jalalabad, in a camp initially set up by Hekmatyar for the Arabs, and then closed by the Taliban after the capture of Khost in September 1996.<sup>61</sup> Camps

<sup>58</sup> See, in particular, *Washington Quarterly*, winter 2000.

<sup>59</sup> On this issue, see John Cooley, *Unholy Wars*, London: Pluto Press, 2002.

<sup>60</sup> Since these training camps were therefore outside Pakistan's territory, this in theory at least, exempted them from India's strictures.

<sup>61</sup> *The News International*, 23 August, 1988.

were also maintained at Muzafarabad and near Khost by two splinter groups of Harakat ul-Ansar, namely Jamiyat ul-Mujahidin, led by Mufti Bashir, and Harakat Jihad Islami, led by Qari Saif ul-Islam Akhtar. However, the origins of the Pakistani fundamentalists and their evolution had little to do with the Afghan crisis, and Afghanistan's role must be seen in perspective, although Zia ul-Haq's policy of establishing *madrasas* was an indirect consequence of the Soviet invasion. In particular, sectarian violence between Shi'ites and Sunnis was neither a result of war in Afghanistan nor a by-product of the success of the Taliban.

The Pakistani *madrasas* were directly linked to the Afghan conflict through the participation of their *taliban* in the *jihad*, which was the natural extension of their teaching. While the volunteers were mainly Afghans, there were also Pakistanis: the majority of these were Pushtuns from the NWFP and Baluchistan, but there were also Sindhis and Muhajirs. In September 1994 when Kandahar was captured, the first *taliban* were the product of *madrasas* throughout NWFP and Baluchistan.<sup>62</sup> According to the Deputy Chief of the Citizens' Police Liaison Committee of Karachi, between 600 and 700 *taliban* were sent to Afghanistan in May 1997.<sup>63</sup> By the end, during the offensive of August 1999, Pakistani and Afghan *taliban* came in their thousands—perhaps as many as 5,000—to reinforce *mullah* Omar's troops.

The presence of these militants in Afghanistan gave rise to problems both with their countries of origins and with the United States. During a journey to Egypt in November 1993, for example, it was significant that Rabbani signed an extradition agreement with the Egyptian government, committing himself to the expulsion of extremist groups. The perpetrators of various anti-American incidents had been trained in the Afghan camps, including Ramzi Yusuf, one of those who carried out the 1993 attack on the World Trade Centre, and Mir Aimal Kainsi, a Pakistani national who was accused of machine-gunning offices belonging to the CIA in January 1994.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>62</sup> The *madrasas* included, among others, Maulana Nur Muhammad Saqib, at Katcha Garhi Camp, Zia ul-Madaris at Peshawar, Hashmia Madrasa at Bara, and Dar ul-Ulum Haqqaniya at Akora. See *The News International*, 11 December 1994.

<sup>63</sup> Owais Tohid, *The Herald*, December 1997.

<sup>64</sup> He was later arrested in Pakistan, in June 1997, and was extradited to the United States.

In response to such criticisms Pakistan decided at this point to deport *jihadi* fighters from Pakistan to Afghanistan, a move whose principal long-term effect was to displace the problem and to place these groups still further beyond control. Pakistan was able to escape inclusion in the State Department's 1994 list of countries supporting terrorism, which would have led to the cutting off of international financial aid essential for Pakistan's economic survival.

After the fall of Kabul to the Taliban, various foreign but non-Pakistani radical groups, whose numbers had dropped after the fall of Kabul in 1992, returned to Afghanistan. These included in particular the militants of the Uzbek Islamic Movement, numbering 2,000, and around 3,000 Arabs of various origins who set up bases with the Taliban's consent.<sup>65</sup> The foreign fighters were organised by Osama Bin Laden, who had come to wage the *jihad* in Afghanistan at the beginning of the 1980s, and had been Abdullah Azzam's deputy when the latter had been the head of the Maktab-i Khidamat-i Mujahidin (Mujahidin Services Office). In contrast to Abdullah Azzam, Bin Laden expressed a desire immediately to expand his field of action to include the United States, perhaps under the influence of the Egyptian radical Ayman al-Zawahiri. In 1987 he declared himself independent of Abdullah Azzam's group, and established Al-Qa'ida (The Base). Azzam was assassinated in 1989.<sup>66</sup>

Bin Laden, the heir to a large family fortune, employed both his organising ability and his money to develop his group, and above all to seek a safe haven from which he could launch his global *jihad*. In order to carry on his struggle, he had set up a network which was basically Arab but was also genuinely transnational—a rare event—and had for some years been looking for a base. After a failed attempt to establish himself in Sudan in 1989, he returned there in 1992 and developing a civil engineering business in parallel to his clandestine activity. In spite of his good relations with Hasan Turabi, he was expelled from Sudan in 1996 in response to pressure from the United

<sup>65</sup> Anthony Davies, 'Foreign fighters step up activity in Afghan civil war', *Jane's Intelligence Review*, vol. 13, no. 8, August 1, 2001.

<sup>66</sup> Rohan Gunaratna in *Inside Al-Qaida*, London: Hurst, 2002, p. 25, pursues the theory that Azzam was assassinated on Bin Laden's instructions, but the weakness of this theory is that it is founded on the evidence of renegades. For a more reliable account of the relations between Bin Laden and Azzam see Stephen Engelberg, 'Holy Warriors', *New York Times*, 14 January 2001.



States, and subsequently based himself once more in Afghanistan, where he took advantage of the absence of an organised state and of the Taliban's blunt political style. The process of convergence between two movements which were very different in their origins and their membership was never easy. Personal relationships later came into existence between Bin Laden and *mullah* Omar:<sup>67</sup> Bin Laden's marriage to *mullah* Omar's daughter cemented the ties between the two movements.

The "*fatwa*" of 23 February 1998, signed by various Al-Qa'ida officials including Bin Laden himself, conveys an idea of his view of the world and of his objectives. His grievances were precise and political; namely the presence of American forces in Saudi Arabia, the destruction of Iraq by the sanctions, and the occupation of Palestine. There followed an appeal to launch indiscriminate attacks against the Americans, in the name of *jihād*.<sup>68</sup> In most respects, Bin Laden's claims do not differ greatly from those of the Arab nationalists.

More broadly, Bin Laden's religious rhetoric is a response to American financial, military and cultural domination that has been perceived by Muslim populations, and particularly by the Arabs, as a threat to their identity, opening the way to the adoption of a religious vocabulary by opposition movements<sup>69</sup>. The Middle East, by reason of its proximity to Europe and its richness in crucial commodities, falls within what might be called the exploitable hinterland of the Western powers. In the event, after the fall of the Soviet Union, the United States and its allies, especially Turkey and Israel, enjoyed unchallenged hegemony. However, the United States has been incapable of fulfilling the role of an arbiter in the Middle East,

<sup>67</sup> It is unlikely that financial considerations came much into play. Actually Bin Laden's financial resources were certainly less than the profits from smuggling across the Pakistani frontier, especially opium.

<sup>68</sup> For a translation and a commentary on the text, see Magnus Ranstorp, "Interpreting the Broader Context and Meaning of Bin-Laden's *Fatwa*," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 21, 1998, pp. 321–330.

<sup>69</sup> François Burgat rightly lays stress on the affirmation of identity by contemporary Islamic movements, which have often taken up the programmes of nationalist and Marxist movements. See François Burgat, *L'islamisme au Maghreb*, Paris, Karthala, 1988; and, in relation to Turkey, Günter Seufert, *Politischer Islam in der Türkei: Islamismus als symbolische Repräsentation einer sich modernisierenden muslimischen Gesellschaft*, Istanbul, Franz Steiner Verlag, 1997.

especially in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In addition, the US has supported authoritarian regimes, often unpopular, such as those in Egypt and Saudi Arabia. The Gulf War of 1991 resulted in the emasculation of the only Arab country which had the ability to formulate an independent policy, while ending the alliance between the United States and the fundamentalist movements, which had come into being in Afghanistan during the 1980s.<sup>70</sup> Following the Gulf War, and in breach of the initial agreements, the United States kept its forces in Saudi Arabia, which provided a *casus belli* for the Islamic movements, and foremost among them that of Bin Laden. The chronology testifies to the expansion of anti-American actions after the Gulf War. The first attack on the World Trade centre took place in 1993.<sup>71</sup>

Bin Laden's originality is to plan and act at a global level. This was a striking departure from the practices of other radical groups, for example the Egyptians, whose membership and objectives were local. Bin Laden's strategic innovation, which seems unlikely now to cease with his death or even with the destruction of Al-Qa'ida, was to strike directly at the United States, and at its embassies and warships, even before 11 September 2001. In an interview in 1998, Bin Laden developed these arguments and elaborated on his opinion of his adversary.<sup>72</sup> A crucial issue, which offers a partial explanation of his strategic decisions, was his perception of the United States as a morally weak power, which was unable to accept military losses in a conflict. This view was based directly on events in Somalia, where Al-Qa'ida appears to have played a part in the attacks on the Americans, which led to the withdrawal of American forces after the humiliating incident on 3 October 1993 when 18 American soldiers were killed. It is likely that the plan to target the World Trade Centre was already in gestation by this time. However it was in Africa that Bin Laden would strike his first truly spectacular blow against the Americans.

<sup>70</sup> John K. Cooley, *Unholy Wars: Afghanistan, American and International Terrorism*, London, Pluto Press, 2002 (1999).

<sup>71</sup> The reader should not leap to the conclusion that anti-American operations multiplied in this period. In fact, in the 1990s, the number of attacks registered as 'terrorist' by the State Department fell by 29 per cent in relation to the 1980s. During the Clinton presidency, in spite of alarmist language, the number of dead averaged 14 per year. Andrew J. Bacevich, *American Empire*, Harvard University Press, 2002, p. 118.

<sup>72</sup> The interview was conducted with an ABC reporter. See [www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/).

On 7 August 1998, eight years after the entry of US troops into Saudi Arabia, the US embassies in Nairobi and Dar es-Salaam came under simultaneous attack, resulting in the deaths of 247 people, including twelve Americans. On 20 August US missiles struck a number of camps in Afghanistan as well as a pharmaceutical factory in Sudan. The military value of this response was doubtful: twenty people died in Afghanistan, but none of them was from the Al-Qa'ida leadership, and the attack in Sudan, based on faulty intelligence, destroyed only a genuine pharmaceutical plant.

US strategy, as it was deployed up till 2001, was not aimed at the overthrow of the Taliban but at the maintenance of sufficient pressure on them to bring about the expulsion of Bin Laden. However, the 1998 missile attacks had a political result which was actually the reverse of the US objective, namely that Bin Laden became a popular figure in Pakistan and the Gulf, in the eyes of Afghan and Pakistani fundamentalists, and more generally to anyone with anti-American views. Posters of Bin Laden went on sale in shops in Peshawar, where they were openly displayed, while the given name Osama became unprecedentedly popular in the frontier provinces. However, as has been seen, it was on the Pakistani fundamentalist movements that the Taliban relied, especially for the organisation of large-scale offensives. This, no doubt, is why Prince Turki, then the head of the Saudi secret services, who had a relatively encouraging reception when he visited Kandahar in June 1998 to ask for Bin Laden's expulsion, saw his initiative turned down at the end of the summer.

The United States had two viable strategic options after the attacks in Africa. The first was to combat the Taliban by supporting Masud while putting pressure on Pakistan. However, its relations with Masud had never been good, and it did not want to confront Pakistan. The second option was to recognise the Taliban and speed up the reconstruction of the Afghan state, which would have strengthened the hand of those who opposed the presence of radical factions within the Taliban. However, this was a strategy which required time, and was not politically acceptable at home given the growing wave of anti-Taliban opinion in the US media. In fact the United States chose a third option, namely to put increasing pressure on the Taliban. In the event this strategy failed, since diplomatic isolation only increased its radicalisation while at the same time, thanks to assistance from Pakistan, its ability to act on the ground was undiminished. The 'rational'

approach of the Americans failed probably because of their misunderstanding of the ideological constraints under which the Taliban operated, as well as the virulent mistrust inspired in general by US policies. In addition, the Taliban believed at this point that it was invulnerable, both because a US intervention was very unlikely and because it was convinced that it could withstand an American invasion, just as it had fought off the Soviets.

With no convincing military option, the United States then took the decision to place its faith once more in the sanctions embodied the UN Security Council's resolution 1267, unanimously adopted by the Council on 15 October 1999, which had been reinforced by resolution 1333 on 19 December 2000. Specifically, these sanctions provided for an embargo on the importation of weapons into Afghanistan, the reduction of the size of foreign diplomatic missions in Kabul, and the closure of Taliban offices abroad. Another measure froze Taliban financial resources abroad, while the airline Ariana was no longer permitted to fly outside Afghanistan's frontiers. These sanctions achieved only a marginal economic effect, without the depth of those which had inflicted grave damage on Iraq in the 1990s. In fact Afghanistan's infrastructure had already been largely destroyed, while for political reasons it was difficult to halt the work of NGOs in a country on the verge of famine because of a drought of historic proportions. 'Smart' sanctions were particularly difficult to apply because of the scale of illicit cross-border trafficking. Nevertheless, the report issued by the UN on the effects of the sanctions demonstrates that the population believed they were more comprehensive than they were in reality.<sup>73</sup>

On the Taliban side the attitude of the west was not seen as a preliminary to negotiation, as the US government would have wished it to be, but rather as an existential threat. After the closure in January 2001 of its office in New York, the Taliban was no longer even recognised as an interlocutor, which in practice brought to a halt the peace talks set up by F. Vendrell within the framework of the UN's mediating role. Contacts with US representatives in Pakistan continued to the end, but remained unofficial.

<sup>73</sup> United Nations, *Vulnerability and Humanitarian Impact of UN Security Council Sanctions in Afghanistan*, prepared by the Office of the humanitarian coordinator for Afghanistan, Islamabad, Pakistan, 16 September, 2000.

The position of the Taliban concerning Bin Laden's extradition remained virtually unchanged, and was also supported by the government of Pakistan before 11 September 2001.<sup>74</sup> The Taliban put forward compromise proposals, having ruled out both the option of bringing Bin Laden to justice in Afghanistan, and that of his direct extradition to the United States. One suggestion was that after an initial hearing by *ulema* from Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia and a third country, Bin Laden could be deported to a Muslim country. The Minister of Foreign Affairs, *mullah* Abdul Muttawakil, made a further suggestion, proposing a mechanism whereby he would be placed under surveillance by the Organisation of the Islamic Conference. It appears that the foreign Minister had additionally proposed that recognition might be extended to the Taliban government in exchange for Bin Laden's expulsion. Whether because *mullah* Omar did not back this suggestion, or because the United States rejected it, this proposal came to nothing. The impasse reflected Bin Laden's growing influence over the regime, the nationalist response to the US attacks of 1998, and the importance to the Taliban of transnational solidarities, at a time when the war was not yet over.

In addition to its support for fundamentalist movements, there was a further issue which caused problems for the Taliban. This was that Afghanistan had become the world's leading producer of opium, overtaking Burma. According to the UN Drug Control Programme, half the world's heroin was produced in Afghanistan, while 80% of the heroin consumed in Europe was of Afghan origin.<sup>75</sup> In its approach to this issue the Taliban displayed unaccustomed efficiency, dramatically cutting down opium production. This was a demonstration of the degree of control it exercised in the countryside, but worsened the situation of the rural population who were already affected by the drought. However, these measures brought the Taliban no benefit in terms of diplomacy, since the United States was interested only in Bin Laden.

By 2001, following the renewal of the sanctions in December 2000, the radicalisation of the regime was undeniable. In this context the destruction of the Buddhas of Bamyan was symbolic of a defini-

<sup>74</sup> See in particular the interview with President Musharraf in the *Washington Times*, 21 March 2001.

<sup>75</sup> *The Economist Intelligence Unit*, 1999, p. 34.

tive break with the international community. The act was evidently political, since previous decrees of *mullah* Omar, issued in July 1999, had offered protection to works of art in general and specifically to the Buddhas. Following the decree of 26 February 2001 ordering their destruction, they were finally dynamited in March after repeated attempts to dissuade the Taliban from the destruction of a unique monument.<sup>76</sup>

Relations with the NGOs also worsened in 2001 as a result of the overall deterioration of the situation. The policy of religious conversion implemented by some organisations such as 'Shelter Now' was the cause of a further crisis. The practice of carrying out conversions under the cover of humanitarian action was condemned by the majority of the NGOs because of its intrinsic dishonesty and its exploitation of the inferior economic status of the population. The increasing presence of Protestant Christian preachers in a Muslim country represented a return to a nineteenth-century practice, leading probably to similar results.<sup>77</sup> In the case of Afghanistan the security of the great majority of NGOs whose operations were above-board was put at risk by these organisations. As another consequence the Islamic NGOs came to play an increasing role, whether they were of fundamentalist inclination such as the Rasheed Trust, or non-fundamentalist such as Fetullahci and the Canadian Relief Foundation.

After the UN vote to re-impose sanctions Pakistan was the last ally left to the Taliban, and its support largely accounts for the continued offensive capacity of the regime up to the summer of 2001. However, questions began to be asked about the rationale for Pakistani assistance. The installation of a Taliban government in Kabul had been intended to open up Central Asia to Pakistan's economic and political influence, but in practice the outcome had been the reverse, with the result that Pakistan found itself faced by hostility from the Central Asian countries, except for Turkmenistan. The undisguised presence of Taliban *mujahidin* in Tajikistan fighting alongside the Islamist opposition, and the links between the Uzbek Islamic Movement and the Taliban, were seen as part of a deliberate bid to destabilise Central Asia.<sup>78</sup> After the capture of Kabul in September

<sup>76</sup> See Pierre Centlivres, *Les Bouddhas d'Afghanistan*, Paris: Favre, 2001.

<sup>77</sup> This presence was reinforced after 11 September 2001; see *Time*, 4 August 2003.

<sup>78</sup> The Taliban commander in Uzbekistan, Namangani, was put in charge of military operations in the north of the country during the war against the United States.

1996 Russia and the countries of Central Asia immediately organised a summit meeting on security issues, whose tone was clearly hostile to Pakistan. During a further summit in 1997 accusations were made against Pakistan over its Afghan policy, in spite of the mollifying remarks of Nawaz Sharif. Finally, the offensives of 1999 and 2000 aroused protests from the regional powers and the UN against both Pakistan and the Taliban.

In reaction to Pakistani policies some states developed a strategy of containment of both Afghanistan and Pakistan. Iran represented no political threat due to its broadly conservative position, but took the decision to make economic overtures to Central Asia. The construction of a railway from Sarakhas in Turkmenistan to the Iranian port of Bandar Abbas, together with the development of the port, offered Turkmenistan an alternative outlet to that offered by Afghanistan. Turkmenistan and Iran also established a free trade zone at Sarakhas, and in 1999 India signed an agreement with Iran to permit the transit of goods from central Asia.

Finally, Pakistan lacked the resources to provide sufficient aid for Afghanistan, particularly for the infrastructural repairs required for the transport of goods to Central Asia. Even the section of road from Kandahar to the Pakistani frontier was in bad repair, and was thus a considerable obstacle to trade with Quetta. The National Highway Authority, charged with the rebuilding of the road to Turkmenistan, failed to produce any practical results, despite negotiations begun in December 1996; while the so-called 'Afghan Trade Cell', established in July 1997,<sup>79</sup> was never allowed a budget sufficient to make any real impact on cross-border trade.

<sup>79</sup> This was the successor to the 'Afghan Trade Development Cell' set up within the Ministry of the Interior by Nasrullah Babar.