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# Cultural Trauma, History Making, and the Politics of Ethnic Identity among Afghan Hazaras

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# Cultural Trauma, History Making, and the Politics of Ethnic Identity among Afghan Hazaras

Melissa Kerr Chiovena, PhD

University of Connecticut, 2016

Based on 18 months of fieldwork in Bamyan and West Kabul, Afghanistan among ethnic Hazara civil society activists, I examine civil society groups' protests and memorialization activities as social and political acts of collective and cultural trauma generation and dissemination. The activists' protests seek to secure greater rights, security and infrastructural development in Hazara populated areas, and memorialize past rights violations and atrocities against Hazaras. Through protests, literature and social media, the retelling of traumatic events inculcates and spreads collective trauma. And the framing of these past events as a present existential threat merges with a widespread sense that Hazara history and culture have been quietly erased by a Pashtun-dominated Afghan state apparatus. Both the constant recounting of collective traumas and the perception of having been excluded from Afghan history and history-writing confirm a need to write and speak about the Hazara past through frames specific to Hazaras' victimization, including an ongoing genocide which began over 100 years ago. Hazara activist history-telling also draws on Bamyan's ancient past, to make a claim to their being Afghanistan's autochthonous people as well as heirs to cosmopolitan, religiously tolerant and non-violent Buddhist and Silk Road traditions. Yet the ancient past is also depicted as having been traumatic, in that the early ancestors of the Hazaras are held to have suffered under Muslim and Mongol invaders. Affective and symbolic echoes of Shi'a traditions of martyrdom and victimization are also to be found in Hazara protest and memorialization. Layered on top of all this is language appealing to a Western audience, giving emphasis to Hazaras' purportedly inherent peacefulness and their recent embrace of human rights and genocide recognition. Hazara activists express a Hazara exceptionalism based on the idea that their people are particular to Afghanistan as an autochthonous group mixed with later migrations and different religious groups which thrived on the Silk Road and are hence imbued with a peacefulness and cosmopolitanism others lack. They provide as evidence a mix of written and mythological historical sources.

Cultural Trauma, History Making, and the Politics of Ethnic Identity among Afghan Hazaras

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APPROVAL PAGE

Doctor of Philosophy Dissertation

Cultural Trauma, History Making, and the Politics of Ethnic Identity among Afghan Hazaras

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# Cultural Trauma, History Making, and the Politics of Ethnic Identity Among afghan Hazaras

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## Chapter One

### An Introduction to Cultural Trauma

In this dissertation, I present research on civil society (*joma'e maidani*) activists, from the Hazara ethnicity, living in Afghanistan. My main goal is to demonstrate the ways, and the methods used by, these activists, mainly within Hazara communities, to spread particular narratives of collective trauma, history, and memory in order to seek sociopolitical gains, both for the community at large and for themselves as individuals. Through their work, a Hazara identity is emerging on the basis of shared traumatic memory and the closely-linked sense that Hazaras historically were, and continue to be, targeted as an exceptional people for oppression in Afghanistan. Both because they say they are descended from an ancient, cosmopolitan people of the Silk Road, and because they state they have been influenced, since the 1980s and '90s, by Hazara leaders who activists say stress universalizing ideals of democratic inclusion and human rights, Hazara activists claim yet another kind of exceptionality: that they, the Hazaras, are by way of particular cultural attributes the best-prepared of all of Afghanistan's ethnic groups to promote peace, respect for human rights, gender equality, and universal education. Such universalizing ideals are also promoted by foreign actors today — development organizations and NGOs. Activist claims that they have long been exposed to and even followed such ideals further their argument, among themselves and the Hazara community, that they are the people with the greatest ability to promote and live by such ideals when compared to other ethnic groups.

All this should sound familiar to Central Asianist scholars and the Hazaras themselves. In this dissertation I go a step further still, to say that Hazaras' narratives of shared persecution bear



a strong resemblance, in their emphasis on martyrdom and providential leadership, to foundational Shi'a (to which sect the majority of Hazaras belong) histories and legends, such as that of the treacherous murders of Hussein and his followers. Hazara activists weave together with these claims concerning current universals and ancient cosmopolitanisms narratives about the justice of Shi'ism as a religion and the injustices suffered by the early protagonists of this sect.

All of these points are tied together by the themes of collective memory and its use by activists to instill a cultural trauma. What makes collective trauma a cultural trauma in this case is not just the dominance of narratives of oppression in discourses of what it means to be Hazara. Activists also often focus on the loss of Hazara culture under the pressure of outside hostility, creating feelings that the very existence of Hazara identity and culture are at stake.

Hazara politicians promote some of these narratives when it is politically expedient. All the same, Hazaras activists seeking recognition for past persecution and current discrimination face a constant battle with the Afghan state, sometimes with those same politicians who, they claim, despite being Hazara co-ethnics, are most interested in their own self-aggrandizement. In other words, many activists expressed the sentiment that Hazara politicians play a sort of double game. Hazara politicians, they said, must agree, at least to a certain extent, with a state that chooses often to ignore Hazara-specific issues in order to ally with major politicians. They also must speak of the problems brought up by the activists, as otherwise they lose local support. Hence activists show distrust for the main Hazara politicians as they attempt to satisfy both central state concerns, and local Hazara concerns. Afghanistan has an extremely centralized government, and many positions are made via appointment. Others, however, such as parliamentarians, are voted on. Politicians seek both appointments and elected positions at

different points throughout their career. Activists hence can believe politicians are only concerned with self-aggrandizement, whether they are strengthening ties with the political elite above them or appearing to work on those issues that the activists find important.

I focus on Markaz Bamyān, or Bamyān, Center, the Provincial seat of Bamyān Province, the unofficial capital of the “Hazara homeland.” Yet evidence points also to Hazaras in the rest of Afghanistan, neighboring countries, and the world sharing the emergent identity being created by Hazara activists, based on ideas of suffering, of loss of history and the need to recover the past and maintain inviolable ties to a homeland. In these other locales such themes are all overlaid with Shi’a motifs of the just frequently losing their fight against oppression as well as a belief in their own, inborn cultural competence for human rights and gender equality. An extremely large Hazara population resides in Kabul and many activists are among them. Hazaras are also in most big cities of Afghanistan. Iran, Pakistan, Europe, Australia, the United States, India, and even Indonesia are all home to activists.

Locally, the sites of Hazara identity-building and the spread of trauma include protests organized by activists; speeches at conferences, in conjunction with protests, or simply as stand-alone events organized by activists but also supported by NGOs; written publications such as newspapers and fliers; and even informal settings, such as in gatherings in university dorm rooms or among family and friends. As Shi’a mosques also serve as informal meeting halls, many meetings and even speeches and events are held within their walls, even if the mullahs are not directly involved in the civil society projects. Activists also make extensive use of social media: Facebook, Twitter, various blogs and informational websites. Often Hazara activist social media posts, seeking a larger audience outside Afghanistan, appeal more to universal ideals, and quote not only Hazara leaders, such as Abdul Ali Mazari — the founder of their political and

*mujahedin* party, Hizb-e-Wahdat — but also international figures such as Nelson Mandela, Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King. Religious themes concerning justice also appear. A seasonal tempo marks social media posting — the birthday or anniversary of the death of a leader like Mazari or King fosters reflection on their legacies, while a religious holiday fosters reflection on the attributes of Ali, Hussein, or Mohammad, the most important religious figures for Shi’a Muslims. Even as my civil society activist informants live mainly in Bamyan, they stand at the center of a worldwide Hazara movement.

The civil society activists come from different social backgrounds, and yet most converge in Bamyan as university students or professors and NGO workers. Some actually work with organizations that are designed to promote civil society in the Western sense, and receive money from foreign donors, although in a subsequent chapter, it will be shown that this perceived loss of independence can be understood as problematic by some activists. Usually these organizations work on “capacity building,” holding training events to improve civil society, people’s knowledge of their rights, with a focus on women’s rights, and training in laws intended to protect the most vulnerable members of society. Others work for civil society organizations which are more grassroots and locally funded, and so deal more with protest movements than other types of trainings. Greater numbers work for one of the many development NGOs active in Bamyan, focusing on agricultural development, women’s income generation projects, educational projects, tourism projects, sanitation and clean water projects, and many other development projects. Working on development projects and hoping to improve the situation of the people of Bamyan streamlines very well with the desire to bring attention to the discrimination faced by Hazaras. Many journalists in Bamyan consider themselves activists, as do a number of university professors, although conflicts of interests often mean they are not the

main organizers. Finally, much of the “rank and file” of the activists are university students or recent graduates. I worked closely with both activist leaders, who welcomed me to their planning meetings, and the “rank and file” who were also eager to speak with me.

Those closely involved in work with political parties are not generally activists, and most of the activists have little patience for political parties. There are a variety of reasons for this, which include a belief among activists that politics in general is corrupt, as well as the lack of any real opposition platforms, as parties are largely personality based. One commonality all but one of the main activists I know share is this distrust of politics, and the belief that politics somehow made activism unclean. Save the one who works directly for the government, those who cooperate with a political party or government official do so with trepidation. They fear the reaction of other activists who might interpret this as a betrayal of civil society ideals.

Some in the Bamyán community perceive activists as working purely for their own self-aggrandizement. Activists benefit from their activities, but telling the story of their people motivates them, as does helping their people in some way. Activists partaking in such activities not only disseminate narratives of trauma; they sometimes feel traumatized themselves. While the activists certainly wish to improve the situation of their ethnic group, Hazara, first, and their nation, Afghanistan, second, it cannot be denied that many also fully realize their activities provide them with benefits. They might gain political connections, become well known in the Hazara community, or benefit from becoming part of a network in a country where many opportunities are still obtained through client-patron relationships. Yet I cannot underscore enough my realization, through their many interactions with me, through hours upon hours of interviews and time spent together, that the activists themselves are deeply, personally invested in improving the situation of their people, and believe that the suffering experienced by Hazaras

throughout their history needs to be acknowledged. Because these Hazara activists work for both societal and personal gain, one way they can be understood is as “social entrepreneurs.” They seek to change, improve, and perhaps create a new society, even as they seek personal gain. Yet they can also be considered “moral entrepreneurs,” drawing on the study of morality and norms by Cass Sunstein (1996), with the idea that while some norms in a society are moral, some are not — and there are individuals that go about the process of changing amoral norms. Hazara activists are changing society, and as they consider such issues as human and gender rights, and equal rights for Hazaras, they are certainly attacking norms in Afghanistan which they consider amoral. Hence, they are entrepreneurs, a vanguard, seeking to change social and moral aspects of their society.

My involvement with the activists happened through chance. I intended to work with people in Bamyan involved in development projects, but at the time, I did not realize the extent to which the categories of activists and development workers overlap. I began to gravitate more towards the stories told to me by the activists, and as I found certain themes repeated — that of the genocide of the Hazaras, their stolen history, their competence for universal ideals that they claimed other groups in Afghanistan were lacking, I realized that there was an important movement happening. If so many people wanted to tell me these stories, I would be wise to listen. The activists certainly saw in me an opportunity. They wanted someone who would tell their story to the West, who would serve as an ally, who would hopefully do something to bring US and other international assistance they feel they need as a group targeted by discrimination. In a way, this worked to my advantage, as many people wanted to talk to me. I was concerned, however — were the stories they told only for my ears? I soon found out that in most cases, what they told me was very much in line with what they were telling the people of Bamyan, and the

greater Hazara community. I found that also on social media, what the activists told me was very much in line with the stories and themes represented through that forum. When some of my informants, who are scholars, speak to a non-Afghan audience, they do code-switch between the Western and Afghan/Hazara audiences. But for some reason, perhaps because I was physically in Bamyan and spoke Dari, I basically received the same information that the community did. I might go more in-depth on certain issues during one-on-one interviews, but I never found any glaring discrepancies.

Hazaras occupy a disenfranchised role in many ways in Afghan society due to several factors. To give a brief overview, historically they have been oppressed by a state in which power has traditionally been held by other ethnic groups. In particular, since the late 1800s, Hazaras have been relegated to positions of manual laborers and servants, and at times, they were enslaved. The then-ruler of Afghanistan, Abdur Rahman, undertook a centralization campaign throughout the country, including a brutal war against the semi-autonomous Hazaras. Many who survived were displaced or fled, creating a large diaspora of Hazaras eking out a living in the cities, mainly Kabul, but also northern Mazar-e-Sharif, western Herat, and others. Hazaras have had a particularly difficult time realizing social mobility because their ethnic differences have become racialized — with distinctive somatic features, Hazaras are said to have descended from Chingiz Khan's invading army. At the same time, there are sectarian issues, as Afghanistan is a majority Sunni country, while most Hazaras are Shi'a. Being different — as ethnically Hazara, racially asiatic, and religiously Shi'a — exposes Hazaras to widespread prejudice in Afghanistan.

Hazaras improved their situation after 2001 to some degree. After the United States and NATO defeat of the Taliban regime, they are certainly one of the groups which has most

benefitted from international involvement in Afghanistan. The Taliban, as a Sunni extremist group, denied rights to, and persecuted, Hazaras, but the history of Hazara oppression does not start with the Taliban, as they were also an excluded minority for many years prior. Today, many attend school and universities in unprecedented numbers, and go on to find coveted positions in government agencies and NGOs. However, most in the community agree that they still face a multitude of problems. Activists stage protests addressing a variety of issues, from lack of infrastructure and security, to specific prejudice against Hazaras. These protests all serve, I argue, to shape a particular Hazara identity based around the idea that they are a traumatized people. History is remembered, recollected, and retold with focus on the suffering of Hazaras. Activists relate current situations back to this past suffering. They tie these narratives of tragedies and suffering, in some ways, to the narratives of Karbala and the martyrdom of Hussein, one of the most important Shi'a religious figures, which is a common aspect of many Shi'a communities throughout the world. And yet, Hazara activist narratives differ from those of other Shi'as. They reach back to the loss of an ancient, Silk Road-based, Buddhist culture as part of their trauma. They argue that the coming of Chingiz Khan also resulted in suffering for their ancestors. And, activists say that Hussein was a figure who lived over one thousand years ago, in a different part of the world. The suffering of Hazaras is recent, beginning several hundred years ago and, according to the activists, continues today. Therefore, while activists use parallels to Hussein, they also make use of other particular, and even more ancient, historical narratives when presenting their suffering. Many also reject the idea that this is a pan-Shi'a suffering, claiming that the oppression of Hazaras is very specific to Afghanistan and that other Shi'as, particularly Iranians, have not done enough to support the Hazaras.

I argue that Hazaras face, and participate in, the construction of a new trauma, a cultural

trauma, by the activists themselves. Through the activists' strong voices in their communities, the historical and recent difficulties of Hazaras come to be widely shared among the population, in Bamyan, in Kabul, and in other Hazara communities throughout the world, including diasporas. This is ostensibly the goal of the activists: to ensure that the traumas and persecutions are never forgotten, so that Hazaras are galvanized to demand a better situation from the Afghan state. It is open to question just how successful the activists have been in spreading cultural trauma through the population. What seems safer to say is that the activists have a voice in their communities, at times mobilize large numbers of people, and are actively seeking to spread their message. Even if not every Hazara is ready to declare her/himself fully a member of a traumatized group, the activists whose work is the main subject of this dissertation are unquestionably committed to this vision of the Hazara ethno-national group.

I consider the subjectivity of the activists as they go about their project, including a variety of factors. How does the history they know and are relearning, based on oppression, and are trying to spread among their community, affect the activists' subjective worldview? How does their status as traditionally low class subjects, and coming to realize that they are the victims of numerous massacres and episodes of ethnic cleansing, impact their subjective worldview? Furthermore, I will consider how their membership in a specific, millenarian religious sect, as well as their purported participation in universal values and the upholding of human rights, impacts their subjectivity. Finally, there is the other side — the fact that while many have been victims, some have also been fighters and have committed acts of violence not in line with their meta-narrative of Hazara victimhood. Having been both victim and perpetrator at the same time also impacts their subjectivity. But most importantly, I will examine how, by the construction and dissemination of a collective, cultural trauma, the activists attempt to persuade the rest of the



Hazara population to accept this narrative. Finally, how do all of these points affect their belief that they are members of an Afghan nation, without any intention to pursue secession?

At base, getting a fuller understanding of how the specific historical suffering and traumas of Hazaras live on in Hazara activist discourse demands a well-developed theory of trauma's relationship to memory, collective trauma, and cultural trauma, matters to which I turn next.

### **Trauma: Personal and Collective**

Didier Fassin and Richard Rechtman, in *The Empire of Trauma* (2009), write that it has become commonplace to refer to the relation of present suffering to past violence through the language of trauma — that is, the aftermath of a tragic event that leaves an imprint upon an individual, whether it be victim, witness, responder or perpetrator. For Fassin and Rechtman, trauma is also “the collective imprint on a group of a historical experience that may have occurred decades, generations, or even centuries ago” (xi). Trauma is something intensely personal, in that violent events always happen to individuals, and yet it may also be something that is experienced as a group when an event has touched a large number of individuals who identify with this group. One might even say that all of Afghanistan has been traumatized by a conflict that has continued, almost without respite, since the late 1970s. This coexistence of individual and collective experiences begs the question of how trauma comes to be experienced by an entire society, rather than a large or small number of individuals. An example that will resonate with Americans is the 9/11 attacks. How did the mass killings on September 11, 2001 transcend the direct experience of a large number of people in New York City and Washington D.C. to become an event that was traumatic to nearly every American?

Cathy Caruth, in her well cited psychoanalytic description of trauma, asserts that what causes trauma is not being part of, or directly affected by, an event but rather one's memories of the event (1995). One needs distance, time, a period of "latency," before trauma can be experienced. After this period, when one begins to relive events in one's memory, and reflect upon how it interplays with one's past life, one truly becomes traumatized, or escapes relatively unscathed. Also figuring into this might be outside factors and influences during the period of latency, events, interactions with people, and perhaps exposure to media. This could be true for both bodily and psychological harm. Even as certain events may be considered inherently traumatogenic, what turns the event into a psychological trauma is the meaning which the traumatized subject attaches to it, based on the person's almost unconscious evaluation of the difference between life before and after, as well as the specific context in which they experienced the event. Hence, some people show greater psychological "resilience" than others in responses to a trauma-inducing event, based on personal temperament and past experiences. In other words, this process is mediated by certain outside as well inner factors, which together with the particular "set of subjective meanings" the person has given to events in his life, including this one, determine the extent to which it will be "traumatic," (Goldberg 1995). Some events are almost necessarily going to be traumatic but the individuals who experience them will differ in the level of traumatization they manifest, and in *how* this traumatization manifests, depending upon what mediating factors intervened during the period of latency.

As we move on to discuss collective trauma, experienced by people who did not directly experience the event, the mediating factors assume added importance. Such mediating factors might include media, activist work, the input of people close to the individual in question, affiliation with groups that aim to remember the trauma (or forget it), and later, similar

seemingly traumatic events, among other possibilities. It is these which either mute or spread the trauma. In this sense, not every large-scale traumatic event results in collective trauma.

The understanding of a collective trauma which impacts some group that shares a level of cohesiveness can be understood the same way. First, however, we might explore the idea of collective memory, in general, before moving on to talk about collective trauma and cultural trauma. One of the earliest theorists of collective memory and historical memory, Maurice Halbwachs, posits that individuals are constantly twining together, melding, their personal memories, group memories, and historical memories. Personal memories are always mediated by, fit into, and contrasted with those memories of other members of a group to which one belongs. Events we “remember” may be an amalgamation of recollections of others about the event, transposed onto our memory. Likewise, historical and personal (or autobiographical) memory are never two completely separate events, running side by side. One places one’s personal memories within the context of larger historical events happening at the time, giving different flavor and meaning to what one actually saw, or thinks one saw. The personal is hence always inextricably entwined with the historical. These interactions allow for some type of group, collective, memory to come to be (Halbwachs 1980).

There are many mediations that impact this collective remembering and its interaction with group remembering, perhaps more today than in the past. The process might be sped up as media, print, television, and social media, give a platform to all sorts of voices, several of which usually become dominant. The events of 9/11 illustrate this. There was surely a feeling, as the attacks were unfolding, that this was important, but exactly how was in the moment unclear. Media sources shaped the narrative, as did political/government ones, stressing that this was one of those lines in history which will always demarcate a serious change in the “way things are.” I

was outside of the United States, in a village in Uzbekistan training to be a Peace Corps volunteer at the time of the event. I remained for several more weeks until, with the impending invasion of neighboring Afghanistan, the decision was made to evacuate. I knew 9/11 was important, but I did not feel myself seriously personally affected, besides the difficulties of returning to the United States and having suddenly to seek employment. People all across America, however, told me they were personally traumatized, even when they did not live in the targeted cities or know anyone personally affected by the attacks. A family member, who lived in Arizona, called me to task for being insensitive to what the American people had gone through. It seemed I missed some key mediation — mourning, memorials, certain media portrayals, and I could not “catch up.” To this day, I have a hard time joining in discussions about this event and how it affected Americans. Ron Eyerman writes, “Collective memory is conceived as the outcome, a conversational process in which individuals locate themselves. This dialogic process is one of negotiation for both individuals and the collective itself,” (Eyerman 2004: 7). It seems I missed some key part of the process whereby a morning of mass killings in two American cities became the collective trauma, “9/11.”

### *The Victim of Trauma: Individual and Collective*

Fassin and Rechtman offer insight into how the “traumatized victim” became a positive archetype over the course of the past hundred years or so, as opposed to a victim too weak to handle a difficult situation. They posit that in recent years, a shift has occurred in society’s widespread reception of said individual. In the past, the victim was someone to be questioned, shunned, and viewed as illegitimate, someone who had some underlying problem that meant they weren’t up to difficult tasks — for example, soldiers demonstrating the neurosis of shell-shock

used to be suspect of using the condition to avoid return to duty (5). Today, PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) while perhaps not a fully accepted condition, as some soldiers within the military still face stigma, is generally accepted by greater society as acceptable. Today, PTSD is also a recognized psychological disorder not only experienced by soldiers, but also by people who have experienced any number of violent or disturbing events.

The concept of collective trauma is also largely accepted today as a given, as something that people who are part of a collective will potentially, even likely, experience, even should they not be directly exposed to an event. Fassin and Rechtman too turn to 9/11 to exemplify that “trauma is commonplace in the contemporary world, an established truth” (Fassin and Rechtman: 2). In Afghanistan the situation is a bit different, and may differ among ethnic groups. Among Hazara activists I found that there was a need to protect those most traumatized by the years of war, as well as by social violence often experienced by vulnerable groups such as women and children. People were reluctant to introduce me to someone who had experienced something traumatic simply for the sake of my research, and people often hid their scars, both psychological and physical, until we had become trusted friends. Among Hazaras, there is not the complete embracing of the victim as a legitimate category for the individual, but the classification of victim for the entire population, for the collective, is treated as something obvious because of the Hazaras’ historical oppression. Victim becomes something very few individuals will admit to as being part of their identity to the outsider, whereas the collective group claims victimhood almost with pride. This might relate to Hazaras’ particular history, their Shi’a faith, or both. I can say that Pashtuns seemed, in my estimation as well as that of several scholars, including Thomas Barfield and my husband Andrea Chiovenda, both via personal communication, to reject a group victimhood narrative. In Afghanistan, this seems more

particular to Hazaras.

Not only geographical distance but gaps in time can be transcended by collective trauma, so that events and situations from generations ago can still be understood to be sources of trauma. I have noticed this myself in debates between friends, family, and acquaintances concerning the position of African Americans in U.S. society. In what sense can African Americans still be subject to feeling “traumatized” by slavery, four or five generations or more after emancipation? A key dynamic here is that the harm did not disappear with slavery’s end but continued for decades later through the denial to African Americans of equal citizenship rights and the perpetuation of unequal socioeconomic endowments. African American feelings of collective trauma around slavery seem indissociable from their never having been justly compensated for being enslaved or made whole from its harms but, quite the opposite, having had to bear the badge of popular racism and being subject to laws aiming to keep blacks “in their place.”

Hazaras occupy an analogous if not identical historical space. Hazaras in Afghanistan and Afro-descendants in the United States have both suffered violence, disrespect and exploitation. Yet, for both, things have improved to a degree to which many non-blacks and non-Hazaras think they should “get over it,” with the implication that clinging to past harms is a way of seeking special favors. There are other Afghans who side with Hazaras in saying that, both psychologically and socially, the imprint of such experiences remains, just as movements such as Black Lives Matter attract supporters of all races. And yet, Hazaras still see themselves as victims, while non-Hazaras can harbor implicit and sometimes explicit prejudices that prevent Hazaras from realizing their full potential in Afghanistan.

Collective trauma, then, is something that is largely accepted as a reality, and yet may be

viewed with suspicion when minority group members are perceived to be trying to take unfair advantage of a difficult past to secure present entitlements. A key variable is the treatment which collective trauma receives through media outlets: favorable media portrayals may lead to easier acceptance of claims of collective trauma, by both minority and mainstream groups. One needs only look as far as the outpouring of support on social media and elsewhere for “people” of France and Belgium following the terror attacks of late 2015 and early 2016 to see this. My own observations seem to indicate that when the victims are more “like us,” the Westerners, and when the perpetrator has Islamist sympathies, the media portrays the event as the targeting of a group, a group to which “we Westerners” belong and hence also might take part in traumatization. If the perpetrator is “like us”, another “Westerner,” he or she is presented as someone who has gone mad, who is possibly a victim of some sort of mental illness. The feeling that “we” are under attack in these cases does not appear in media descriptions of the event to such an extent.

Trauma, in some circumstances, may be felt well beyond the immediate victims, and media plays a part in spreading the feelings that a group should be traumatized. The question as to whether trauma can be passed through generations is more contentious — many individuals claim to feel great psychological pain because of the suffering of their collective ancestors, while others deny the legitimacy of these feelings. Below, is a passage from my fieldnotes with Qasim (all names are pseudonyms, unless the individual is a public figure or they asked specifically to be referred to by their actual name), an informant who was raised in Quetta, Pakistan among the Hazara community there, and then traveled to Bamyan for work. Qasim and I met at a protest planning meeting, and he was always willing to talk to me after that, at least once every couple of weeks. Sometimes we held long conversations/interviews in my quarters, and sometimes at

his workplace, although the privacy offered in my quarters was preferable — there were always some things informants did not want overheard. We spoke a mix of Dari in English in this case. Having grown up partially in Pakistan Qasim had a strong English education, and so we switched between the languages, discussing ideas and terms in one or the other depending on the context. In this passage, Qasim speaks at length about the real, recent problems and traumatic events he has experienced. But in the end of the passage, he brings up points that indicate this is a collective, if not cultural, trauma he is describing. He says that, with the destruction by the Taliban of the Buddha statues, Hazaras' former gods were destroyed, and along with them, part of their culture. He also relates the entire passage to the genocide that he says Hazaras have experienced for at least one hundred years. He relates current events to past difficulties faced by Hazaras, weaving together a single narrative that allowed them to claim genocide is still happening. This was a common mode of expressing for many activists — the claim that they are targeted now, but that they were also targeted over one hundred years ago, and that these events are continuous. In this way, all Hazaras become victims of Abdur Rahman's purported genocide.

Qasim was raised mainly in Quetta, Pakistan. He was tall, thin, in his late twenties, had short dark hair, and a habit of sucking on his teeth as he thought about a particular point. He spoke very cultivated English, and liked to practice language with me. His father was from the Panjab district of Bamyan, an extremely rural area, while his mother came from the Lal District in neighboring Ghor Province. The both moved to Mashhad while Zahir Shah was still in power (so sometime before 1973). There, they met and married, and had several children. Qasim attended school in Iran until fifth grade, when his family moved to Quetta, Pakistan, as they believed there would be more educational opportunities for



the children there. (Iran is well known for barring Afghan children from school, whereas in Pakistan, Hazaras have been a diaspora long enough that they are recognized as an official minority group). “Now, we feel Quetta is too dangerous, with the suicide bombings and targeted shootings of Hazaras, but what can we do? Now we have roots there. We have a house, and while my parents want to sell, who wants to buy a house in Hazara Town in Quetta?” Qasim pondered.

Qasim finished high school at an Iranian school in Quetta, and then decided he wanted to get to know his homeland, so he moved to Bamyan hoping to enroll in university. However, he found the *konkur*, the mandatory entrance exam, difficult to pass as it focused on different subjects than those he learned in school in Quetta. He could not speak Pashto at all, and said as the school he attended in Quetta was dedicated to the arts, he was also unable to pass many of the science sections. Luckily, with his very good English (common in Pakistan, as a former British colony), he found a job with Save the Children.

“Melissa, I want to leave Afghanistan. I am so afraid of what will happen after 2014, after the withdrawal of troops. I don’t need a luxurious life; I don’t need to go to Europe. I would be fine in Indonesia or Turkey. I am sick of these Muslim countries (questioning revealed that since these countries offered, he had heard, more freedom as to how one can practice religion than Afghanistan, Pakistan, or Iran, where a significant amount of legislation is based on religious tenets, he knew he would have more freedom to do a he liked in these countries, which are also home to Muslim majorities).

“Working for Save the Children, I think a lot about the problems and danger for children — but we Hazaras all face problems. I mean, children are never safe here. But a

close friend of mine was targeted and killed in Quetta for being Hazara...just forty minutes after I said good-bye to him. For these reasons, while I am not looking to live in luxury, I need to leave. But I cannot live in Iran because they are racist and insult Hazaras and deny them rights. I cannot live in Quetta because of the extreme risk of death for Hazaras and for all Shi'as. And I cannot live in Afghanistan because of the insecurity and because I don't know what will happen after 2014 (after most foreign troops were to be withdrawn), and because every time we travel from Bamyan, we are risking death. Security is bad here — one takes one's life into one's hands every time they move. Three years ago I tried to escape in a ship, but it sunk off the coast of Turkey. We were rescued and put in jail. I told the Turks, I do not want luxury, I can stay here. But they did not accept this.

“But here in Afghanistan, we have many problems because of Pashtuns. With our looks, we cannot escape identification from them. Second, as Shi'as, we have problems. Ayatollah Mohseni (one of the main religious and political figures among Shi'as in Afghanistan) is always bringing up Sunni-Shi'a differences, making it worse for us. They say, when a Pashtun picks up a gun, he becomes a Taliban, and when he puts it down again, he is again a Pashtun. That is what we deal with. But the government is no better. It is when the Americans came that Hazaras came to be human, not animal, for the first time. We support Americans. When others wanted to burn the American flag, we stopped them. Hazaras have never killed one U.S. soldier. But we have suffered. The loss of the Buddhas was, after all, the loss of our former god. What greater loss can there be? But we Hazaras cannot have an independent country, surrounded as we are. So maybe we should all just leave Afghanistan. We are distinguishable from the other Afghans, so we will

never be free, and others will always kill us. We will never live without fear here. My brother moved to Turkey and he is happy, because it is the first time he feels he is treated as a human, not a low Hazara. Hazaras are like the untouchables of India. Now, when we start to get something, education, some opportunities, the others become angry.

Professors at Kabul say that for three hundred years we have been laborers — so what right do we have for education now? It is dangerous to go to Kabul, to go to Quetta, to go anywhere, for Hazaras. And if you leave, Iran is racist and Quetta is hell. Or you drown on a boat to Australia. This is still a genocide, just like it has been for over one hundred years.”

Qasim’s story is one in which he, and his people, are regularly denied rights because of their ethnicity. They have problems attending school, and they have problems finding jobs. Worse, their life is fraught with danger and fear. Every time they travel, they believe they face the possibility of kidnapping or death. Post-2014, they believed that they would be attacked immediately by the Pashtun Taliban (which did not happen, although danger during road travel between cities increased). The situation in Quetta, Pakistan, however, is no better, with suicide bombings and targeted killings. Qasim does not feel safe in Quetta or Afghanistan, and believes the level of discrimination against Hazaras in Iran is unbearable. He gives a litany of problems Hazaras face, discrimination, as well as possible insecurity and killing. All this, for Qasim, is the continuation of a genocide against Hazaras, which started with Abdur Rahman in the late 1800s. In the end, this is the root of the problem for Qasim, and he can find no other solution than a life outside of Afghanistan. Not every activist wants to leave, but many, if given the chance, would leave, because they believe the problems, which most summed up as genocide, are too great to

tackle. Hazaras are faced with a difficult choice: Stay and try to improve life as Afghan citizens, though they do not feel accepted as such? Or leave in search of a life without fear? Who believing themselves to face genocide would actually stay? And yet many Hazaras, like Qasim, actually do stay. They hope that the racialized differences, which Qasim alludes to when he says Hazaras are “distinguishable from other Afghans,” are somehow surmountable, somehow not too difficult to be overcome. For the time, Qasim stays. He sends money from his moderately well-paying job in Afghanistan to his family in Quetta. But he has given up on the idea of coexistence, and knows racially he does not blend in.

### **Cultural Trauma**

A collective trauma can, with time, become cultural trauma, which is not a further development of a collective trauma, but rather a collective trauma with certain attributes that affect, and endanger, the very cultural and meaning making core of a group. Cultural trauma, succinctly put by Ron Eyerman, occurs when a group has “a dramatic loss of identity and meaning, a tear in the social fabric.... (2001:2).<sup>1</sup> The trauma can then become interwoven into the new identity of the group as it tries to re-invent itself. This loss of identity and meaning means that the group will search for new identity and meaning, and the new identity and meaning found, or rather constructed, can be predicated upon the very idea that a trauma was suffered. This can be expressed through language of eternal victimization, through a language of the strength of the survivor, or through some combination of both. This search for new signification, when what was previously available to a group has been erased or made untenable, is what Eyerman refers to when he states trauma can be a “cultural process.” As a cultural process, “trauma is mediated through various forms of representation and linked to the reformation of collective identity and

the reworking of collective memory” (2001:1).

As Caruth wrote that trauma is not inherent to an event itself, but rather arises after a period of latency and is actually the memory of the event, a collective trauma is not the direct experience of a traumatic event, but rather the formation of a collective memory of a trauma. Should the memory show that the people somehow acted outside of their cultural norms, and their ideas as to what morals are important for their culture — that they somehow, as a group, committed a violation so bad it went against their very identity — a cultural trauma might also be formed. The people in question could believe that others have threatened or harmed their culture, or that they themselves have done this. Here, then is the difference between collective trauma, in which people feel trauma as group, but it does not signify an existential threat to who they are culturally. This memory of a traumatic event goes on to impact the formation of a group identity of a people (Alexander 2004, Alexander 2012, Eyerman 2001). In other words, an event happens that is traumatic, and some individuals experience it directly. Perhaps such large numbers of people experience the event, which came to be traumatic, that it seems natural a collective memory will be formed that deeply influences its affect for future generations and impacts their actions, their choices of representation, even their very identity. Or perhaps relatively few people suffered the event, but it was spread, through mediators, so that a large number came to be collectively traumatized. It is the nature of the event which will determine whether it is a cultural trauma, whether the culture of the people was somehow perceived or actually threatened. In the case of the Hazaras, after the events of the later 1800s, Hazara culture was at least partially destroyed, social structures dismantled, and religious practices banned. And at the same time, Hazaras today are using trauma as a significant marker in an identity-building project. These two points together, in my view, define a movement as cultural trauma.

The most obvious example is the Holocaust, which was certainly a cultural trauma for Jews in Europe and worldwide, in that it not only resulted in the deaths of millions, but deeply impacted group identity in ways which continue to be felt by all group members, and furthermore, has been expanded into a sort of universal trauma felt throughout a large portion of the world (Alexander 2001:197). This might be the best example of an event that was almost inherently traumatic for the collective (and for individuals that experienced it firsthand, development of trauma was almost guaranteed). But even when the group is threatened in such a purely existential way, and the horror so great as to be incomprehensible, time and different mediations can show different incarnations of a collective memory. In the case of the Holocaust, initial narratives focused on a “Nazi-as-incarnation-of-evil” narrative, and a Western progressive narrative that led to positive developments such as international organizations being formed to try to avoid the ramifications of such events in the future. It was only later that witness narratives by those interned in the camps became a common form of mediation, and the focus became the victim and the survivor. From this, the cultural trauma, the way we understand the Holocaust today, has grown (Alexander 2012).<sup>2</sup> This took time, and several groups working to promote their own narrative, their own “take” on the event, before one was settled upon as the current dominant narrative. Not that the various narratives were in conflict with each other, they simply had different actors disseminating them with different political goals. Those groups spreading a particular narrative that is most appealing to the larger population for some reason, and that has the ability to reach a large number of people, are more likely to have their “version” of the memory take hold among the collective.

Theorists of cultural trauma have put forth specific criteria for a collective memory to be considered as such: Sociologist Jeffrey Alexander (2004: 44) states that a memory must be “a)

laden with negative affect, b) represented as indelible, and c) regarded as violating a society's existence or one or more of its fundamental cultural presuppositions.” Sociologist Piotr Sztompka (2004: 158-161) says of cultural traumas that they must be brought about by a change that is sudden and rapid, that it must be wide and comprehensive, that it must be radical, deep, fundamental, or touch the core of personal life, and that it must be unexpected, surprising, by those who experience it. Smelser writes that a cultural trauma “refers to an invasive and overwhelming event that is believed to undermine or overwhelm one or several ingredients of a culture or a culture as a whole,” (Smelser 2001: 38). A trap that these theorists of cultural trauma seem to fall into is the claim that the cultural trauma results from “an event”, or in the case of Sztompka, “a sudden and rapid change.” In fact, the examples most often given do seem to relate to events that can be described as discrete: the Holocaust, the end of socialism in the Eastern bloc, the rape of Nanjing, the partition of India, and the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. However, such a strong focus on a singular event, particularly, if as Sztompka claims, the event must include a sudden, rapid change, can exclude cases when a group seems to be suffering a trauma that is not sudden but continues in the form of systemic oppression marked by a series of events — as is the case for Hazaras.

Eyerman, in fact, writes that, with respect to African American identity, “the ‘trauma’ in question is slavery, not as an institution or even experience, but as collective memory....” (Eyerman 2001:1). Clearly, the enslavement of millions of Africans and their descendants was not sudden (except for perhaps those who were transported on slave ships), nor, for most who experienced it, was rapid change involved. The trauma was rather a long-term, deeply entrenched social system of oppression, to which certain events might be attached, but which overall was extended. Eyerman does qualify that an event, the disappointment that occurred after freed slaves

and other blacks, post-civil war, were not integrated into American society, spurred the building of a new, African American identity. But trauma indicates event, and the event can be something drawn out, such as slavery.

The same can be said for Hazaras. Although the wars and rebellions experienced in the late 1800s were a traumatic event, and occurred rapidly, Hazaras went on to experience years of social exclusion and oppression, which can't be consigned to a sudden event, but rather a long, drawn out series of events. The idea of the sudden event seems to be an attempt to unnaturally relate the cultural or collective trauma of a group to the individual, psychological trauma of a singular person. While there are some aspects in common, trying to create a perfect fit between individual and group trauma fosters a model that does not adequately take into account the differences that must surely also occur. And anyways, it seems that a person exposed to abuse for a long period of time, those rare individuals who are held captive against their will for periods of years, for example, cannot be excluded from potentially experiencing trauma, especially when we define trauma as the memory of the event and not the event itself. Therefore, it is here that I make a break with these main theorists of cultural trauma.<sup>3</sup> Hazaras surely cannot agree which particular event it was which has most threatened their culture.

Many Hazaras, with a history of enslavement, oppression, mass killing, kidnapping, loss of land, and ethnic cleansing, believe that they have lost what was once the essence of being Hazara. Furthermore, Hazaras are experiencing similar problems in two countries which are home to significant diasporas: Pakistan, where they are increasingly targeted for violence because of their Shi'a faith, and Iran, where they have suffered discrimination in spite of a shared Shi'a faith. When one adds to this current anti-immigration sentiment in places such as Australia and Europe, where large numbers seek asylum, it becomes clear how activists and other Hazaras



are left feeling that they have no place to call their own. Many among the community are hence trying to reclaim, or remake, what it means to be Hazara. Central to their project is the suffering to which Hazaras have been subjected.

Cultural trauma can be an intergenerational project, whereby a collective trauma experienced by a group is passed on to its descendants. However, this is not always the case. Many Hazara youth in Bamyān are relearning about what exactly happened to Hazara culture and way of life from activists, and are hence picking up a trauma that, for many, had been lost or forgotten in much of the general population in the intervening years of subservience and conflict. Hazara activists are (re)creating their history and spreading their version of history. Alongside this history comes, for many, an experience of cultural trauma, or, more abstractly, the feeling that culture itself has been traumatized.

The term “cultural trauma” is appropriate for Hazaras on several different levels. First, in some way, the identity, meaning, and social structure, of the group was lost or severely threatened. In this sense, it is as if the culture, as well as the individuals who experienced the event, and the collectivity with whom the story has been shared, are all traumatized. Individuals, the group, and the very culture have all faced an existential threat. The upheaval experienced by society was so great that the people’s very existence was threatened. As the story of this event, this upheaval, is retold, it results in cultural trauma. Those doing the retelling might be quite far removed from the event: temporally, as the event might have happened several hundred years ago; spatially, as those affected might consider themselves part of the group that experienced the event but were not close to where the event actually took place; or relationally — that is, the group relationship might be “imagined” in Benedict Anderson’s terms, so no one really related to the hearer was affected. An existential threat to the group, turned into narratives and retold, are

the makings of cultural trauma. The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 are a good example for the second two points, as while the United States was not actually faced with an existential threat, mediators created the impression that it was, and this impression continues to this day.

The cultural trauma is hence leading to some sort of social change which is likely going to be contested within the group. It is usually spurred by a social movement (in this case, that of the activists), and many in the community might not be open to bringing such issues to the forefront of their concerns, especially initially. Cultural trauma is not, then, a “discovery” one makes but is rather a construct, worked in discursively and promoted socially. Hazara activists discuss what their cultural trauma entails, debate it, while at the same time their points are mediated by Hazara politicians and sometimes greater Afghan society. During, by way of, and after this discursive exchange, a clearer model of a specific cultural trauma and its attributes emerges. Through this process, the political aspects of cultural trauma become clearer. Activists and other Hazara power brokers constantly discuss, argue about, try out, use for a while, and discard after a period of time or sometimes right away, particular trauma narratives depending upon how useful they are. Some narratives work against Hazara causes, and these are discussed and, if such realization is made, discarded. In the case of the Hazaras, we will see what types of changes are occurring, and what changes activists are pushing for. The question of the community’s reception of cultural trauma messages is important, too, though, not having done a systematic opinion survey, my evidence base here is less certain and complete.

### *Hazaras and Cultural Trauma Theory*

Finally, all of this upheaval, all of this loss and change, does not mean that the groups involved are left with a blank slate. Upheaval, as opposed to continuity, is often, if not always, a driver for

the traumatogenesis of a cultural trauma. At the most extreme pole, trauma itself becomes an important addition to the culture beset by trauma, but of course, it is sown with shreds and patches of custom, some social structures that remain, and language, unchanged or remnants. Cultures might be threatened, torn apart, social structures eradicated, but remnants and memories, and patterns exist. At the same time, new cultural ideals are borrowed. Historically, a particular Hazara feudal social system was completely destroyed by the Afghan state. But a system in which certain individuals maintained power over others was re-implemented by the state. The traditional feudal leaders were removed, and in their place were instated individuals who had cooperated with the government when the Hazaras were subdued.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, religious narratives remain strong and lend themselves particularly well to creation of trauma. And finally, many, especially activists, are embracing, or at least paying lip service, to universalizing (often promoted as Western although not necessarily so) ideals such as human rights, gender equality, education, and so on. This is another strand. This mix of old and new are cultural artifacts and cultural importations upon which a trauma-based identity is being overwritten by the activists.

In part, the activists appear to promote a “culture of trauma,” repeating histories, ancient and recent, that fit with the idea that they are oppressed, their way of life has been destroyed, to an extent unknown by any other group in Afghanistan. This fits in very well with Shi’a narratives of victimhood and martyrdom. On the other hand, activists want to show that they are the future of Afghanistan, exceptional not only in their suffering but in the propensity for change. Ironically, one might relate to the other — if Hazara culture was so completely destroyed, it makes sense that they would be open to new ways of doing things. Hence they stress their openness to universal values, to multiculturalism, to tolerance, to gender equality. And yet at the

same time, they make the circular claim that many of these values are actually ancient, original values that they have always carried with them.

These criteria can apply to events that happened to most, if not all, groups in Afghanistan today. That is to say, while other groups have not experienced such extreme events such as genocide, enslavement, and years of systemic oppression, all have experienced the past forty years of warfare. Hazaras seem to be the singular group of people, though, who are taking the memory of past cataclysms and using them to construct and promote cultural trauma. The reasons for this might relate to a much longer history of traumatic events to draw on, to religious narratives that tend to glorify martyrdom in the name of justice, or other unknown factors. This trend among Hazaras was apparent not only from speaking with Hazaras, but also by listening to common refrains by members of other ethnicities. Friends who were not Hazara, and particularly those who lived in areas where ethnicity was mixed, seemed generally aware that they were witnessing some sort of Hazara identity-building project. This project was met with a mixture of admiration, fear, and sometimes disgust, often combined and expressed by the same person. Zafar, a prominent political figure who was very knowledgeable about the various political and social movements happening in the capital city, summed up this feeling as we sat in his office sipping green tea, eating nuts and raisins, and discussing my research during a trip to Kabul.

These Hazaras, they are impressive. They are getting educated. They are achieving top political positions. They are even successful in business. And you can't deny that they have had a difficult time, that historically they have suffered. But can't they understand? (Pauses). I mean, don't they realize, when they talk so much about these difficulties they experienced, when they are so outspoken about it, that they alienate everyone else?

Perhaps it would be better if they were a bit more restrained.

Zafar's unease, echoed by so many, signals the very potency of the Hazara movement, and the fact that those civil society activists heading the movement are, in fact, successful in reaching a larger population. It also indicates that cultural trauma is something constructed volitionally, and is specific to Hazaras more than to Afghans as a whole. What might bring Hazaras together as a political force could also drive a wedge between them and their potential allies in Afghanistan.

When Hazara activists take their movement online, clashes with other ethnic groups can become more heated. For example, in May 2016, large protests broke out because a power line, known as TUTAP for the countries it would traverse (Turkmenistan – Uzbekistan – Tajikistan – Afghanistan – Pakistan), be routed through the Salang Pass, avoiding Bamyan.<sup>5</sup> Information emerged that Bamyan had been considered as a potential route, and that both Bamyan and Salang routes offered both advantages and disadvantages. In the end, the Salang route was chosen. The lack of reliable electricity in Markaz Bamyan has long been a sore point for Hazaras. On Facebook, when Hazaras would voice their discontent concerning the decision to use the Salang route, other ethnicities would fire back, accusing Hazaras of claiming discrimination that had been already eradicated, just to benefit at the expense of others. Some non-Hazaras involved in these online arguments claimed that Hazaras have a harmful culture of martyrdom or victimhood that they persist in using politically to the detriment of other groups. The issues expanded, with people of other groups pointing out they also suffer from underdevelopment and insecurity, but do not disrupt things with large protests because of it but rather focus on bringing the country together.<sup>6</sup> Hazaras answer that they are targeted by insurgents of other groups specifically because of their ethnicity, and are denied infrastructure because of their ethnicity. One individual

who posted, Ali, who is of mixed ethnicity, stated, “So, the goal of this protest — which blocked roads throughout Kabul and led to hundreds, maybe thousands, of shops and businesses being closed, was to bring electricity to Bamyan, except now the government has suspended work on TUTAP for six months. Now, more people will continue to be without reliable power for longer.” Ahmad, a Hazara, answered, “The protest didn’t block the roads. The government did.” Then Yaqub, of unknown ethnicity but probably not Hazara, chimed in, “Administration blocked roads because of your racist and uncivilized protests.” Yaqub seems to be playing a “reverse racism” card, which holds that when Hazaras bring up race, they are the ones who are racist. (Another post said in answer to a Hazara, “Whatever you say doesn’t count, you are just another racist Hazara.”). Far from being “uncivilized,” the protests were not only peaceful but actually moved with their own teams of garbage collectors to clean up as the more than 4,000 protesters moved through the city. My experience has indicated that many who discriminate against them commonly call Hazaras “uncivilized,” because non-Hazaras think it morally improper that Hazaras take more liberal attitudes towards many issues, such as women’s seclusion. Other, even more offensive comments about Hazaras also commonly materialize in on-line forums, referring to their slanted eyes, flat noses, or as “*mushkhur* (mouse eater,” a very common derogative epithet against Hazaras).

### **Carrier Groups, Movement Intellectuals, Social Entrepreneurs**

No matter how traumatizing, violent and oppressive, events themselves do not create lasting, intergenerationally-transmitted cultural traumas. Rather, the mediation of people who re-tell the stories of past traumas must happen for this to occur (Smelser 2001). A smaller group, who serve as “agents” of the trauma, spread the trauma throughout the group at large. They might do so

intentionally, or it might be an unintended consequence of other goals they have. For example, some Hazara activists believe that memorialization of Hazara genocide and mass killing is of the utmost importance, and seem to work directly towards the spread of trauma. Others were more concerned with addressing issues of underdevelopment, but their narratives almost always include the years of discrimination which resulted in underdevelopment of Hazara areas. The spread of trauma in this case seems to be more of a side-effect. However, involvement by the activists in one or another type of issue is usually not mutually exclusive.

Alexander bases his description of agents on Weber's concept of "carrier groups," which Weber described in reference to religious movements. Alexander writes of carrier groups:

Carrier groups have both ideal and material interests, they are situated at particular places in the social structure, and they have particular discursive talents for articulating their claims — for what might be called "meaning making" — in the public sphere. Carrier groups may be elites, but they may also be denigrated or marginalized classes. They may be prestigious religious leaders or groups whom the majority has designated as spiritual pariahs. A carrier group can be generational, representing the perspectives and interests of a younger generation against an older one. It can be national, pitting one's own nation against a putative enemy. It can be social, representing one particular social sector or organization against others in a fragmented and polarized social order (Alexander 2004: 11).

In many ways, Alexander's definition of carrier groups fits Hazara civil society activists. They are of a certain generation and occupy a certain place in the social structure — most are young

and have high school or university education. Educational attainments give them a degree of influence that most other young adults not have. This also gives them access to positions, for example, with foreign and local development NGOs, which confer respect from the community. Yet in Afghanistan more generally, as Hazara, they almost by definition come from a denigrated class. They are certainly not religious leaders. Though some have been trained as mullahs, none currently works as a mullah. They might sometimes cooperate with the religious establishment but, more often, younger members denounce the religious establishment as backwards, as working against Hazara interests, as concerned simply with spreading Shi'a (or Iranian) interests. In this way, many consider them religious pariahs, and are wary of them, even as they are given a grudging respect for working for greater rights and conditions for all people in the community. They are sometimes guilty of pitting one ethnic group against another, as they tend to cast their problems in terms of oppression at the hands of a Pashtun ruling elite, a theme to which I will return. And generally, they do have material and ideal interests. They very much want to improve their community, to improve all of Afghanistan, to make it a place with peace, security, and equal opportunities for all. But there are also material gains activists can realize, as they become part of their own particular "in-group".

Eyerman's elaborates on the idea of the carrier group as follows:

[I]ntellectuals, in the term's widest sense, play a significant role. Intellectual here will refer to a socially constructed, historically conditioned role rather than to a structurally determined position or a personality type. Although bound up with particular individuals, the notion will refer more to what they do than who they are. Generally speaking, intellectuals mediate between the cultural and political spheres that characterize modern



societies, not so much representing and giving voice to their own ideas and interests, but rather articulating ideas to and for others. Intellectuals are mediators and translators between spheres of activity and differently situated social groups, including the situatedness in time and space. Intellectuals in this sense can be film directors and singers of songs, as well as college professors. In addition, social movements produce “movement intellectuals” who may lack the formal education usually associated with the term intellectual, but whose role in articulating the aims and values of a movement allow one to call them by that name (Eyerman 2001: 3-4).

This description fits, as Hazara activists are certainly mediators between the cultural and political. They claim that Hazaras are culturally more open to universal ideals such as human rights, seeking a political goal to ameliorate the systemic social exclusion of Hazaras. And they use Shi’a religious patterns and idioms to try to promote their political goals to the larger population. They stand between politicians, both Hazara and non-Hazara, and the Hazara masses, and attempt to pursue certain goals with respect to each. And while some are certainly intellectuals, many more have a basic degree and a job that requires some education, although nothing too advanced. In fact, they know who the “real” Hazara intellectuals are, and they respect and defer to those intellectuals’ work on Hazara history by translating and summarizing it for the rest of the population. In these senses, they are surely mediators.

To me, the labels of social or moral entrepreneur fit best. An entrepreneur can be someone working for his own interest while at the same time advancing the interest of society as a whole, whether through business or non-governmental organizations. The civil society activists always work as mediators between the people, the government, international actors, and others,

while also seeking more selfish aims. Hence, it is never clear whether their self-aggrandizement was selfless or selfish. In seeking to become leaders of a movement, is it their own leadership or the movement which they seek to promote? I feel certain that most of my informants sincerely want to help their communities while also sincerely wanting to become as successful as they could as activists.

In this dissertation, then, I examine would-be agents of cultural trauma, self-described Hazara civil society activists, described by me as social/moral entrepreneurs, as they seek to construct, promote, and spread a cultural trauma for the larger group, Hazaras as a whole. I consider the particular media through which these activists promote cultural trauma and the types of representation they use, and what historical and cultural contexts lead the activists to choose certain concepts, tropes and narratives. All traumatic events, all instances of collective remembering and all social movements, unfold in a particular way because of the cultural signifiers and historical contexts available to the actors. James Wertsch posits that there is a tension between active agents, in this case, the activists, and the cultural tools they use to create collective realities (Wertsch 2002:11). Cultural tools might include actual tools, such as social media, which provide specific ways to interact and spread ideas, or cultural narratives, such as the Karbala Paradigm, rooted in the story of the martyrdom of the Shi'a sect's founder, Hussein, at the hands of a corrupt and unjust ruler. Wertsch is drawing upon Bakhtin's perspective that every utterance is multivocal, inclusive of a speaker, a listener, and the voice or voices which are "heard" before the speaker utters the word (Wertsch 2002:16, Bakhtin 1981). A basis of shared knowledge makes these media or concepts or narratives "cultural." Activists are speaking to a people who have already "heard" the voices of the martyrs of Karbala on many prior occasions. Similarly, when they meet with each other, they rely upon their fellow activists being already

familiar with “Western” human rights universals and exemplars such as King, Gandhi and Mandela. The power of their speech is thus enhanced by both Shi’a and Western-derived epistemologies and traditions. Much is, then, already “heard” by the listeners. Because Shi’a ideals and narrative archetypes speak particularly “loudly” for much of the Hazara audience, I devote particular attention to how activists are influenced by Shi’a thought and speak through Shi’a idioms and paradigms.

Therefore, Hazara civil society activists have available to them several paths to choose from in representing cultural trauma, several cultural tools to choose from, per Wertsch, or, as Bakhtin might say, several sets of “voices,” which add significance to all their communications. Activists take two very different modes of understanding the world, the Karbala Paradigm and the rights and liberal “universals” promoted by Western actors in Afghanistan today, and reconcile these to form a seamless whole. Similarly, Hazara activists merge the cultural trauma of Shi’a rituals that commemorate and make felt the suffering of martyrs with much more recent mass killings, displacements and political martyrdoms. Hence, the two are woven together in the minds of many Hazaras. Among Hazara activists, the two concepts enter into a discursive relationship in the Hazara identity project. Hazaras seem to be predisposed to a “trauma” narrative as Shi’as, while at the same time, they make the claim that they are inherently more open to the universal ideals promoted by the West in Afghanistan, both because they claim descent from the cosmopolitan, Silk Road culture that dominated the region centuries ago, and because their main political leader, Abdul Ali Mazari, spoke of the importance of human rights and gender equality. At the same time, the death of Mazari at the hands of the Taliban is interpreted as a martyrdom in the tradition of the martyrdom of Hussein.

## **The Plan of the Dissertation**

The next chapter will provide an overview of Bamyan. It will explain why it, in particular, is an important place for Hazaras, and why activists' activities take on a certain flavor in this province. A background of Hazaras' interactions with the Afghan state will also be presented, to explain their claims of oppression and even genocide. This chapter will set the stage, so the reader can understand how the particular collective and cultural trauma of the Hazara activists came to be.

The third chapter will provide a more in-depth look at cultural trauma as it relates to Hazaras particularly. Those aspects of Hazara history and identity which shape and flavor trauma will be considered. Furthermore, different types of trauma will be introduced. In some cases, trauma can come from having harmed others as well as being harmed. This is all the more important to bring up when activists are promoting narratives of peaceful protest, human rights, and equality. At times, a disconnect exists between an individuals' past actions and current worldview.

The fourth chapter introduces the activists' work, goals, and views in a more in-depth fashion. I examine the way that the activists view civil society and its role in greater society, and consider several "case studies" of important protests the activists were engaged in while I was in Bamyan. Activists view "politics" as a polluting factor, and stress that what they do is somehow inherently not political. It seemed necessary then to examine the seeming contradiction of pursuing political aims through "non-political" means.

The fifth chapter considers the Karbala Paradigm, gives a background of Shi'ism, and delves into the role that religion plays in activists' lives. The Karbala Paradigm — the idea that all Shi'as live with, and model their lives after, certain narratives concerning martyrdom and justice — became key in understanding how the activists talk about Hazara trauma to the greater

population. Understanding activists' religious viewpoint, and how they use religious narratives in their project, is vital to understand how they connect with other Hazaras.

The sixth chapter considers one event — a memorial protest and march for the anniversary of the Afshar Massacre (1993), in which several hundred to several thousand Hazaras were killed in the civil war (1992-1996) in Kabul. The memorial events are compared directly to the holy days of Muharram and Ashura, when Shi'as remember the death of Imam Hussein, their most important religious figure after Mohammad and possibly Ali. I consider this to be a collective-memory building event which makes clear use of the Karbala Paradigm.

In the seventh chapter, I consider the role of martyrdom as it is used by activists in their project. The most important Hazara martyr is Abdul Ali Mazari, leader of the Hazara mujahedin and political party Hizb-e-Wahdat, which succeeded in uniting Hazaras under ethnic auspices for the first time. Mazari, and other important Hazara martyrs, will be compared to Hussein and Ali, to show that this, too, represents a continuation of the Karbala Paradigm.

Finally, the eighth chapter addresses history. Against the Hazara claim that their history, along with their culture, has been stolen or erased by the Afghan state, I examine new ways that Hazaras are (re)constructing their history. The idea that their history has been stolen or destroyed is a key factor in Hazara narratives of cultural trauma. Then, I consider two points of contention from the ancient past — whether or not Hazaras can be considered descendants from the ancient Buddhist inhabitants of Bamiyan, and whether they should be considered descendants of Mongol invaders. I then discuss both the ways in which, and the reasons why, Hazara activists recast both of these aspects of history, contrary to what is often popularly accepted, asserting that they are descended from early Buddhists and that they are likely not descended from Mongols. It will be shown that many view outside insistence on Mongol descent as one more instance of

discrimination against Hazaras, as Mongols are often cast as “murderers” and “killers” (despite it being hundreds of years since they invaded Afghanistan). The idea that Hazaras are descended from Buddhists, who they describe as peaceful, serves as a foil to the Mongol narrative. Through this narrative, Hazaras attempt to regain control of their history.

The primary concern of this dissertation will not be the establishment of the “truth” of an event, such as numbers killed or injured, whether it happened exactly as those telling the story of the event claim it did, and in some cases, whether it happened at all. Where there are discrepancies in numbers or versions of events that I am aware of, I will bring awareness to these discrepancies and try to analyze why they exist. More important is the way that the representation of certain events come to hold an important meaning concerning what it means to be Hazara today, and how this meaning comes to define and make salient the “groupness” of “Hazara” for Hazaras themselves. The following is from my field notes. It provides an example as to how a trauma can be experienced collectively when no one present has actually experienced the traumatic event in question:

Watching the film commemorating the Afshar Massacre, I was struck by the reactions of those around me. Tears ran down the faces of people who had not only not been in the Afshar section of Kabul when it was bombed during the civil war, but who likely did not even know anyone with connections to the area. It did not matter; Hazara ethnic feeling was strong enough that this was seen as an attack on all present. I was also affected, and cried, but I can’t claim the same affect as that experienced by Hazaras. I noted that in the short talk before the showing, it was stated that between 4,000 and 7,000 Hazaras were killed in the attack. All official accounts, from organizations such as Human Rights

Watch, (2005), for example, stated much lower casualty numbers, from the hundreds to no more than 2,000. It is possible the numbers were much higher, that people were simply uncounted, or that women who were missing were not reported because of issues relating to honor. But I could never get a firm answer from my informants when I later asked for their sources for these high numbers, and I soon gave up this line of questioning so as not to lose credibility and seem that I did not believe them or was working against their interests. In the end, after all, it did not seem to matter. The same number of people were experiencing the event through the film, tears streaming down their faces, and hearing the figures 4,000-7,000 killed.

I am not seeking to tell a “truth” about what happened, but rather describe the actions, accounts, and subjective experiences of a particular category – Hazara civil society activists, who are one of several categories (as Hazara political leaders can also be said to be representing this cultural trauma as well, as well as others), although perhaps the most vocal, working towards the current construction of a cultural trauma and framing it as an integral part of Hazara current and future identity.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Bamyan: A Land of Peace and a Land of Conflict**

Markaz Bamyan is a conglomeration of settlements, stretching out in about a fifty-kilometer radius from the center itself, which is a mile and a half stretch of road, along which sits a bazaar. At first glance this bazaar area seems inconsequential. It can be walked from one end to the other in no more than 45 minutes. A few small crossroads intersect with the main road. But the bazaar is surrounded by several villages, some quite old and others which emerged from the dusty ground recently, mainly to accommodate returned refugees. A plateau close-by has been developed, to accommodate government and office buildings as well as housing, and is now known as Shahr-e-Nau, or New City. The New Zealand PRT, or Provincial Reconstruction Team, was located here, as is UNAMA (United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan) headquarters. The proximity of these two important foreign institutions likely explains why the Shahr-e-Nau area is being developed. The university has two sites — an old one that is near the bazaar, and a new one located about a forty-five minute walk through a steep ravine that stretches north-west from the bazaar. NGO offices are mainly located in the bazaar itself, as well as in Shahr-e Nau and in some of the closer residential areas. The main such area is Zargaron, which is on a hill rising up from one end of the bazaar. The bazaar area and surrounding villages (many located as far as a forty-five minutes' drive from the bazaar), with an estimated population of 60,000, is Markaz Bamyan and its "suburbs."

As home to the university, the PRT, UNAMA Bamyan headquarters, the governor's office, and many NGOs and development organizations, this small place is important. While difficult to get to, it still serves as a gateway for travelers to the rest of the province from Kabul,



meaning economically, for the region, it plays an important role. I chose it for my fieldsite because it is where civil society activists would organize and stage protests against the government or UNAMA for not giving for attention to problems faced by Hazaras. The activists are linked to the university, to the NGOs, sometimes to the government. Many of them are students, professors, NGO and development workers, with a few government civil servants thrown in. Even though there is an active civil society in other districts of Bamyan, it was essential that I be at the provincial seat, where most of the action was happening.

Bamyan not only is valuable as a government seat, economic gateway, and main bazaar for the region but it is also a place which contains physical reminders for Hazaras of who they are as a people. It was home to the giant Buddha statues destroyed by the Taliban, whose empty niches are located directly behind the bazaar — no more than a five to ten-minute walk. It is home to Shahr-e-Gholghola, an ancient city, first Buddhist, then Muslim, and now a pile of ruins, a large built-up hill-fortress with multiple spires emerging from the ground, which was destroyed by the Mongols. Gholghola is located just a five-minute walk through the potato fields behind the bazaar. These sites are constantly visible from all parts of the central bazaar area. The Buddhas are now invisible ghosts staring out of massive, empty niches, and the ruins of Gholghola are a pile of rubble with remaining impressive spires. They cause you to wonder about Bamyan's past splendor, if you know something of the history of the area. They also stand for all of the central highlands and for all of the Hazarajat, homeland of the Hazaras. The Buddha niches and Shahr-e-Ghoghola represent ancestors who, depending whom you talk to, were Buddhists and Mongols, or one or the other, or neither. Yet the emptiness of the Buddha niches and the ruination of Gholghola, serve as a metaphor for the travails of a people who came to call themselves Hazara. The landscape is written over with past violence, as is traces of Bamyan's

“cosmopolitan” history, that is, the history of the Silk Road era, when peoples of many identities and religions mingled. Being Shi’a, and descendants of the Buddhists, and descendants of the Mongols all come together in one merged Hazara identity. Even for those for whom being Hazara now holds preeminence over all other identities, including that of Shi’a Islam, both the past violence and the cultural mixing stand at the heart of what it means to be Hazara. Even as this Hazara identity is not simply given but must be built, the place, Markaz Bamyan, symbolizes all of this — at the very least to the activists embarking on an identity building project, and many others, as well.

Given the importance of the above, which many Hazaras, activists and others, expressed, I found it strange that Markaz Bamyan has only recently been restored as the seat of the Hazara homeland (Figure 1). After the Pashtuns subjugated the Hazaras more than a century ago, they, and their allies, dispossessed the Hazaras. Sunni Tajiks maintained control of the bazaar and relegated trade. It is unclear whether the Tajiks were transplants or small minority communities who had lived for a long time in the region but they quickly took on the arrogance of wealthy merchants, according to my informants, treating Hazaras poorly, charging them high prices and excluding them from trade. The cultural trauma about which I write relates in large part to this Hazara history of being removed from one’s place, then reclaiming it.

What is known about the history of Hazara identity suggests that it has changed significantly in the last hundred years. My reading of this history shows that a majority of Hazaras previously considered their adherence to the Twelver Shi’a faith<sup>7</sup> the most important aspect of their identity. Now, many Hazaras consider their ethnic identity most important — that is to say, the aspect of their identity which seems to motivate them to action or which they

**FIGURE 1**

**Afghanistan's Provinces**



Source: Afghanistan Online Map of Provincial Districts.

[http://www.afghan-web.com/geography/provincial\\_divisions.html](http://www.afghan-web.com/geography/provincial_divisions.html)

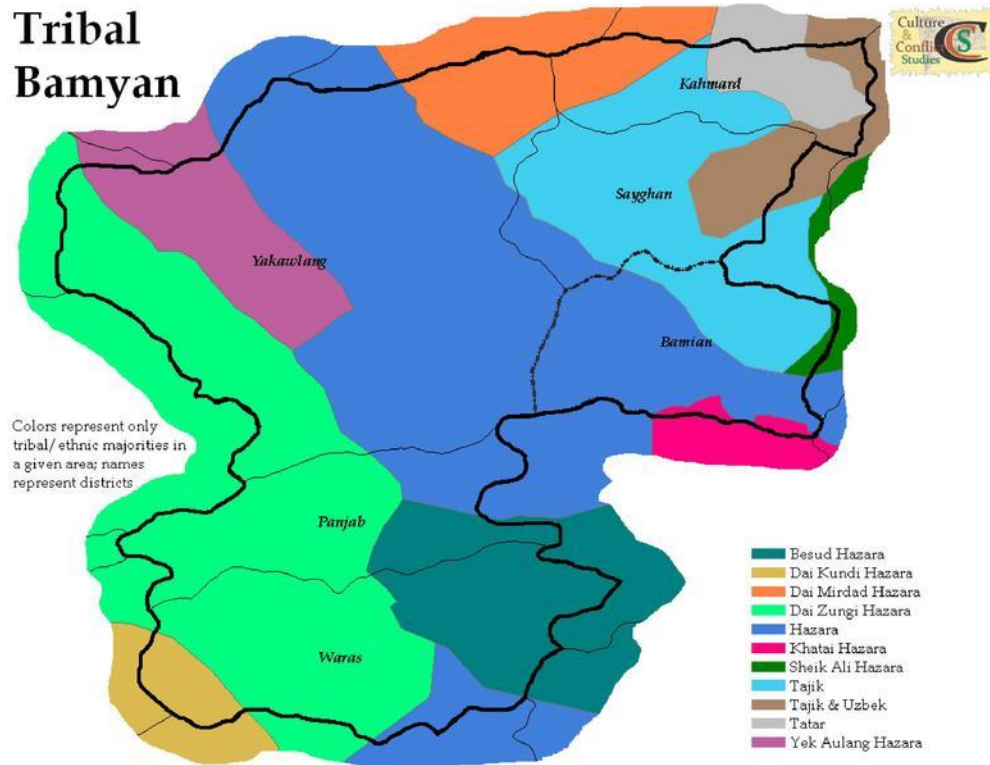
themselves describe as most important. It was clearly stated to me that in the past, Hazaras viewed themselves as Shi'a first, Hazaras second, and this governed political decisions but that, at a certain point during the war years, the importance assigned to these two identities was flipped.

In this background chapter, I seek to accomplish three things. I will first describe what has happened in Afghanistan to make land such an important issue for Hazaras, and to tie it so closely to trauma. In connection with this, I will show how the land itself can remind Hazaras of traumas suffered. Of course, other issues related to discrimination are now seen as extremely important as well, but the story started with a history of a loss of control over a homeland. Second, I will show what political developments led to a change in how Hazaras understand their identity. Shi'ism and ethnicity, as well as nationality (as citizens of Afghanistan), compete among Hazaras as the most important "groups" they consider themselves to be a part of. For the moment, ethnicity is winning out to a degree not seen among other ethnic groups in Afghanistan. Third, I seek to give an idea as to what kind of place Bamyan is, while also going into greater depth about why certain issues encountered in the field may have resonated with me.

Markaz Bamyan is located in the center of Bamyan district (Figure 2). The "tribal map" is by no means exact but does show in rough outline the general geographical location of Afghanistan's different ethnic groups. Besides showing concentrations of ethnic Tajiks in the region, the map also indicates where the Sheikh Ali Hazaras reside, who are exceptional among Hazaras as they are mainly Sunni and do not always maintain good relations with their Shi'a co-ethnics. Shi'a Hazaras often accuse the Sheikh Ali Hazaras of having worked with the Taliban, even though those from Sheikh Ali are not actively fighting against the government.

**FIGURE 2**

**The Districts of Bamyan Province.**



Source: Afghanistan Zendabad. <http://www.afzenda.com/Report%20of%20Bamiyan.html>

## **The Importance of Place**

During my eighteen months of fieldwork in Markaz Bamyan, Afghanistan, I would often stand, not far from the village, Saroa-e-Syob, where I lived, on the top of a nearby cliff to take in the view. On one of my last walks before leaving my field site, I was accompanied by my friend and long-time informant, Jawad. We were reflective, sometimes commenting and sometimes looking out in silence, as we viewed many of the heritage sites and landscape features of this small bazaar town. Across the valley, almost directly north, I saw the larger cliff face that contains two huge niches, roughly human-shaped, which once housed two giant Buddha statues from the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries, famously destroyed by the Taliban in March 2001 as un-Islamic idols. I remembered Jawad telling me months earlier, “the Buddhas are our biography, we have the same faces, so they prove we belong here.” The Buddha cliff face, high mountains rising and extending behind it, also houses at least a thousand caves which were once cells of Buddhist monks living in the monastery that thrived in the valley during the time that the statues were built. People still inhabit the caves, sometimes building additions which make their houses seem to emerge from the cliff face. Life in the caves is hard, but they provide a warmer space in winter and cooler space in summer to people who might otherwise have only flimsy shelter against the elements.

Jawad said, “The history of the land shelters the people who live there.” For Jawad, the land belongs to the people, and the people to the land, inseparably. And yet, the land has a bloody history. Something about this bloody past seemed to indicate to Jawad that there was protection, because in the end, the people had survived.

Activists use the violent past experienced by Hazaras in an effort to ensure that such violence will be avoided in the future (despite misgivings that this might be an impossible

project). But, if bringing attention to what had happened to Hazaras in the past on that land can, indeed, somehow protect them, the land offers protection not only through sheltering caves, but also through promoting awareness about the very past that has been wrought upon Hazaras. By displaying their traumatic pasts, activists hope to find protection — from the government, from international institutions. Having been a victim means one had survived, and displaying victimhood is a strategy to seek continuing survival. Victimhood, in Bamyan, is written upon the land.

Returning to my reflections with Jawad, to my right, to the east from this overlook, I made out a huge mound, ancient structures and towers reaching from its heights, rising from potato fields. This is Gholghola city, Shahr-e-Gholghola, or the City of Screams, whose construction began in the 6<sup>th</sup> Century and is said to have been destroyed by the armies of Chingiz Khan in the 13<sup>th</sup> Century. I knew that further in this direction, as one follows the main road out of Bamyan, is a similar cliff top fortress, Zuhak City, Shahr-e-Zuhak, built sometime between the 5<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Century. Jawad and I looked straight down, to the main street of the bazaar, one and two story mud shops stretching in a line between the river and the potato fields. The bazaar is pressed in between inhospitable foothills and mountains, and a high plateau, which rise on either side of it. Hardly anyone builds houses in the actual valley — besides the bazaar, structures that make up surrounding villages cling to hillsides, so that every bit of arable land is in use during the short growing season. This bazaar is relatively new. The ruins of the old bazaar — deteriorating, roofless mud walls that now look almost as ancient as Gholghola or Zuhak city — are closer to the Buddha cliffs. They stretched to our left along the road that leads out of town to the west. The old bazaar, mainly run by Tajik merchants, was destroyed in the fierce fighting that took place during the civil war of 1992 through 1996 and during the resistance against the

Taliban. Behind us, to the south, extending from the cliff on which I stood, more potato fields and Saroa-e-Syob village are located on a plain that was also the base of the New Zealand Provincial Reconstruction Team, or PRT, until the New Zealanders withdrew in 2013. The local airport — a gravel runway while I was there — is also located on the plain. This high plain is also home to many international NGOs and development organizations, as well as government institutions, including the governor's house. One can drive over winding roads to villages in the southern direction, such as Shah Fulladi, where people live at higher altitudes. The road climbs through the foothills, heading up towards the mountains, and encounters several villages on the way. Directly behind us stood a huge billboard with a picture of Abdul Ali Mazari, the martyred Hazara leader, seeming to look down protectively on his people.

Other important villages were nearby. On the road to Kabul, to the east, is Shash Pul, mainly inhabited by resettled refugees who told me they are in a disagreement with the nearby landowner who seems to be a remnant of Hazaras' feudal past. Closer, to the southeast, is Sayedabad. Sayeds are descendants of the Prophet Mohammad, but I was told that no Sayeds lived in this very large village. Rather, the founder, over one hundred years ago, revered them. To the northeast, directly off the end of the bazaar and built upon a dusty hill with no vegetation, is Zargaron, a village I lived in during my pilot field project in summer 2010. It is also relatively new, made up mostly of returned refugees, and no one could tell me why its name meant "gold smiths." Taking the road west out of town, you pass the large village Surkhrud. Other important villages in this area include Mullah Ghulam and Azhdar. Azhdar is named after a particular geographical feature, a small rocky ridge that appeared to look like a dragon. The dragon's "eye" is forever crying as a small spring bubbled out from the spot that would be his head. Local



legend said that Imam Ali had killed the dragon to save the people nearby, and that is why it cries. In all of these villages live people who work in Markaz Bamyan.

Bamyan has long attracted outsiders to visit its remarkable sites. In the 7<sup>th</sup> century the Chinese monk Xuan Zang traveled to the area and left behind a diary detailing the kingdom, including the Buddha statues. European, mainly British, explorers in the 19<sup>th</sup> century also left travel accounts. In the 1960s and 1970s, Western tourists followed the “hippy trail,” including Afghanistan, and enjoyed the natural and heritage sights of Bamyan. Today, Bamyan is one of the safest provinces in Afghanistan and because of this and its many unique sites, tourists of a different type visit. The provinces surrounding Bamyan are dangerous and travel by road into the province is risky, but for internationals working for NGOs that allow them access to humanitarian flights, Bamyan becomes a place for a sort of “R&R” in Afghanistan. Commercial flights can also now take you to and from Kabul.

The beauty of Bamyan does not stop in Markaz. As one leaves heading west, one passes Shahidon, a nearby town that features a *qala*, or fortress-house, on top of striped red and cream cliffs. Further, one enters Yakawlang District, and within forty-five minutes after leaving Bamyan one comes to Band-e-Amir, a six-lake complex of astounding beauty which many inhabitants love to visit for a picnic, possibly a swim, and a ride on the swan paddle-boats that still remain from the days when Bamyan was truly a tourist destination on the hippy trail. Continuing further, you reach the seat of Yakawlang, Nayak, and slightly further, you get to the *chaman*, a grassy plain where the narrow river valley widens and land changes from farms to pasture.

Hazaras know that this landscape was only recently a battlefield. Beitamoshkin and several adjoining villages, located in this lush river valley just past the district center of Nayak,

were the site of one of the worst instances of Taliban brutality in Bamyan Province. Taliban and Hizb-e-Wahdat forces fought for control of the district in 2000. After the Taliban won, around three hundred men were massacred, the victims having been Sayeds, who do not consider themselves Hazara but Arab. Some activists claim that the Sayeds sought to join the Taliban, to save themselves, and were, as they approached the Taliban forces, easily cut down. Today, a small memorial stands on top of a wind-swept hill, listing the names of those killed. This incident points to the intricacies of ethnically-based conflict, as much of the outside world, the Taliban included, did not differentiate Shi'a Sayeds from Shi'a Hazaras.

I was taken to the site by a local woman, Parvin, who lost several family members in the massacre. We, and several other people around us, went from one marker to another, paying our respect in silence. Like the ruined bazaar in Markaz Bamyan, ruined houses serve as a daily reminder of past violence in Beitamoshkin, except in this case the victims continue to inhabit the ruins. Visiting Beitamoshkin, before I viewed the memorial, I was surprised by the construction of the houses into a small cliff face, on top of older houses, now used for livestock or simply abandoned. In these old houses you can see broken dishes, water carriers, and old clothes, bearing silent testimony to the old life, rapidly left behind. To get to the new living areas, you scramble up the steep cliff face. I asked Parvin, "Why were the houses built like this?" She told me a brief version of the story. "After the Taliban massacred the people, they went from one house to another, burning them. Every family lost at least several male relatives, fathers, uncles, sons, nephews, brothers, husbands." She quickly fell silent. It became clear to me that Parvin did not want to talk about the details of the event very much, even, or perhaps especially, as the remnants and ruins of the old houses can be seen from the veranda of her current house. Visiting a nearby house, where a widow lived with several children, revealed to me another story. "How

can I live like this? My children must weave carpets all day, every day, with me, to survive. My husband was killed. My children can't go to school. What can I do? What will life bring?" When I climbed to the memorial for those killed in the massacre, the widow's voice echoed in my head, as did the pained look and deeply etched creases on her face. What Kathleen Stewart writes of West Virginia could easily be said of this Hazara village: "the hills find themselves reeling in the dizzying, diacritical sensibilities of the local and the transnational, the past and the present, the all-too-real-effects of history" (1996:137). As in Stewart's rural West Virginia, so much collides on the Bamyan landscape: past and present, local and international, soldiers and aid workers, sites of beauty and reminders of horror all coincide in the steep mountains and river valleys and farming villages. Sometimes one comes across the ancient ruins of a Buddhist stupa, or an ancient Muslim fort rising above an idyllic village.

The further you go, however, the less likely the people are to have seen a foreigner. Aid projects seem to focus where monitoring is logistically easy, and most expats looking for a relaxing weekend are easily satisfied by the tourist sites nearest to Markaz Bamyan. Deep in a trip into Yakawlang with friends who worked in Bamyan but hailed from a distant village, an old man approached me and said, "A foreigner! You are so brave!"

I answered, "Yakawlang is secure, safe. Why am I brave? I am simply visiting my friends' families."

"Maybe. I never saw a foreigner here in this village, though. It must be frightening, to be so far from the others."

I laughed and told him I was not frightened, I was with trusted friends, and also knew that the people of Yakawlang were hospitable and would not do me any harm.

*A reflection of my self*

As I write this, my Hazara Afghan friends are posting on Facebook about the 23<sup>rd</sup> anniversary of the Afshar Massacre (1993). During the Afshar Massacre, during the 1992-1996 civil war, hundreds, maybe thousands, of Hazaras were killed. Right now, my civil society activist friends are posting pictures of this area of Kabul which is now just a desert of buildings only half standing. It looks like an ancient archaeological site, not a site from a war 23 years ago. None of my informants were at Afshar. Very few even know someone who was. Few have gone to the place. But Afshar has come to represent, in their imagination, the killing, the massacre, the genocide of their people. They no longer have to have been there. They are all part of the in-group that has vicariously experienced the event.

Then I think of myself. I have long mourned my own lack of ancient roots, something I suppose is common among Americans. I grew up in Ohio and moved to Arizona when I was twelve. Neither is my place. My mother comes from New Jersey but the roots there start with her father and grandfather, who moved from Canton, Ohio — and prior to this, I am not sure, although her mother was a World War II war bride from Hull, England. My father comes originally from Tennessee. My family owned a farm in Tennessee going back hundreds of years, up in the hills and hollows, where they grew tobacco and corn, raised horses and other livestock. As a child, I visited often and loved it there. I felt it was mine, the only place I could have any real claim to. There was a giant tree that my great-grandmother planted when she was a child. The hills behind the house were untamed, with bobcats and deer and all kinds of wild things. Every ploughing, ancient arrowheads would be turned out of the moist earth, reminding us we were not the first to claim this place. Is it really my place? I have family who, unlike me, actually stayed and grew up there. I can't really say I am a Southerner, much less a person of Tennessee. I

feel ties to it because it is the only place I can possibly feel ties to. Except now I don't have it. Several years ago, my great-grandmother passed away, at the age of 104. The heirs decided to sell the land. Yet if that land was ours, to be honest, our claim was shallow. It seems to have been a hunting ground for several tribes, Shawnee, Cherokee, and Chickasaw up until my family would have arrived, a few hundred years ago. I might argue that these transient tribes also had a shallow claim compared to even more ancient inhabitants, who left their arrowheads. Perhaps it is the shallowness of my roots which motivates me to go to other places — Kyrgyzstan and Russia, before Afghanistan — to get to know the people there and learn how they create a sense of their own rootedness.

Somehow, discussing the hollows and hills of Tennessee brings me to Bamyan, or rather, Bamyan once brought me back there. On sunny spring day during my research, I was crossing the fields from Saroa-e-Syob, where I lived, to the bazaar. I saw a Hazara man working in a field with a wooden plough and oxen. I saw the sweat streaming down his face, I saw how close one becomes to the land when work is done in that way. All of a sudden, I was transported. I remembered my great-uncle telling me a story about how his father offered him a small field to cultivate in order to make some extra money. He chose tobacco, a common and lucrative crop in the area. Having seen the plough that he used, I know that it was only slightly more sturdy than the one I saw in Bamyan. I started thinking about the timelessness of this place, of the ancient ways of working the land, of the ties family formed to soil. But my family is no longer working land in Tennessee. They sold it, and even before, for many years, my great-grandmother lived alone in a house on a hill, renting the surrounding farmland to others to farm. Now a car factory has been built nearby, and many residents are not related to agriculture at all but just want a

“country” way of living. Things change, and the question remains open whether Tennessee and Bamyan are timeless places or ever really were.

One of the most prominent anthropologists who worked in the region, Robert Canfield, discussed with me how Markaz Bamyan was largely controlled by Tajiks in the past. His fieldwork examined how the politically privileged Tajiks occupied the center, with Shi’a Hazaras in the periphery. On a boat on the Charles River in Boston, and later through emails sent from various spots around the world, we spoke of Bamyan. He told me his surprise in learning that Markaz Bamyan was now full of Hazaras, not Tajiks. I also realized that most of the Hazaras I know in Markaz Bamyan are from somewhere else. They have come to work in government, in NGOs, in business, or to attend university. Many are returned refugees. There are Hazaras who have lived in surrounding villages for longer periods of time, but the civil society activists are physically in the Markaz.

Thinking back to the Markaz Bamyan of Canfield’s time, I began to ask what happened to the Tajik merchants. Tajik farmers still live in their family houses on farmland they had owned for more than a hundred years directly behind the bazaar. And in neighboring districts, even those with a Hazara majority, villages of Tajik subsistence farmers can be found. Beyond the obvious fact that the actual ethnic composition of the area has changed, due to displacement, the exact details are hard to understand from within the field site. My informants in Bamyan either did not know, or did not want to tell me what had happened to the Tajik merchant class described by Canfield, at least not initially. For some time, I knew only that the Tajiks had been displaced at some point during the wars, but exactly when, and how, was unclear.

Looking to secondary sources, Mousavi (1997) writes that Pashtuns, particularly nomads, were moved in to colonize the area after a series of Hazara uprisings. He also writes of a

campaign of “Sunnification” by the Afghan state, involving the building of Sunni mosques and dismantling of Shi’a structures, accompanied by pressure on the Shi’as to convert. The king who subjugated the Hazaras in the late 1800s, Abdur Rahman, quite successfully carried out his campaign to destroy Hazara social structure. Encouraging traders loyal to him to take advantage of the Hazarajat would have been one part of this project. Ethnicity is a fluid thing, and religious affiliation can be switched. Was everyone displaced? Or did some switch sides? Could the Tajik “label” have even included Hazaras who converted, long ago? And once the tide changed, could some Tajiks have re-adopted Hazara and Shi’a identities? With much open to conjecture, I clearly needed to get the story from those who has been there.

Canfield (1973), speaking about the situation in the 1960s, describes the flat, basin area where Markaz is located, that area where farming is most productive, as controlled by Sunnis, with “Imamis” or Shi’as, in the outlying, less productive areas. Moreover, the basin in which Markaz is located has more connections to the Kabul government and trade opportunities, making it all the more valuable to whoever maintains control over it. Canfield very clearly referred to sect as being the most salient feature of a person’s identity, and also that which determined one’s social status as well as the value of the land one lived on. Therefore, not coincidentally, the most unorthodox group, the Ismailis, occupied the most isolated areas of the region, with the least chances for agricultural or commercial success. Canfield indicates that any who converted from Shi’a to Sunni Islam would also begin calling themselves Tajik; in fact, Canfield (1973) was struck with the large number of Tajiks with what appeared as Hazara somatic features. So, perhaps it is possible that some Tajiks moved to the area, while other Shi’a Hazaras converted to Sunnism and began calling themselves Tajiks. Yet when Hazaras regained control, it is known that many of these Tajiks, whatever their background, did flee.

What caused religious sect to be the main feature of identity is something we cannot know for sure. It certainly wasn't the case for all in the region: Pashtuns, for instance, clearly gave more import to ethnicity, as Barth (1969) noted in his chapter on Pashtuns in *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*; in some cases "tribal" affiliation was very important, too. Tribal allegiances were likely much more important for Hazaras before they were subjugated by the Afghan state. Yazdani (1989) describes a feudal society in which each person gave allegiance to a tribal leader, worked his land, and fought for him when necessary. Amir Abdur Rahman smashed this feudal system when he defeated the Hazaras. Abdur Rahman's reliance on an anti-Shi'a jihad to rally troops to carry out this war can be speculated to have heightened the importance of all sides of sectarian affiliation as an identifying marker.

It was clear that my friends in Markaz Bamyan knew about the Tajik merchants even if they didn't want to tell me what had become of them. When I asked about the destroyed structures at the base of the cliff where the Buddhas had stood, I was told, "That was the old bazaar. The one the Tajiks owned." Ahh, I thought, *this* was the bazaar where Canfield told me he drank tea while discussing the Buddha statues. "What happened to the Tajik merchants?" "I don't know. They left." The "mystery" of the Tajik merchants stuck with me (despite knowing that for some in Markaz, it was not mystery at all). The unveiling of the mystery sheds light on the contested nature of Hazaras' claim to Bamyan as their homeland. But before I can unfold the oral history that I finally learned while drinking endless cups of tea with an old man, the father of a friend, who unlike most whom I knew had remained in and around Markaz Bamyan throughout the years of war, I first say more about the place itself.

### **Bamyan: The Place, and Life as a Researcher**



The plateau of Markaz Bamyan is surrounded by the high mountains of the Hindu Kush, the most significant being Koh-e-Baba, whose peaks are white with snow year round. The smaller cliffs which housed the Buddhas, reddish-yellow in color, shoot straight up from the ground, right at the edge of town. Bamyan is a high desert, with little precipitation, many sunny days and little vegetation. Canfield (1973) suggests that at one time poplars were harvested in the area, but around Markaz Bamyan today the poplars are few. Possibly initially a naturally growing tree, the forests came to be managed for extraction. Today, some line parts of the newly-paved streets. Bamyan inhabitants indicated that the years of war and hardship caused people to overharvest the poplars, so while they are still a local resource, many have been used as firewood, simply to survive. In fact, years of war and poverty have resulted in severe deforestation in much of Afghanistan, including Bamyan, where even the small shrubs that cling to hillsides are much fewer in number than they should be. Summers are mild, and winters are very cold, although during the day often the temperature rises to right around freezing, only to plummet twenty or thirty degrees as soon as the bright sun sets. A few settlements around Markaz Bamyan manage to support some farming, mainly subsistence, on riverbanks or watered with a canal system dug into the dirt, most with no sort of concrete reinforcement. Most plowing and threshing is done with oxen, as few people can afford tractors.

While I conducted fieldwork in Bamyan, there was no running water and no electricity. People used common water taps, wells, or the river for water, depending on the exact location of their house. Electricity was provided by an individual's solar panels or community generators that a group of residents agreed to pay in to. For this reason, most houses, businesses, and organizations only had several hours of electricity each evening, if they had any at all. During the total of 18 months I spent in Bamyan, I lived in three different areas. In Zargaron, the suburb that

extends up a dry dusty hill at one end of the bazaar road, I paid a teenage boy to bring me buckets of water from a common tap, which only provided water for a couple of hours each day, and I paid into a community generator, for two hours of electricity each evening. I later lived with a family that ran a guesthouse in the suburb of Saroa-e Syob, which sits on the plateau slightly above the bazaar, but closer to it than Shahr-e Nau. There, water was provided for me, and a solar panel provided several hours of electricity at night, with a generator for backup on cloudy days or when the house was full of travelers who wanted to use their phones and computers. Finally, for the last few months of fieldwork, I rented a house in Shahr-e Nau where I lived alone. I pulled up water by hand from a well, and I purchased a single solar panel, which provided electricity for two lightbulbs and a charge for my phone and computer each night.

Travel in and out of Bamyan is difficult. There are two routes from Kabul, both of which go through a high mountain pass. Both also pass through areas where Taliban insurgents are active, and drivers of shared taxis and mini-buses had to make constant calculations as to which route was safer in the summer. The warmer summer months are the fighting season, both because travel was easier and the growth of vegetation provided greater cover for the insurgents. When I first started going to my field site, the route that went through the Haji Gak pass, to the south, was considered safer. It does travel through the problematic Wardak Province, the Jalrez district being particularly dangerous, but we were in that area for such a short time it seemed worth the risk. Unfortunately, Haji Gak is completely impassable in winter. At a certain point in my fieldwork, the other pass, the Shibar, which is more directly to the east of Bamyan and therefore slightly faster, came to be considered less dangerous. It goes through Parwan Province, and there, the Shinwar district is known for harboring insurgents. The Pashtun Shinwari tribe hail from Nangarhar Province in the east, where I did my master's fieldwork and where my husband

did his fieldwork. I knew the Shinwaris of Nangarhar well, but even they said that those in Parwan cause problems. They speculated that the Parwan Shinwaris were discontented ever since having been moved there by Amanullah Khan, as punishment for rebelling against him in the 1923 uprising.

During the initial stages of fieldwork, I traveled by shared mini-bus (always a *tunus*, or Toyota Town Ace), wore a full burqa, and hoped I would not encounter a Taliban checkpoint. An Indian airline began a commercial flight partway through my fieldwork, and this was a relief for me and for the inhabitants of Bamyan who could afford it. The flight is only half an hour and treats you to spectacular mountain views. For those who cannot afford the flight, travel is stressful. A Talib, or even a simple bandit, can set up a checkpoint at any moment. Passengers might be robbed, or even kidnapped or murdered if their ID shows they work for the government or a Western-affiliated NGO. (A Provincial Council Member, Jawad Zuhak, was stopped and beheaded while traveling from Kabul just days before I arrived for my first stint of fieldwork). Later on, there was an increase of incidents of Hazaras being stopped and murdered simply because of their ethnicity. This might be because more insurgents are choosing to adhere to Daesh (Islamic state) ideology rather than the Taliban.

### **Hazaras in Afghanistan**

Bamyan is a small, underdeveloped town. This does not make it unique for provincial capitals in Afghanistan, though some others are larger, more developed and more like cities. Bamyan is one of the most well-known provincial capitals in Afghanistan, however, because of the Buddha statues. The presence of the statues, or what remains of them, reminds one that Bamyan was the seat of an important Buddhist civilization in the sixth and seventh centuries. It was also an

important stopping point along the Silk Road, before sea trade displaced the ancient land route. It remained important, as the Afghan state was founded, as the gateway to the Central Highlands, the Hazarajat, homeland of the Hazara people. For this reason it is an important market town.

To understand Bamyan, and the history of Hazaras in the region, as well as the reason that activists choose certain issues as important, it is necessary first to know certain basics of Hazara history, a history that I will touch upon throughout the dissertation. Certain events and processes I will examine in greater depth in the context of civil society activists' narratives of cultural trauma. A sense that non-Hazaras have gotten Hazara history wrong sits very much at the center of the activists' work of correcting and revising Hazaras' knowledge of who they are as a people. Here, let it suffice to offer a simple, short framework rather than a comprehensive, in-depth history, a historical summary that is intended to give readers points of reference. I will attach particular emphasis to historical events which support Hazaras' belief that they are the most oppressed group in Afghanistan.

While the rule of the king Amir Abdur Rahman is mentioned by many Hazaras as the start of the most egregious oppression of their people by the Afghan state, many insist that earlier rulers laid the framework for this. The first antagonist they bring up is Ahmad Shah Durrani. He managed, after the assassination of Nadir Shah Afshar of Iran in 1747, who had himself taken power in Iran after the Safavid Dynasty fell, to make off with much of Nadir Shah's treasure (Barfield 2010:98). Using this as leverage, he built an army that deposed his Pashtun rivals and took over all of Afghanistan as well as much surrounding area. "It was with Ahmad Shah Baba that Afghanistan became a Pashtun state, and that we lost control of parts of the territory" Firuzan, one of my main social activist sources, once told me. Ahmad Shah ruled from Kandahar and collected riches from wealthy, marginal areas such as Sindh, Punjab, Kashmir, and

Khorasan. Likely the resource-poor central highlands were not considered worth the effort of subjugating. The problem for Hazaras was that, now, their lands were claimed by Pashtuns. Ahmad Shah controlled the borders of Hazara lands, leaving the inner central highlands largely to self-rule. But even these central regions were now nominally considered part of a Pashtun-controlled state, a development which Hazaras today trace the beginnings of their loss of autonomy. Conrad Schetter (2005) uses the term “ethnoscapes” to describe how the imagined historical homelands of different groups in Afghanistan overlap with each other and may often seem larger than expected.<sup>8</sup> Hazaras today do not look back at the reign of Ahmad Shah Durrani, as he came to be known, as the ruler who actually removed them from their land.<sup>9</sup> But, almost as bad, they do see this founder of the Afghan state as the one who began today’s pattern of Pashtun domination. In hindsight, many say that this was the start of their loss of autonomy.

Far more violent tragedy would come under the rule of King Amir Abdur Rahman (r.1880-1901). The upheavals wreaked by Abdur Rahman’s policies would threaten to destroy Hazara social structure, culture and livelihoods. Ibrahimi (2009a) goes so far as to claim that the massive ethnic cleansing, enslavement, and killing of Hazaras was genocide. Hazara social structure and culture would never be the same. Abdur Rahman leveraged religious sectarian identity to call Sunni Afghans to arms against the Hazaras. Devastatingly, the Hazaras were treated after defeat as “infidels,” meaning that their property could be plundered and the people enslaved. This brutal defeat stands at the heart of Hazara cultural trauma constructs today.

Amir Abdur Rahman Khan sought to centralize his authority in Afghanistan, targeting many groups but none more horrifically than the Hazaras, due to the anti-Hazara campaigns’ Jihadist roots. Layered onto sectarian conflict, even then, was a quasi-racialized distrust. Abdur Rahman himself wrote, “The Hazaras had raided and plundered the neighboring subjects for

about 300 years past, and none of the kings had had the power to make them absolutely peaceful” (Khan 1900[2005]).<sup>10</sup> The campaigns began in 1881, were carried out through strategies that included pitting certain tribes, as well as Sunni and Shi’a Hazaras, against one another, and ended around 1893, when resistance was largely crushed (Mousavi 1998).

And yet, looking at some of the history books that have been written about this period in Afghanistan, it becomes clear why so many Hazaras complain that their history has been erased, covered up by the Pashtuns. Many of these works are likely read by those foreigners who work in Afghanistan. I will give two examples that were used in a course I took on Afghanistan at Georgetown University in Washington, DC. Many of my fellow students would go on to NGO or development work, work for the US government, or were members of the military.<sup>11</sup> From Stephen Tanner (2002), they learned that Abdur Rahman was in power during the Second Anglo-Afghan War. Then, he set about a centralization campaign, seeking to weaken the ability of his main tribal rivals for the throne, the Ghilzai Pashtuns, and to weaken tribal and feudal power holders throughout the country. No mention is made of Hazaras. Earlier in his narratives, when he describes a period of upheaval among the Afghan monarchy in the 1820s and 1830s, he does mention that tribes such as Hazaras were largely unaffected. And yet, he gives no mention of what happened to the Hazaras as a result of Abdur Rahman’s conquest. Martin Ewans (2001) at least adds that in response to Abdur Rahman’s campaigns, many revolted, the most serious of which were carried out by the Ghilzais, the Uzbeks, and the Hazaras. He mentions an anti-Shi’a jihad and subsequent enslavement and loss of lands (Ewans 2001). The deep ruptures to Hazara social fabric, and its impact today, is missing. Neither of these authors says anything untruthful; their error is simply to have left out how extreme the violence of Abdur Rahman was and how devastating this was for the Hazaras and others.

Thomas Barfield's history gives a much more in-depth look at the implications of Abdur Rahman's policies for the Hazaras. Barfield (2010) writes that until this time only the border areas of Hazarajat were directly controlled by the state. When Abdur Rahman demanded formal submission of all the Hazaras, it was not exactly clear what he wanted. Not just the threat of losing direct control but even more, "the behavior of the officials and troops that the amir sent to the region" sparked the rebellion of 1891 (Barfield 2010: 150). Barfield continues:

The war quickly took on a religious overtone when the amir had the Shi'a Hazaras declared infidels. This allowed both his army and the tribal levies that he raised to ignore the usual Islamic laws of war. In particular, the army could enslave those that they captured, and keep their land and property. This was especially important in recruiting Pashtun tribes, which agreed to participate in hopes of plunder. The amir mobilized a hundred thousand troops for this campaign, more than any other. The army broke the power of the Hazaras, many of whom were enslaved, while a large number fled to Persia and Baluchistan, where they formed refugee communities. The amir's government reaped a large dividend from taxing this slave trade. Hazarajat itself was impoverished as neighboring Pashtun tribes expanded their territory into lands formerly controlled by the Hazaras. The war also opened vast new stretches of summer pasture land to Pashtuns.

Barfield elaborates on the forced removal of people that followed. Ghilzais were forced to the north where they were thought to be less of a threat. And the demographic make-up of Kabul was completely changed by the sheer numbers of Hazaras who moved there. The same occurred in other large cities, such as Mazar-e-Sharif and Herat.

While Barfield gives a very clear overview as to what happened to the Hazaras during this extremely pivotal event, one must turn to Hazara authors such as Sayed Askar Mousavi, and later, Naimatullah Ibrahimi, to get to the details of what happened to the Hazaras during this time. Mousavi states outright that hatred for Abdur Rahman continues to this day, an attitude which I can confirm.

The Hazaras, in fact, were subjected to two main methods of attack as Abdur Rahman sought to extend centralized control. An initial area of concern was that known as Yaghestan (land of the rebels) according to court historian and Hazara Faiz Mohammad Kateb in 1916. This area included parts of today's Uruzgan, Ghazni, Zabul, Kandahar, and Helmand Provinces. Other Hazara tribes, co-opted by Abdur Rahman, took part in quelling this uprising, and problematic Pashtuns who might have challenged Abdur Rahman's rule, such as those of the Ghilzai tribe, were forcibly moved in to settle these areas. In fact, these are places where Hazaras and Pashtuns noticeably live side-by-side today. Initially, sectarian differences among Hazaras were also played upon, and the Sheikh Ali Hazaras were used to this purpose (a Sunni Hazara group closer to the seat of power in Kabul). Additionally, Pashtun groups were brought in from the east to populate Hazara areas as well, and there they remain today, in areas such as Uruzgan. (Mousavi 1998, Gharjistani 1988).

Hazaras were then subjected to high taxes, which they accepted (Ibrahimi 2009a). However, their political structure remained in place, which state of affairs was still viewed as threatening to Abdur Rahman, and which heralded the first main thrust of his efforts to subdue the Hazaras. Hazara *mirs*, community leaders, and religious leaders were summoned to Kabul in the early 1890s, where some of them were imprisoned or exiled. Others, usually those who were weaker and might seek to empower themselves, he used against the now leaderless stronger



tribes, in order to sow discord among the Hazara community. After having “beheaded” the stronger tribes, he could strategically divide not only along sectarian but also tribal lines (Ibrahimi 2009a). Abdur Rahman then sent his own governors, administrators, and commanders of battalions in the place of those he had removed. These representatives indiscriminately fined people and imprisoned them with little reason, while torture was widespread — according to Mousavi (1998), torture won promotions for those who carried it out. Large scale massacres occurred against those who could not pay taxes. The Dai Chopan tribe lost hundreds of members, including women and children, for non-payment (Mousavi 1998). Mousavi claims that there are thousands of documents listing such evidence.

During the second phase, Abdur Rahman decided to bring the region under even tighter control (Ibrahimi 2009a) and almost all of the Hazarajat was defeated by 1892. This happened after the *jihad* against Hazaras, mentioned by Barfield and Mousavi, managed to bring together the previously divided Hazara tribes. The Hazaras rebelled against this “jihad,” which started as a popular uprising and then quickly gained support by those prominent Hazara leaders still in place (Mousavi 1998). These leaders, at the *Jirga-e Au Qaol*, a planning meeting, actually declared war on Abdur Rahman. They attracted Hazaras serving in the state military to defect, as well as a number of Uzbeks, who were also a minority which experienced discrimination, if not as extreme as that of the Shi’a Hazaras (Ibrahimi 2009a).

As a result, Abdur Rahman then embarked upon his all-out religious crusade against the Hazaras, promising land, riches, and women to those who participated. Mousavi claims 30,000-40,000 government troops, 10,000 cavalry, and possibly 100,000 civilians took part, as well as nomadic *kuchis*. Barfield states that 100,000 troops were raised for the campaign, a number greater than those used in any of his other campaigns (2010: 150). The Hazaras did not have a

chance. The main leaders were captured and executed, and all of Hazarajat subjected to intense fighting and laid to waste. Thousands were sold into slavery, and it was decreed that Hazara slaves would be especially cheap (Temirkhanov 1993). Such heavy taxes were levied that many had to sell family members, or themselves, into slavery (Mousavi 1998). An exodus of more than half a million people streamed into Iran and British India (now Pakistan), where Hazaras had previous trading ties. Smaller numbers fled to the north. Mousavi, as well as the Hazara activists whom I interviewed, call this stage genocide.

But when commanders were ordered to collect all of the names of the *mirs*, *Sayeds*, *khans*, *begs*, as well as any other sort of leader in a non-inherited position, as well as names of their families, rebellion spread again. Initially, they made gains (Mousavi 1998), but Abdur Rahman used their de-centralized tribal structure against them. Some he enticed to fight on his side, while others, he conquered.

Hazara society, then, was completely disrupted. No longer were there the rich feudal lords who carried a large amount of political authority as in the past. Rulers were no longer independent, *mirs* disappeared, or at least, did not advertise their identity for a period of time. *Arbabs* or *maliks* (locals chosen by the government as their representatives) were put in their place.<sup>12</sup> Attempts were made to convert people to Sunni Islam (Mousavi 1998). My informants say that many did convert, and then also chose to refer to themselves as Tajiks rather than Hazaras. Many also practiced *taqqiya*, attending Sunni mosques while hiding their true Shi'a faith, a practice allowed for Shi'as (Emadi 1997). Dupree's (1980) description of Abdur Rahman's policies as internal colonization seems apt.

The loss of land by Hazaras to Pashtun *kuchis*, or nomads, is another point of contention, particularly as bloody feuds with *kuchis* continue to this day. Klaus Ferdinand (1962)

documented the process by which Hazaras came to lose much of their land to kuchis. Initially, a large amount of Hazara land was given to kuchi tribes who helped in the subjugation of the Hazaras by Abdur Rahman, which assistance was given not only because of promises of land, but because of tax breaks and other benefits (Ibrahimi 2009a). As kuchis only appeared in summer months, some Hazaras remained on their land and continued to attempt to farm it — leading to conflict, as kuchis now officially owned the land. Kuchis also served as itinerant merchants, but gave Hazaras prices they could not pay. Eventually, Hazaras lost livestock, and then land rights, to these kuchis to pay such debts (Ferdinand 1962). It is not surprising, then, that Hazaras still resent kuchis and associate them with the Pashtun state that has long subjugated them. Today, encounters between Hazaras and kuchis can result in bloodshed, with Hazaras claiming kuchis are at best trying to trample their crops and steal their land, and at worst, are Taliban-associated terrorists, with kuchis, on the other side, explaining that they are simply claiming land rights that are, after all, legally theirs.<sup>13</sup>

The activists I worked with in Bamyān knew this history quite well. Some of them, especially those whose ancestors were mirs, or begs, know specific areas of land which belonged to their family, which is now owned and farmed by others. Usually, it is the richest land. No one among my informants suggested they resented the loss of this title, as after all, they now espouse a philosophy of equality as civil society activists. They know these things partly because of memory, and partly because more recent opportunities have allowed a few, such as Mousavi and Poladi, to become scholars and start uncovering this past.

Schools in Afghanistan are not allowed to mention ethnicity. In addition to conducting interviews with teachers, school directors, and students, I examined history books, in which Abdur Rahman's wars are justified as a suppression of a series of rebellions. The government

claims this elision is to avoid current ethnic tensions; Hazara activists think the lack of attention to these issues just adds to the tensions. One of the key aims of Hazara activists is to tell these stories, which have been written by several authors, to as wide an audience as they can. They want to make sure that it is known that their land was stolen, they were enslaved, and what little was left to them is soaked in their ancestors' blood. This history seems all the more important to remember because, as I explain the next section, Hazara blood continued to be spilled in fighting in the years after Abdur Rahman.

### **After Abdur Rahman: Calm, then Revolution**

Except for several small and unsuccessful rebellions in the early 1900s, Hazaras remained largely pacified after Abdur Rahman's campaign (Gawecki 1980). For most of the century, Hazaras were excluded from most educational opportunities and relegated to the lowest classes of society. Under the reformist policies of King Amanullah slavery was outlawed in 1923, a reform that clearly improved the situation of Hazaras who were slaves. It is not known how many of these freed Hazaras and others continued to be poorly treated servants and manual laborers. Some improvements were made between 1963 and 1973 under Zahir Shah's reforms, including the entry of two Hazaras into Shah's cabinet (Khalilzad 1987).<sup>14</sup> Yet the systemic social exclusion, created under years of oppression, has been difficult to overcome even in the present (Karimi 2011).

The Saur Revolution, the communist coup of 1978, and subsequent years of communist rule until the civil war period began in 1992 does, in fact, mark a time when Hazaras' situations improved, particularly in the cities. Educational opportunities increased as did access to business and government positions. The communist PDPA of course, in line with the rhetoric of the

Soviet Union, espoused a policy of equality and opportunity for all ethnicities. As in the Soviet Union, this narrative was rather haphazardly applied, with Russians in the USSR and Pashtuns in Afghanistan remaining the most powerful groups. However, gains were made by Hazaras, from the appointment of Sultan Ali Keshtmand to prime minister, to many other smaller-scale opportunities.

Why, then, do activists remain silent on this point? On the one hand, it clearly does not fit in with their narrative of a near unbroken period of oppression from the time of Abdur Rahman to the present. When I asked, several activists told me that, in fact, it had been Hazara missteps which had not allowed them to fully benefit from communist ethnic inclusionism. Hazaras tended to choose Maoism when they joined any urban revolutionary group during this time of upheaval. This means that while they might have benefited from some policies of the PDPA, they also suffered from PDPA purges if they were affiliated with a competing, Maoist group. Those who were familiar with the situation in the countryside explained that Hazaras had almost immediately revolted against the PDPA, as they saw it as a threat to their right to practice religion as they wanted. Rural Hazaras were deeply influenced by the Iranian Revolution of the same time, from which they initially hoped they might benefit. This precluded collusion with the communists in Afghanistan. All the same, the activist silences on what gains were made by Hazaras during this time, which were not in any way insignificant, can only be understood as a selective telling of history that focuses only on Hazara oppression.

However, the wars in Afghanistan, set off by the communist coup, or Saur Revolution (April 1978) and subsequent Soviet invasion (1979-1989), did offer an opportunity for Hazaras to establish themselves politically. At the same time, they were sidelined by many of the mujahedin groups fighting the Soviets. Pakistan played a major role in determining which groups

would receive United States, Saudi and other aid, funneled to the mujahedin (Maley 2009, Rubin 2002). The increasingly Sunni dominated regime of Zia al-Haq had no interest in funding a largely Shi'a contingent.

At this time, in fact, Hazara political action was still mainly motivated by affiliation with the Shi'a sect. Hazaras tended to look to Iran for leadership, and most of their leaders were either religiously trained or had some ascribed religious status, such as the Sayeds (Mousavi 1998, Harpviken 1997). Political developments did occur, in which competing Hazara groups, some religious, some influenced by Iran, and some secular, engaged in armed conflict with each other. Eventually the largely ethnic-based association, the Hizb-e-Wahdat party, emerged as victorious. It is an open question whether the majority of Hazaras managed to unite under this overarching ethnic principle. Hazara politics today has splintered into several political parties. Having noted that, I was often told that Hazaras would unite on an ethnic basis, should they again be threatened as a group. In spite of internal fault lines, the Hizb-e-Wahdat party did manage, at the time, to unify most Hazara groups for a period. And today, much political and social capital among Hazaras is gained by association with the former leader of the Hizb-e-Wahdat, Abdul Ali Mazari, who was killed by the Taliban in 1995.

Hazaras in Bamyan were among the first to revolt when the Saur Revolution, or communist coup, occurred in Afghanistan in 1978 (Canfield 1984). Early rebellions were largely local in nature and led by secular community leaders and power holders, those mirs who still retained some authority (Harpviken 1998). Yet, the Soviet invasion largely overlooked the central highland region, focusing its attention on urban areas (Maley 2009). Pakistan funneled foreign money, weapons and logistical support to Sunni resistance groups of its choosing, maintaining a virtual monopoly over the channeling of fighters and assistance (Maley 2009) over

its borders with Afghanistan, while such movement was barred across the Soviet and Iranian borders (the Shi'a, Islamic revolution in Iran put it at loggerheads with the United States and Saudi Arabia). This gave the mainly Hazara region of Bamyan a reprieve from the ruthless attacks suffered by urban populations. It also allowed the Hazaras to work out political, religious, and ethnic issues, which, although preceded by a bloody internecine war, gave rise to and continues to influence what Hazara identity means today.

After the initial reaction against the communist government, led by what remained of the mirs, the Shura-e Inqelab-e Ettifaq-e Islami, the Council of the Islamic Revolutionary Alliance, consolidated Hazara political authority in the Hazarajat to create an anti-communist organization (Harpviken 1998). The Shura was led by Sayeds, who derive social and religious status on the basis of their claimed descent from the Prophet Mohammad. Even as Pashtun Sayeds are considered ethnically Pashtun, Sayeds among the Hazaras claim to be of a different ethnicity, perhaps to distance themselves from the low social status of Hazaras.<sup>15</sup> As descendants of the Prophet, they claim to be Arab, although they do not speak Arabic. The Sayeds, using this religious identity, cross-cut the localized power of the mirs and created a more regionally based organization.

The Sayeds drew also upon the momentum of the Iranian Revolution (Harpviken 1998). Iranian-inspired groups such as Harakat-e Islami and Sozemen-e Nasr, and later Pasdaran, began to also build a following. Harakat was a more moderate Islamist group, led by Ayatollah Asif Mohseni,<sup>16</sup> and had more military power. Nasr was more strongly Islamist and Khomeinist, and was initially followed by many Hazara labor migrants returning from Iran (Harpviken 1995). Nasr continued to play a strong role in Hazarajat politics, while Harakat was stronger in the northern edges of the Hazarajat, where there was a more ethnically mixed population, and

became a mujahedin group in its own right and the main non-Hazara Shi'a alternative for what would develop as the major Hazara resistance group, Hizb-e-Wahdat.

Starting with the Soviet invasion and on into the early 1980s, the Shura acted as a sort of para-state, instating taxation and military conscription, playing on people's fears of the communists and Soviets. As these threats failed to materialize, due to the strategic irrelevance of the area, Shura levies were seen to be a burden by the people, diminishing its legitimacy (Harpviken 1995), because the Shura's demands yielded no perceptible security dividend (Ibrahimi 2006). Islamist *shaykhs*, with ties to Iran, challenged the Shura, leading by 1982 to an internal civil war in the Hazarajat (Harpviken 1995). This situation was further complicated when Iran decided that Nasr was not effective, and began to mainly support Pasdaran (Harpviken 1998).<sup>17</sup> After a period of fighting, the Islamists unseated the Shura from power.

Seven different Shi'a based parties were in operation by 1987, under a loose coalition, the Shura-e Ettalaf, not to be confused with the Sayed-led Shura above (Harpviken 1998). Pakistan excluded all from foreign assistance. A decision was made, ostensibly brokered by Iran, to unite the parties into one, Hizb-e-Wahdat, the Party of Unity (Harpviken 1998). Harakat remained outside of this alliance. Wahdat came to be based on Hazara ethnic, rather than Shi'a, alliances, and Harakat served as the non-Hazara, Shi'a alternative.

Clergy dominated Hizb-e Wahdat, but it was very clear in a policy of opening up membership to those who were not Islamist as well. Abdul Ali Mazari, who had been the leader of the Nasr faction, is credited as its founder and first director. Trained as clergy in both Qom, Iran and Najaf, Iraq, the two major centers of Shi'a learning, Mazari, my informants all agree, broke with Islamist leadership and turned Wahdat into an ethnicity-based group. He then, they say, became the champion of Hazara rights, and the father of all Hazaras. His importance to the



movements I studied cannot be overstated. It might be the case that the break at the time was less clear than my informants said. Mazari, even when incorporating those Hazaras who were not religiously motivated, maintained an Islamist framework in order to appease Islamist supporters. His relationship with Iran is also contentious. While William Maley (2009) has no problem in stating outright that Iran pushed for the unification of the squabbling factions into Wahdat, my informants state the opposite: Iran wanted the factions to continue arguing, to make them easier to control. The Islamic Republic, they reason, would naturally not want a party based on ethnicity rather than Shi'ism. Mazari, they claim, intentionally turned away from Iran, and in response Iran refused to send needed money and arms.<sup>18</sup> He is remembered as the one person who most fostered this change.

Wahdat invited sidelined mirs back into the fold. Wahdat also offered secular, urban elites a place in the organization (Harpviken 1995), particularly those affiliated with Maoist groups advocating for Hazaras, and others, in cities. Wahdat realized it needed members who brought skills lacking in its rural base and largely madrasa-trained leadership. Clergy remained important, and Iran did have a strong hand in the initial formation of Wahdat. However, it tended to be more ethnic in the character of its membership, and less Islamist in its political decision making-processes.<sup>19</sup> Additionally, its leaders may have recognized that a Shi'a based party might have been alarming for the other, Sunni, parties; so, a nationalist party based on ethnicity was instead stressed (Ibrahimi 2009a).

While this was pursued as a possibly effective strategy under Mohammad Najibullah's communist regime, the situation in Afghanistan was quickly changing. After the Soviet withdrawal in 1989, Hazaras, now almost exclusively represented by Wahdat, found themselves without strong alliances. The civil war in Afghanistan began after Najibullah was removed from

office, in 1992, and would continue until 1996. Wahdat distrusted the post-communist governments of Sibghatullah Mojaddedi, and then Berhanuddin Rabbani, backed by Ahmad Shah Massoud, as well as lesser figures such as the Wahhabi Abd al-Rasul Sayyaf. When it seemed that it would soon be asked to disarm, Wahdat chose to fight against the government.

Strengthened by the large number of Hazaras already living in Kabul, Wahdat allied with Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's Hizb-e Islami. All sides, including Wahdat, bombarded each other with ground-to-ground missiles. In 1993, Hazara civilians were subjected to a particularly brutal massacre in the Afshar neighborhood of Kabul, an episode which has become central to Hazara cultural trauma narratives. Cracks within Wahdat had already begun to appear, based on old party alliances. Mohammad Akbari, an ethnic (Shi'a) Kizilbosh who had headed the Pasdaran faction before unification, was co-opted by Rabbani and left Wahdat (Ibrahimi 2009a). Harakat under Mohseni also supported Rabbani. These splits did occur along earlier faction lines within the group, but it might also not be a coincidence that they seem to split along ethnic lines as well, as Mohseni and Akbari were both not Hazaras. A party mainly affiliated with Sayeds did not emerge.

As the civil war wound down, and Hazara Wahdat seemed sure to be on the losing side, a last-ditch attempt to create an alliance not only failed, as a new group, the Taliban, moved to take power, but resulted in the death of Mazari. In discussions with both Wahdat and Harakat, the Taliban promised some degree of autonomy and recognition of Shi'a jurisprudence. Hence Hazaras, engaged in a conflict with the mainly Tajik-run government of Rabbani, offered little resistance to initial Taliban encroachments (Ibrahimi 2009a). Mazari ventured to meet Taliban leaders in 1995, but instead of making a deal with him, they captured him, tortured him, and killed him. Karim Khalili took over Wahdat leadership after Mazari's death and retreated to a

stronghold deep in Yakawlang district. Khalili's resistance resulted in a near complete blockade of Bamyan province by the Taliban. As people faced starvation, the only route to obtain food was the long journey north, to the city Mazar-e Sharif. As the Taliban closed in on this city too, fighters, many of whom were Hazaras, put up a strong resistance. In early 1998, anti-Taliban fighters, including Wahdat and Uzbek Junbesh troops, killed hundreds of Taliban while chasing them from the city. They locked many Taliban in shipping containers and left them to die in the desert south of the city. When, less than a year later, the Taliban finally took Mazar-e-Sharif, they in turn massacred five to six thousand mainly Hazara civilians in retaliation, while others were captured and taken as slaves, sometimes for sexual abuse (Ibrahimi 2009a). Hazara activists today refer to the civil war events as yet another genocide, a continuation of the one perpetrated by Abdur Rahman. This was the first of several massacres the Taliban carried out. Khalili never gave up fighting, so that, even as the Taliban controlled Markaz Bamyan until they were removed from power, fighting moved back and forth across Bamyan and Yakawlang districts, sometimes a few kilometers away from Markaz Bamyan. The population fought, hid in the mountains, and suffered. Everyone I met who was in Bamyan at this time told of hiding from the Taliban in the mountains. The fighters, some of whom were young teenagers, were more reluctant to discuss their experiences.

Today, Hizb-e Wahdat has disintegrated further, after the first break with Akbari. Khalili, who served directly under Mazari and then continued fighting, seemed a legitimate heir. But at the same time, many of my informants criticize him, saying he carried out heavy-handed purges, and even killing, of political rivals during the years he led the fight against the Taliban. He was challenged by Mohammad Mohaqeq, who was a leader of Wahdat in the north, and ran in the 2004 presidential election won by Hamid Karzai. The split between these two leaders led to two

further, personality-based factions, Khalili's Hizb-e Wahdat-e Islami Afghanistan and Mohaqeq's Hizb-e Wahdat-e Mardom- e Islami Afghanistan. Akbari leads Hizb-e Wahdat-e Millat Afghanistan. A fourth group is that of Qurban Ali Erfani, the Hizb-e Wahdat-e Millat-e Islami Afghanistan (Ibrahimi 2009b). In spite of the factionalism, all parties claim ideological "descent" from Mazari and celebrate his values. The civil society activists I worked with are suspicious of all these parties. They believe that none has lived up to Mazari's legacy, and that working with the government would mean compromising their ideals.

### **Return to Bamyan**

Taking up where I left off earlier, looking for some sort of first-hand account as to what happened to those Tajik merchants, the history of political divisiveness among Hazaras and of violence between ethnic groups helps explain why even my friends in Markaz Bamyan were hesitant to explain. Hazaras in Bamyan hold the Tajiks responsible not only for general mistreatment and prejudice but also for collaborating with the Taliban. Latif is an acquaintance working as a local journalist for a news agency. He is one of my few contacts in Bamyan who was born in one of the nearby "suburbs" and who has stayed there his whole life. His parents, except for a few short years in Karachi, also spent their entire life in the region. I asked Latif if his parents would tell me the history of Bamyan. On a chilly day at the end of January, we made the trip to his parents' house. Latif's mother and father, as well as one uncle, were kind enough to sit and talk with me for hours, about their lives and local history, on a porch enclosed with heavy plastic, creating a sort of greenhouse. I will never forget their kind, wizened faces. Though in their 60s, they appeared much older.

Latif's mother and father started with a familiar refrain: the cruelty (*zulm*) that others demonstrated in their relations with the Hazaras. Latif's father spoke of the Taliban coming and killing people, burning their houses, tying their hands and chopping them off. "Old and young were both killed," he said. "We had to run to Dukhoni, a secluded mountain valley, to escape them." At times, his story of *zulm* would wander and he would mention Abdur Rahman. This tendency to jump in a non-chronological fashion between different stories of cruelty I had noticed even among more highly-educated civil society activists, and I found it interesting to hear much the same from an old man who had been a farmer on the same piece of land for most of his life.

At a certain point, I told Latif's father that I was particularly interested in knowing what had happened to the Tajiks. "The Tajiks," he said,

were moved here on purpose by Abdur Rahman. They owned the bazaar, and they were kept in place, supported, by later governments. It was not explicitly stated that Hazaras could not own shops, but whenever a Hazara offered to buy a shop that was for sale, they were told an extremely high price. In that way, they were kept out of the bazaar. Later, before the Taliban came, during the civil war, Khalili managed to push the front all the way to Markaz Bamyan. The Hazaras who were part of this offensive remembered how the Tajiks treated them, and they knew what was happening in Kabul with Ahmad Shah Massoud (the alleged perpetrator of the Afshar massacre). The Tajiks, knowing what they had done in the past, thought that it was likely they would be massacred, and so they fled before Khalili arrived. The Hazara fighters with Khalili saw this bazaar as a symbol of

their humiliation, they did not want to just take it over, so they destroyed it. They built a new bazaar, Shahr-e Nau.<sup>20</sup>

We then continued the discussion about what happened during the Taliban period. Latif's father said:

“When the Taliban came, they took control of the Markaz. The Tajiks returned with them, and they cooperated with the Taliban. They took part in the injustices the Taliban carried out against the Hazaras. Khalili kept attacking during the Taliban period, but he never managed to take the Markaz back. Only after the Americans came was Khalili successful. Then the Tajiks ran again. They were wealthy you know. They all had second homes, in Herat, in Kabul. They went there. Some of them sold their Bamyan land, some did not. But mostly they are gone.”

I pointed out that I knew some Tajiks in Bamyan, and that they certainly were not wealthy. The answer was simply that the poor Tajiks could not leave. “But,” said Latif's father, “we have no problem with them. They are just trying to get by. They did not help the Taliban.” This was not in agreement with what I was told by Tajiks I knew in the area. They claimed a significant amount of job discrimination and harassment from the Hazaras.

Bamyan is appealing for Hazaras for a number of reasons. Historically, it represents a sort of prize, an important area that was taken from them, a symbol of Hazara subjugation. Now it is an economic and political seat, with government, NGO, and merchant jobs not found in the rest of the province. It is home to the only state university in Afghanistan that is attended by a

Hazara majority (although there are several private Hazara-majority universities in Kabul and other large cities). Its landscape recalls an ancient past, with its Buddha statues and ruins of archeological sites, a past which Hazaras want to claim.

The story that Latif's father told me brought to life all that I knew about Bamyan as a place of unrest. The Bamyan I lived in was at peace, but the stories I was told were haunted not just by the past but also by the possibility of a return to bloodshed in the future. This is what the activists told me, and talked about in their speeches and protests. This is also what many ordinary Hazaras in Bamyan told me. The people of Bamyan are terrified, feel haunted, are traumatized, by their history, and by their knowledge that they are still not seen by many as true Afghans. The activists' narratives carry pain and suffering, and activate these same feelings among the people who hear them speak. As I will go into in greater depth in the chapters to follow, sometimes the narratives bring up old memories which people might want to forget; often they build upon a religious-cultural framework that emphasizes suffering and victimhood; at times, they make collective experiences personal, promoting the cultural trauma.

## Chapter Three

### Cultural Trauma Among Hazara Civil Society Activists

It was a clear sunny day, not a single cloud in the sky — the perfect day to welcome spring. Today was Nowruz, a Central Asian celebration of New Year that predates Islam. I had traveled with several friends from Markaz Bamyan to a village in the nearby district Yakawlang. Hundreds had gathered here for a rare day off to celebrate. The weather was still cool, bordering on cold, but the deep freeze of winter was mostly behind us. My husband Andrea, who is an anthropologist and was conducting research in Nangarhar Province at the time, was visiting. For us, as well as my Afghan friends, the festive atmosphere was intoxicating. My husband worked in an area with a large number of insurgents, and the ability to be outside in a village, openly, was a heady experience for him. I could travel safely in Bamyan, and yet as a woman alone still kept a low profile and presented myself as modest and married. But someone heard I was able to ride horses, and offered to let me ride one of the mounts used for *buzkashi*, a game somewhat like polo in which a goat carcass is used as the ball. I galloped the horse up and down the field, let go of myself as people cheered my ride, not expecting it from a foreigner, much less a woman. My veil blew back and my hair streamed in the wind.

But it seemed we could never fully escape the fact that Hazaras felt precarious, vulnerable . . . their collective trauma was always a part of them. I walked along the top of the hill, barren of vegetation like most of the landscape, with my friend Sajjad, a young Hazara activist who was born in Quetta, Pakistan. His family originally hailed from Yakawlang, and had left several decades ago. Sajjad had returned to Afghanistan, to Bamyan, for university, because he wanted to be in his homeland, to which he felt a strong sense of attachment, and he was



currently seeking work. But he felt uncomfortable. He was not fully Afghan, not fully Pakistani, and trying to understand what it meant to be a Hazara, especially a Hazara who belonged to two nation-states, but felt part of neither. We looked across the valley. To one side was a rousing buzkashi match. To the other, four- wheel-drive trucks kicked up dust, attempting to race to the top of one of the steep hills, all slowing and holding for a moment in stasis until rolling back down without actually cresting the top. Sajjad, feeling reflective, began to contemplate his place in Afghanistan. “You know, Melissa, I am Hazara, my family is from Afghanistan originally. I came back here because I want to be Afghan. I feel myself Afghan. I want to help rebuild Afghanistan.” But then, as so often happened, I noticed a slight, ironic smile as his voice turned playfully sarcastic, yet slightly bitter. “But what about our Pashtun brothers? They are my brothers, they are Afghans too, right? What do they think of me, of us Hazaras? Are we Afghan to them? After what they have done to us?”

This chapter provides a broad overview of the ways in which cultural trauma relates to Hazaras, and particularly to Hazara civil society activists. I introduce points to which I will return in subsequent chapters: how trauma relates to issues such as religion, history, and human rights. The main idea is that activists are promoting ideas that “induce” collective and cultural trauma in a bid to gain recognition of Hazara suffering and, it is hoped, address and find solutions for Hazara exclusion. Yet, in setting Hazaras apart as “the most traumatized” group in Afghanistan, activists may antagonize members of the other ethnic groups in the country, and alienate themselves further.

In this chapter, I explain the specific historical context that has given existence to a group of collective agents, civil society activists, working to promote cultural trauma. Among the key questions: How can we understand the strength of ethnicity as a major identity marker among

Hazaras, particularly when in the context of Afghanistan, among other groups, other markers, such as tribe, local affiliation, or religious sect might be stronger? How do cultural trauma narratives sustain such a long historical timeline, extending back into ancient history and into the future? Finally, how do the activists express collective trauma, find a ready audience, and influence the emotions of those they want to reach?

Versions of my conversation with Sajjad were repeated often throughout my fieldwork in Bamyan with Hazara civil society activists. Almost completely uninvolved in the current anti-government insurgency, Hazaras seem to be very much invested in the Afghan state. They attend school in numbers higher than any other ethnicity (Oppel and Wafa 2010), and they seek work in the government and with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), working in the spheres of development and state-building. It is a rare exception for a Hazara to take up arms against the current Afghan government. Criticisms of the government are common, but they concern issues related to democracy, civil society, meritocracy, human rights, women's rights, and sometimes Shi'a rights. Hazara activists voice their criticism through protest — writing articles or taking to the streets — not through open or violent rebellion. These protests do not preclude working from within the state, through which the activists believe that they can improve their situation. Yet they feel rejected by the Afghan state at the same time, and speak hopefully of a federal system, whereby they could be both full members of the nation, and at the same time retain autonomy as Hazaras. Federalism is held out as a remedy both for Hazaras' rejection by other groups and the gap between Hazara core cultural values and those of many other groups in Afghanistan.

Because of the length of the conflict in Afghanistan, which affected all geographic regions of the country at some point, it is very difficult to find a group that remained untouched by violence. Most Afghans, and historians of Afghanistan, agree, however, that Hazaras

occupied a low social status before the current conflict began in 1979, and were more likely to be targeted with violence historically prior to that. With a majority adhering to the Shi'a sect of Islam (a relatively small minority in Afghanistan), and displaying distinct Asiatic somatic features, Hazaras experienced victimization that relegated them to the lowest rungs of Afghan society — servants and manual laborers, subsistence farmers, and at certain times, slaves. The current conflict, dating back to the 1979 Soviet invasion, has provided them with an opportunity to rally politically and in some ways better their situation.<sup>21</sup>

Still, Hazara efforts to become full members of the Afghan nation seem to have stalled. Their desire for greater inclusion has been partially fulfilled but the activists hoped for more progress, faster. They continue to feel excluded from state institutions and from certain positions, both inside and outside of the government, because of their ethnicity. Hazaras attend school in high numbers, while many believe that they suffer from discrimination in the university system. Activists and many others believe that development efforts in Hazara-majority areas are intentionally inadequate, especially when compared to efforts in other areas. Hazaras are targeted by insurgents, usually when traveling outside of their majority areas. They are victims of kidnappings and murders, and they believe that the state intentionally avoids increasing security measures in insurgency-affected areas through which Hazaras must travel. Some such fears might be exaggerated, and some are completely valid, but it cannot be denied that Hazaras suffer from continued, systemic social exclusion and prejudice that has not been fully countered by improvements in the post-2001 period.

Hazara activists, expecting more from Afghanistan, particularly after buying into rhetoric and promises set out by the international community (as reflected in Sajjad's decision to return from Pakistan), build and promote a cultural trauma that draws upon the past of exclusion and

oppression. Hazara culture has been threatened by the policies of a Pashtun-dominated Afghan state since the late 1800s, but a cultural trauma is developing now, both because of the current disappointment with what was hoped to be a new, post-2001 Afghanistan, and ironically also because the current political and cultural climate make it possible. Hazara activists, finding a platform in the language of civil society development, continue and expand upon past projects that sought to establish a Hazara political force. Current disappointment with the rate and degree of Hazara integration, as evidenced by Sajjad's concern with what his "Pashtun brothers" felt about him, are compounded by concerns about lack of development and security. This fosters disappointment and the development of an identity based on past traumatic collective experiences. Hazara culture, believed by many to be lost to historical upheavals, is being reshaped by the activists around a narrative of collective trauma.

Another aspect of the current situation that encourages Hazaras to embrace a collective victimhood is the introduction of a discourse of human rights from the international community. This is not completely new to Afghanistan: part of the Western rhetoric against the Soviet intervention, and hence the pretext to supply extensive assistance to resistance groups, was that not only of Afghan sovereignty but also universal human rights were being violated. And, given that one of the main tactics of the Soviets was the "clearing of the population" from rural areas (Maley 2009), as well as the use of land mines, and even "butterfly bombs" (which, looking like playthings, were appealing to children), this was not unfounded. The post-2001 invasion was, after the initial push for revenge against the regime which harbored Bin Laden, rationalized as a way to provide rights denied by the Taliban, particularly for women. Subsequently, many of the development and aid projects provided by the West focus on training in issues relating to human rights, again with a strong emphasis on women's rights (Farrell and McDermott 2005; Hesford

and Kozol 2005).<sup>22</sup> The organizations that bid on and administer these programs in Bamyan are often the ones for which civil society activists work. The views expressed by the activists towards the international community indicate that such international interventions and programs create a sort of “script” which rewards victimhood.

In what might seem a paradox, the religious-cultural context specific to Hazaras and Shi’as confirms the script of victimhood. Shi’a religious narratives praise suffering and martyrdom. Thomas Barfield pointed out that a major reason why collective trauma narratives are common among Hazaras, and yet seem to be lacking among Pashtuns and other groups — all who have also suffered during the years of conflict — is that Pashtuns tend to value revenge for wrongs committed against them, and do not emphasize a trauma narrative.<sup>23</sup> This is despite the fact that in the more recent 35 years of conflict, they have suffered as much, if not more than, Hazaras. On the other hand, Pashtuns have politically controlled the country, and do not have the same history of oppression, marginalization, and enslavement that Hazaras experienced. I argue that the combination of already present religious tradition and historical context make the Hazaras more receptive than other groups in Afghanistan to the influence of imported scripts of victimhood.

### **The Historical Context of Cultural Trauma**

A specific historical context in Afghanistan led to a situation in which civil society activists, working as collective agents, or social/moral entrepreneurs, could begin working towards a representation of events and situations around which cultural trauma can coalesce. I propose this context relates to the continuous conflict experienced since the Communist-led Saur revolution and the subsequent Soviet invasion in Afghanistan in 1978-1979. It is in this context that earlier

events, such as the wars Hazaras fought with Abdur Rahman's central Afghan state, their subsequent enslavement, and relegation to a lower class, appear as further evidence of trauma. Had certain political developments and other instances of targeted killings not happened in the more recent wars, the catalyst for a collective trauma may not have materialized. Hazaras arguably suffered *less* than many other groups in Afghanistan during the early phases of the communist takeover, Soviet invasion, and subsequent conflicts, as the areas of the country where they predominate were largely left to their own devices during its initial stages. This situation ultimately allowed for the remembrance of earlier traumatic events, which were experienced a century ago, as continuous with more contemporary targeting of Hazaras.

During the civil war and Taliban years, the extent and severity of Hazara suffering can hardly be overstated. Hazara-majority areas in Kabul, such as Afshar, were razed in April 1993 by intensive shelling from several sides. During the Taliban years, when much of the country was relatively peaceful, fronts existed in the north, and in Bamyan itself, mostly in Yakawlang district and Bamyan district, where a front moved back and forth for years, causing a cycle of displacement, recuperation of lost territory, and return of the displaced. Even those who are now students in local high schools remember these events first-hand.

"Did you ever have to escape the Taliban?" I asked Fatima and Hakima, two sisters I befriended. They were from Yakawlang, on the fairly wide valley known as the Chaman, where a river created a grassland for animals to graze. Fatima had married a friend of mine, Ali, who worked in Bamyan at Sakhi's guesthouse as a manager. Sakhi also had a job with an NGO and needed extra help for his business. The two, Ali and Sakhi, were, in fact cousins, and since I was very close to the mother and sisters of Sakhi, who I visited often in their village, I easily became friends with Ali's female relatives, as well as his new wife. Ali went back to his village for his

arranged marriage, which was a long time coming. He had previously traveled as an asylum seeker to Switzerland, had his claim rejected, was jailed for nine months, and agreed to return to Afghanistan. He was not illiterate, but neither had he completed his high school education, so a job managing a guesthouse was a good one for him. I was invited, and so spent several days of festivities at the wedding, where I got to know Fatima, his new bride. She had finished high school, and Ali was working to have her enrolled in courses at Bamyan University — it was very common that male activists would support the higher education of their wives. Hakima was staying with Fatima for the first few months after she moved to Bamyan with her new husband, to help her settle in.

The village this family came from was not too far into the interior of Yakawlang, and so easy for me to access. I thought perhaps in the past it was easier for the Taliban to access, too. “Yes, when we were children, it happened a lot. They came in their pick-up trucks. We ran into the mountains. We were so scared. If they caught us, they would kill us. We had to run. We had to escape,” said Fatima.

I asked, “Just the mountains? There were no houses, any structures?”

The two young women explained, “Well, we have summer grazing pastures there, with basic structures for the shepherds, but they are very cold, with no facilities. And every time the Taliban came, we couldn’t bring enough food, or blankets. We would see their trucks coming, and we had to leave quickly! We were so hungry! You know, our little sister, Anara, here, was born up there. That was so hard.” The smaller girl in question smiled shyly at me.

“Well, why didn’t the Taliban follow you up the mountain?” I asked. “I mean, there are trails, and it is not too far to the summer pastures.”

At this point the brother of the girls, Hassan, who was also visiting at the time, broke in. “Those Taliban, those Pashtuns, they were so stupid! They came here in their light shalwar kamiz, their sandals...how could they make it up into our mountains?” We all laughed, a moment of levity when discussing a serious situation, a situation that marked these young people for life with fear, as people who had been hunted, and marked Pashtuns, too, as the enemy.

### **Hazara: Ethnicity or “Groupness”?**

The analytical category “ethnicity” rightfully arouses criticism when used as a static entity, particularly in a place such as Afghanistan where ethnicity, local affiliation, religious sect, and class all carry importance, depending on the context. At one level, my emphasis on ethnicity reflects the activists’ choice to stress the ethnic category “Hazara,” as the most important marker of their identity. Yet that only raises the question of why ethnicity came to be so important to Hazaras. It is certainly not a given that there exists a coherent ethnic group, “Hazara,” nor that the people of this group tend to act in concert or consider “Hazara” the most salient aspect of their own identity. Yet for the people I worked with in Markaz Bamyan, ethnic Hazara-ness is the marker most used to make sense of their affiliations and political actions. Civil society and development in Bamyan are certainly based around ethnicity, as a contrast is made with the higher levels of development that activists imagine are found in non-Hazara areas. The political parties that most Hazaras follow are certainly ethnic in nature, and descended from the original Hizb-e Wahdat. Status as a refugee according to international law also enhances the importance of Hazara as an ethnic category, as many seeking asylum make the claim that ethnic Hazaras are a particularly vulnerable group in Afghanistan.



Sociologist Rogers Brubaker writes of the need to question ethnic, national, racial, or religious groups as static groups, to which one either does or does not belong:

Much talk about ethnic, racial, or national groups is obscured by the failure to distinguish between groups and categories. If by ‘group’ we mean mutually interacting, mutually recognizing, mutually orientated, effectively communicating, bounded collectivity with a sense of solidarity, corporate identity, and capacity of “group,” it should be clear that a category is not a group. It is at best a potential basis for group-formation or “groupness.” . . . We can ask how people — and organizations — do things with categories (Brubaker 2004: 12-14).

A category, in these terms, is any descriptive feature one uses for oneself or others, whereas a group is a bounded number of individuals to which one must either belong, or not belong. The problem is, while groups are not static, categories are used in different ways depending upon need, and given different import depending on context. One might be female, and Shi’a, and Hazara, but depending upon particular historical and social exigencies one may or may not choose to act in concert with others who also have the possibility to lay claim to any one of these categories. Therefore, Brubaker perceives “group-ness” as an individually-felt sentiment which emerges in the wake of specific historical and socio-political circumstances.

Shifting attention from groups to groupness as variable and contingent rather than fixed and given, allows us to take account of — and, potentially, to account for — phases of extraordinary cohesion and moments of intensely felt collective solidarity, without

implicitly treating high levels of groupness as constant, enduring, or “ontologically” present. It allows us to treat groupness as an *event*, as something that “happens” (Brubaker 2004: 12).

Groupness can then crystallize and cause individuals to act in the name of a particular category, whether it be ethnic, religious, political, or other. Furthermore, the “groupness event” is often encouraged and exploited by “political entrepreneurs,” who can engage in a group-making project (Brubaker 2004). I argue that the figure of the political entrepreneur can potentially overlap with Jeffrey Alexander’s collective agents who promote cultural trauma, or the “carrier groups” (in Weberian terms) of religious movements, depending upon what their goal is. “Carrier groups have both ideal and material interests, are situated at particular places in the social structure, and have particular discursive talents for articulating their claims — for what might be called “meaning making” in the public sphere. Carrier groups may be elites, but they may also be denigrated or marginalized classes (Alexander 2004: 11).

The achievement of Hazara crystallized groupness relies upon historical factors that both impact and are acted upon by Hazara political actors. In other terms, the Hazara activists claim that the people they represent are a passive target of traumatic historical events, even as their own efforts are turning them into active participants in an identity-building process premised on these same traumatic events. By using trauma to build identity, a new way of understanding cultural trauma comes about. The identity, even the culture of Hazaras can come to be premised on trauma and victimhood. As I will also argue that Shi’a religious practices also do some of the same work, this becomes all the more salient for Shi’a Hazaras. Shi’ism informs how the

activists promote their messages, and in turn, the audience might be more receptive to traumatic narratives familiarized through Shi'a images and metaphors.

Such “newly-created” identity will, activists hope, allow Hazaras to become legitimate and functioning members of the Afghan state — that is, to be “Afghanistanis” as well as Hazaras. I use here “Afghanistani” because the word Afghan is, in fact, synonymous with Pashtun. However, my informants are at the same time aware that the promotion of the memory of past traumatic events within the collective consciousness may not alone be sufficient to achieve the full membership in the Afghan body politic to which they aspire. The trauma the activists are experiencing and addressing is represented precisely by the denial to Hazaras of such membership on the part of the dominant ethno-political categories in the Afghan state (mainly Pashtuns, according to them). Subverting the status quo will, in their view, allow the greater Hazara population to overcome the trauma, and open a new era of political and social participation for Hazaras in the country. Thus, while I speak of Hazaras as an ethnic category, I analyze the possibility for the emergence of a particular type of Hazara *groupness* as a consequence of the politico-ideological work of the activists who were my informants.

Fredrik Barth's (1969) model of ethnicity as a function of social boundaries and cultural diacritica — the everyday cultural practices and material artifacts that index belonging to an ethnic group — can be used to understand certain other aspects of ethnic belonging, parallel to the view I am proposing. Barth makes the point that it is not only a group's internal cultural characteristics but also the policing of borders done by insiders and outsiders, which determine who belongs to a certain ethnicity. This does not preclude one changing their ethnic affiliation, of course — Barth himself discusses Pashtuns in Balochistan, Pakistan who, when their territory was overtaken by ethnic Baloch, “switched” identities to Baloch themselves. They did so, he

claimed, because, once under the sway of Baloch landholders, they could not hold up Pashtun norms of behavior, making it no longer possible to sustain the “diacritica” that defined them as Pashtuns, and so made the decision to “become” Baloch. This was only possible had the Baloch also accepted it as such.

The activists express the opinion that their efforts to be “Afghanistani” at the moment are inconclusive, and that their ideal objective might in the end prove unattainable. This is because they are aware that their project rests on its acceptance by their social and political adversaries, who may potentially never acknowledge Hazaras as possessing the “right” diacritica to be fully inside “Afghanistani” boundaries based on egalitarian premises. This comes within a context in which the state has attempted, with more or less intensity depending upon who is in power, to implement different sorts of “Pashtunization” at various points in Afghan history. Hazaras can be excluded and ridiculed because of certain diacritica, such as looser purda restrictions of Hazara women, less of an emphasis on honor (although this concept is still important), somatic features, and even denial of particular types of physical culture such as song and dance as not legitimately “Afghan.”<sup>24</sup> The activists are reacting to perceived and real boundaries set up by other ethnic categories in Afghanistan, many of whom reject any sort of commonality with Hazaras. As a result, they are also maintaining their own boundaries against other groups, by focusing on a sort of Hazara “exceptionalism.”

If, per Benedict Anderson (1983), a nation is an imagined community, a community of people who believe they have something in common with one another (even should they have never met one another individually), and if one of the goals of Afghanistan today is to strengthen, even build, such a nation, then the Hazaras present a problem. An Afghan nation will, by definition, have to be something that is somehow inclusive of the extremely multiethnic

nature of the state — after all, even Pashtuns, the most numerous ethnic group, make up a plurality, rather than a majority, of the population. Tajiks, the next most populous group, have been more successful in seeing themselves as members of the Afghan nation. While they have not controlled the top echelons politically, they have maintained a strong, wealthy, and politically connected upper and middle class, something denied to Hazaras. Afghanistan has a multitude of minority ethnic groups, but it may be that Hazaras, with their different sectarian affiliation and their different somatic features, are just too “other” to be accepted by the other main groups.

Hazaras represent the danger of the minority that is analyzed in Arjun Appadurai’s *Fear of Small Numbers* (2006), especially when they are portrayed as descendants of Chingiz Khan, that Mongol who is most known for bringing death and destruction wherever he went. And, having been oppressed seems to have the effect of creating a perception by others that they are all the more dangerous. Appadurai supposes that a nation-state is built upon peoples who must have something in common, whether it be shared ancestral background or adherence to certain values which are embodied in a sort of foundational myth. If people within a nation state do not manage to somehow adhere to one of these two qualifications, they become dangerous. A nation-state is only held together by its mythological foundations, or shared blood, or of shared values expressed by a foundational story. People who do not fit into these categories, even if a small minority, are hence perceived as dangerous, and cause discomfort, and even fear, among the majority, who consider themselves related by blood or foundational myth-values.

Not only is Afghanistan home to many different ethnicities. It is also hard to pin down what the shared foundational myth of Afghanistan might be and what values bond all its people. One answer might be religion, but Hazaras, as mostly Shi’as, do not even fit in this way. And

most Afghans have concerned themselves more with tribal, local, familial, and sectarian affiliations than with national affiliations. Even attacks from the outside did not unite the country as a nation, as evidenced by the Soviet invasions, followed by a civil war. Today, Afghans of all ethnicities wish to embark on some sort of national project, espousing a belief in the strength of their armed forces against the Taliban, for example.

Ironically, the Hazara cause may be hurt when their activists proclaim themselves the most suited for a nation-state along modern lines and the ones most invested in rule of law and rights of all citizens. The more they seem to work within the state and make demands as citizens, the more their minority status seems to be thrown back at them and their difference from others, stressed. They are Shi'a. They are descendants of Mongols. They have occupied the lowest strata of society for a long time. They do not keep the same strict rules of purda (gender segregation) as others do. They are just too different, and yet they make these demands. They will not be quiet but work to make themselves heard — so, they are feared by other Afghans. Even as they try to assert themselves as members of the Afghan state, their demands for remembrance of past injustices may work against them, as do all the other ways they are different. But they have no other state, no other place, to claim. Located in the middle of the country, with only diaspora populations which comprise even smaller minorities in Iran and Pakistan to flee to, they cannot be easily excised. They are hence something to be feared as a possible spoiler to an Afghan nation state, looked at through the lenses of the fear of small numbers evoked by Appadurai.

A Pashtun friend put succinctly what others alluded to, during many conversations about my work with Hazaras. “Of course we know what we did to them in the past! That is why we cannot let them get power now. Can you imagine how they will want revenge? What they will do to us?” While this might seem like a projection of a more characteristically Pashtun cultural

attitude onto Hazaras as an abstract group, some Hazaras do express the desire for revenge against those who had placed them in the lowest rungs of society, who had enslaved and massacred them, seemingly without a second thought.

These fears can also be tied to Conrad Schetter's conceptualization of the ethnoscape (2005). If Hazaras imagine that their homeland, their "ethnoscape" encompasses fertile farm territory they were removed from as early as the 1700s, under the reign of Ahmad Shah Durrani, whereas Pashtuns' ethnoscape *also* encompasses this land, which they currently inhabit (and part of Pakistan, another nation state with a large Pashtun minority), then it becomes understandable that Hazaras and Pashtuns fear each other based on ethnic animosities. Pashtuns and Hazaras hence have both real and imagined grievances against each other, and different ideas about what the ethno-national make-up of the other includes. These grievances work against Pashtuns accepting that Hazaras can be part of their nation, and against Hazaras wanting to be members of that nation.

Such grievances seem to be so deeply rooted that even the most rational persons cannot resist them. "Taliban, Pashtuns, they cut off women's hands! They committed such acts of cruelty (zulm)!" declared an old woman from a village outside Bamyan, who had remained there during all of the years of conflict. Meanwhile, a very open-minded Pashtun from a village south of Jalalabad told me, "Hazaras are cruel (zulm)! When they fought against us, they nailed our ears to the wall, to ensure our suffering!" Both sides claim *zulim*, cruelty, against the other. And Tajiks, for whom ethnic groupness is not as crucial, and for whom identity is based upon language and place of origin, also get caught up in these narratives. Hazaras were cruel, they say ("Just look at Hizb-e Wahdat, who bombed Kabul during the civil war!"). Pashtuns, they say, are also cruel — the Taliban never did any *real* favors to Tajiks, after all. Yet the Pashtuns rebuke

that the Northern Alliance, after it pushed out the Taliban, took all the important government positions except for the very top, the president. So, a Pashtun cannot *really* succeed in today's Afghanistan. Of course, I am describing a situation in which everybody has grievances against everybody, but these complaints and squabbling have turned into a real memory of trauma only among the Hazaras.

Those who are part of the “category” Hazara currently feel that this is the most significant aspect of their identity, leading to a strong crystallization of Hazara “groupness” at present. This, however, does not mean that other categories to which my informants belong do not significantly impact their actions. Also extremely important, both to their self-representation and for the judgments leveled towards them, are other factors, such as sectarianism. From the subjective point of view, being Shi'a is of varying importance to my activist informants. Some believe strongly, while others have gone as far as to renounce Islam. However, Shi'ism remains (almost unconsciously) relevant for many, with its cultural, narrative, and iconographic patterns based on suffering and personal sacrifice. Hazaras find that they can present themselves as a people persecuted in Afghanistan for their ethnicity as well as for their affiliation with an Islamic sect (the Shi'a), which itself originates from the history of suffering and persecution of two of its founding figures. Hazara groupness and Shi'a groupness can overlap, and sometimes are wholly intertwined. In fact, Sunni insurgent groups (the Taliban, al-Qaeda, and Daesh/Islamic State) still target Hazaras both for their ethnicity and their religious affiliation, which they consider heretical. While Afghanistan is often lauded as a place where few instances of sectarian violence occurs, there have been in the past years some egregious examples of precisely such events (e.g., the 2011 bombing of a Shi'a mosque in Kabul during the most important Shi'a holiday, Ashura [Nordland 2011], and the 2016 bombing of Shi'a mosques in Kabul and Mazar-e-Sharif, also on



Ashura). As Daesh's ideas gain traction in Afghanistan, sectarian acrimony may increase as well (Goldstein and Shah 2015).

### **The History of Hazara Groupness**

The political developments experienced by Hazaras during the Soviet invasion, civil war, and Taliban period, as well as the post-2001 conflict, provide the setting in which Hazara ethnicity has crystallized as an analytical (and experiential) category, and in which Hazara activists find it possible to promote their ideas about cultural trauma. This process, by which the sense of groupness centered on the category "Hazara" emerged, was likely set in motion by Abdul Ali Mazari's decision, after founding the Hizb-e-Wahdat political and mujahedin party, to focus on ethnicity, rather than sectarian or political affiliations (Harpviken 1995 and 1998; Ibrahimi 2009a and 2012). Previous to this, Hazara political activism was minimal. Following Hazara society's decimation by Abdur Rahman's policies, a few Hazaras did seize leadership opportunities, particularly with Communist groups struggling for control in Afghanistan in the period leading up to and during the Saur Revolution and Soviet invasion, but there was not yet a movement inclusive of Hazaras as a whole. Mazari, a member of the Shi'a clergy trained in Iran, initially appealed as a sectarian leader but later made a decision to include secular, including many Maoist, Hazaras, in the Hizb-e-Wahdat (Party of Unity). Some, particularly Shi'as of other ethnicities, such as Pashtuns, Tajiks, and Kizilbosh (a Turkic minority who have long held an elite position in the Afghan state), saw this move as closing the door on mobilizing around Shi'a identity and abandoned Mazari's leadership for a party that was more Shi'a oriented, Harakat-e-Islami, led by a non-Hazara, Mohseni, who became a rival to Mazari. All of this political

maneuvering on the part of Hazaras was made possible by the fact that the Central Highlands, homeland of Hazaras, was left largely to its own devices during the Soviet invasion and communist period. Mazari emerged as the leader after a period of internecine fighting, as Hazaras sought to define themselves politically (Harpviken 1995, 1998).

During the civil war period of 1992 to 1996, Hazaras entered the political and military scene more fully. Large numbers of Hazaras were threatened in cities such as Kabul after the Soviet withdrawal led to fierce fighting within Afghanistan for control by the many various mujahedin groups. After the communist regime of Najibullah collapsed in 1992, Wahdat tried to establish themselves as an effective fighting force, and initially Hazaras were moderately successful in gaining control of a large part of Kabul due to its large Hazara population. However, other factions soon joined the fight and Hizb-e-Wahdat was not satisfied with the power-sharing agreement offered. Taking a gamble, their leader, Abdul Ali Mazari, allied himself with the anti-government force of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar. This led to the retaliatory shelling of Hazara areas such as Afshar, and corroborated the narrative of the Hazara-as-victim.

When the Taliban began to take control of Afghanistan, Mazari took another gamble and attempted an alliance. He was promised a meeting with Taliban leadership, and instead was kidnapped, tortured, and killed (March 1995), further establishing a Hazara martyrdom rhetoric along the lines of the Karbala Paradigm. This indicates that even should people mobilize around one particular category, patterns for understanding the world, other cosmologies, are not simply forgotten. With Mazari gone, Hizb-e-Wahdat as a unified political party fragmented, and in fact today there are four distinct factions descended from the original party. However, the idea of Hazara *ethnicity* as a defining category for political action was firmly established and continues to this day. Although there are exceptions, most Hazaras I spoke with agree that despite current

fragmentations, when confronted or threatened, Hazaras would unify politically once again along ethnic lines.

### **Collective Agents**

In Ron Eyerman's description of cultural trauma, collective agents are intellectuals who "mediate between cultural and political spheres . . . not so much representing and giving voice to their own ideas and interests, but rather articulating ideas to and for others." He clarifies that they are not necessarily educated individuals, but are "movement intellectuals" whose "role in articulating the aims and values of a movement allow one to call him by that name," (Eyerman 2001: 4). Mazari can hence be understood to be the founder-intellectual of this particular group of collective agents. It is Mazari's ideas that civil society activists interpret for the basis of their platform and activities. This, even as other political groups in Afghanistan remember Mazari as a mujahedin leader or warlord.

Hazara middle- and upper-class businessmen became a force in the 1970s, providing a counterpoint to the political activities of Wahdat in the central highlands. They, too, focused on issues of Hazara identity, parallel to, not at odds with, and sometimes overlapping with, Wahdat, and helped to create, or give voice to, certain identity narratives (Ibrahimi 2012). While these businessmen were successful financially, they were able to support scholarly and academic projects, led by Hazara intellectuals, who wrote histories of Hazaras' place in the greater history of Afghanistan, accounts stressing Hazara suffering and oppression (Ibrahimi 2012). These histories are today used by activists in their activities which promote cultural trauma. They serve as a historical basis for speeches and narratives promoted by the activists.

A third event that led to the particular creation of the Hazara activists as collective agents of this cultural trauma was the introduction of Western "universal" ideals as United States and

NATO activities in Afghanistan commenced in Afghanistan in 2001. Alongside the military activity came a massive attempt at state building and the building of civil society. Worldwide, the development sector had shifted from a focus on large-scale projects such as infrastructure to so-called soft-projects, which allow at least the appearance of local stakeholder control and involvement.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, they promote sustainability in that they focus on human capacity, and not infrastructure, which will collapse without the correct maintenance. They also can be completed without full reliance on the host state, and so, in theory, cut down on governmental misappropriation of resources. Commonly, these projects work through civil society organizations, developed to address the needs of local communities. Many members of the current young generation have been shaped by taking part in civil society and capacity building projects of various sorts, and many have adopted these ideals as their own. For many Hazaras, an alliance with Westerners, indexed by the full embrace of such ideals as human rights, gender equality, and so on, which are promoted through such civil society and capacity building projects, is highly appealing. Other influences entering Afghanistan are less appealing to Hazaras. Sunni extremist ideas which arrive through Pakistan, such as the ideals of the Taliban, al-Qaeda, and now Daesh or the Islamic State, are obviously not attractive to a largely Shi'a group. And Iran, which has tried to attract Hazaras because of their shared Shi'a identity, finds that Hazaras are distrustful. Iran did not fully support Hizb-e-Wahdat because of its focus on ethnicity rather than sect. Also, Iran in the 1980s simply did not have significant resources to spare from the war with Iraq. Iran inspires mistrust for the discrimination and mistreatment encountered by Hazara refugees there, who began arriving during Abdur Rahman's time and continue to this day. This leaves the "Western option" for Hazara activists. While Westerners find it easy to believe that their narrative is the strongest, and underestimate the appeal to

Afghans of more orthodox and even radical Sunni and Shi'a narratives,<sup>26</sup> the particular social and historical context that Hazaras have experienced make Bamyān one place where Western narratives are the most appealing.

All these factors make the current period an ideal time for the narrative of a Hazara cultural trauma to spread. Hazara activists question the dominant narratives concerning their history, and, on the basis of trauma, suffering, and martyrdom, seek to change what their future might be. One irony here is that if Hazaras fully accept the activists' narratives of victimhood, martyrdom, and trauma, they might find it difficult to go beyond such narratives should their situation improve. In other words, it might prove difficult in the future to change one's self-representation premised on victimhood, regardless of what the future might bring for Hazaras. This argument can also be problematic, because an improvement in their situation in the last 15 years (or even 25, if we count the political formation of Wahdat, or 45, if we count the fortunes of the businessmen who became successful in the 1970s onward) cannot easily counter more than a hundred years of social exclusion and suppression (Karimi 2011). If trauma narratives are limiting neither can the historical experiences on which they are based simply be undone; other groups who have suffered genocide (Jews, Armenians, Cambodians, and Ukrainians, for example) seek ways to remember and grieve even as they move on. Conversely, Hazaras face difficulties when enacting these narratives because they do not have a monopoly on suffering in Afghanistan. And when compared to the suffering faced by other groups who have experienced genocide, the suffering of Hazaras seems of a lesser magnitude. They have simply experienced a particular suffering to Afghanistan.

### **The context and scope of the Hazara trauma**

The emergence of the feeling of a cultural trauma, and the way in which it is created, is predicated upon the historical and cultural context in which a group exists. This determines the form it will take, the way it will be experienced, and whether it will be accepted or rejected by the group.

In the case of the Hazaras, there can be no doubt that understandings of the past 35 years of war are backgrounded by the fact that this group occupied the lowest rung on the social ladder for at least 150 preceding years. The subjugation of the Hazaras by the Afghan state, under the Pashtun ruler Amir Abdur Rahman, indelibly changed Hazara social life. The social structure of the Hazara people was destroyed, ripped apart, as the Afghan state sought to ensure that further rebellions would not occur. These events serve as one sort of background, so that more recent instances of violence against Hazaras can be portrayed against them as an unending persecution, integral to Hazara identity. Cultural trauma confirms the fatalistic attitude that things cannot improve, even as the civil society activist agents of its transmission try to bring about positive changes to the community. The overarching paradox is that Hazaras may feel they cannot become full members of the Afghan state, no matter how they try; the more they succeed in becoming functioning members of Afghan society, the more push-back they receive from other groups.

One thing that stands out about the trauma described by Hazara activists is that it spans an incredibly long period of time. Most activists start with a description of Abdur Rahman's consolidation of Hazara lands when describing their traumatic past, and propose that what happens today is a continuation of what happened under Abdur Rahman. The wars waged against them by Abdur Rahman certainly fit the criteria set out by theorists of cultural trauma such as Alexander (2004; 2012) and Eyerman (2001; 2004). The events happened over a few

short years, and although we can't know what the emotional impact was for the people at the time, we do know that Hazara social and cultural life was forever changed as a direct result. Among the activists, knowing that much if not most of their previous culture and way of life were lost has left an indelible emotional mark. It can be argued that while the event was sudden, the repercussions continue to this day.

On a summer evening early in my fieldwork, I had dinner with a couple of friends, Sakhi, the owner of a guesthouse who also worked at an international NGO, and Jawad, the manager for the local Lincoln Learning Center, a US Embassy-sponsored English language and American culture resource center. These were two of the informants I was closest to, as I had made contact with them during my initial summer doing a pilot project the year before, so we were all quite relaxed and the conversation was easy. Neither was originally from the Markaz Bamyan district — Sakhi came from a village in Yakawlang. Jawad was from Shahrستان, a remote part of Daikundi province, and he and his older brother were the first in their family to receive an education. After a large meal, we leaned back on brightly colored pillows and cushioned mats on the floor. Sakhi plucked lazily at a *dombra*, a traditional stringed instrument, as we chatted. He said that he did not know how to play, and that he was teaching himself. Jawad chimed in that he had always wanted to play, but because of the Taliban presence, Hazaras were not allowed such traditional symbols of their culture, so he never got the chance. Some friends of his, he said, managed to hide out in the barns of their household and escape Taliban detection, to play this way. They both said that songs had been lost because of this.<sup>27</sup>

I wanted to learn something of what Hazaras thought about their own history from Sakhi and Jawad, although I was unsure how to start. So, I started with the obvious. Sakhi's guesthouse is situated beneath the cliffs in which the famous giant Buddha statues once stood, and the empty niches can be seen towering over his courtyard wall. So, I asked him to tell me about the history of the Buddhas, intending this to be a sort of icebreaker. The story I was told was much more than I bargained for.

Sakhi began by telling me that there were ancient civilizations that thrived in the valley before the Buddhists came to power. He spoke of a time when Zoroastrianism thrived, and related this period to certain traditional practices done in his home region, Yakawlang, if not today, then in the very recent past. Sakhi then stressed some continuities between Buddhism and Zoroastrianism, and explained that in these ancient times, a third religion, Mithraism, also thrived. People belonging to the three faiths, he said, lived side by side in the very valley in which the guesthouse was located, where we currently relaxed. Sakhi explained that the coming of Buddhism to the valley was achieved by missionaries, but that these missionaries were peaceful, and convinced others to join them by words and explanations — not by conquering the area in a warlike way. They showed, he said, that the Buddhists were educated and brought many skills, and this was how people were convinced to join their religion. It seemed clear he was setting up a contrast between this, and the coming of Islam, which happened in a warlike fashion. He stressed that during this time, when the three religions existed peacefully together, the valley experienced a golden age. Advances were made in metal working, and in art.<sup>28</sup>

As Sakhi continued to speak, it became clear that he was telling me a story that spanned epochs, and did not simply cover the Buddhist people. In fact, he fairly quickly



glossed over the building of the Buddha statues, and the foundational legend the Hazaras put forth about them, as male and female figures named “Salsal” and “Shahmama”. Sakhi forged ahead, seeming to want to fit in all of the history of the valley into this one meeting, even though I had already visited him several times over the course of several years and even though I assured him that this visit would last for a full year. Sakhi’s speech seemed to take on a fervor of someone who needed to tell something, and who was not willing to give up a chance. This happened often with my informants — many would get on a roll and speak faster and faster, making it hard for me to ask questions, because they had so much to say and seemed to fear they had only one chance to do so.

When Sakhi began to describe the “Arab period” I found him to be very much to the point. “When the Arab people came,” he said, “they destroyed many things, but most importantly the destroyed our history.” Sakhi attributed a specific intent to this. “When they were first sent out as missionaries, away from Arabia, they were first sent to those places that had ancient things, those ancient places that had valuable treasures. Sending missionaries was only a secondary goal. They robbed our history in more than one way.” (I understood this to mean they robbed both the multicultural, peaceful environment that thrived as well as the riches this civilization produced). “At the end of the 7<sup>th</sup> century, a group of Arabs, under a leader named Yakub Lais, took 300 loads of camels laden with treasure, statues, jewelry, anything of worth with him. What they couldn’t take they destroyed, such as some of the smaller Buddha statues in the cliff. They tried to destroy the two large statues, but were unable to.” This story, in many ways, fit in with the larger historical context. Sunni Muslims, under Amir Abdur Rahman, under the Taliban, had also persecuted the Hazaras. This seemed like it might be described as religious or

sectarian based persecution. But then Jawad continued, as Sakhi nodded and chimed in his agreement.

“By the 13<sup>th</sup> century,” Jawad said, “Jalaluddin, a Muslim, governed the valley, and lived in the city of Gholghola.” I knew well the city of Gholghola, as I could see its ruins from my house, and walked closely past it on my way to the bazaar or to another “suburb” of Markaz Bamyān known as Zargaron. Gholghola was a giant earthen mound, with ruins of towers reaching from all parts of it. One city after another after another seemed to have been built on top of this mound. Sakhi briefly explained that the base of the city had been built by Buddhists, but that the current ruins of towers one could see were built by Muslims. Jawad continued, “During Jalaluddin’s rule, in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the Mongols under Chingiz Khan attacked and the locals made a stand. Gholghola was surrounded at the time by a deep moat and had supplies to wait out the assault. But a daughter of Jalaluddin saw Chingiz as a great, brave warrior, and decided to help him, in the hopes that she would become one of his wives. She got a message to Chingiz explaining how to cut off the water supply to the city, so that the defenders were quickly flushed out. The inhabitants of Gholghola, fought fiercely, and one of the grandsons of Chingiz was killed, right here. In retaliation, every living thing, even the birds, of the valley were killed. For many years it was empty. Just as it was empty when the Taliban drove everyone out. We call it Shahr-e-Gholghola, the city of screams.”

It became clear to me that the “truth” of this history of the region inhered in the lesson it seeks to impart as much as in its factual accuracy. Even in those early days of my fieldwork, and even when I knew much of the oppression of Hazaras, these extraordinarily far-reaching narratives

pointed to unending oppression, which began in ancient history and has never stopped.

Oppression and suffering have become a core part of Hazara identity, through stories passed on by activists such as Sakhi and Jawad.

This episode of history-telling shows that activists and other Hazaras do not only talk about Hazara history for political and instrumental purposes but sometimes do so simply out of interest in their history and wanting to share information. Jawad was a deeply involved activist, whereas Sakhi did not consider himself an activist at all, but was friends with many of the others because of his position with an NGO. Though my presence and status as a foreign anthropologist surely influenced their account, these two were close friends of mine and had not sought me out for an interview but just as friends enjoying dinner. And it was I, not they, who turned the topic of discussion to my research. Even more, it was the avid but relaxed interest with which both Sakhi and Jawad engaged the topic of Hazara history which marked for me that theirs was an impromptu and not a calculated account.

The scope of the trauma, then, is huge, greater than epic in scale, with a baseline much earlier than the obvious start point of the centralizing efforts of Abdur Rahman, but which reaches back rather into pre-history, when peoples of different ethnicities and faiths co-existed, and which was allegedly destroyed by the coming of the Arabs. Hence, Hazara activists put forth the idea that their group suffers a timeless oppression.

What is more, there is no end date. Each version points to a start time for this oppression — the coming of Islam, and also the wars waged by Abdur Rahman, depending on the audience and the setting — but one larger lesson is that they still suffer, and will continue suffering for as long as they live surrounded by enemies who, unlike them, are unenlightened, who do not enjoy the cultural resource of an early history of mixing and cosmopolitanism, in which three religions

peacefully coexisted and diverse cultural groups met on the Silk Road. Hazara suffering is boundless, not just because it is ancient but because there is no end point to it in the future. Had Hazaras achieved a place in the Afghan state they felt was stable, had they truly believed that they had managed to escape this past, then perhaps the cultural trauma of discrimination, exclusion, and persecution would not have been propagated. My activist informants possibly could have accepted the entrance of Western forces after 2001 as the end of their persecution. But their future holds the dread (even the anticipation) of a return of Pashtun/Taliban rule during which things will become much worse. Hazaras have hence already lost a culture, a history, a way of life, in a historical past. They expect to lose their current culture and way of life, because of their perceived failure to integrate into the state. Activists could speak of these issues in an almost contradictory way. Hazaras are the ones who are enlightened enough to introduce Afghanistan to “universal” values such as human rights and gender equality. And yet, their non-Hazara national “brothers” would never be able to accept them. Examples of enlightened, forward-thinking Pashtuns could always be found, they said, but most of the others would prefer Hazaras did not exist in Afghanistan. And with a homeland right in the middle of the country, there is not a chance for a separatist movement. Hazaras are caught in a bind from which they cannot escape, say the activists, even as there is something inherent to their mindset that makes them work for better things.

### **The Haunting Presence of the Past**

So far, the cultural trauma whose rhetoric is advanced by the activists clearly relates to their status as an oppressed people. There are two aspects to the cultural trauma of Hazaras, I argue.

First is suffering related to the war. This trauma was experienced by most Hazaras of a

certain age. People who remained in Bamyan remember firsthand the Taliban incursions into their valleys. Hazaras from Kabul, for example, speak of being beaten, and even shot in the street simply for looking like Hazaras. Refugees in Pakistan and Iran suffered from discrimination from their hosts as well as from growing up not having seen one's homeland, only to experience difficulty in trying to fit back in when they returned. These sorts of psychological and/or physical sufferings, experienced personally or by someone close, may be traced back to Abdur Rahman's persecutions as well. The land policies of Abdur Rahman meant that Pashtuns and other ethnic groups more accepting of his rule were given Hazara lands. Ahmad, who had been a successful agriculture professor at Bamyan university and a sought-after consultant in agriculture development, due to an MA degree from India, told me, "I visited my ancestral land. Where my family comes from, near Ghazni. I saw Pashtuns farming our land. But I know it is ours." Ahmad has a wife and young daughter. But not long after I left the field, he left everything, including his young family, to further study in Japan. He says he misses Bamyan, but he never seemed fully attached to it — he made it clear his home was elsewhere. I speculate that his move to Japan, although not easy, was perhaps facilitated by his feeling that his "real place" had been overtaken by others. Unmoored, he might go anywhere.

These traumas become collective when they are told and retold. This comes easily when you have lost someone in your family, or been gravely injured yourself, or suffered the anomie which accompanies displacement. You can then add to and take from this history, both building it and making the larger history one's own. When influential members of the group say that what has happened was an attempted genocide, then each person becomes a survivor of a genocide. Here, the civil society activists have been very successful in their campaigns.

A second type of cultural trauma relates not to the erasure of the people themselves, or the grave harm done to them physically and psychologically, but to the destruction of their way of life, of their cultural artifacts, stories, songs, and so on. This is harder for the activists to convince people of because, if one takes at face value all that has been lost since the time of Abdur Rahman (and if even half of the history told by the Hazara historians is true, then it is significant) then the population cannot even know what it has lost.

Other things people may not care to recover. A system of mirs, khans, and begs who served as feudal rulers to an indentured population has been lost, but no one wants a return to it. Individuals know if they come from a family of mirs, khans, or begs, but today descent from these groups carries, according to all I spoke to, little to no social capital. They are remnants of a past system that is seen as being out of line with the “universal” Western ideals many Hazaras today want to embrace. Sayeds, who also used to have a high degree of political control due to their ascribed status as descendants of Prophet Mohammad, are both revered and distrusted at the same time as they maneuver for political capital they have somewhat lost.

The more tangible aspects of the culture are mourned by more. As referenced earlier, there is a feeling that traditional music and songs are in danger, and their loss relates to the internal colonization suffered at the hands of the Pashtun state, which my informants made clear they consider continues in an unbroken line from Amir Abdur Rahman and subsequent kings, to the Taliban and even Ashraf Ghani today. Celebrations, types of clothing, art forms and ways of weaving, were described repeatedly as traditionally Hazara and as lost. People see these things are lost, and so the activists are able to engage them at this level.<sup>29</sup>

In some ways, the loss of the very ancient Silk Road culture, of the variety of religions that once thrived together, is harder for the activists to convince the more general population of,

particularly as most Hazaras do remain devoted to their Shi'a faith. In some cases, however, it is easy for the activists to make the case that the loss of pre-Islamic cultures is part of the trauma, given that they are operating within a physical space literally surrounded by archeological remains and ruins. We were living in a valley in which the staring, empty niches of the Buddha statues were visible from pretty much every vantage point. They are hauntingly beautiful, but they are also horrific in their deadly emptiness. They are horrific because of the symbolism they hold for the people, something of theirs which was taken from them. This was done by Taliban, by Pashtuns. But the trauma narrative is quickly expanded if one turns around and gazes upon the ruins of Gholghola, and recalls the legend of Chingiz Khan destroying every living thing in the valley. The descendants who managed to return still live in a nearby village, Sayedabad, inhabitants of that village told me.<sup>30</sup> Hazaras, then, easily became the eternal sufferers. Their cultural trauma includes the destruction of their social structure, the destruction of their way of life, the destruction of the monuments that represent them.

There is a third aspect still to cultural trauma, which the activists did not want to discuss but whose presence was clear to me.

I took a walk with one of the civil society activists, Bilal. He was one of the most involved activists, one who was always involved in some project. He ran an organization, which was shut down for political reasons, and he then devoted himself completely to civil society. Towards the end of my fieldwork, he started an English education center. Bilal was well-educated, with a university degree, and his English was impeccable. But I always felt somewhat ill at ease with him, although I could not tell you the exact reason why. Sometimes I felt that he was one of the few who was crafting the stories he wanted

me to hear and tell to others with great care. Sometimes I felt there was something dangerous lurking beneath the surface. Not a danger to me, but some dark past, some hidden demon, that his polished looks and accent and carefully crafted narratives covered over. That day was different, though. We climbed a ridge and looked over the valley as the sun set. Bilal began to talk of the fights he participated in against the Taliban, rather than of the protests coming up or of the problems faced by Hazaras, the topics he normally focused on. “I was in Mazar”, he said. “During the massacre. We shot them. Lots of them. We helped put them in containers and left them in the sun.” He paused and looked over the valley. “After all my people have been through, do you really think I would not fight against the Pashtuns again, despite what we have built here? Do you think I would not do it again?”

The third, secret trauma comes from every group in Afghanistan being both victim and perpetrator. We can play at assigning blame, at tallying numbers dead, at trying to apportion out fault and say who wronged who more, but in the end, this is an impossible exercise. Each group deals with this differently. Hazara activists maintain their innocence, they maintain that their leader never targeted civilians, even as stories abound among other groups of Hazara cruelty, just as Hazaras tell of the cruelty of others. To me, activist reluctance to deal with this issue might also be what Galia Plotkin-Amrami terms “ideological trauma” in her work with a center providing psychiatric services to Israeli settlers made to disengage from the Gaza strip. Plotkin-Amrami indicates that the settlers, forced to move from their land and disengage from their religious-ideological belief concerning the land, were traumatized because of “identification with a threatened ideological project,” (2013:54). Hazara activists have become such proponents of



human rights and ideals, that the dissonance between this and the involvement of Mazari, their founder, in the shelling of civilians or other war crimes, may generate another kind of collective trauma, perpetrator's guilt. Activists purport that Hazaras are the one group in Afghanistan who carry an almost inborn cultural competence regarding human rights. When confronted with evidence that suggests otherwise, they themselves seem to react with denial, and are reluctant to face this reality.

One occasion on which the tensions between victimhood scripts and perpetrator guilt became clear involved dissent among the community concerning wanton killings of Pashtun civilians perpetrated by a Hazara Local Police Commander. Hakim Shujayi is, or was, a commander who was initially supported by United States special forces through the Afghan Local Police program.<sup>31</sup> This project empowered local militias, giving them uniforms, weapons, and some amount of training, in the hope that they would work within their local communities to battle insurgents. Shujayi was operating in an area with a mixed population of Pashtuns and Hazaras. He was accused of brutally torturing, raping, and killing Pashtun civilians. Shujayi was supposedly sought by the government for arrest, but many claimed he was also being protected by high level Hazara officials so he would not actually be arrested.

One of my friends who was a reporter wrote an article which detailed these accusations, citing an Australian piece (McGeough 2013). When the article was published, all hell broke loose among the activist community. The reporter received death threats, and considered working with an organization in Kabul that protected threatened journalists. None of the activists would talk to him. When I questioned the activists about the incident, they told me that the reporter had made the story up to get asylum. Worse, they actually expelled him (temporarily, as it turned out) from the Hazara community. They othered him. Most activists I asked began to say

he was not Hazara at all. The reporter himself was completely distraught. “I never wanted to hurt my community,” he told me. “You know, my managers, are Pashtuns. They made me do this.” And this claim is what saved him. The organization that helped reporters intervened with the news source, and a retraction was made, with the claim that it was the managers who wrote the story, and put the reporter’s name on it. This was enough for the activists and the rest of Bamyan. The reporter was accepted back into the fold. Those who had said he was not Hazara denied having done so.

None of this sat well with me. I was working with people who claimed to support human rights, and said that a genocide had been committed against them. And now, when claims were made that someone from their ethnicity was torturing civilians, women and children, they not only did not consider the claim but even seemed to endorse Shujayi’s cruelty. “Why?” I asked one of the main civil society activists. “You have to take it seriously, these are serious claims, and they are credible! Why are you doing this? Why are you treating the reporter like this? You are supposed to stand up for people’s rights!”

“Melissa,” he said, “You can’t understand. You did not go through our history. You did not live through what we lived through. Maybe it is true, what Shujayi did. But we are vulnerable. We were the first group that was disarmed. If the Taliban comes, they will kill us. We need strong figures like Shujayi.” Could I accept this answer? Still I had an uneasy feeling that there was some satisfaction in revenge. Hazaras do not uphold the concept of *badal*, that revenge is something mandatory, that it must be carried out, that it is actually a sort of system of exchange, as do Pashtuns. However, the urge to seek revenge is a human need to seek justice on behalf of the injured, and so Hazaras all the same might do this, outside of the concept of *badal*.

So many Hazara women and children were killed, tortured, raped that now, it was the Pashtuns' turn. No one told me explicitly, but I felt it, inferred it, when Shujayi was the topic of discussion.

Shujayi was like a ghost who followed me out of the field. His initial actions were in Uruzgan Province. In 2015, thirty Hazaras were taken from buses by the Taliban. They were separated from the other passengers and taken away. For months, their fate was unknown. Some were eventually recovered, but not all. I continued to speak with my informants, and when such tragic events were ongoing we spoke more often. On one phone call, one said, "Melissa, I need to tell you something. It is about Shujayi. He is planning something, because of the kidnapped Hazaras. He is going to take his revenge." I actually felt ill after this conversation, disappointed and somehow let down. This was someone who claimed to be a strong proponent of human rights — and in most cases, I believe he was.

"I thought Shujayi was dead?" I said.

"No, he is not. He will do it."

I do not know if Shujayi did anything. Reports surfaced of Hazara local police, for some reason stationed in a region fully Pashtun, committing abuses. I never got an answer as to why they were there. Ostensibly it was to guard a particularly dangerous stretch of road that Hazaras are often threatened on when they drive to Kabul from Bamyan, but the local police is not supposed to be deployed this way. Another friend had brought up Shujayi's name regarding this incident.<sup>32</sup>

Shujayi kept haunting me. I was writing about activists who defend human rights, and my mind kept returning to Shujayi and the protection he was receiving. I called a trusted activist and asked him point blank. "I need to know. You say you defend human rights, but everyone, including you, defended Shujayi. You did not even question his actions. And I know some

activists were happy about these stories concerning what he did. How can you defend him, and defend human rights? How are both things possible?”

Our conversation was long, but again it came down to two points. “Melissa, we need someone strong. Shujayi knows how to fight. So few of our people know how to fight anymore. We are not fighting every day like the Pashtuns. We need his knowledge.”

“Fine,” I said. “But he is accused of doing really terrible things. There are others who can fight besides him. Why him?”

“Melissa, let me tell you, those things can’t be true. Shujayi, he is a religious man. You know our religion. You know we are Shi’as, that Shi’as are the Muslims who are more peaceful. We are not al-Qaeda, or the Taliban, or the Islamic State. A true Shi’a would never do such a thing. This I know. I believe it.”

I came to the conclusion that something was haunting my informants too, even as Shujayi was haunting me. I do believe most of them, at least, are sincere when they speak about human rights. But they are also terrified. The history they had uncovered shows a mass ethnic cleansing and possible genocide against them. They see a clear connection between the perpetrators of these acts, and many of the Pashtuns who seemed to, and continue to seem to, threaten them at every turn. This past haunts them, and a future that would be a return to this past haunts them. A limit to the embrace of rights for everyone is crossed when it comes to giving rights to Pashtuns who might themselves deprive Hazaras of their rights. This is part of the ideological trauma. Unable to confront this inconsistency for what it is, they try to explain it away, to banish the specter.

Talking with a Hazara who had gotten asylum in Europe ten years ago, when he was a fifteen-year-old unaccompanied minor, I found other echoes of this. This person is completely

integrated into German society. He studies at a German university, and has a wife of Turkish descent who stresses her full assimilation into German society.

You know, I know all these activists, and they want me to join them, but I don't want to be a part of it. I don't want to live their suffering. Plus, all this stuff about how Mazari was a great man . . . I don't like it. He did some good things; he said some good things. But he was also a mujahedin, like the others. He decided to bomb innocent people, like the others. And in the beginning, the activists knew this. They talked about the problems in Mazari. But only in the beginning. Then, they stopped. They had to see him as pure, as a great man.

I will later discuss Mazari in greater depth, but this Hazara refugee's insights cast further light on the kind of forgetting needed for the activists to pretend that the ghosts of Hazara-perpetrated violence do not exist.

I am limited here by my interviewees' understandable reticence to talk about Hazara-perpetrated violence. I could not even ask most of my informants about this, because after witnessing what happened to the journalist, I did not want to be shunned. I did ask a few very close friends, and I have recounted their answers. I also include what hints were given when I can, in order to be honest in telling what happened to the Hazaras, what are the various forms of their own cultural trauma, while also acknowledging the suffering of others. Some types of trauma, whether collective or individual, are certainly repressed, and this is likely one such case. At the same time I will stress, here, and repeatedly, that this does not diminish the oppression, the suffering, the trauma the Hazaras themselves experienced, which stretches much further back

than the beginning of these last brutal wars that started with the Soviet invasion.

### **The Hidden Wounds**

In Afghanistan, the people of every group have suffered. I have already written of the way in which many or most Hazaras have suffered, and how this seems to make it easier to spread vicarious cultural trauma. Of course, this is not always the case — sometimes people want to forget, and sometimes people simply want to lead a normal life, unburdened by the memory of the past. There are degrees to which those outside the activists' circle are receptive to their message. Some, in Bamyan, echo the sentiments of the refugee in Europe I mentioned above. They want nothing to do with it, and tell me that the activists' efforts do not reflect what they want. Some are sympathetic but not vocal. When I ask, they say they generally agree with the activists but are not going to stand on the street shouting slogans with them. And others outside of the circle of activists do join them on the streets, and shout slogans, but do not go so far as to plan any events. Certain narratives, like that of the Afshar Massacre, receive a wider audience. Most people who know about the event manage to identify with it. It might also be that just like some people hide their physical traumas if they can, some people hide their psychological traumas.

I knew a shopkeeper for a year before I knew he was a victim. He had an excellent shop, and was always smiling and happy, so I tried to frequent it most often when I needed to buy certain goods. One day, when I went to buy some things, he was being filmed by a reporter. I asked him why. He pulled up his shirt, and I saw his body was horribly scarred. "They are interviewing me about this. I was in Kabul, during the Taliban. I was walking along near the grain silos (one of the most notable landmarks of Kabul, where bread was made). Some Taliban

drove by. They shot me, because I was Hazara. I almost died. But, I didn't." And he smiled at me, always kind, and helpful.

Sakhi was another friend I had known for three years when a traumatic story came out. I knew him, and his family, since my initial summer of fieldwork in 2010. I loved getting away from Markaz Bamyan and spending time in the village with his family. His father had run off with another wife, and his mother and five sisters lived in her ancestral house, which was one hundred years old. While uncommon among Hazaras, a female-centric household of this kind would be completely impossible among some of the other ethnic groups in Afghanistan. Among Hazaras, it was accepted, and the family was respected, I came to understand from what others told me. The village life was something different, busy with chores, but not the frantic rushing to meetings and protests I experienced in Markaz Bamyan. Sakhi stayed in Bamyan with his guest house, where he always welcomed me. He had studied sociology at Kabul State University, so we built a rapport as fellow social scientists. As far as I knew, he was simply a quite intelligent boy who had left his village study in the capital, and then returned to Bamyan to set up a successful business. On one occasion, near the end of my fieldwork, my husband was visiting. We went visit to Sakhi with Abdullah, another activist. By this time we had all become friends, and my husband would come to the safer environment of Bamyan not only to visit me, but to enjoy a place where security was not problematic, and where people were more open and trusting. (By contrast, many Pashtuns in Nangarhar, where the American military conducts operations regularly, wondered whether a foreigner who seemed to have no job and spent his days asking questions was a spy). We ate and laughed, speaking a mix of Dari, Pashto, and English (I speak Dari, while my husband speaks Pashto). Abdullah then suggested Sakhi tell some of his stories from the time of the war with the Taliban.

“You know Sakhi was a fighter, right?” he asked.

I was shocked. I had no idea. “How old were you? What did you do?”

Sakhi answered, “I was around fourteen, fifteen, sixteen. But Khalili trusted me, because I was from the area, I knew it well. I guarded some important areas.” I noticed he began to look uncomfortable, and I did not want to push him into telling what were surely terrible experiences for a young teenager.

But Abdullah said, “Sakhi has some really funny stories from that time! Tell them the funny stories!”

At this, Sakhi lit up a bit. “Yes! One time, the Taliban were coming, and everyone was so scared and we were helping them to run away. And one woman was so scared, she thought she grabbed her baby, but really she grabbed a pillow! A pillow! We were driving away, and we had to go back and get the baby!” Sakhi and Abdullah collapsed in peals of laughter. My husband and I exchanged uncomfortable looks and laughed politely.

Sakhi continued, “One time, there was a farmer near his house, and another in the field. The farmer in the field noticed the other farmer’s cow was going to escape, so he started to motion with his hand. The farmer near his house thought the other one was telling him he saw the Taliban coming up the valley! He was so scared, he immediately grabbed what he could and ran to the mountains. And then the other farmer saw this, and ran home, and got what he could, and also went to the mountains! They were there for more than a day, and finally one asked the other, ‘Why are we here?’ And the other said, ‘You motioned the Taliban were coming!’ And the first said, ‘No! You motioned the Taliban were coming!’ Then they understood the mistake and went home.” Once again, the two erupted in laughter.

“That’s not true . . .” I ventured.



“No, it is! These things happened all the time! People were so afraid, they had no idea what they were doing.”

I wondered if my friend Sakhi, successful in business, in full time employment at a development organization, and who held a prestigious degree for someone of his background, was not emotionally scarred underneath his amiable exterior self. I cannot say how much, as the opportunity never presented itself to ask further about these stories. Without over-analyzing, several issues seem to be at play. One, Sakhi seemed to be reacting to these stories like the fifteen-year-old boy he had been, not the man he had become. Somehow, when it came to these events, he was stuck in the past, and had not moved forward. And two, these stories seemed to be covering up something deeper, some wound I could only guess at. Someone later mentioned he may have witnessed the death of a close friend while fighting, but I did not confirm this.

The point is, the shopkeeper hid serious physical scars. Sakhi hid emotional scars. Some Afghans talk about their scars, physical and emotional, openly, some wear them as almost a badge to be shown off. And some hide them. A collective trauma, a cultural trauma, might also be hidden by some individuals affected by it. If someone does not join protesters or attend speeches, does the past not move them, all the same? There are surely those who embrace trauma, and those who dismiss it, but dismissal does not mean it is not existent, at least not for every individual. Just as dismissal of ghosts one does not wish to confront actually does not banish them completely, at least not for every individual.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Who are Hazara Civil Society Activists? Relations with Local, National, and International Political Institutions**

On an early spring day in Bamyan in 2013, I sat with a group of civil society activists preparing to travel to the neighboring province of Daikundi, the only other Hazara majority province, to visit civil society organizations there. The meeting was a chance for the core group of civil society activists living in Bamyan to discuss what they believe are the most important tasks to be completed and subjects to be brought up with the activists in Daikundi. The activists convened in the sunny meeting room of one of the main civil society organizations in Bamyan, on the second floor of a business center located in the main bazaar. Only a few of those in attendance were officially affiliated with this organization. Others worked full time at various other civil society organizations but most of the attendees held jobs in education, development or journalism, or were students, and dedicated their free time to civil society activism. We sat around a long conference table in the bright sunlight that streamed through the window, drinking tea and listening to everyone's thoughts.

Abdulkhakim suggested what he believed was the main problem which needed to be addressed during the trip. "These civil society activists in Daikundi simply are not as advanced as we are in Bamyan," he stated. "We need to teach them to work more like we do. We have more experience here in Bamyan, there is a lot they can learn from us."

Everyone around the table, about fifteen men and five women, most in their twenties and thirties, agreed.

"In Daikundi," Abdulkhakim continued, "civil society activists don't understand how necessary it is to remain independent, separate from political activities." Seeking elaboration, I

later questioned him further. “Melissa, the whole point of civil society is that it remain independent, from the government, from the political parties, and if possible, even from outside donors. We try to fund as much as we can ourselves. Well,” he qualified, “most of us do. But even this organization, where we have met today, they rely too much on outside donors. It means that they lose control of their actions. Of course, they have the best intentions, but they are not doing the right thing completely, as those of us who are more independent do. And in Daikundi, they really have ties to the government, to outside donors.”<sup>33</sup>

Unfortunately, due to a late-season snowstorm, the roads and passes we would have crossed in the journey to Daikundi were closed, and the trip was canceled, to my disappointment. It was not rescheduled due to the busy schedules of the activists. This discussion, however, led me to consider more deeply, and question more specifically, what the activists believed were better practices for civil society, and what practices should be avoided. It led me to realize that Hazaras as a whole, and particularly civil society activists, have an ambivalent relationship with various institutions — state, aid and international organizations, foreign governments, and others — that they promote, denounce, and use to redress problems, both those specific to Hazaras and those which affect Afghans more broadly. In general, I found that there is a tendency among these informants to classify certain ideals as positive: education, democracy, and human rights. Yet when these ideals are promoted through state institutions — elections, state-run schools, political parties — they come to be seen as corruptible and open to discrimination. When they are promoted through international organizations — the UN, U.S.-funded projects, international human rights organizations — they are seen as being promoted in much purer form, uncorrupted by internal Afghan politics, whether at a very local or a national level.

It is true that independence from the government is widely accepted as one definition of

civil society and as one guarantor that civil society groups will stand for the people's interest. But is complete independence necessary? This is disputed among Bamyan's activists. Many struggle with reconciling civil society ideals with the need to get things done by allying with groups that are not purely civil society.

Questioning institutions of education, elections, and formal justice just because they are affiliated with the state, which is viewed as corrupt, can be understood through Jeffrey Alexander's proposal that discourse surrounding the civil sphere can be understood in terms of a binary. Civil/democratic values such as cooperation and rationality are found on one side, and, anti-civil/non-democratic values such as aggression and irrationality are on the other. The civil side of the binary is viewed as the legitimate side, and the non-civil side is not only illegitimate but polluting (Alexander 2006). The civil society activists place the Afghan government squarely in the non-civil side, and as such, they reject institutions administered by the government as polluted. One might even take this argument a step further, and say that international organizations, such as the United Nations, and even the United States government, are in line with civil values and hence might even be considered purifying.<sup>34</sup>

From the point of view of the Hazara activists with whom I worked, the Afghan state is the institution, in its different manifestations, which has consistently betrayed Hazaras. International organizations, on the other hand, promote ideals such as equality and human rights, which ostensibly benefit Hazaras. While a unified Hazara political bloc did not survive the creation of the current government, awareness of the need to counter and act against the historically-rooted social exclusion faced by Hazaras is one of the most important legacies Hazaras carry with them from the years of war. Even more importantly, according to the activist point of view, it is the state that has traumatized, and still traumatizes, Hazaras. Therefore,

activists view alliances with the state as dangerous and polluting. Many Hazaras and other Afghans consider the post-2001 period as a turning point, when real opportunity and integration into society became a possibility. Many have benefitted from educational and employment opportunities relating to an influx of foreign NGOs and funds. Yet Hazaras continue to distrust their own state, even as they adhere to the goals and ideals of the international community, which, they believe, will result in real inclusion if left to work without interference from the Afghan state. In spite of this, Hazaras will work for state institutions which promote ideals championed by the international community. These they see as universal values,<sup>35</sup> clearly on the “civil” side of Alexander’s binary, but which they also believe the state itself does not value. Universal ideals which are pure when promoted by outside organizations and institutions are polluted when touched by the corrupt Afghan state. And yet, Hazara activists continue to work towards these ideals, ideally independently but through state institutions when necessary, with the hope that somehow this situation will change and that their dedication to civil values might have a purifying effect. This does not exclude the possibility that those who work for the state are also motivated by getting good jobs with a high degree of social capital, and possibly good pay as well. One can find Hazaras who work for the state and with civil society, and they do not receive much criticism for this, likely because people know that others can be self-interested and idealistic at the same time.

In this chapter, I consider Hazara civil society experiences with and views of Afghan state justice, education, and electoral systems, and try to shed light on the points of view of young Hazaras, concerned with overcoming ethnic exclusion. A counterpoint is provided to the examples of activist interactions with the Afghan state by examining a protest involving an international body — a Hazara appeal to UNAMA (United Nations Assistance Mission to

Afghanistan) on the part of activists seeking to bring attention and provoke a response to mass killings of Hazaras in Pakistan in early 2013. By providing this point (activists' views of state institutions) with a counterpoint, it becomes clear that the Afghan state is viewed as polluting what should be pure ideals.

### **Who Are the Activists?**

It is difficult to describe an extremely diverse group of people who have come together around a certain mission, particularly when the importance placed on that mission might differ from person to person. Still, certain characteristics can be defined as common among civil society activists, which help illuminate what motivates them. The biographies of a selection of the activists whom I got to know well highlight both commonalities and variation among them.

Civil society is generally considered everywhere to be a “third sector,” outside of government and private business institutions, the sector that reflects the will of the people. All of the activists believe it is important to do something to make society better, bring awareness to problems, and, when possible, attempt solutions. Many work in the NGO and development sector. Others are journalists or professors. Others still work for organizations specifically geared towards civil society, usually foreign-funded NGOs whose express goal is to develop a strong third sector. Many are students. A few hold government positions, but the idea seemed to be that they can still very much consider themselves civil society because they are involved in local institutions like the Provincial Council, voted directly by the people (albeit without any real policy-making ability, but simply an advisory role). Or, alternatively, that they can try to change government from the inside while still adhering to civil society principles. Most of the activists are men, but several of the most well-known and influential are women as well, and women do

make up some of the more rank-and-file numbers, too. Activists espouse gender equality, but deep-rooted cultural norms make it more difficult for women to take on such a public role.

The civil society activists all see themselves as very much in line with Western and U.S. intervention. They all, to a person, decry Iran as a meddling country that has no interest in helping Hazaras.<sup>36</sup> The United States and United Nations, they believe, implement human rights and democracy programs and hence are the Hazaras' natural allies. In my presence, at least, they never criticize any U.S. action but blame "the Pashtuns" for giving the Americans wrong information. The United Nations is held to greater accountability, but the United States is always off the hook as not fully understanding the situation.

While activists claim to defend human rights, work for gender equality, promote development, and improve access to education (among other issues), they are very clearly concerned first and foremost with the rights of Hazaras. This can give rise to a sort of ethno-nationalism, which to Western eyes does not seem in line with the universal ideals they publicly espouse. Any sense of contradiction is resolved through the belief that Hazaras are still being victimized in an ongoing genocide, and that the only way to counter discrimination and social exclusion is to put Hazaras, the most vulnerable group, first. But it also means that when a person from another ethnic group is targeted, they do not always necessarily respond in the way one might among people who stand for human rights. I have already mentioned the support shown for Shujayi. Likewise, when Malala Yusefzai was shot and nearly died, Hazaras expressed sympathy but a few also wondered openly why this Pashtun girl deserved the world's sympathy while Hazara children, including those working to expand educational opportunities, have been targeted by militant Islamists for years. There is debate about such issues, but activists are quick to say clearly that, among the many who have suffered in Afghanistan, Hazaras have

suffered the longest and the most intensely. Worse, Hazaras are still at risk not because they live in zones of heavy insurgency, as Pashtuns do, but simply because they are Hazara.

The activists hold regular meetings to decide how best to approach the problems they feel are most pressing. They might work at a grassroots level if they are affiliated with an organization, bringing information about rule of law and rights, particularly women's rights and human rights, to the larger population. Through protest, activists attack perceived government inability or unwillingness to address specific structural issues, such as the lack of state-delivered electricity in Bamyan, or security problems on the roads leading in and out of Bamyan. They also protest incidents when Hazaras are targeted, such as the kidnapping and killing of Hazaras during travel or when Hazaras appear to suffer discrimination in university. In these cases, they want to bring awareness to the problems faced by other Hazaras, in the hopes that those not experiencing these problems will join them. Likewise, they bring attention to mass killings and massacres of Hazaras, whether from several hundred years ago, to more recent incidents during the civil war (1992 to 1996) and Taliban period (1996 to 2001). They also address the present situation, when Hazaras are sometimes kidnapped and even killed when travelling or fall victim to targeted killings and even large-scale suicide bombings. Not only in Quetta, Pakistan, but more recently in Kabul, Hazaras have been the targets of mass suicide bombings, such as that in July 2016, claimed by Daesh (the Islamic State) the deadliest suicide attack in Afghanistan since 2001. Activists also seek to bring awareness about a Hazara history, which they believe shows them to be a once great people, subjugated and oppressed by the Afghan state. All of these activities are done to spread knowledge and political awareness through the larger population.

In this sense, the activists serve as a sort of vanguard, almost in a Leninist sense, to the rest of the Hazara population. Their success remains to be seen; some among the general



population embrace their ideas, while others are wary and reject what might be perceived as a movement that foments ethnic divisions. Their goal, first and foremost, is to teach Hazaras about their history of suffering, which continues to this day. In this way, they hope to mobilize a larger population. Those who are part of the movement can find it difficult to change the views of those outside. Certainly, some causes draw more general support than others. Often the more “extreme” activists, especially those with more ethno-nationalist tendencies, cast out those who question the dominant narrative that Hazaras have suffered more than any other in Afghanistan.

Tensions linger around whether leaders are mainly self-aggrandizers or act out of genuine concern for their people. The perception that activist leaders work for their own political gain can hurt their cause among other ethnic groups. For those lower in the ranks of activists, there might be some social network gains, but most work for the betterment of their people and country.

### **Activist Biographies**

Most Bamyan civil society activists are fairly well educated, and come from middle-class, rather than elite or extremely poor backgrounds. However, several have a rather poverty-stricken family background, and are finding ways, such as seeking education and then work with the international development sector, to escape this. Some of the stories that follow in this section seem shocking, so I should clarify that I chose them as representative biographies rather than intrinsically interesting stories. Perhaps it is those who have had extraordinary personal experiences who are most likely to become devoted to the cause of civil society. Or perhaps they are more likely than people with more normal jobs to open up and reveal terrifying, and likely traumatizing, individual experiences. Some uncertainty, then, must linger around the question of why some people become activists and others do not.

### *Hussein*

Hussein, age 44, is one of the most approachable people I worked with in Bamyan, although because he is older than many of the activists, we never formed the type of friendship I did with others. Hussein has dark black hair, a neatly trimmed black beard, a slight stature, and sparkling dark eyes. An intriguing aspect of his biography is that, in addition to his civil society work, he is also well known for having trained to be a mullah. In addition, he makes women's rights issues a priority in his work. He comes across as less of an "ethno-nationalist" than some others, more committed to rights and equality in general.

Though he is Hazara, Hussein was from the village of Kalo in the Shibar district of Bamyan, which has a large Tajik population. Hussein began training as a member of the clergy in the madrasa at age five, and was sent to Iran and Pakistan at age nine, to study while living in a dormitory. He told me he suffered a lot during his childhood, as he felt very alone. His family believed a religious education was important for him, and yet for a small boy, this was extremely unsettling if not trauma-inducing. He missed his family and the social support he knew in Kalo after he was essentially ripped from his natal social environment at an early age and placed among strangers. He returned to Afghanistan by the time of the civil war and was working for the Ministry of Education and as a teacher back in his home district in Shibar. He was a member of the political committee of Hizb-e-Wahdat, in Mazari's inner circle of advisers, and stresses often that the party included women on the political committee.

Hussein says it was because he was a champion of women's rights that he was put in jail by the Taliban. He made public speeches denouncing the Taliban's restrictions on girls' school attendance. Girls' schools were not entirely shut down but many were closed and girls' education

was highly discouraged. For speaking out on this issue, Hussein was imprisoned for eighteen months. Hussein says these were the worst months of his life. He was tortured, was beaten with cables on his hands, had his teeth broken, and was given very little food. At a certain point, he said, the ICRC intervened and his family was able to bring him food. They campaigned for his release, and he was eventually freed.

Several of the other activists complain that Hussein, running an organization dedicated entirely to civil society, has stepped outside of the bounds of civil society and become corrupt. They do not see it appropriate that he writes grants and accepts money from international and domestic donors for projects in the name of civil society. However, it is hard to know whether these complaints were legitimate. It is very common for people to speak poorly about others and try to improve their own reputation in Bamyan; “backbiting” is endemic in many fields. Plus, many civil society activists can be quite blasé about forming NGOs, writing mission statements and submitting grant proposals for stated aims that conform to donors’ priorities more than community needs. As I once struggled to help a group prepare a mission statement and initial grant proposal, one said, “Melissa, these projects are all just lies. You tell them what they want to hear, they give you money, and then you do whatever you want with it.” Since Hussein’s organization seems to be carrying out legitimate projects, there would seem to be little for others to grouse about. Hussein’s sin, more likely, is that he is doing development projects, which require cooperation with donors and with the government, under the umbrella of civil society. For some activists, civil society needs to be completely unencumbered by the expectations of outsiders, whether Afghan or foreign.

*Firuzan*

Firuzan works in an organization dedicated to civil society activities, and focuses on women's issues in particular. Firuzan, 29 years old when I did my fieldwork, has long, thick, dark hair, a serious face, and an even, measured tone when she speaks. She is the only woman who regularly gives speeches at protests. While other women do sometimes give speeches, take part in planning, and certainly join the protest marches, Firuzan has a particularly public role. Firuzan, like many, was born in Iran, in the city Mashhad, which is where most Hazara refugees in Iran settled. Her father was originally from Yakawlang and her mother from Ghor, but when the war broke out, they fled first to Pakistan, and then on to Iran. Firuzan was able to go to school in Iran.

Firuzan's life experiences led to her commitment to work for women's rights. She was married at age 14. "I returned home from school, thinking it was a normal day. But when I got home, the house was full of people. I understood what was happening, and I fought my mother, but she still made me marry. My husband was five years older than me. We never had a good relationship. In the past few years, it has improved somewhat, but we still only stay together because of family and because of social pressure. I had my first child when I was 15." I commented that this must have been difficult, and she replied, "Yes, but those who marry at 9, they have it much harder. Afghan women have no choices."

Firuzan was 19 when her family returned to Afghanistan, in 2003. She stayed in the village in Yakawlang and taught school to support her husband while he attended university in Markaz Bamyān. This choice caused many in the community to speak poorly about her, a woman alone in the village. Usually, it would be expected that she accompany her husband, or, if this is not financially possible, stay home and help her in-laws but not pursue an independent career as a teacher, particularly not in a village setting. This choice did lead to many disagreements with her husband and in-laws, but Firuzan stood firm. After he finished university,

she traveled to the Markaz and started university herself, studying history. Not long after, in 2008 or 2009, she became involved in civil society and women's rights, a decision informed by her own life experiences. "In Iran, there were many problems, but relations between men and women were better. In Afghanistan, girls are kept down, deprived. Sometimes they cannot even go out of the house. Things are better for men. Women can only talk to their family and give input, but not make actual decisions. Women don't have basic rights, they have no choice at all, they have no rights at all. If they go against what their family wants, they are shamed, their honor is hurt. Everything is up to the husband, and marriage is like being sold for sex. The first thing that must change for women is that they must have choice."<sup>37</sup>

Of course, Firuzan took her fate into her own hands in many ways, and made many choices, after her experiences when she was younger. She decided to attend university without her husband's support. She decided to become involved in civil society activities, without her husband's blessing, causing a deep rift, and is one of the most vocal and most visible of the activists. She visits the homes of other activists, men and women, without her husband, not caring what others (including her husband) may say. She runs seminars and projects designed to inform women of their rights, and to inform men of women's rights. These seminars are usually carried out in conjunction with Hussein's organization, and are designed to provide education, so women know the law, know when their rights are being violated and understand which organizations they can turn to should they need assistance. After I left Bamyan, Firuzan ran for a high local political position. She has become an influential politician by her own right, and not through family ties, as is often the case for women in such positions. She was running against men, and men were voting for her.

Although it appears Firuzan is mainly involved in Afghan women's issues, she is extremely concerned about problems facing Hazaras as an ethnic group, as well. She maintains that Hazaras are the original people of Afghanistan, whose land had been taken by Pashtuns. She promotes the idea that there was a Hazara genocide. While not quiet about these issues, as a woman, she seems more likely to address the problems of women directly, rather than simply paying them lip service, as some male activists do. From Firuzan's point of view, women suffer in Afghanistan, and Hazaras suffer, and she knows something from personal experience about both.

#### *Abdulahakim*

Abdulahakim, in his early to mid-thirties, has stylish hair and excellent English skills. He grew up in Iran, and became a "jihadist" (*mujahedin*) when he was 15 or 16. Well educated and urbane, he seems to have little problem charming foreigners who come to Bamyan. His mujahedin experience was, not surprisingly, something he does not much want to talk about with Westerners, hence my knowledge of his past is sketchy. After 2001, he worked with the U.S. military on psy-ops projects, intended to change the point of view of Afghans via media and other means, and then moved on to civil society.

Abdulahakim, I should point out, is one of the most respected activists. He does have disagreements with some community members, as all did. For example, he ran a project out of the university that the dean shut down, apparently for personal disagreements. Abdulhakim bounced back, becoming involved in cultural activities, starting an organization that would provide cultural speeches to whoever wished to attend (I and my husband both contributed speeches). His intent is to broaden the knowledge of any Hazara who wished to listen on a

variety of subjects, which range from social science to natural science, history, politics, and more. He throws himself fully into civil society activities, even planning, directing, carrying out, and serving as a main public figure for visible protests. His lack of pay for this work is not an issue, as his wife has a well-paying job with an international organization. Abdulhakim is fully devoted to gender equality, not only in theory, but in his personal life as well. He had a love marriage, having met his wife online while she was living in Iran. They have one son, now about eight years old. His wife actually came to the United States on a training program several years ago and applied for asylum, which was granted. Abdulhakim's work with the United States military should allow him to get a special immigrant visa, but he has been unable to discover the location of the American commander who can vouch for him, a requirement of the program.

### *Rustam*

Rustam, in his late 30s, is another activist who was involved with the mujahedin, although he seems to have been more of a victim of the fighting than Abdulhakim. With cropped hair, rough, almost sunburnt skin (even in winter), face covered with stubble, and a perpetual scowl, Rustam may seem intimidating. Contrary to his thuggish appearance, he is always, once you know him, extremely kind and approachable.

Rustam's family, his wife and children, were living in Herat while he was in Bamyan. He comes originally from Panjab district, in an extremely remote area where everyone was, according to him, a subsistence farmer. His own father, through madrasa study, was the only person in the village who was literate and gave lessons to the children during the idle hours of winter. In this way, Rustam learned to read and write. When he was 14, his father passed away.

His brothers, himself, his mother, and his father's second wife traveled to Mazar in the north around the time of the civil war, about the time Rustam was 18.

Rustam found himself caught up in the fighting between the Taliban on one side and Hizb-e-Wahdat and Junbesh-e-Milli, Dostum's Uzbek forces, on the other. Rustam, by then in his early 20s, remembers the Taliban massacre of Hazaras. "They just went around looking for Hazara men to put in jail or kill. If you were a little fat, or had a nice haircut or seemed well-off, they just killed you. I think they killed between six and twelve thousand people. It went on for three days." Rustam went into hiding, and his uncle came up with a plan to escape to the mountains. A Pashtun friend of his uncles, however, offered to take the family in, along with several others, for a few days to hide them and then find a way to escape. It was not clear whether this friend turned them in or was caught, but when they made their escape, they were taken instead to a place with a mass grave. Rustam spoke of seeing body parts partially buried and sticking out of the ground, and of the intense fear he felt. "I felt so young, looking at the light bulbs rigged up that shone light on the scene." An argument ensued as to whether they should be killed, but their lives were spared as they were apparently under the protection of an important Pashtun commander, this friend of Rustam's uncle who was doing the family a very risky favor. They were tied and beaten. Rustam's uncle tried to bargain, to offer a jeep he owned in exchange for freedom, but it was discovered the Taliban had already taken the jeep. In the end, his uncle was released because, as a man in his 60s, he was not considered a threat. Rustam, however, was kept in a horribly crowded prison full of Hazaras and Uzbeks for a period of time. Five hundred were moved out to another prison in Jowzjan in containers, and Rustam claims he learned only seven survived the trip in the summer heat. Rustam was moved with 200 prisoners



in a tarp-covered truck. He stayed in prison for three years, and the prisoners arranged classes for each other; in this way, Rustam learned English.

He was released shortly after September 11, probably when the Taliban realized they would soon need to retreat into Pakistan and could no longer hold thousands of prisoners. Rustam returned to his village in Panjab to pay respects to all he knew who had died. After a couple of weeks, he joined Khalili's forces and took part in the final push in which Hizb-e-Wahdat drove the Taliban from the Markaz. He had told Khalili that he knew English, and so worked together with U.S. Special Forces when they arrived to assist. He stayed on in Bamyan to work as a translator for the Provincial Reconstruction Team, headed by New Zealand, and then worked for the American Correctional Support System Project, concerned with reforming prisons in Afghanistan. He married, but as most of his family had resettled to Herat he sent his immediate family with them. Rustam has since been granted asylum because of his work with the U.S. military and is residing in Maryland with his family.

I give this much background on Rustam to show what a complex individual he was. Abdulhakim shared much less with me, but I always got the impression that he was as much concerned with his own self-aggrandizement as with helping the community. Rustam, despite his rough appearance, truly seemed to want to help. Through a hunger strike, for example, which I describe at the end of this chapter, he sought to bring UN attention to Hazara problems. He strongly believes a genocide is being carried out against Hazaras, and after what he has witnessed, I understand this. But when he speaks, it is never with bravado but rather in a soft, gentle way.

*Latif*

Latif was one of the few people I knew who spent most of his life around Bamyan. (His father, whose account of the fate of Markaz' Tajik merchants I referenced in Chapter Two, filled in much of my missing knowledge about the events which had occurred in Markaz Bamyan.) Latif has a good job as a journalist, and for this reason he is quite well respected in the community. Barring a few years that he spent as a child in Karachi, during the worst years of the civil war, Latif spent his entire life in a town located close to Markaz Bamyan. Twenty-five when I was completing my fieldwork, he had attended university in Kabul to study journalism. His father only owned two *jeribs* of land (two and a half jeribs are equal to one acre), due to the division of larger land holdings among sons in previous generations. His father had done fairly well with this small amount of land and through work as a trader in Karachi, while the positions of the non-farming sons also contributed to the family finances. Of the five sons in Latif's generation, two worked the land, and the rest had to find other jobs.

Latif, too, is materially relatively successful. He owns his own car. He is also engaged to be married in a "love match" to another reporter who works at a local radio station. This seems to be more common among activists than in the general population, although for couples to meet and court on their own, rather than through arranged matches, is by no means the most common situation. Latif is not one of the most committed activists but he always attends their activities as a reporter, and is often in attendance for planning events, straddling a divide between the role of a journalist who documents and an activist who provides input. Latif suffers because of his commitment to journalism, as evidenced by the criticism he got for first publishing, and then retracted, the story concerning the abuses committed by the local police commander, Shujayi.

*Zeinab*

Zeinab is another journalist I came to know quite well. A student at Bamyan University, I met Zeinab initially at a human rights conference, and later at the same radio station where Latif's fiancé worked. A features reporter with her own talk show, she reports on issues concerning merchants and others around Markaz Bamyan. I accompanied her as she gathered interest stories, such as the problems facing bazaar sellers. Zeinab has thick dark hair, a round face, and dark, engaging eyes. Her Dari is quick and difficult to understand, unlike Latif, whose every word, carefully enunciated, I could catch, and with whom I would carry on long conversations. However, after multiple meetings I learned much about Zeinab, and I managed to become adept at understanding her tempo of speaking, as well.

Her family originally hails from the remote Waras district in Bamyan province, but she grew up in West Kabul, where most Hazaras in the capital live. Her father became a successful shopkeeper. She was interested in civil society activities, and was involved in the formation of an organization which intended to help the development of Waras. Her activities with the main body of activists I worked with, however, seemed to develop from her association with me. We were picked up by chance while walking in the bazaar to go to a spontaneous planning meeting (as most meetings were due to security). From that point on, Zeinab was always in attendance at the various events. Yet, Zeinab understood herself to be a Kabul girl and thought she would do better in that city, rather than in Bamyan. She approached one of the more important Hazara political leaders, pleading that she was a poor girl from Waras (not exactly the truth) and that she needed funding to attend a private university in Kabul. She was convincing and has now moved to Kabul, though I can see from social media that she is still involved in activism through journalism: as a television reporter, she keeps up with civil society activities.

Latif and Zeinab likely are not involved with the activists' *only* for idealistic reasons. They have careers as journalists which fit well with the needs of the activists, and both have been very successful in their careers. Of course, activists may gain indirectly from their civil society activities, politically (even as they decry politics), through the creation of networks, and simply by becoming recognizable members of the community. This last point could also be a drawback, as threats and violence may also follow from those who do not like their activism, including the politicians they criticize.

### *Jawad*

More than any other, Jawad became, and remains, my close friend. I could discuss with him the difficulty of fieldwork and the direction my research might take. When I was sad or discouraged, I went to him to discuss my problems. I think he is the only informant who saw me cry because of my frustrations. He shared with me some very personal aspects of his life, as well. He was also always willing to help me with setting up interviews, helping me with translations of texts, and informing me when a protest was about to happen. Such friendships between members of different sexes are uncommon, but Jawad and I related to each other as brother and sister, and I also became close to his wife.

Jawad is from a district known as Shahristan, in Daikundi province. His brothers were the first in his lineage to receive a formal education. As we were so close, I know more about his family's past than about the others'. His grandfather, he told me, was a very important and wise elder. People came from afar to seek the knowledge of his grandfather, to have him solve disputes. "Even Pashtuns came for his advice," he told me. "He managed to help a lot of people, people said good things about him."

Jawad's father was an only son among daughters. Jawad said, "My father was different. He lacked my grandfather's charisma, he could be moody." He also described his father as quite religious. Unlike most of the people in this rural district, he had learned to read and write some, through religious training. Jawad's father had three wives. Four wives are permitted in Islam at one time, if the husband provides for all equally, although he only had two living wives at one time. The first was an arranged marriage, which produced two sons and a daughter. Then his father fell in love with the daughter of a nearby farmer. "My grandfather did not approve of this relationship, but my father married this woman anyway. He had two sons and one daughter with her," Jawad said. "Soon after, the first wife died, and my grandfather's wife could not assume all the duties she needed to, in order to provide for the guests who often came to visit my grandfather. So my grandfather found a third wife for my father. She was very young. She was my mother." Eventually, his father divorced the second wife, and had six sons and two daughters with the third. All of the six sons have gotten an education. The eldest, and Jawad, the second eldest, regularly traveled six hours away to attend a school, staying in a rented room, and had to stay there for extended periods of time as travel back and forth each day was not possible. Living without his family was difficult, Jawad told me, but worth it. Jawad stressed that it was his mother, the last of three wives, who pushed her sons to get their educations. Jawad completed his university education and then also finished a two-year degree at a private business school while I was in the field. He also worked for the Lincoln Learning Center, a United States Embassy resource center for Afghans.

Jawad got married before I met him. He had an arranged marriage with Tahira, a sixteen-year-old girl from their village. But he believes so strongly in equality, he wanted to be sure she received an education too. They delayed having children, and Tahira completed her high school

education during the first several years of her marriage. She then took the state exam for college entrance and was accepted at Kabul State University. Jawad agreed that she would study there, living in a dormitory (in fact, I suspect he pushed her), while he remained in Bamyan.

Eventually, Jawad lost his job with the Lincoln Learning Center, as he was too involved in activism, something discouraged by the embassy for its political implications. He went to Kabul, where he has had difficulty finding work. Tahira, on the other hand, won a scholarship from the government of India to study English. Tahira then gave birth to a baby girl, and cares for her in India while she studies while Jawad works in Kabul. Probably, few Afghan men who claim to support women's rights would have gone so far as Jawad has in helping his wife achieve her potential.

### *Hassan*

Hassan approached me because he wanted to talk with me about a very important issue. He is from one of the two districts with the name Behsud in Wardak Province. Wardak is majority Pashtun, but the two Behsud districts are majority Hazara, He wanted me to understand that the people of his district feel under attack every time kuchi nomads came through the area, with all-out battles erupting and people being killed on both sides. For him, of course, the kuchis are the instigators, and I was unable to make him see things from the kuchi point of view. Hassan asked me multiple times to discuss these problems. Along the way, I managed to gather his life story.

Hassan's father was a farmer in Behsud. When he was 30, he married Hassan's mother, who was 16. His father managed to get an eighth-grade education, but then because of the war had to stop studying, while his mother was uneducated. Hassan has four brothers and four sisters, with one brother and one sister older than him. His older brother left school to work as a farmer,

as the family is completely dependent upon cultivation and livestock raising, while his older sister quit school to marry. Hassan finished a geology program at Bamyan University, and the rest of his siblings plan to continue their studies. He was working at an English language center he had cofounded, and has since gotten work doing geographical information system studies with an NGO, and has moved on to expand this type of work with the UN in Kabul. If he continues to be so successful, I am sure he can help support the education of the rest of his siblings. However, he is also very passionate about the problems with the kuchis. His family has had several disagreements with them on their land, and he remains concerned about the issue. When it came to that matter, he is very intense, wanting to be sure I understood the Hazara side of the situation completely.

### *Sajjad*

Sajjad was one of the informants I met with most often during my time in Bamyan, and I learned extremely useful information from him. Our meetings were always difficult, however. Sajjad's mind seemed to work more quickly than his ability to speak, and so our conversations could jump from one point to another, leaving me scribbling my notes, trying to keep up, and trying to interject a question once in a while as well.

Sajjad is one of those Hazaras whose families have lived for several generations in Quetta, Pakistan. He comes from a middle class family, his father was a businessman, and he went to school in Quetta. The Hazara community in Quetta is very firmly established, as it has been there for several hundred years, based upon trade relations, and later the movements of refugees who escaped during the time of Abdur Rahman and later years of war. Sajjad knows that his family came from a particular village in Yakawlang, however, and maintains some ties to

relatives there, and hence he wanted to return to Bamyan, the family's homeland. So, he attended university in Bamyan, and then found work with an international NGO.

In Pakistan, Hazaras and Shi'as in general have become targets of Sunni Islamist extremist attacks in recent years. Sajjad told me that he had, in fact, been a "Shi'a extremist" when he was younger. "At that time, I would never have helped Sunnis. I only wanted revenge." When I asked what changed, he said that he had, in seventh grade, become angry at a female classmate for sitting too close to him. His female teacher then reprimanded him, telling him he was living in a modern world, and that anyway, he was Hazara first, and then Shi'a. He went home to complain to his father, who sided with his teacher. He then apologized to his teacher, who encouraged him to start reading, including the speeches and writings of Mazari. Sajjad joined a Hazara student association, and his political involvement took off. He maintains ties to the most important Hazara political parties in Quetta. Many of Sajjad's stories include the theme of learning from a teacher, who pointed him towards further reading that shaped his outlook.

But Sajjad is a study in contradictions. Is he Pakistani, Afghanistani, or Hazara? Are Hazaras Turkic, as he argues often, or Mongol, as the Quettan Hazaras, as opposed to the Bamyan Hazaras, were at that time claiming? He finally decided that he himself is of Mongol descent, but that this incorporated only a small portion of Hazaras, most of whom are Turkic.

Sajjad is extremely charismatic. Although young, he always gives speeches at civil society events, his uplifted voice heard at every type of protest, and his speeches, effective. His tone, his body language, as well as his message, led me to believe I was watching a true future leader. I remember joking to a friend at home, "He will be a great leader, or he will be assassinated. Or both." But I quickly sobered when I realized I was not really joking.



These activists' relationships with state institutions is fraught, because the very state in which activists are trying to induce change is seen by them as a corrupting, polluting entity. Activists want to base Afghanistan on a Western model, focused on democracy, rule of law, equality, and education, all "institutions" that very much fall within the purview of the state. For example, even as activists use protests to speak out and demand change, they never call into question the ideas behind the institutions: it is never asked whether democracy will work in Afghanistan. Rather, the activists demand that the state change, to allow the positive aspects of these institutions to actually emerge and become relevant.

In the next section, I ask how activists balance their distrust with the state with their desire to support institutions, of electoral democracy, justice through law, and public education, administered by the state.

### **Electoral Processes and Political Parties**

Before the 2014 presidential elections in Afghanistan, ethnic Hazaras were featured prominently in multiple international media outlets, whose reports stressed the important role they would play. Hazaras, deeply invested in the democratic system, voted in higher percentages than other ethnic groups, such articles stated. A reading of such media suggests that Hazaras are possibly the Afghan group most invested in cooperation with the state, even as they distrust it. The only way they can change it is by reforming it themselves, and so they launch themselves wholeheartedly into elections. In fact, leading up to the 2014 elections, many of my Hazara friends posted declarations on Facebook (a key way civil society activists spread their ideas)

emphasizing their commitment to democracy and to elections.<sup>38</sup> Hazara turnout in elections has been consistently high in past elections as well. Votes received by ethnic Hazara candidate Ramazan Bashardost, who achieved third position in the previous presidential elections (ahead of Ashraf Ghani, current president) also indicated Hazaras' influence, winning them greater attention in 2014. At first glance, this does not seem to be a group totally disillusioned by the state itself.

Yet an examination of Hazara activist attitudes towards these elections demonstrates that activists can believe fully in an ideal while distrusting the way this ideal (here, democracy) is implemented by the state apparatus. Several Hazara civil society activists contacted me after the 2014 election and expressed concern that nearly every Hazara majority area had run out of ballots, including Bamyan, Daikundi, West Kabul, and Hazara-majority districts in Pashtun-majority provinces like Wardak, Uruzgan, and Ghazni. This was interpreted as a systematic attempt to marginalize the Hazara vote.<sup>39</sup> But Hazara civil society members' distrust concerning elections and politics runs much deeper. Bashardost was not affiliated with a political party when he achieved third place, and many stated this was part of his attraction. He was considered clean, unsullied by affiliation with the main Hazara political parties, which are considered problematic.

The creation of Hizb-e-Wahdat in 1980 by Mazari is considered by Hazaras in Bamyan today as the first time Hazaras displayed political and military strength by uniting most of the population under its umbrella. Of course, actual unity was short-lived. Today, the original Wahdat has split into four parties, based on personality politics and leadership's squabbles.

Hazara activists see the original Hizb-e-Wahdat as something pure, describing it, and its leader Mazari, as not only interested in bettering the situation of Hazaras but also in promoting the same universals the activists now espouse: democracy, human rights, gender parity,

education, and equality for all Afghan citizens. For them, the dissolution of the party into something based on personality and patronage networks is especially painful. Few of the self-proclaimed civil society activists associate openly with any of these parties.

Evidence points to this distrust of the political parties being widespread. Among the youth in Markaz Bamyan, association is often kept a secret, as if it was something to be ashamed of. I tried unsuccessfully to find youth who did affiliate with the parties to interview, but so few would come forward that I had to abandon this approach. As I tried to arrange interviews, one of my main informants explained, “No one *wants* to be associated with one of these parties, they are corrupt, unjust, not really working for democracy.” At one point Sajjad asked my advice because he had been pegged to lead a youth group of Mohaqeq’s party. He was clearly torn: on one hand, this would give him access to patronage networks and the chance to influence the youth; on the other, he told me it was “wrong” for an activist to accept such a position. In the end he did accept, but I sensed he was afraid that he, or at least his image, would become polluted by this affiliation. Civil society activists believed that it is *they* who have inherited the ideals, if not the party of Mazari. From the activists’ point of view, the original Wahdat ideals have been destroyed by those who broke up the party in order to enhance their own personal position, and they are being kept alive by the activists and by the very nature of Hazaras in general, who they claim display a rare open-mindedness as a group.<sup>40</sup> The general population of Bamyan is wary of parties, and activists seem more able than the parties to mobilize the population as a whole. When I attended Mazari’s birthday celebration at the headquarters of Khalili’s Wahdat compound, for example, only a modestly sized crowd turned out. I later attended a celebration staged by the civil society activists, at which hundreds of people packed into Mazari Square and the surrounding fields to listen to several hours of speeches, singing, and poetry. It was clear in

which setting they preferred to remember their martyred leader.

### **An Unjust Justice System**

When I first arrived in Bamyan to conduct the main part of my research in summer 2012, many of my informants were eager to tell me about an event that had happened several months earlier. A sixteen-year-old Hazara girl, Shakila, was shot and killed while staying with her brother-in-law. Their house was within the compound of a Provincial Council member, who happened to be a Sayed. Sayeds are descended from the Prophet Mohammad and hence considered by some to be of Arab, not Hazara, descent, though they speak Dari. Sayeds live among all ethnic communities in Afghanistan and indeed in most Muslim communities throughout the world. However, understanding them to be of a different ethnicity seems to be fairly particular to Hazaras, likely because of their low social status. Authorities initially suspected Shakila's brother-in-law, although he had an alibi. The Provincial Council member, who was at home, claimed he was alone praying when the murder occurred. When the investigation shifted away from Shakila's brother-in-law, the crime scene was no longer viable. The case was closed, and although later reopened under a new prosecutor with pressure from civil society groups, no real headway had been made at the time of writing. An American lawyer who was carrying out trainings in the justice system sector expressed to me his opinion that the case had been handled badly.

For many, Shakila's case represents an ethnic divide that was opening between Sayeds and Hazaras, although it should be noted that a number of civil society activists deny that this is an ethnic issue, but rather a gender issue. That summer, I met with three activists in the living room of the house where I was staying to discuss this and other issues. Firuzan stated clearly

when asked if ethnicity impacted the activists' response, "No. This is an issue in which a young girl has been killed, and has not received justice. This is a crime against women, against humanity in general. This issue must be understood in this context." But Sajjad quickly jumped in. "Sayeds think they can get away with anything. The first prosecutor, he was Sayed. How many working in the criminal justice system are Sayed? This case should have received attention nationally, but all of the Sayeds throughout the country mobilized against us." People are ambivalent when interpreting cases such as Shakila's. Some blame a generally corrupt judicial system, targeting weak strata of Afghan society cross-ethnically, while others emphasize malice against Hazaras in particular.

The power and influence of the Sayeds is somewhat ambiguous, and has changed throughout the years of conflict. Pre-conflict, Sayeds maintained leadership influence from the social capital they gain from their ascriptive position. Kopecky (1982) wrote that, in the 1970s and before, Sayeds were able to unite divisive Hazara groups, as evidenced by the para-state Shura that emerged after the Soviet invasion. The Shura and its Sayed leadership lost power because the population felt that Shura demands for taxation and conscription were burdensome (Harpviken 1998). Today, relying upon their status as descendants of the Prophet, Sayeds retain enough power for many Hazaras to resent them, although many Hazaras do support them for reasons of religion and tradition (and these two feelings are not always mutually exclusive). During my fieldwork it became clear that there is an ambivalence among Hazaras as to whether Sayeds are actually a "special" holy group deserving respect, or a group that plays upon the superstitions of the people to reap benefits for their own profit. While Sayeds seem to have peaked in terms of political power in the 1980s, they certainly still retain the ability to mobilize enough supporters — whether to vote for them or even act violently in their interests — to

remain important political players, though they cannot monopolize the very top echelons any longer.

I did not find any activists who are satisfied with the justice system — whether in the Shakila case or more generally — although I did find that specific individuals working within the justice system are acknowledged for their integrity. And yet, these activists stress the importance of the rule of law, emphasizing that conflicts must be resolved by the state apparatus and not through community-based conflict resolution. Informants explain that traditional dispute resolution systems might restore harmony but would not provide justice. In order for these traditional, extra-state institutions to work, both sides in a disagreement need to feel some satisfaction, meaning also the one who was seen to be at fault in the dispute would receive benefits, especially should he be the more powerful party. To my informants, such a system is not justice; justice, they said, comes from a strong rule of law implemented impartially. Hazaras historically lived under a feudal system and after integration into the Afghan state occupied the lowest rungs of society. Hence, activists say that they do not see any benefit in a system that favors the actor with more power, even should he be in the wrong. They saw themselves as the underdogs most likely to lose in a dispute resolution system aiming to restore harmony. Better, they told me, to work towards a more just state system, something that, if it does work as it should (even as it still does not now), will in time provide better outcomes for the least powerful. Before the current conflict, Hazaras might try to stay away from the state system because they knew it would be, in many if not most cases, prejudicial against them. In today's setting, state justice systems on paper should act fairly towards all groups, and ostensibly have the backing of the international community. Hazaras consider their best possibility to be supporting justice within the state and criticizing the justice system when it clearly is not living up to the standards

set for it by supra-local authorities. Such authorities, in the Hazara activists' eyes, clearly include international actors who they know are working to reform the system, and can hence be counted on more than the Kabul government.

And yet, there is a sense among Hazara civil society activists that politics is inherently unclean, impure, and that in seeking to adhere to values of human rights, gender rights, and democratic values, politics must be avoided. Rather, means such as development and civil society must be utilized, with the paradox remaining, although overlooked by the activists, that these groups are also, in some fashion, politically involved. They must work to reconcile these two issues, and demonstrate that they are not contaminated by the political institutions which they feel are repressing them. This tightrope seems to me to be one of appearances: going beyond the fact that the activism often seems inherently political, activists will, on occasion, ally with certain members of the political establishment. Maintaining their purity means, then, keeping these sorts of alliances to a minimum, and being sure to openly criticize established political leaders when necessary. At the same time, ideals such as justice, as interpreted through the trainings and messages given by foreign (often American) contractors who work with developing the justice sector in Afghanistan, make it clear that justice must be delivered through the state apparatus. But it is not only those working in the justice system who receive these trainings. Activists, development workers, and some university students are also invited to attend (I myself observed five such training sessions). The tendency of Hazara activists to accept what international and foreign organizations teach them almost without question means that these ideals are internalized, but the actual institutions, that is to say, the Afghan judicial system, police, and so on are still seen as corrupt, whether more generally or more specifically relating to Hazaras. The belief that such institutions are still corrupt clearly relates to the past experiences of

Hazaras, prior to and during the war (in addition to real corruption that certainly currently exists). Informants often spoke of their almost complete exclusion from or lack of fair participation in such institutions.

Hazara trepidations about the justice system do not stem solely from the state overthrow and state collapse of the conflict years in Afghanistan, but also from their own particular problems as a marginalized minority trying to navigate this institution. Yet no matter how apolitical Hazaras activists might claim to be, the political movement of Mazari-era Hizb-e-Wahdat is their idealized version of what politics, including justice, should be. And the current conception of justice that Hazara activists promote is essentially the same rule of law project promoted by international actors working in Afghanistan today. Hazaras' own political trajectory combined with these outside influences result in a situation whereby activists repeatedly demand justice be served in the face of patronage politics and a corrupted justice system.

### **Educational Institutions**

When activists talk about their history within the Afghan state, they almost always begin with the wars undertaken by Abdur Rahman. Hazaras were included in the state, but, they point out, institutions were used as weapons against them. Abdur Rahman appointed his own rulers to Hazara lands, replacing Hazara leaders, and taxation was heavy (Gawecki 1980: 67). Gawecki further reports that in the 1970s (likely with the influence of communism), more Hazaras were afforded some access to institutions, such as elementary and secondary education, although there were few schools in rural Hazara regions, and higher education would have been even more difficult to obtain. Several of my own informants told me that according to the law while Hazaras did have a right to education during these periods, they were often denied admittance on



the basis of names or places of birth or residence that identified them as Shi'a or Hazara. Since 2001, many more Hazaras receive education, although many also claim that, especially within state universities, a high degree of discrimination still exists.

In recent years Hazaras have received much attention as the ethnic group in Afghanistan with the highest attendance rates among both male and female schoolchildren (Oppel 2010; Larson 2008). Pre-conflict, Hazaras in the rural areas had very little access to schools because few existed. According to Mousavi (1997), during times when a Pashtun-dominated state was promoting language and educational opportunities in Pashtun regions, Hazaras were left isolated. In the 1970s, during the rule of Daoud and Zahir Shah, as well as during the communist period, a few schools were created but reached a very small percentage of the population. Many Hazaras relied on religious madrasas for schooling, but a secular education was much more difficult to obtain. This changed drastically with the push to bring schools to all rural areas after 2001. Schools are now present in all parts of Afghanistan, but Hazara regions are significant in that they face less insurgent activity and less social-cultural pressure that could discourage attendance. Rather, many Hazaras now consider it a key aspect of their identity that they support education for boys and girls.

What is taught in those state schools, however, can be a point of contention. A common refrain in Bamyan is "Pashtuns have stolen our history." Most historians from Afghanistan, I was told, have been Pashtun, and they have written histories that entirely leave out the Hazara point of view. Worse, they said, non-Afghan scholars rely heavily upon these historians when writing their own histories in Afghanistan, and the result has been that Hazaras are often left out of the story, when not shown in a negative light. Of course, there have been Hazara scholars in more recent years who have done much to fill this gap, by writing a history of the Hazaras: for

example, Hassan Polladi, Sayed Askar Mousavi, Mohamad Isa Gharjistani, and Hussein Ali Yazdani. Many Hazaras in Bamyan say that with access to schooling, members of the community are becoming much more interested in reading the works of these historians and others.

I sought out teachers, school officials, and students in Bamyan after I began to hear about the frustration many Hazaras harbor about their history. I wanted to understand what was taught in Afghan schools regarding history and ethnic issues. According to teachers, school administrators, and professors I spoke with, the Ministry of Education made a determination that bringing up any issue relating to ethnicity would potentially give rise to greater ethnic problems. As a result, within the official curriculum and textbooks, no mention of ethnic issues is made. In fact, I was given the chance to inspect history textbooks from several grades, and I did not find mention of ethnicity in any case, even when it seemed necessary in order to understand historical events. The fact that Abdur Rahman played up the Shi'a aspect of Hazara identity is left unsaid, as is the fact that ethnic Hazaras were one of several groups singled out for his centralization campaign. Abdur Rahman's wars are rather described as a justifiable suppression of illegitimate revolts against the state, and ethnicity and religious affiliation of any of those revolting is absent. Hazaras resent this policy, seeing their history being overlooked in favor of a history that focuses on kings and the development of the Afghan state, which is, to them, the same as a history of the Pashtun elite.

As a result, Hazara activists and students in Bamyan are setting out to teach themselves their own history. Several people in the community are considered "historical experts" as they have (usually independently) studied those historical works that have been written by Hazara historians. They meld and interpret these histories, and then retell them orally. When I first

arrived in Bamyan, these retellings seemed informal, taking place in dorm rooms and around bazaars, listened to by whichever students happened to be present. However, it soon became apparent that they were becoming more formalized. History experts are called upon to speak at such events as the birthday and anniversary of the death of deceased Hazara leader Abdul Ali Mazari, at Hazara Unity Day, and even in conjunction with the presidential elections in the United States. During my stay, several programs were held at educational institutions in Bamyan to show how democracy worked in America (usually with U. S. Embassy sponsorship), and at most of them, one of the “historical experts” would give a speech, often comparing Hazaras, the formerly enslaved people of Afghanistan, to formerly enslaved African Americans. If the United States could come to have a black president, went a narrative I heard several times at these talks, then the same could happen for a Hazara in Afghanistan one day.

Hazara concerns about educational institutions in Afghanistan also extend to more concrete issues. In Bamyan, I was often told, one does not have the same opportunities for augmenting one’s schooling with private classes as people enjoy in other areas. Schools themselves are of lesser quality, especially in the districts and areas located even a slight distance from Bamyan center. After visiting a number of schools and speaking with teachers and administrators, I learned that teachers often have little training, schools are horribly overcrowded, and there are not enough supplies for either students or teachers. Furthermore, in the more high-altitude areas, schools are forced to close for six months out of the year because of the intense cold (the schools are not heated and many students have to walk two hours or more to rural schools, which in winter months becomes an impossibility). Several school directors I interviewed told me they simply had to do their best, cramming a nine-month curriculum into six months. They expressed regret that their students then have to compete with students all over the

country on the standardized *konkur* (university entrance exam), believing that they cannot prepare their students sufficiently. It is certainly true that this is not simply an ethnic issue, as Hazaras in Bamyan are not the only Afghan citizens to live in high altitude locales or extremely rural areas. Yet Hazaras in Bamyan strongly believe they are more affected by this problem than others. Furthermore, Pashtuns are believed, by many Hazaras I interviewed, to live mainly in warm areas where this is not an issue. Other problems that prevent Pashtuns from attending school, such as societal pressure and pressure from insurgents, are seen to be a problem within Pashtun society (not stemming from state neglect), and earn little sympathy.

In Bamyan during the summer of 2013 allegations of discrimination against Hazaras at Kabul University flared. Hazaras claimed that they were systematically given lower grades by professors in certain faculties. The professors claimed that Hazara students were simply not performing up to standard. Hazaras held protests in response, demanding that the professors in question be removed. Eventually a resolution was reached. At the same time, a large number of Hazaras study in private universities and schools, where they are less constrained by state curriculum. Many of these universities, such as Ibn Sina and Kateb University in Kabul, employ mainly Hazara professors trained in Iran. In these environments, both students and professors feel they are better able to reach their goals. Even non-activist Hazaras have concluded that education, believed to be a right and a way to achieve success honorably, is implemented by the state in such a corrupted way; because of this, most believe that reliance upon state educational institutions will never result in their advancement. Hazaras hence take it upon themselves to remedy this situation — by writing, learning, and retelling a Hazara-centric history and by opening, promoting, and supporting private schools. The truth of these histories is augmented because they are promoted outside the auspices of the polluting state, which has, in their eyes,

proved unable to present knowledge that might work against its own interests. When state educational institutions are necessary, Hazaras pride themselves on their performance even if they do not believe them to be ideal, and protest what discrimination they believe still exists.

### **Appeals to UNAMA**

In winter 2013, I met with a number of my informants who were protesting the January terrorist bombing of a market in Quetta, Pakistan which resulted in the killing of approximately one hundred Hazaras. The activists had decided that the best way to approach the problem was to go straight to the UN (i.e., the Bamyán headquarters of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, or UNAMA). My friends set up tents outside of UNAMA headquarters in Bamyán and several went on a hunger strike. I visited them throughout their protest, both to give moral support and to continue my research. During the day, we sat outside in the sun on carpets, talking for long periods of time about the reasons for their protest. During the night they set up *bukharis*, or wood-burning stoves, inside the tents and huddled under sleeping bags.

One young man, Salim, became quite emotional as we spoke. He kept repeating, “We have been the victims of a systematic genocide for over one hundred years. They have to listen to us!” Initially, wanting to help, I decided to point out what I considered weak points of their campaign. I tried to highlight those problems that in my opinion were inherent in trying to get the UN to recognize any mass killing as genocide, because the UN would avoid using the “G-word” if it meant becoming entangled with the internal problems in Pakistan. I was met with disbelieving stares.

“We have been killed since the time of Abdur Rahman . . . ,” Salim trailed off.

I agreed, but pointed out that from the dry, bureaucratic standpoint of the UN, the century-long predicament of Hazaras in Afghanistan and Pakistan would probably not gain the same consideration and acknowledgment that other historical traumatic events have received (such as the Jewish Shoah, the Rwandan genocide, and the mass killings during the former-Yugoslavia civil war).

Several people asked “Why does that matter? We are being killed, even today...we are killed in Pakistan, we are killed in Afghanistan, and there has never been a stop to this killing!”

It was clear that my informants did not consider the UN to be prey to the same internal problems that they believe plague Afghan state institutions. When I tried to explain that the UN was also concerned with political issues, and that it was unlikely to rock the boat by focusing on investigating a Hazara “genocide,” I was met with what seemed to be quite genuine shock.

Almost all Hazara civil society activists, at least those that I spoke to, believe that the UN is primarily concerned with humanitarian issues, and do not recognize the political wrangling that goes on within the organization. I was met with either a complete lack of understanding, or an unwillingness to understand, how the Security Council, for example, works, and what it would take to have the UN take any concrete steps concerning the situation of Hazaras. Hazara activists have come to believe that the UN will surely help them if the organization can only be made to understand what is happening, and how it is part of a larger pattern of oppression and mass killing. Activists have read the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and they have read the definition of genocide, and thus believe that if given the chance to explain themselves, the UN will respond. These are pure, civil ideas, promoted by an organization also believed to be pure. The activists would not accept that there is in fact room for pragmatism alongside the defense of such ideals at the UN. Unfortunately, when a UNAMA representative came to meet them, they

were told they did not have any concrete demands that UNAMA could address, and they should just go home. The hunger strike, which was a dry strike, meaning they also abstained from liquids as well as solid food, ended quickly and the activists went home after several more days. They were sad that they had not succeeded, but convinced that once again the fault was misinformation given to the UN about their situation. They were not disheartened, and continue to appeal to the UN on other issues.

The complete trust in the intentions of the United States is another area where Hazara activists seem unable, or unwilling, to acknowledge the factors (political, economic and strategic, among others) that shape policy. Many, when speaking of the United States, focus on civil rights issues, on the importance of having a black president today and how that directly relates to Hazaras in Afghanistan. Of course, there is a good amount of propaganda put out by the United States on these issues, and Hazara activists work closely with U.S. Embassy outreach programs, such as the Lincoln Learning Center, to promote these ideas. And yet, they are not happy with their rate of progress, even as they attribute what progress they have made to international intervention. They often complain that they know Pashtun areas receive more development funds and attention, and they believe Pashtuns are being unfairly (and paradoxically) rewarded for participating in an insurgency, while Hazaras have worked hard to help the nation building projects. The blame is never placed upon the United States or the UN, however, but on Pashtuns who work with these organizations and “spread lies” about Hazaras, such as the rumor that “they are all Iranian agents.” The United States, in its efforts to promote civil ideals, has managed to place itself, in the eyes of the activists, if not in the eyes of the population at large, on the “pure” side of the binary, so that blame when things do not appear to be fair is displaced onto those who are perceived to be against Hazaras.

## Conclusion

Many Hazaras have long viewed the Afghan state as a Pashtun-run enemy that is corrupt and oppresses Hazaras even today, despite the fact that they see themselves as one of the groups most invested in the state-building project. Why Hazaras decide to invest in a state that they believe is corrupt, even polluting, largely stems from the fact that they see no other choice. Independence is clearly not an option for a people who are concentrated in isolated central highlands, in the capital, and the rest scattered throughout the country. To try to change the state, as insurgents from other groups do, is also not an option. For ideological reasons, Hazaras and the insurgents want something quite different from a new state. Furthermore, the current state, corrupted as it is, was put in place by the international benefactors with which Hazaras align themselves. Generally, they believe the international community does care about Hazaras and their difficulties, and that it is actors opposed to Hazaras who ensure that the state remains corrupt. Hence the paradox. The state is corrupt, because many staffing it are corrupt, but it symbolizes the efforts of those outside benefactors who do have their best interest at heart. Perhaps it is better, then, to say that the state itself is not polluting but rather has been polluted by those politically-motivated actors working within it. Hazaras, particularly activists and their sympathizers, continue to try to reform the state from within, to purify it, while at the same time remaining mistrustful in their dealings with it. And yet those who do work within the state, even in the name of civil ideals, risk pollution. Hazara activists in Bamyan are equally distrustful of the locally elected Provincial Council. A Hazara who becomes affiliated with state institutions is in some way sullied, and most of the Provincial Council Members are considered to have achieved their positions based on patronage networks, or as one informant told me, “through the



means of the mafia.” They do not believe the provincial council has changed over the past 14 years either, except with the loss of one member, Jawad Zuhak, who is thought to have worked hard for the development of Hazara areas, and was murdered by the Taliban in 2011. Zuhak appears to have been able to maintain civil ideals during his time in office. As rumors circulate that a Hazara rival was complicit in his death, the possibility grows that memory of his violent death will come to be “purified” as a kind of martyrdom.

Hazaras, then, are contributing to the state-building project, because the ideals of such a project are in line with the democratic ideals they have come to embrace, and because at this point they see no other way to improve their situation than to seek education and work to improve things from inside the very apparatus they distrust. Indeed, they also believe a federal, rather than the current centralized, system, would better serve their needs. But in addition, Hazara activists are spreading the message that human rights, civil rights, the pursuit of knowledge through education, justice, and even gender equality are universal ideals and rights owed to every human being. They believe that these ideals have been brought and promoted by foreign actors such as the United States, UNAMA, and other various international organizations working in Afghanistan. However, civil society activists also promote the ethno-national view that these ideals are somehow inherent culturally to Hazaras and had already been promoted by Mazari before the NATO intervention. Even as they exercise their right to protest, their right to civil disobedience, against this state, they also wholly work for its betterment from within, while paradoxically believing that these ideals can only be polluted when administered by the state.

Having discussed how Hazara activists view Afghan state institutions as impure and corrupting, while the ideals they are supposed to stand for — democracy, rule of law, and education — are pure, I turn in the next chapter to another area that Hazaras view as sometimes

corrupting and sometimes purifying, religion. The next chapter will show that much as Hazara activists are wary of state institutions, so also are they wary of Shi'a religious institutions. And similar paradoxes apply in the Hazaras' perception of and use of religion: many claim not to be religious, or state that religion should be a private matter; and yet, religious themes became apparent in many of their protests and memorials, sometimes intentionally, and sometimes through a cultural pattern of giving heightened meaning to victimhood, oppression, and collective trauma.

## Chapter 5

### Shi'ism: History, Activism, and Iran

“Melissa, let me tell you, those things can’t be true. Shujayi, he is a religious man. You know our religion. You know we are Shi’as, that Shi’as are the Muslims who are more peaceful. We are not al-Qaeda, or the Taliban, or the Islamic State. A true Shi’a would never do such a thing. This I know. I believe it.” So said an activist in discussing Shujayi, the local police commander accused of torturing and killing Pashtun civilians. In this same conversation, the activist added his views on Shi’a morality: “At the heart of Shi’ism is justice and peace. Shi’as only fight when forced to. Shujayi attended madrasa, and he truly believes, more than many of us. It is *not possible* that such a person could have done these things.”

I expected that educated, mainly middle class civil society activists, such as my informants, would tend to espouse more secular views; many do claim to be secular. Yet, as I became closer to them, had more in-depth conversations, and observed their protests and speeches, I understood that, emotionally, morally and cosmologically more than consciously, they are very much guided by Shi’a Islam. Some acknowledge this openly, while others, seemingly wary of organized religion, use Shi’ism as a pattern that allows them to make sense of right and wrong, justice and tyranny. What almost all of my informants are wary of is institutionalized religion. This, like Afghan state institutions, is something which corrupts the pure ideals people should follow. But Shi’ism, according to most activists I spoke with, is very much in line with their adherence to human rights and justice. Some state this explicitly, while others show it through their actions.

This chapter will demonstrate how the activists’ particular brand of Shi’a spirituality is

conceptualized. I start with a brief history of Shi'ism, as this provides a blueprint for Shi'a Hazaras as they incorporate their religion into their fight for justice. I then describe some of my informants' attitudes towards religion and spirituality, letting their own detailed and eloquent words take primacy. Finally, I address the problem of institutionalized Shi'ism, distrusted by my informants both because of geopolitical and local concerns.

Shi'ism for my informants provides a blueprint both to interpret trauma and express it publicly in a way that will affect others. The ways that the activists present the Hazara past, present, and future, the methods of activism, and the types of emotions they seek to evoke are in many ways based upon Shi'a tradition. And Shi'a tradition is premised on loss, upon always being the ones subjugated to tyrants. Not only is Shi'a tradition used by Hazara civil society activists to reach their audience. It also makes the activists — and possibly the greater Hazara community — more receptive to a message based on a collective trauma. Having been already exposed to trauma narratives of Shi'ism from a young age, they can weave themselves seamlessly into this paradigm as Hazaras. Collective mourning for the historical founders of Shi'ism resembles collective mourning for the events that have historically traumatized Hazaras. Not the institutions of Shi'ism (with which activists feel disillusioned as one more group of power-holders taking advantage of them), but the narratives and iconography of Shi'ism provide building blocks for cultural expressions that have at their roots narratives of trauma. In what follows, I give a background of the basic story of Shi'ism to illustrate trauma narratives within Shi'ism, before going on to explore how my informants described their relation with their faith.

### **The Karbala Paradigm**

Michael Fischer (1980: 21) writes that for Shi'a Muslims the Karbala Paradigm has become a

model for life, a “mnemonic for thinking about how to live.” Karbala, located about sixty miles south of Baghdad, and just west of the Euphrates river, is a city of about 570,000 people. In the year 680 AD, a nearby desert plain was the site of the final battle and death of Hussein. Hussein is considered by the Shi’as to have been the legitimate leader of the Islamic world of that time, because of his descent from Prophet Mohammad. Hussein and his followers saw the Caliph Yazid as an illegitimate and oppressive ruler. In the battle, Hussein and many of his family members and followers were slain. Hussein had until that point remained quiescent, choosing not to seek to head the Muslim community in order to preserve unity. He entered into battle after being called by the people of Kufa, another city close to the Euphrates, to stand against the tyrant. The Kufans were then convinced by one of Yazid’s generals not to assist Hussein in battle (Jafri 1981).

In yearly processions, Shi’as commemorate this tragedy through displays of intense sadness, breast beating, self-flagellation and even cutting with razors, knives and swords, all meant both to atone for the Kufans’ treachery and reenact the pain of Hussein and his followers. Fischer states that the remembrance of this event, which features multitudes of side stories and vignettes, can be used by Shi’as during every part of the year and just about every life situation. The tendency to make use of the event as a series of parables, Fischer states, leads him to refer to it as a paradigm rather than a passion.

The remembrance of Karbala by Shi’as resembles certain Christian commemorations of Christ’s Passion. There is an emphasis on sharing the suffering of Hussein and his followers, experiencing what they experienced. Christ-like, Hussein knew that he would die at Karbala, his death having been foretold by Allah, but he went willingly, knowing he would model for his people an example of holding up one’s righteousness against injustice.<sup>41</sup>

During Muharram, the Islamic month when the Battle of Karbala occurred, and Ashura, the tenth day of that month (on which Hussein was killed), Shi'as listen to stories of the suffering of Hussein and his family, and they, too, suffer. Part of their suffering is based on mourning and part on sharing in the pain felt by Hussein and his family. Many told me that their suffering is to feel what Hussein felt, and some criticized people who they claimed were not truly suffering in empathy with Hussein, as was required of them religiously. The mullahs who lead the *majlis*, the assembly of worshippers who listen to stories and sermons related to Karbala, clearly work to bring people to a state of intense suffering, brought on by stories of the pain of Hussein and his family. A number of earlier analysts have written that the intent implicit in Shi'a Ashura rites is to bring about emotional pain, whether to feel the same pain that Hussein did or atone for the Kufans.<sup>42</sup> The atmosphere during Muharram and especially Ashura is extremely emotional. In Bamyan, I saw people sob for Hussein, cry into their hands, and rock back and forth from the overwhelming emotional pain. Some beat their breasts, while teams of boys gather at a shrine and beat themselves with chains. In essence, they come to experience Karbala as Hussein did. In Bamyan, no one I spoke with mentioned atoning for the Kufans, but rather the importance of Hussein's suffering. The passion element of the Karbala Paradigm brings people emotionally close to Hussein, and his family. Ashura and the Muharram processions are hence collective trauma events.

Before Fischer's explanation of Karbala as a paradigm, scholars tended to describe these rituals solely in terms of their resemblance to the Passion. Important as the example of the pain and suffering of Hussein and his followers is for Shi'as, they also use other aspects of Karbala to make sense of their life predicaments. Fischer makes clear that Karbala is about not just suffering, but also justice, truth, and more. More specifically, Fischer holds high both the affect

that Shi'as experience and the symbolic meaning of Karbala. This symbolism is so multifaceted that it, more than the commemoration's emotional impact, explains Karbala's influence on today's Shi'as. For Fischer, the emotional responses, while extremely important, simply do not take into account all aspects of the larger paradigm.

Hence, civil society activists promoting scripts of cultural trauma among Hazaras make use of the Paradigm in a more measured way, looking to Hussein pragmatically as they seek to transmit their message. The suffering of Hussein and his followers is compared to the suffering of Hazaras. Some activists are rather secular, while some consider themselves quite religious. All, however, grew up with the stories of Ali, Hussein, Yazid, Abbas, and Zeinab. All witnessed and took part in the emotion-laden Ashura and Muharram ceremonies, whether openly as refugees in Iran or Pakistan, or secretly, in whispers, during the years when it was either prohibited or discouraged, depending on the leadership, by the Afghan state. Karbala, through the ceremonies of Muharram, provides an inner framework that informs their view of the world, influences which stories about Hazaras are considered most important, and styles protests and rhetoric. Sometimes activists explicitly invoke Hussein; at other moments he is a subliminal presence. Activists also invoke Hussein to support human rights; according to more religiously inclined activists, Hussein, a just leader, would have supported the modern concept of human rights.

### **Ali, Hussein, and Karbala**

The story upon which the Karbala Paradigm is based is one of tyranny and oppression, depravity and justice. The story begins long before the battle, when the Prophet Mohammad died, in 632, and the community of Islam, the *ummah*, had to choose his successor (Pinault 1992). Some

claimed that Mohammad's cousin and son-in-law, Ali, was to be successor, citing the Prophet's own stated wishes. Others claimed that the successor should be chosen from a consensus of the community, a sort of tribal council as had been tradition among Arab tribes at that time. The second group won. Abu Bakr, close advisor to the Prophet and the father of Mohammad's favorite wife Aisha, was chosen (Jafri 1981), despite protests that the family of the Prophet had been left out of this council (Hyder 2006). Ali stayed quiet in order to preserve the unity of the community (Jafri 1981; Pinault 1992). Abu Bakr died within two years, and leadership passed to Umar. Umar led for ten years, and from the Shi'a perspective, he was unfit to rule, as he made decisions which were un-Quranic, such as stoning pregnant women and mad people, and outlawing temporary marriage and the "little" Hajj pilgrimage, done outside of the official Hajj season (Fischer 1980). Abu Bakr was assassinated by a Persian slave in response to the conquest of Persia (Siddiqui 1993). Then, Uthman reigned for twelve years, before he, too, was assassinated. He was perceived to have governed unwisely, triggering conflicts in Kufa, Basra, Mecca and Medina (Fischer 1980).

Ali was then offered the caliphate and, though he had disagreed with Uthman on religious law, he initially turned it down, only accepting leadership after other possible successors had declined and being pressured from all sides to take on the role (Jafri 1979). Those responsible for Uthman's death claimed his killing had been legitimate, as he had not ruled according to Islam; others, most importantly Aisha, the Prophet's favorite wife, and Mu'awiya, the governor of Syria and the brother-in-law of the Prophet, demanded that Ali avenge Uthman's death (Fischer 1980). Mu'awiya of course also had an interest in achieving a premiere place as a leader of Islam after Uthman's death. Ali refused to avenge Uthman, and Mu'awiya and Aisha rose against him. Aisha's forces were defeated at the Battle of the Camel in Basra in 656. Although this is known



for being the first civil war between the followers of Islam, it went even further in establishing Aisha as an extremely important and influential female figure (Mernissi 1992).

However, Mu'awiya continued to fight. At the Battle of Siffin, he used a ploy, placing Qurans upon his lances and causing a stalemate (Fischer 1980: 16). Mu'awiya and Ali then entered into arbitration, and Mu'awiya declared himself caliph. Ali did not accept this usurpation but chose not to continue the fight. Rather than those who fought Ali alongside Aisha and Mu'awiya, it was an extreme group of former Ali supporters, the Kharijites, who then sought Ali's and Mu'awiya's deaths, in outrage that arbitration had even been considered (Dabashi 2011). Mu'awiya escaped their efforts; Ali did not. A Kharijite assassinated him in 661 in Kufa.

For the Partisans of Ali (*Shi'at Ali* in Arabic), Ali was a first major martyr, having inherited the caliphate in 656 only to be killed five years later (661). He knew it was predestined, he even knew who would carry it out. But he went to it willingly. Ali told others it would be Ibn Muljam the Kharijite who would kill him, but he refused their proposal to kill the assassin first (Fischer 1989). Ali told his family he would be killed the next day, and refused their pleas to stay home. He went to the Great Mosque in Kufa, where he found Ibn Muljam sleeping. The two stood to pray together, and on the second prostration, Ibn Muljam struck Ali with a sword (Fischer 1980). Ibn Muljam was captured and brought back to Ali, who comforted the man, gave him food and water, and declared that should he, Ali, live, Ibn Muljam would be released. Before dying, Ali specified that Ibn Muljam be killed with a single blow, as that was equal to what the assassin had dealt Ali.

If Ali was the first important martyr, it is the martyrdom of his son, Hussein, which holds the most importance for Shi'as. Mu'awiya assumed the caliphate uncontested, as Ali's older son, Hassan, was too weak to stand against him. It is widely thought among Shi'as that Mu'awiya had

him poisoned (Pinault 1992). The understanding upon Mu'awiya taking power had been that rule would return to the Prophet's family once Mu'awiya died, yet Hassan's likely murder was followed by Mu'awiya's insistence that his son, Yazid, inherit his rule, not Ali's younger son, Hussein, as should have happened. Mu'awiya did not force the issue when Hussein refused to declare allegiance to him, but when his son Yazid came to power, this changed.

In 680, Hussein was called by the people of Kufa (southern Iraq) to lead a revolt against the tyranny of Yazid. Hussein, like his father Ali, foresaw his own death, and released most of those in his service. Only his family and seventy-two men, mostly his personal guard, stayed with him (Pinault 1992). As he journeyed to Kufa, Yazid managed to co-opt the Kufans so that they did not come to Hussein's aid. Hussein and his small troop were trapped on the plain of Karbala on the first of the month Muharram. The suffering was intense. The troop was not allowed to approach the river for water, and the children's thirsty cries could be heard. Hussein's half-brother, Abbas, attempted to bring a water skin and was cut down before helping the children. Children and youth were killed, including three of Hussein: the infant, Ali Ashgar, pierced by an arrow in his father's arms, five-year-old Jafar, and twenty-year-old Ali Akbar (Pinault 1992; Hyder 2006). Hussein himself was beheaded, his body desecrated, his head brought back to Yazid and struck by the tyrant, showing the dead Imam the greatest disrespect.

Only two men survived, the sickly twenty-two-year-old Zayn al-Abidin (the fourth of the twelve Imams of the twelver Shi'a tradition), and his four-year-old son, Muhammad al-Baqir (who would be the fifth Imam) (Pinault 1992). The women, too, were taken in chains to Damascus. Hussein's sister, Zeinab, shamed Yazid for what he had done to her brother, and for her family's treatment as prisoners, as she was held in his court. She is credited with keeping alive the movement of the Partisans of Ali until the fourth Imam was able to take over leadership

of the nascent sect (Fischer 1980). From that point, inheritance was passed from one Imam to the other, until the twelfth Imam, a child, Mahdi, inherited the Imamate in 874. Under threat, he went into hiding, the “minor occultation,” during which he contacted his followers through four deputies. After seventy-two years, he entered “major occultation.” Today’s Shi’as believe that he, the last of the living Imams for Twelver Shi’as, is hidden by God’s order, and will return at the end of times (Fischer 1980).

It might seem improbable that a minority group could survive for such a long time among a hostile majority. Shi’ism survived as the Imams practiced quietism and did not interfere in politics, and their followers practiced *taqiya*, the hiding of their faith, so as to blend in when threatened, though holding protest in their hearts.<sup>43</sup>

Today, Muharram and Ashura processions commemorating Karbala are common throughout the Shi’a Muslim world, even as many states discourage certain of the rituals, viewed by some as “barbaric.”<sup>44</sup> There has been a difficult relationship between states and Ashura rituals, when leaders felt threatened by Shi’a believers taking to the streets and displaying great religious affect and fervor.<sup>45</sup>

During the first ten days of Muharram, culminating with Ashura (the tenth day), mourners attend mosques or peoples’ houses in the evening, listening to sermons that focus on the tale of Hussein’s martyrdom and encourage empathy with its victims (Pinault 1992; Hyder 2006). Mourners cry and moan, and may become so overwrought that they pass out. Young men join processions in which they practice *matam*, the beating of the chest, or hit their backs until they bleed with a whip of metal chains. Often the marchers are organized by mosques, and have practiced beforehand. Some of the most extreme followers will cut their faces with razors or knives, and attend with blood running down. These are the “penitents,” standing in for the people

of Kufa, who failed to come to Hussein's aid (Hyder 2006). In some places, *ta'aziyas* are held, passion plays which reenact the death of Hussein and his followers.

### **An Ashura in Bamyan**

In Bamyan, the *azadari*, mourning, begins with the first of Muharram. As Muharram approaches, black banners with slogans for Hussein, Ali, Hassan, and others start to appear outside shops. Gates covered with black cloth are erected over the road, also bearing slogans and images such as Hussein's riderless white horse, Zuljanah. Yet the main gate near the most important mosque, the Baba Mazari Mosque, featured at its apex not a picture related to Karbala, but rather one of Abdul Ali Mazari. I was told this was intentional. Mazari and Hussein were to be related to each other, their similarities emphasized.

On the days preceding Ashura, I attended a majlis, a commemoration assembly to recall Hussein and Karbala, with my friend Zeinab. We went to one *Hussainiya*, (a gathering place for such assemblies among Shi'as, similar to a mosque), found they would not be giving a sermon for several hours, and so walked for forty minutes through dusty streets to another *Hussainiya* whose sermon would start soon. The interior was dark and crowded, and the wooden beams that crossed the ceiling seem to press down from above. Women had their own room in the building, so the sermon was piped in via a sound system. The room was packed, women sitting shoulder to shoulder, hip to hip, upon the floor. The *Hussainiya* had women volunteers roving about, keeping the rowdy children in line with the threat of a thwack from a stick. As the sermon began, it became clear that its focus was the moment in which those surrounded at Karbala felt intense thirst after several days of resistance, especially the children. Of course, Yazid's forces prevented them from reaching the river (the Euphrates) to sate themselves. *Teshna* (thirsty), was repeated

over and over by the mullah. The children were thirsty, the women were thirsty, the children cried because they were thirsty, thirsty, thirsty . . . . It was painful for even me to listen to, and my friend Zeinab rocked and moaned. The mullah related how Abbas, son of Ali and half-brother of Hussein, could not stand the suffering of the children. He bravely went to the river, and Yazid's army allowed him to pass, to reach the river, and to fill his water skin. Abbas did not drink, the mullah said, wishing to get the water to the others as quickly as possible. Abbas returned, and he was struck in the back, multiple times. The water skin was pierced, and the water was lost. Then, the mullah exclaimed, a death-blow was dealt to Abbas.

By the end of the sermon, Zeinab was sobbing into her scarf. Most of the women around me were as well. Hearing about the children, so thirsty, about Abbas's valiant attempt, about the way that Abbas was toyed with, the water lost and then Abbas struck down, left no doubt as to the cruelty of Yazid and his troops in the minds of those attending. One woman became so overcome during the sermon, she became ill and passed out. The volunteers quickly trampled through the people sitting down towards the exit route holding the woman. We all moved out of the way in a panic, so they could assist the sick woman, remove her into the fresh air, and give her water. At the end of the majlis, while we ate *nazr*, charitable food provided for all attendees, I asked Zeinab about her feelings. "I was so, so sad," she said. "I was sad for Hussein, for his family. And I was thinking also of my own problems, and hoping that Hussein could help me." It is believed in Shi'a Islam that the family of the Prophet can offer intercession for pious believers (Pinault 1992).

I was repeatedly told, "Here in Bamyan, we discourage matam (ritual self-flagellation). That is often done in places where people want to make a political statement to Sunnis, to show their strength, but not here." However, some younger boys told me otherwise. One, who worked

in the house where I stayed, said “Yes, in my village, we practice matam, in the mosques. Some plan it. But last year I was so overcome, I did not plan it: I just grabbed the chains from someone and began to beat myself. Because I was doing it for the right reason, for Hussein, for Ali, I did not feel any pain.”

A day later, Arif, a neighboring high school boy who knew I was interested in the practices surrounding Ashura, knocked on my door and told me to hurry. “At one of the shrines, the boys are singing and doing matam. They are from different mosques, from villages nearby, come on! Quickly!” We rushed together to the shrine, and the crowd was kind enough to insist I move to the front of the spectators. Each mosque would be introduced by a mullah serving as a sort of master of ceremonies. As one boy chanted a song associated with Muharram, the others struck themselves and moved around the shrine area in a sort of choreography, sometimes striding up and down, sometimes dropping to their knees. This continued for hours. In Bamyan, matam done as part of large processions starting from the main mosque through the bazaar might not be encouraged, but people still found room to keep these practices alive and public. Activist friends told me these ritual practices lie at the “margins” of socio-religious life, both figuratively and physically (in shrines located some distance from the heart of the bazaar), while their own activities (protest marches and public gatherings) hold center stage (in the central bazaar). No matam happened in the main mosque or in the bazaar, which very much does seem to be the *secular* center of Bamyan, where shops, offices, inns and restaurants are plenty. Yet I wonder whether a shrine that predates the bazaar and stands directly beneath the Buddha niches might not actually occupy a place symbolically closer to the center of religious life as a whole. The answer seemed to depend upon each individual’s sensitivity and how each decided to practice Muharram ceremonies. Bamyan is in a country where for many years these rituals were

discouraged or banned. People are bringing them back into the open, with the help of returned refugees from Iran and Pakistan. Perhaps because of this, too, there did not seem to be one, prescribed way people were expected to celebrate.

On the morning of Ashura, I was ready to spend the day out and about, absorbing all that I could. I woke early to find my host family already busy. Fatima, the wife, made *shula shirin*, a sort of sweet rice she distributed among the neighbors. I also was given some. She showed me that she had burned several candles on a rock nearby as she was cooking it to emphasize the sacredness of the event. Mohammad, her husband, slaughtered a sheep in the yard of our house. The meat, he said, would later be distributed to the poor. I promised to return in time for this, then headed to the bazaar.

The day was extremely bright and sunny, although already somewhat cold, as it was November (the first snow of winter would fall a few days later). I started at Abdul Ali Mazari mosque, where not only mullahs, but also public officials, were giving speeches. The mosque was packed, so we listened from outside. The governor (who in Bamyan at this time happened to be a woman, Habiba Surobi) was giving a speech. We ran into several of my civil society friends, including Hussein, and he suggested that we stroll along the bazaar. Despite the gravity of the celebrations, there was a festive atmosphere. Mosques were giving out tea to anyone who asked. People smiled and laughed as they greeted each other in the bazaar. From time to time, a caravan of cars and vans and motorcycles from one of the outlying villages would drive through the bazaar. They were decorated with green and black flags and banners with the slogans, “Ya Hussein! Ya Ali! Hussein is justice!” They played loud religious music. The activist Hussein was not comfortable with these displays. “If you were in Kabul, it would be worse,” he said. “They drive around the whole city, into areas where there are no Shi’as living. Now that they can, they

want to make their presence known, to show they can be strong. Sometimes there are fights.” This was repeated by several I knew, Hazaras and non-Hazaras. Thousands of Shi’as would gather and march in a political statement, and most were Hazaras. In reaction to the times when observing Ashura had been discouraged, today Hazara participants take to the streets, on foot, on motorbikes or in cars. They drive around Kabul, flying flags similar to those I had seen in Bamyan, and playing music as I had heard. Tacitly, these Hazaras are making the point that they are a force to be reckoned with, no longer an oppressed minority, from whom there will be consequences if they are harassed. The unease such displays cause among others cannot be denied. “Don’t go to West Kabul,” I was told when I was in Kabul during an earlier year’s Muharram. “It could get dangerous. They get out of control.” Yet most well known, and most serious, incidents of real violence seemed to be against the Shi’as — including a mosque bombing in 2011 when about sixty were killed, mostly Hazaras, and an incident in the university in Kabul while I was residing in Bamyan. A group of Shi’a and Sunni students argued over the use of a mosque at Kabul University, and the groups finally confronted each other violently. Two young Hazara men, not part of the fighting, were studying in their dorm rooms. A group of Sunnis found them there and threw them from the window, killing both (Osman, 2013).

So, in many ways, Muharram and Ashura indicated an ambivalence among my informants. Some wanted to tone down the political aspects, to focus on the social justice lessons learned from it, while other emphasized the chance to give charity. Some wanted to celebrate in the way their grandparents did, keeping tradition alive. I never managed to talk to those who were using it for political reasons, but their presence was clear as well, as they drove their motorcades through the bazaar in Bamyan as well as the streets of cities such as Kabul. And everyone had an opinion, as to whether others were celebrating in the right, or wrong, way.



During the latter part of the day, I returned home to meet Mohammad and distribute some of the meat from the slaughtered sheep. I found that much of the meat had already been given to neighbors. All the same, we took Mohammad's van and set out to give away what was left. We delayed the trip to pick up an American who was doing government sector training. He had to lose his security detail, as Ashura is apparently considered to be a day particularly dangerous to foreigners (I am not sure why this was the case in Bamyan, as everyone I ever interacted with was very welcoming to a foreigner who wanted to learn about their religion). So, the sun beginning its descent, my husband (who was visiting), the American trainer, Mohammad and I set out to where the poorest lived, the caves, once cells for Buddhist monks and now home to those who have nowhere else to go. It was actually the first time I saw the inside of the cave houses. I was impressed by the ability of the people living there to make the caves homelike. Curtains hung in entrances. Some had actually built doors. Laundry lines stretched outside. We stopped at a few places, distributing meat. The American trainer gave away some goods like flashlights, a sleeping bag, and a pair of boots, in almost mint condition.

I later asked several friends what Karbala meant to them, and got a variety of answers. Arif, the neighbor and high school student I had mentioned earlier, says that he participates in the majlis as much as his school schedule allows. That year, he had attended six or seven of the gatherings. His family, he told me, was very involved. "We cook meat and rice and donate it to the mosque as nazr, for the entire Muharram period." Arif knew that I had heard it but he wanted to tell me the story again. "Ashura is about the martyrdom of Hussein by Yazid. Also, Hussein's children died. Little Ali Askar died, he was shot in the throat by an arrow, can you imagine? Karbala was dry. There was no water. Karbala is a desert. They could not even get water for the children. Seventy-two people were killed, and it was the darkest night for Hussein. It makes me

feel so, so sad. The children should have had water. But the enemy was too numerous.”

At first, I found it interesting that Arif considered this to have been the darkest night for Hussein. Hussein was, after all, a martyr who knew he was going to his own death. He had knowledge of his martyrdom. I later came to understand he thought it was Hussein’s darkest night not because of his own death, but because of the suffering of the children he was made to watch, which was a theme I heard repeated in Bamyan, at both majlis I attended that year, and which was recounted to me by others, too. Having released all from his service, because Hussein knew the futility of his battle, only his seventy-two personal guards, and his family, remained. His family’s presence is a central element of the story. People cry desperately for Hussein when the moment of his death is recounted. But, they also sob when thinking of thirsty children, crying for water, and never sated, only to be cut down by a tyrant. The whole story, with its many parts, resonates with the traumatic experiences gone through by its hearers and others whom they know. Surely, the theme of suffering children would resound particularly strongly with those who had been in a situation when their own children were in danger or faced (and still face) food insecurity. I now wonder if this theme, evocative as it is for all Shi’as, might be particularly emotive for Hazaras who had run into the mountains to escape the Taliban, or survived the Taliban blockade, or lived in precarity as refugees in Iran or Pakistan.

Arif’s own life history is rife with parallels to the Karbala story. He lived his whole life in Saroa-e-Syob, where I stayed for part of my research, located on a large plateau above the bazaar area, so he definitely experienced the Taliban blockade when he was a small child. While the Taliban was in control of Bamyan, a massacre occurred in the village. Seventy-some men were killed. This event impacted Arif profoundly as a child. His demeanor reminded me of the symptoms of PTSD. He had trouble looking me in the eye when talking, he would seem to move

in a shaky, jerky, manner, and his ability to navigate social situations seemed somehow inhibited. He remembers when the Taliban knocked on his door looking for his father. Knowing what was happening, his father had hidden, along with most of the other younger men, so it was the old men the Taliban killed. As a child, Arif must have been scarred by watching the oldest, respected adults in his community marched away, and then hearing the shots. Was his concern about the children of Hussein projected back to the child he had been?

Why one should cry upon hearing the martyrdom story, I found, was a point of disagreement. Arif said that people do cry for their own predicaments, but this represents a different type of sadness. He seems not to condemn those who cry for their own reasons but believes tears for Hussein are more “valuable.” Sajjad spoke disparagingly of “women who just go there to cry for their own problems.” As a professed secularist, his interest is not whether their worship is correct but whether they are being sincere. If you claim to be religious, he pointed out, then you should concern yourself with religion and not worldly issues. Mohammad took a much more understanding approach: “People, and especially women, are not allowed to cry in everyday life. They have to remain strong, always in control of their emotions, even when in private. These mourning rituals, they give them a chance to cry for their own problems. When else can they do that?”

Muharram and Ashura, then, were experienced in a variety of ways, which is very much in line with the idea that Karbala provides a sort of paradigm for life, something which can guide one’s actions and one’s responses to many different events and circumstances. For some, it represents a purely religious event. For others, it is a time to feel pain that had been felt by the founders of their faith. For others still, it serves as a catharsis for nagging problems, a chance to feel at peace with the world, or a moment to sustain the traditions of one’s forefathers. Many at

the same time take the opportunity to connect with their neighbors and help the needy. And for a few, it is a chance to make a political statement.

### **Activists Views on Religion and Muharram**

Beyond their disagreements about religious attitudes and motivations, nearly all of the activists hold in common a distrust of organized, institutional religion. This came through both when we spoke about Ashura and about religious faith more generally.

Musa is from Daikundi and worked both as a student and in a guesthouse. He expressed attitudes held by many activists as he recounted his experience of a talk by a writer (who goes by the pen name of Mohammad Ali Arzada) titled “Mirror of Islam.” The event was attended by about 150 people. Musa was incredibly enthusiastic about the talk, as were others with whom I later spoke. The most important point that Musa took from the talk, which was directed at students, were that crying and sadness are neither the only way, nor the best way, nor even the right way, to experience Ashura. What one should do instead, explained Musa, is to think about the message of Hussein, and Hussein’s goal, his reasons, in standing against Yazid. “Crying in itself doesn’t solve anything,” Musa explained.

“What did the speaker say you should do, then?” I asked.

“He said we should try to be good people, to value other human beings, to respect each other, and to be sure not to do anything that might cause violence or insecurity. We should never accept when others act in a cruel way, or corruption, or any kind of misuse of people. Hussein’s message was to be against crime, violence, cruelty, misuse of others, and corruption. So in essence, his message was a very political message.” Musa continued, “When we see these things in Afghanistan, we cannot accept them, just as Hussein did not accept cruelty and violence.

These things that people do, going to the mosque, hitting and crying, just don't make sense for real followers of Hussein." Here Musa seems to be saying that true followers will take action that will affect social justice in a society, and not simply partake in actions, no matter how pious, that does not affect the greater good of the community. Musa continued:

There were three main points we should have taken away from the speech of Arzada.

First, there are people who do not really understand what Imam Hussein stood for. These are uneducated people. And yet they try to make things sacred that aren't really sacred, and this takes away from the more important ideas of Hussein. Second, there are people who criticize what others do without really understanding what Imam Hussein stood for. So third, to avoid these problems, one must really seek out knowledge, analyze it wisely.

If one analyzes and understands the knowledge of Hussein, of Ali, and then uses these ideas for the good of human kind, then one has reached a certain, correct, pure point of knowledge oneself. Some people are bad, and some people are good, and it is the bad people who cause limitations in what the good are able to do. It is not the fault of the truly good people, they are inherently good and will find a way to seek the right path.

Groups like the Taliban create limitations for good people to achieve their goals. Only other humans prevent good people from reaching Hussein's goals, his purpose, by taking the rights of others. The biggest evil of people is corruption and cruelty.

Often, those who want peace, who work for it, who demonstrate it, they are the ones put in prison. They are sacrificing themselves, but at the same time, they are working to do good, to bring peace. So this should be what we do. This is Hussein's message. Ashura exists to show these messages. We need to stand up against those who

are making problems. Like Karzai. Arzada did not mention Karzai by name, but it was understood, from what he did say, that Karzai is part of the problem, that we must stand up to people, to politicians, like him.

Sometimes, it is good to cry during Ashura, but only for the right reasons. I was reading the website of Ayatollah Mohaqeq Kabuli. He says you should go to majlis, you should take part in the ceremony, but only in order to pass on the message of Imam Hussein, to make sure that his *qiyom*, or uprising, defense against those who did wrong things, is understood. When I pray, it is never blindly. It is only for the right things, with the right thoughts. It is better not to pray than to pray without the right intent.

In this one conversation, two main themes came up, which would be repeated to me by other activists. The first was that Muharram and Ashura are times to be devoted to Imam Hussein, what happened to him, and what he stood for. Generally, with a few exceptions, they believe that this is a period in which you should mourn for Hussein, and not focus on your own problems. Yet this does not mean you should leave your thinking in the past. The battle against tyranny, the need to stand up for what is right, even against impossible odds, is happening in Afghanistan and many other parts of the world, today. Civil society activists see what they do as directly related to and descended from the ideals for which Hussein stood.

Civil society activists see themselves as participating in this battle. They have a message of respect for human rights. They believe that Hazaras had suffered a genocide, and that in order to prevent more horrors for their people, they have to bring attention to this. All of their actions, all of their protests, are done in the name of righteousness, which descends directly from the authority of Hussein. They might not be able to talk to everyone in the community about human

rights, distrusted by some as a foreign import. But if Hussein is justice, and human rights represent the ultimate example of universal justice, then the activists are able to weave these two ideas together.

A second point I saw reflected here, and in other conversations with activists, was a sort of play on the ideas of authenticated Islam, as explained by Lara Deeb (2006), Saba Mahmood (2005) and Mandana Limbert (2010). One prays and practices a religion not just because it is one's tradition but with intent, focusing on the message. For those activists who are religious, intent can include civil society work, in which they see themselves carrying out the precepts of Hussein. For them, becoming an activist, putting yourself on the line, and openly declaring what you believe, is a practice fully in line with what Hussein stood for, making you perhaps the most authentic Shi'a of all, even if you drink alcohol and never attend mosque.

The story of Hussein's martyrdom while standing up to tyranny affirms the activists' determination to stand for what they believe is right, even in the face of danger. Some have been beaten or shot at. Even as they want allies, activists reproduce a lonely subject position as eternal victims, their religious traditions running parallel with their retellings of history and their portrayals of the situation of Hazaras today, and the real danger they face.

Those who grew up in Iran had the stories of Karbala and Hussein presented to them publicly: the Islamic Republic requires people to take part in certain public majlis ceremonies.<sup>46</sup> Those who grew up in Quetta, Pakistan, could also practice openly. Today, of course, the religious and political situation in Pakistan has changed such that people might practice Ashura rituals but risk being targeted by violence and terrorism. This has, in all likelihood, made the rituals all the more meaningful, as Quettan Hazaras and Pakistani Shi'as in general find themselves once again caught standing up for their religion against blood-thirsty terrorist groups,

such as Lashkar-e Jangvi and Lashkar-e Taiba. In this way, Quettan Hazaras can now view themselves as victims of a tyrannical ruler, as Pakistani militant Islam groups don the mask of Yazid.

The religious parallels are at times made explicitly, as when the Afshar Massacre is spoken of as the “new Karbala.” Hussein, the former mullah who had been jailed by the Taliban for supporting girls’ education, shared his views of religion at some length during an interview in his civil society office.

What we are doing, it is a new Karbala. Karbala was where Imam Hussein, a Prophet of Islam, was killed. His sister Zeinab carried on for him. He was killed for his people, and for his God. Mazari was also killed for his people and for his God. He was also defending his people and he was killed. It is true that Mazari did have some characteristics, some ideas that changed throughout his life, which would lead some to say he was not really like Hussein. He was always changing. Every day as he thought, and he considered things, he changed his position on things to be better. In the 1980s he was in Iran, cooperating with their government. But then he realized, Iran only thought of itself. It did not think of the problems of all Shi’as around the world. Iran wanted to put its own type of government here in Afghanistan, but Afghanistan is not Iran; it would not have worked. So, Mazari changed his ideas about Iran. All the same, all Shi’as share a certain kind of compassion. You can see this when you understand how both Imam Hussein and Mazari were killed in mass killings, in massacres. All Shi’as had something of the same experience.



I asked what practicing mullahs might think about what he was saying.

“Well, of course, they would not all like it. They would think that I am taking the religion too lightly! But from my point of view, I am taking it the most seriously. I have always tried to do the right thing, to stand up for those who needed someone to help them.” For a moment, I reflected upon not only all of the activism work I had seen Hussein do in Bamyan, but his story of being jailed by the Taliban, the horrors that he endured — all because he insisted girls should study. And yet he was still willing to work for justice as he understood it.

Hussein hinted that his ideas sometimes put him at odds with the Shi’a establishment in Bamyan. “I believe that only one God made the world.” But Hussein continued, “Because there is just one God, I see all people as one, too. And this has influenced my decision to work on social issues. All people are deserving. Sect is not important to me, but rather the belief in God, that one God that made all the world. It is not possible that one part is more right than another part. God sent Prophets but there were more than one. God does not see much difference between them, Mohammad and Isa (Jesus) are just different, one is not above the other. Showing the right behavior and seeing how good people behave is a very important part of religion, this can help all people. All people are good, there are no sects but just different ways to the same goal that all people must travel. People are traveling this road to help others, and at the end is religion and God.”

Hussein’s need is to help others, to devote his life to doing things that he believes will help those in his community. To him, this is what religion is about. He was trained as a mullah, but he rebelled against the establishment. He does not have a particularly bad relationship with the clerics, but they do not approve of all he says. In deciding how to live his life, two points stand out to me. First, he believes very much in Karbala and that Imam Hussein died for his

people. This is in no way at odds with the idea that Mazari also died for his people, and Hussein wholeheartedly believes that Mazari is the martyr of Hazaras, and his picture, he told me, belongs on display during Muharram. Hussein does not prioritize one above the other. Some would say that Mazari is an emulation of Imam Hussein, some would say that Mazari is even more important than Imam Hussein, because he was a more recent leader, a more recent martyr. Hussein does not want to prioritize, and he sees them all as important. He believes, somehow, that Mazari had modeled himself after Imam Hussein, and they somehow were devoted to the same thing, in that they both stood for justice. This might even be in line with what Hussein says about Jesus and Mohammad. Both were important Prophets to Islam. Mohammad is not more important than Jesus per se, according to Islam, but simply because he came later he is a more “complete” prophet: he had more knowledge, and thus what he says should be given priority. While Hussein does not seem to go quite that far in his comparison of Imam Hussein and Mazari, those who do prioritize Mazari, in fact, stress that he was more recent, as Mohammad is more recent than Jesus, and that he is concerned with “their own” people. I am not saying that any Hazara went so far as to suggest Mazari was an Imam or a Prophet. This would be complete blasphemy as the last Imam, Mahdi, is in occultation, or hiding, alive and waiting to return at the end of time. But it is not foreign to the cosmology of the Hazara Shi’as to think that a more recent leader, who was able to leverage a significant amount of political and, in a way, spiritual influence, should also be held high and emulated.

Hussein’s seeming rejection of sect, and even of the prioritization of one religion (at least, those in the Abrahamic tradition) implies that he sees all people as inherently equal. This is in line with other bits of information I know about him. He was less ethno-nationalistic than some of the other activists. He is deeply committed to women’s rights. He is very spiritual, very

religious, even, but he lives his life by his own interpretation of these moral values.

Hussein's somewhat mystical view of religion was echoed by some who were not particularly religious at all. Nawruz, student and "expert historian," told me about his relationship with religion when we met in the bazaar to talk. In a crowded men's dorm, we had a conversation on the topic of religion. "I am not against religion but like anything else, it should not be under human control. All people from different religions say that their religion is the best but they are wrong. Religion is under the control of people and yet, if it can't solve people's problems, it is useless."

I asked Nawruz what he meant by, "Under the control of the people." He was referring to organized religion, religion with a hierarchy and a clergy, and not a religion simply practiced by individuals. "All religions around the world come from all parts of the globe and meet in one place. These different aspects all have some problems but the problems are caused by humans, not by the religions themselves. When they reach the ocean, that is, God, they have no problems. So all religion should be plurality." Nawruz then continued:

As for me personally, I do not act as if religion *is* God, but I trust in God. God is the one thing there is, and all other things, including religion, are created by people. Religion should not be a game in which we defeat people, although so often this is what it turns into. I myself do not pray and I do not fast. These things are not clear in the Holy Quran, and so I believe they are created by people. If I were Christian, I would not go to church. To my way of thinking, the importance of religion should be that people come together and embrace humanism; they should focus on helping each other. If religion is keeping people from acting this

way as a group, or is not encouraging them to act this way, it is much better to act as an individual. I went on the Hajj, but while I was there, it was clear to me I could not see God. And then, after starting to study, I had so many doubts, I began to doubt my own self-existence. But I realized, one's own mind must believe one exists, and this helps the soul. I believe that people who pray in an exact way, at the same time every day, have a different way of thinking. They are more narrow-minded. They see praying as a movement and a habit, but this is not real praying. Islam and Christianity have both defined paradise, but given a choice, I would never go there. I believe one can make paradise on this earth. And, for example, Mexico City is a place worse than hell, so hell exists in this world, and not the metaphysical world.

Nawruz's views on religion were so similar to those of Hussein in some ways, and then, in others, different. God is important to Nawruz, and like Hussein, God is at the end of all paths, or rivers flowing to the ocean, as he puts it. But, organized religion has not only let him down, it has let humanity down. Organized religion leads people astray, leads them away from God, makes them closed minded. For Nawruz, God is a personal thing, but religion should also be about coming together and helping humanity. And yet he doubts that it can achieve that. And so, in this case, one must act alone to help others. Again, Nawruz is not forsaking God, something he believes in. It is a religion corrupted by people that he cannot abide.

A criticism that some level against those who are most demonstrative in their suffering is that they were not doing it for the right reasons. Some accuse others of crying simply to show the depth of their religious feeling. "They are hypocritical," Sajjad once told me, echoing a

complaint he made several times. “They cry during Ashura, but they drink home-made alcohol from the Ismailis the rest of the year.” Sajjad qualified, “I drink home-made alcohol from the Ismailis. But I do not believe in these religious things. Hazaras have bigger problems to worry about, and religion holds us back from addressing them.”

On an earlier occasion, as Muharram was approaching, I shared lunch with Mohammad and Latif at Mohammad’s house. After we ate, I asked what they thought about the upcoming holy days. Mohammad, who was religious, began to complain about hypocrisy. He was forgiving of those who might use Ashura majlis as a catharsis for their problems. But he also believed that it was wrong to make a public display of it. In addition, he said that when he prays, he tries to focus his mind only on God and Hussein. Mohammad stated that, “For me, Ashura is a personal thing. I only go to the mosque on the tenth day of Muharram. My relatives, they give me a hard time, they tell me I have converted [to Christianity]. I say, fine, think that I have converted, if you want, because that is only between me and God.”

Like Mohammad, Latif also complained about the hypocrisy people showed during Ashura. “Many people just go to the mosque and pray. They pray to God, for Hussein, about their problems, and they are fine. But some, some just want to show off that they are good people, even if they drink and do other such things the rest of the year. Or, they pray more for their own problems than for Hussein. Often these are young people trying to make themselves visible during this time, to cover up all the bad things they do the rest of the year”.

A number of these activists, then, work to keep their religion pure. Some condemn those who go to majlis and other religious events, and pray too ostentatiously, calling them hypocrites. A comparison can be drawn with how the activists view their civil society work. That, too, is something that must be kept pure. As religion is corruptible by some clergy members, or by

people who participate for the wrong reasons, so, too, is civil society work corruptible by government affiliation, or by activists who work only for political power and money, and not to improve the lives of Hazaras.

Nawruz told me during one of our subsequent meetings in the bazaar, this time together with my good friend Reza, that he had written an essay on Mazari. “In this essay, I make the suggestion that Mazari is more non-Muslim than Muslim,” he said. “I compare him to the Greek philosopher Socrates, to Che Guevara, as well as to Ali, Hussein, and Abraham Lincoln. We must consider others’ perceptions of things in order to understand them, to understand how great they were. The way Mazari perceived being human is that it is not so important to concern yourself with simply staying alive. Rather it is important to concern yourself with honesty, with ideals. Perhaps Mazari did not have some of the characteristics that these others had to the same degree, but still, he had them.”

When I asked Nawruz again for some thoughts on religion, he said, “Hussein has not ruled my life, this is true. But Mazari, he worked in my life, unlike Imam Hussein. Mazari is like Abraham Lincoln and Martin Luther King. To Mazari, all people were important. Yes, Mazari said that oppressors should be killed. But he also said that all humans should live, no matter their ethnicity. Nothing is hidden about Mazari’s life.”

Let me pause to consider the “great men” that Nawruz chose to compare to Mazari, Imam Hussein and Ali. Socrates was tried for his philosophy and put to death. Che Guevara was killed fighting for what he believed was right in Bolivia. Abraham Lincoln was assassinated. So was Martin Luther King. Gandhi was assassinated by a Hindu nationalist. All of the heroes mentioned were martyrs. This is not to say that Hazara activists do not find other heroes from outside their own cultural milieu. But martyrdom fits with the Karbala Paradigm, as does the

subsequent martyrdom of their leader, Mazari. In spite of Nawruz being possibly the most contrarian of my informants, for him, too, the symbolic patterns of Karbala are still palpable. If not religiously Shi'a, Nawruz is certainly "culturally" Shi'a.

### **Institutionalized Religion**

I was told that there was a time everyone had a picture of Khomeini in a corner of their house, on display like an icon. When Khomeini initially came to power, Hazaras thought that he would also be their leader. But this changed rapidly. Relations with Iran soured, and Hazaras' relationship with Iran changed, particularly among the well-educated. It also changed for the many who went to Iran as refugees and came back to recount that they were not welcomed as brothers in Shi'ism, but simply "dirty Afghans." I have yet to meet a returned refugee with a positive story of Iran.

There is a prequel to this story. Early in my fieldwork, I met with Ali Amiri, a well-known Hazara activist, political figure, and social science professor. We discussed many themes, including Shi'ism and Iran. While Islam tends to be decentralized, Shi'ism has a system of madrasas, or Islamic schools, grouped into *hawzas*, centers of learning. The two most important hawzas are located in Najaf, Iraq and Qom, Iran. Anyone who wishes to further their religious studies at an advanced level must spend time at these hawzas. There sit the most important Shi'a religious scholars, the ayatollahs, and the marja-e-taqlid himself (the sole cleric whose faith one should emulate).<sup>47</sup> Although there is no clear path to becoming the marja-e-taqlid, there is a method of consensus, whereby the top scholars, the ayatollahs, slowly give approval as to who can first join their ranks, and then be considered the marja-e-taqlid. The choice is made on the basis of public renown, authoritativeness of teaching, diffusion of one's publications, and more.

However, a break in this system of reproduction of religious authority and standing occurred. The Ayatollah Khomeini made his case for the necessity for an Islamic government to guide the people through his idea of the *vilayat-e-faqih*,<sup>48</sup> an idea promoted in a speech in Najaf in 1970 (Khomeini 1981). After the Islamic Revolution in Iran, he was able to turn this concept into a reality. Up to this point, political thought in Iran had concerned itself not with Islamism but with the corrupt nature of the Pahlavi regime and by concerns about direct and indirect Western control at all levels, from economic to cultural (Keddie 2003). What Khomeini did was not simply to create an Islamic revolution, but through his use of *vilayat-e-faqih*, to revolutionize Shi'ism as a tool for rule (Arjomand 1988). Qom then became a seat of political Shi'ism. Around the same time, the secular, largely Sunni-controlled Baath regime in Iraq began to restrict the activities of the Najaf hawza (Louer 2008). Najaf came to stand for disengagement from politics, the necessity of quietism, while Qom came to stand for the opposite, political Shi'ism.

In our conversation, Amiri said,

Religion should not follow politics. This is a long Shi'a tradition, and it is the view of Sistani [Ayatollah al-Sistani is one of the most important Shi'a clerics in the world, based in Najaf, who *should* in theory be sole marja-e-taqlid had Iran not usurped political Shi'ism]. This Najafi view of religion; it is the stronger, deeper, view of Hazaras. Of course, after the Iranian revolution, the Qomi, the Khomeinist, point of view, was very seductive for Hazaras and many others. So, there are a lot of ayatollahs who endorse this point of view. You might even find that a majority embrace this point of view, but we should really, in the case of Hazaras, pay more attention to the core, Najafi way of thinking. We should give more prominence to Hazaras who follow Najafi principles,



because this is our heritage. Me, I manage to be religious, and secular, at one time. And I believe politics should not be influenced by religion, and vice versa. Otherwise, religion is tainted by worldly things.

Amiri's belief that many Hazaras, especially clerics, had been seduced by Khomeini's message, but that this was antithetical to the Hazara way, clearly echoes activists' views of civil society. It must not be tainted by government or religious institutions, for both had let Hazaras down.

I also met with several members of the clergy, whose views should enter at this point. First, Ayatollah Waiez Zada Behsudi, the youngest ayatollah in Afghanistan, met me at his madrasa in West Kabul's Dasht-e-Barchi neighborhood. He was very kind, small framed, with a pointed beard and sparkling eyes. He spent a great amount of time with me. We discussed all manners of things, but on religion, he was clear: "Religion and politics should go together. This is what the Prophet said. Religion needs to guide all things." Ayatollah Behsudi studied for thirteen years in Qom and two in Najaf before returning to Afghanistan. He told me he wanted to use his standing as ayatollah to help his people. "I was briefly nominated as a vice-presidential candidate," he said. "I will guide my people as best I can, and that includes helping politics to be guided by religion."

Later, during Muharram, I met Ayatollah Sharifi, who is older, but actually has less training — in fact, it is debated whether he actually benefits from a consensus that he is an ayatollah. He too was kind, if somewhat gruff. Around sixty, a long white beard is the most notable feature of his appearance. He spent ten years studying in Najaf but was forced out due to the political problems of the Baath regime. He then spent time in Iran and Pakistan, but once the Taliban was removed, he returned to Afghanistan. "I am ethnically Hazara. It was my duty to

serve my people, as I felt my religious education was done. The international community was here, serving my people, so I felt I should do the same. Plus, Hazaras were especially deprived, particularly during the Taliban. There were several massacres against them. As a knowledgeable person, I felt I should come back and help my society. And as a Hazara, I felt like I should come back and help Hazaras in particular.”

When I asked about politics, he said, “Reverence of Hussein is a mix of political and religious, and in my point of view, in following religion, politics cannot be separated. I do both at the same time and bring awareness to both.”

All my readings and discussions support the view that major Shi’a religious figures in Afghanistan, like Behsudi and Sharifi, want to be involved in politics in some way. And, of course, they are getting support from the people. The civil society activist stance is very clearly the opposite: politics and religion need to be separate — religion could be contaminated by politics and vice versa. With a clearly politically involved clergy (uncounted more examples could be added to the two I have cited) the distance between civil society and clergy could hardly be greater.

But the problem extends to another issue, Iran. Not one activist I met had anything good to say about Iran. Iran, they believed, had abandoned the Hazaras during the civil war and the Taliban years. Yes, perhaps Iran gave some small sums of money, but not at a level close to what the Sunni mujahedin groups were receiving. Also, uncounted stories (even today) contend that Iran treats Hazara refugees very badly. They not only are often denied work permits, or schooling, but everyday racism is common. “I got tired of being called a ‘dirty son of Chingiz’” one of the female activists, Halima, told me, about her time in Iran. A taxi driver told me, “Yes, they treated me so badly there! Once some people threw eggs at me, just out of cruelty!” A

combination of state disregard for the needs of refugees and such racism soured Hazaras on Iran. Many told me they would prefer to follow Ayatollah Kabuli, who though not Hazara, as an Afghan even so knows their problems better than the Iranian clerics. When I ventured that many clerics did, in fact, manage to remain independent, I was met with dismissal. Yes, they said, you read that in your books, but we know what the truth is. And when I asked about Najafi Shi'ism, a number agreed that Ayatollah Sistani, the most important Ayatollah in Najaf, was good, and that they follow him as marja. Very few are aware that among the four most important Ayatollahs in Najaf, one, Fayoz, was Hazara. When I asked about him, most said he had been gone for too long (he is 85 or 86 years old).<sup>49</sup> One or two people I knew followed him as marja. My most secular informants told me they did not need a marja, that they were old men out of touch with the modern world. One told me he followed as marja Abdolkarim Soroush, who is not a cleric but an Iranian philosopher. His importance as a thinker and appointment as a visiting professor at the University of Maryland may have been things this person found appealing. The idea of marja-e-taqlid seems more than ever open to reinvention, in ways that would make Khomeini roll in his grave.

To conclude, activists base much of what they do on the Karbala Paradigm. Some of this is quite intentional, while at other times, it seems to be that Karbala serves as an almost subconscious pattern that they put to use without realizing. But Karbala stands quite apart from organized, institutional religion. There are several reasons activists mistrust institutional religion. First, they tie it inextricably with Iran, and they believe that Iran approaches Afghanistan as a pawn in a geopolitical game. Hopes that an alliance with Iran having been dashed, when Iran does contribute something — builds a new mosque or sponsors a cultural center, for example — it is immediately interpreted as an effort to “use” Hazaras against Iran’s enemies — foremost, the

Americans. When the United States builds a cultural center or a school, ulterior motives are not raised by activists. Hazaras also suffered — and continue to suffer — as refugees in Iran, or as migrants today trying to pass through to Europe. Stories abound of migrants being forced by traffickers to carry drugs, and then being hung if caught. Other stories proliferate of Hazaras being pressured to fight for Assad's Syria with Iranian support. And as long as the most important Afghan clerics, as well as the lower clerics, continue to insist that religion and politics must go hand in hand, Hazara concerns will persist about the Iranian and even Najafi clergy (which many claim is also dominated by Iran).

Religion, for many of the activists, then, must not be tainted by religious institutions. It should instead be something personal, which you believe or not on your own terms. It certainly is a source of inspiration, as all are moved by the story of Karbala. Much like the political ideals I discuss in the previous chapter, which are perceived to be subject to pollution by state institutions, an anti-institutional bias positions the ideals of Karbala as something the activists may claim to be better prepared to protect than the religious authorities.

## Chapter Six

### The Afshar Massacre Remembrance as a Collective Memory Event

“We mourn Hussein and his family during Ashura, we cry for him, and hit ourselves,” Qasim explained, as we discussed Ashura, the holy day commemorating the killing of Hussein and his family. Qasim is the Quetta native who moved to Bamyan and found a job with Save the Children. “But that happened so long ago, and in another place. We Hazaras are being killed now. Genocide is committed against us. This is our Karbala. This is what we should pay more attention to.”

In this chapter, I focus on how the Karbala Paradigm is reflected in Hazaras’ remembrance of the Afshar Massacre, the massive loss of life that happened in 1993 in the Afshar sector of Western Kabul. Both remembrances, that of Afshar Massacre and that of the death of Hussein, happen every year. I attended Afshar remembrance events in 2013 in Bamyan. The events were planned and organized by the civil society activists who were my main informants, and attended by many others in the community. The remembrance events consisted of three components: a speech by a leading activist which related Afshar directly to Karbala, a viewing of a film concerning Afshar, and a procession/protest through the Bamyan bazaar. The film, which shows, sometimes explicitly, the aftermath of the Afshar Massacre, is like a passion play — the ta’ziyah through which the death of Hussein is reenacted. It provokes profound expressions of grief among those who view it.<sup>50</sup> The protest march bears resemblance to the processions held by Shi’as on Ashura. Activists make use of the Karbala Paradigm broadly to guide their actions and to self-reference themselves as protagonists suffering at the hands of the unjust. Afshar remembrances make the parallels with Karbala explicit, through the clear references made within these remembrances to the sacrifice of Hussein.

In 1993, during the civil war after the fall of Najibullah's Communist government (1992), the "Afshar Massacre" or "Afshar Operation" occurred. The civil war took place between 1992 and 1996. The various mujahedin factions, which had opposed the Soviets and Afghan Communists, fought intensely, mainly in Kabul. The war ended when the Taliban came to power. While the Afshar Massacre is often treated as a side note to the history of the civil war, for Hazaras it was a pivotal moment in their recent history. In this episode, protracted fighting in the streets of the Afshar sector resulted in the deaths of a disputed number of ethnic Hazaras. Some estimate the casualties to have been in the hundreds, while others estimate the loss of life to have been as high as 7,000; disagreement about the numbers will likely never be resolved.<sup>51</sup>

The chain of events leading to the massacre was set in motion when the so-called legitimate government, headed by Burhanuddin Rabbani as President, and the much lauded commander Ahmad Shah Massoud as Minister of Defense, lost the support of Abdul Ali Mazari, the leader of the ethnic Hazara party Hizb-e-Wahdat. The reason for this break is unclear, but may lay in rumored plans by Massoud to disarm Hizb-e-Wahdat before the other mujahedin factions, leaving Hazaras vulnerable,<sup>52</sup> or because four fairly high-ranking Wahdat members were allegedly killed without provocation by Massoud's forces while returning from a party meeting. Whatever the catalyst, Mazari then made a non-aggression pact with Gulbuddin Hekmatyar of the Hizb-e-Islami party, the main faction fighting Rabbani's government at the time, allowing Hekmatyar to operate out of Wahdat-controlled West Kabul. Hekmatyar had been shelling Kabul, resulting in scores of deaths, bringing Hizb-e-Wahdat and the Afshar district into Massoud's crosshairs. Hizb-e-Wahdat forces likely also committed acts of violence against other groups at this time. In February of 1993, Massoud ordered the shelling of the Afshar area. Subsequently, another government affiliated commander, Abdul Rasul Sayyaf, led his Ittihad-e-

Islami party forces through the Afshar area of Kabul. Many civilians were killed in the house to house fighting. Other were kidnapped; some were later released but most never seen again. Rape was reported to have been common as well, with the great importance attached to women's purity and consequent terrible social implications for the victim complicating the gathering of evidence about these crimes. Sayyaf's Wahhabi ideology would have led him to look down on Shi'as as heretics or worse, apostates.

Building on Halbwachs' theory of "collective memory" (1989 [1950]), I argue that the story of Afshar has become a "group memory," which provides a framework around which Hazaras contextualize their own individual, and at times unrelated, memories of trauma. Like the wider phenomenon of cultural trauma, collective memory is not necessarily experienced directly by individuals but spread among the members of a group through collective memory-making events. The Afshar memorials I witnessed were such collective memory-making events, intended to bring awareness to and induce the spread of a collective trauma among Hazaras, specifically relating to Afshar. While Afshar was not the worst instance of violence against Hazaras in recent memory, it seems to capture the attention of the Hazara community more than any other.<sup>53</sup>

## **The Remembrance**

Collective memory emerges through the memorialization of a traumatic event by a group (many of whom, like my civil society activist acquaintances, might not have experienced the event personally). Defined this way, the remembrance that I witnessed in February 2013, the twentieth anniversary of the massacre, was an exercise in collective memory-building. Community members attended the event not just to remember but to learn. The activists' intention was to show those in attendance that they were all targeted in Afshar, as they were all Hazaras. In other

words, the event, both the film and speech portions, were carried out in such a way that Afshar was presented as an attack on all Hazaras. Worse, several of those implicated in the attack still held government positions, and so justice had never been obtained. Framed thus, as an attack against all Hazaras as a group, Afshar remembrances serve to create and spread collective trauma. This generalization of the event as something affecting all Hazaras changed its genre from historical to group memory.

The event was also extremely emotional. Much of the audience cried as they listened to what had happened and watched a film about it. I myself was moved to tears during the film. Afshar, for activists and many other Hazaras, is somehow untouchable, something that cannot be questioned, because it elicits such affect. The reason that it does elicit such strong emotion is related to the fact that it is generalizable; that it is now perceived by many as an act against all Hazaras.

Activists indicated that as Afshar is generalized as an attack against all Hazaras, it can hence be interpreted as an act of genocide. Afshar remembrances also provide implicit support for other victimization narratives, so common among activists. In this context, Afshar is more than a single, solitary event; it is also an emblem of the many attacks against Hazaras in recent history. Activists point to it as one of the most egregious examples, but only one among many terrible events, of the ongoing genocide against Hazaras. Activists constantly stress the existential threat faced by Hazaras, and Afshar is one of the most important proofs of this. For the Hazara activists, one of the main features of the cultural trauma they are striving to spread is that the threat is not over, that the targeted killings and genocide continue to this day. Feeling unhinged from their own history, a history that is separate from that of the rest of Afghanistan, they adopt the mantle of the victim as a main feature of identity.



This also relates to the Karbala Paradigm as a broader cognitive schema for life. Events memorializing Karbala at Muharram can also be extreme in the affect they elicit. But the comparisons go further. One way to interpret Karbala for Shi'as is to see themselves as the eternal underdog, and Shi'as have lived under (sometimes harsh) Sunni rule for long enough that this interpretation not only has credibility, but is a main marker of political identity. The Afshar Massacre is the event that activists compare most often to Karbala. Even as many of the protests and actions of the activists in general seem to draw upon the paradigm for inspiration, Afshar is explicitly and often referred to as "our Karbala." Yet Afshar is, by many, categorized as worse than Karbala, because Karbala was not a genocide.

One important background consideration is that people belonging to other ethnic groups in Afghanistan express frustration with the attention given to Afshar. Many view it as a legitimate military operation, marred by terrible excesses but not worse than what happened elsewhere and to other groups during the conflict. After all, it is pointed out, rockets were being fired out of West Kabul at an alarming rate, and Massoud, as defense minister, had to stop this barrage.

And yet, Hazaras see themselves uniquely as the victims of Afshar, and they see Sayyaf, Massoud, and even Rabbani as unjust perpetrators of cruelty aimed at them as a people. Perhaps this feeling comes in part from Afshar's symbolic importance in a larger strategy of Hazara advancement: it has been reported that Hazaras thought their strong control of West Kabul might give them one basis for claiming a fair role in governance, from which they had so long been excluded (Maley 2009). These hopes for political inclusion were first set back by the killings of Wahdat members and attempts to disarm Wahdat early in the post-Najibullah period, and then

obliterated by the rockets and house to house killings by the Ittehad-al-Islami forces of Abdul Rassul Sayyaf.

The presence of a soon to be martyred figure, the leader (*rahbar shahid*), Mazari, is another parallel between Karbala and Afshar. Mazari is said to have been in West Kabul when the attacks started. One of the most beloved parables told about him by Bamyan people, activists and non-activists alike, concerns his willingness to stay in the area despite the danger posed by the bombardments and Sayyaf's forces. One of the many reasons Mazari was exceptional, Hazaras say, is that he told the people of West Kabul, "Do not worry, I will stay with you." His fate was their fate. Of course, Mazari would not die in Afshar but later, at the hands of the Taliban, but his death, like Hussein's, involved going willingly to a likely death for the sake of his people. While I heard the connection to Hussein stated explicitly on only a few occasions, it is evident in the way Mazari is spoken about. Both are understood to have fought a tyrannical ruler for the sake of justice and to have stayed with their followers even when surrounded by overwhelming enemy forces.

Regardless why importance is given to Afshar, it seems safe to say that activists, political figures, and others work to spread the memory of the Afshar Massacre among Hazaras as a collective memory and shared trauma. The ways in which high symbolic value is invested in this event include street posters and processions, speeches, and social media. This in spite of no one I knew in Bamyan having been present in Afshar at any point during the massacre. The Afshar remembrance was the best attended protest of all of those I observed during my year in Bamyan. In fact, more people took to the streets for the Afshar memorial protests than for Ashura. The Afshar memorials of 2013 put on display the means by which the activists seek to instill collective memory.

Several non-activists claimed to have known very little, or even heard of Afshar before seeing the memorial protests.<sup>54</sup> The civil society activists, acting as “memory entrepreneurs,” were aware of the power of images in shaping collective memory, and made strategic use of Afshar-related images to do this. In February 2013, they used a two-pronged approach. On the night before the anniversary of Afshar, they showed a film, *Baroye Tarikh* (For History), which was preceded by a series of speeches, open to the public. The film featured speeches by Mazari about Afshar and scenes from Afshar itself. On the second day, a protest/memorial march was held in the center of town which incorporated aspects of the film with other visual cues — placards, political cartoons, and the image of the marchers themselves — which were later further circulated using social media. While the actual events during the commemoration created a public memory — a memory shared among people present at a particular time and place (Casey 2004) — they also reached beyond the people physically present. I found many Hazaras who claimed to have known nothing about the Afshar events before the commemoration, later to be well-versed about it and to speak about it in terms of what “they” as Hazaras had suffered, suggesting that activists succeeded quite well in framing Afshar as part of a larger collective victimization.

### **Afshar as Karbala: An Activist’s Speech**

The speech preceding the film viewing was given by Neamat, one of the best-respected activists in Bamyan. Neamat was an older man, distinguished looking, who did not attend many protests. When he did make appearances, other activists made sure to attend and treat him with deference. Neamat was known as an author and a mullah, having attended madrasa for a number of years. This point was always stressed when people talked to me about him, and it seemed to give him

more legitimacy when talking about Karbala. On this day, the event was attended by over one hundred people. Many had brought their children, despite the graphic nature of the topic and the film. People wanted their children to be aware of what had happened, and what was happening, to Hazaras.

As Neamat started speaking, he stressed several times that Afshar was part of an ongoing, systematic genocide against Hazaras. It had started long before, during the reign of Abdur Rahman Khan and even earlier, and continued in the present. He compared Afshar to another example of mass killing, the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima. For Neamat, Afshar was even worse, because although the Hiroshima bombing meant the murder of many people, it did not include face-to-face stealing, burning, and killing.

The use of the word “genocide” by activists is important in that it links the killings of Hazaras to mass killings that are recognized as being particularly heinous by Westerners. Genocide morally demands an intervention from the international community, while distancing the violent Orientalistic portrayals of war in Afghanistan as “tribal” in nature and therefore without solution. Often, activists use the word in Farsi for “massacre” or mass killing, *qatl a’am*, as a synonym for genocide. These two words, translated directly mean “general murder” or “collective murder.” Another, more precise translation for genocide, *nasl kushi*, means literally, “the killing of a generation” and hence does not fit exactly what happened at Afshar. Therefore, similes to other events, here Hiroshima, where an entire city, including women and children, young and old, was wiped out, help get the point across. Sometimes activists use the English loan word “genocide” while also using comparisons to other historical events to make their meaning clearer to a non-English speaking audience. At other times still, they use the word *kha’lukast*, borrowed from English and of course referring to the Holocaust of the Jews in

Second World War Europe. However, activists also pointed out that this term was useful because it brought to mind burning and destruction that had been intentionally brought upon their houses, both by setting on fire and bombardments.<sup>55</sup>

Later in his speech, Neamat invoked the Karbala Paradigm directly. He said, “In Karbala, it was certainly true that people were killed and murdered, but everyone needs to remember it happened a very long time ago. Yet, today, people still remember it, talk about it, and mourn for the dead. At Karbala, many were killed, many children were even killed. But,” he continued, “Afshar was actually worse than Karbala. More people were killed. More children were killed. For this reason, Afshar needs to be remembered just as much as Karbala. Afshar was an extraordinarily terrible historical event, one that stands apart from other events.”

Neamat then placed the blame for Afshar upon three main actors. “First and foremost was Sayyaf, who went house to house killing people. Second was Rabbani, who although not perhaps directly implicated, was president and a man of knowledge and hence should have known better than to act in such a way. And third was the actual murderer, the defense minister who gave the order for the operation, Massoud.” Sayyaf, the one who actually led ground forces into Afshar and likely ordered the killings and kidnapping, has, like Yazid, become a name that is synonymous with evil among Hazara activists. Rabbani’s role was less clear, but as the supposed head of the state, and an educated man, Neamat implicated him because he should have acted differently. He purported to be the one who would bring peace to Afghanistan, had studied Islamic Law at Kabul University and Islamic theology at Al-Azhar in Cairo, and lacking the Wahhabi leaning of Sayyaf should have treated even Shi’as with more compassion. And finally there was Massoud, whose guilt from the Hazara point of view will probably be most difficult for Western readers to understand. Massoud has been lauded in the West as the preeminent

freedom-fighter mujahed, a military genius who was able to keep the Soviets out of the Panjshir Valley, from which he hailed.<sup>56</sup> Massoud, a French speaker who engaged with Western policy makers and reporters, was mourned in the West when he was assassinated by al-Qaeda two days before the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. For the Hazaras, Massoud represents something totally different. As the Defense Minister of Rabbani's government, he made the decisions, first, to attempt to disarm Hizb-e-Wahdat and then to attack Afshar.<sup>57</sup>

Neamat went on to say, "Horrible things have happened in many times and many places, but Afshar was recent and happened right here, in Afghanistan. For this reason, this is the genocide (qatl' a'am) those in Afghanistan should pay attention to, not other instances of cruelty in other places." Other activists echo this theme, asserting that Afshar was worse than other atrocities in Afghanistan and that the massacre's aim was to eliminate Hazaras and not just win strategic advantage in the fight for Kabul. All this fits with the implied message that the Hazaras are a particularly vulnerable group.

Neamat meandered a bit, speaking about Afghanistan's history, in general, and the geographical location which Hazaras inhabit at the center of the country. He said that there needs to be a place for Hazaras, a place for Shi'as, not just a geographical place, but also a place in education, a place in the government. He stated his intention that Hazaras live as brothers with all other groups in Afghanistan, something that until that point had been denied them. His focus on place, both physical and metaphorical, fits also with Hazara activists' concern with past land removals, present land conflicts with kuchi nomads, and historical ties to the land as the region's autochthonous (*boumi*, original) people. Neamat was able to extend this concern with "place" to one's place in society, two issues which may seem separate but which for Hazaras are linked. Neamat pondered,

What are Kabul's intentions? Mazari actually formed a government for Hazaras when he was head of Hizb-e-Wahdat. He formed a government that worked. He formed a government that was concerned with human rights, with women's rights. Hekmatyar, who led a group of Pashtuns, did not do this. Neither did Ismail Khan, leader of the Heratis. But Mazari got Hazaras to think about equality, about rights for all, early, before the United States intervened in Afghanistan. For this reason, Hazaras must work especially hard to become educated, to get jobs in the government, to become leaders of Afghanistan. Afshar was an event against Hazaras, and the enemies who did this are clear, and they are still here, and they still commit genocide.

The link is implied in Neamat's speech, but on occasion people directly compare Mazari to Hussein. Like Hussein, Mazari is said to have fought for justice, for the rights of his people, and was martyred for it. Yet if Hazaras feel righteous in their belief in human rights and gender equality, or at least think themselves better on this score than the rest of Afghanistan, fatalism is an even more pervasive mood. A common narrative is that Hazaras are still suffering under an unjust government and will suffer for as long as Shi'as suffer at the hands of Sunnis. Ultimately, the hidden Imam must return to bring justice to the world. Hence, even activists seem pessimistic that things will ever be better for them. Even as they believe the values for which they work are pure and just, and feel a duty to try to improve things and do what is right for Afghanistan, they fear they will ultimately fail. Despite all the hope exhibited in the many protests I attended, all of

the activists were pessimistic, speaking at time as if a savior could only emerge from the outside, in the form of Western intervention.

Neamat's words about history are imbued with this sense that Hazaras have historically been the losing side and as such are written out of Afghanistan's history books. "The history of Afghanistan is not a history of all of its people," he said (a complaint voiced often by activists). "Abdur Rahman killed or removed sixty percent of the Hazaras, but Abdur Rahman is the one in the history books, not the Hazaras who were killed." Perhaps together with the local journalists in the crowd, I felt Neamat's next statement pointed at me.

Those of you here who write, you must write about this. You must write about those killed. You must write about those who were pushed out of their homelands, out of the provinces like Kandahar and Uruzgan. This story is not told in the history. Hazaras are part of the history of Afghanistan, and it is a difficult history. But if one writes only of military events, if one today writes of the Taliban, then that is not enough. These people, these were the victims, the martyrs, the *shahidan*. This should be their history, too.

Neamat began to wrap up his speech with direct reference to Karbala:

How many people were martyred, how many homes were destroyed, how many children were killed and livelihoods destroyed at Afshar? And yet people are not crying for this. When people think of Karbala, something that happened many years ago, they cry. When people think of Hussein, of Zeinab (Hussein's sister), they cry. This is the event that stands out for them. But just twenty years ago, Afshar happened, and it did not get the



same attention. Mazari was the most important martyr of the Hazaras, but today, only his own people remember him. Massoud murdered and killed, but unfortunately history remembers him differently. Rabbani was recently killed and they named the university for him,<sup>58</sup> but what memorial is there for Afshar? We are guests in our own country.

Neamat, by concluding with a call for history to be re-examined, not only highlights the importance of collective memory but identifies a memory gap, which is itself one aspect of the Karbala Paradigm: Sunnis and Shi'as today have very different interpretations of what took place at Karbala and of what the roles of Hussein and Yazid were.

In the end, however, Neamat's appeal for memory is anchored more in the emotions than in reason. He references the passion, the suffering and death of Hussein, the suffering and humiliation of Zeinab. He knows, of course, that almost everyone in the room grew up actively mourning these figures, experiencing emotional and possibly physical pain in sympathy with them. He knows that the mention of Hussein and Zeinab and of the events of Karbala can strike a deep emotional chord among his audience. He then says that Afshar was worse: more people died, *their own* people, not people of the Arabian Peninsula, and it was *only twenty years ago*. His final statement, "We are guests in our own country," reminds everyone of what is at stake: a place in the country of Afghanistan. The tacitly referenced context is that people from other groups in Afghanistan often speak of and to Hazaras as if they should be happy to be allowed to stay at all. The Karbala Paradigm, paradoxically, gains in meaning and suggestive power by relating Karbala to, or even replacing it, with Afshar. Karbala, when transfigured as Afshar, casts Hazaras as mourners for their own people and their own martyr, Mazari.

Neamat's words may have reached some, and not others, in the audience. Fewer would remain unmoved by the film that followed his speech. This was truly a Passion play, moving every person in the room to tears. Based on documentary footage of people searching for their loved ones, finding their bodies, and crying and screaming in agonized mourning, the film establishes that one way for sure in which Afshar was "worse" than Karbala is that its aftermath was captured on video.

### **The Film: *Baroye Tarikh* (For History)**

Made by Naim Paik, a diaspora Hazara,<sup>59</sup> who used mostly Wahdat footage spliced together, *Baroye Tarikh* features clips showing the Afshar sector after the killings took place, interspersed with footage and voiceovers of speeches by Mazari. The title of the film, "For History," speaks to its goal, ostensibly to see Afshar included prominently in the history of Afghanistan. When activists showed the film in Bamyan at the twentieth anniversary remembrance of the massacre, it was obviously with the goals of making the audience feel that they, too, were a part of this history and hence of fomenting the formation of a collective memory of this traumatic event. The intent was not only to inform but to trigger emotions and promote sympathy.

The film opens with images of previous leaders of Afghanistan from the past 200 years. It then shows scenes of education and development in the 1960s and 1970s in Kabul. The scenes then change in nature, showing events in the Saur Revolution, or the coup that brought the Communist (PDPA) Party to power in 1978, the Soviet invasion in 1979 to support the communists, and the 1992 accession to power of Mojaddedi, signaling the end of Communist rule. The scene then cuts to Mazari being embraced and welcomed by Hazaras. This visual recitation of established historical events places the images of and speeches about Afshar, which

follow, in the context of Afghan history, a context which implies that the film seeks to situate its version of the contested facts about the Afshar Massacre on the same plane as the uncontested “facts” of history, such as who led Afghanistan over the past 200 years. The opening sequences, then, seek to situate the film as incontestable history.

The very fact that in Bamyan there are very few people who actually witnessed Afshar places added weight on this film as a memory-creating device. The activists felt that there really was a need for people to learn about the events. Accordingly, all viewers were welcome after the showing to have a copy of the film put onto their own flash drives so they could watch and share it with others.

Early in the film, the unity of Hazaras as a people is stressed. Mazari is shown giving a speech concerning the lack of rights of Hazaras, the fact that they are subject to persecution, when all they want is equality. Mazari also says that all of Afghanistan needs to be unified with no one group left out. It soon becomes apparent that he is talking about the Constitution of Rabbani’s government. This was especially evocative for the audience, as of course they know that the film is about Afshar, and hence are quick to link the earlier acts of exclusion with the later killings. Mazari goes on to speak about leaders of other groups who have either explicitly displayed prejudice (*taishub*) against Hazaras or who have spoken of working with Hazaras, only to turn on them. A fairly long scene depicts multitudes listening to the speech, declaring the greatness of Mazari as leader, giving him flowers and wreaths. The crowds bow and kiss his hand, and declare his greatness. Not only the facts of Hazara exclusion, but also Mazari’s greatness, are things that most Hazaras agree upon today, regarding Mazari as a great leader, who started them on the path of equality (*barobari*) and against oppression (*mazlum*). Activists say Mazari made them conscious of the fact that they need to demand their rights. All Hazaras

know how Mazari died, attempting to broker a deal with the Taliban that might save his people. The scenes of Mazari also return Hazaras to a time when they were largely unified politically. Their cohesiveness as a group is emphasized, preparing the viewer to derive meanings of general significance for Hazaras as a group from the singular event of the Afshar Massacre. Viewers are also prepared to become witnesses of Afshar — to not just look upon what happened, but to report it to others.

The film continues with more speeches by Mazari. He catalogs the many atrocities of Afshar, the people shot, beaten, their throats cut, women and children killed. The list is long. As Mazari speaks, the film transports its viewers to Afshar. Houses burn as opposing forces fire upon Afshar, intercut with scenes of what appear to be Tajiks or Pashtuns firing artillery. The audience is slowly drawn into the horror. Mazari's speech is interrupted from time to time by testimonials of people who lost loved ones. A woman appears on the screen and says, "My husband was killed in Afshar. His body was in a house, no one was there to bury him, for eight or nine days his body stayed there until they buried him." The film cuts back to Mazari, and then another woman appears, this one more frantic and crying. "My child, who was seven years old, his throat was cut by them."

At a certain point, more graphic scenes start to appear. Bodies are lined up on the ground; a giant hole turns into a mass grave as people lower bodies into it. Horrific scenes are shown of children's bodies, mangled by rockets or some other attack. At times, you do not even really know what you are seeing; you just know you are looking at death, the result of a full-scale rocket attack against a densely populated urban area, followed by a house-to-house campaign to kill whoever was left. You have heard this is what Afshar was like but that is not the same as

seeing it. In a dark room, surrounded by members of the ethnic group that was under attack, you are part of it. You cannot escape it, packed in, sitting close, side by side.

The film once again alternates these scenes with Mazari's speeches, or pairs them with his words as voiceover. The content of the Mazari speeches shifts to the need to remember: "We will never forget this painful event that happened in Afshar, and our future generations will feel pain because of this event." Hearing Mazari's voice as we watch these images reminds the viewer that he stayed in Afshar. You are transported to Afshar, and you can hear him there as well. He was willing to give up everything for his people. And yet, despite the horror of what has happened, despite the deaths, Mazari speaks of hope. After discussing the oppression of Hazaras by Abdur Rahman, Mazari says, "You have to remember this point in history. Our people, after a long, deprived situation, after all these sufferings and oppressions, all these things have been like a message to the people, that they should make a decision about their destiny. Now this chance is given to you. All you people who are here, you were hated, you suffered, now you feel free. Don't be afraid of anything. You should not be afraid, as you were not afraid in the past."

Mazari could as easily be speaking to all Shi'as as to ethnic Hazaras. He speaks of unending oppression and ongoing killing. All in the audience of the film believe that they still might be killed, because Afghanistan is an unstable place in which many do not like Hazaras. I wondered if those I see in the film survived the subsequent attacks, and the Taliban regime, or were at some later point killed. Mazari calls on them to not be afraid. He does not tell his people they are safe but that they are the right people, the just people, and need to go on unafraid.

The film cuts to a little boy who is singing, "Mazari, you are our leader, you saved us. We all follow you." He rhythmically beats his breast as people might do in an Ashura procession. Several scenes later, a man says, "We can't find any person like Mazari. Mazari is

pure. Mazari is honest. And we don't want anyone else except Mazari. Other people are trying to be our leader now because the time is right, the food is ready (a metaphor meaning: we want to be united under a leader). Where were you during the war? We want Mazari!" These scenes underscore the charisma of Mazari, and the savior-like qualities he has among the Hazaras. The filmmaker had access to a great deal of footage compiled by Hizb-e-Wahdat, and he no doubt specifically tried to include footage that would stress Mazari's heroism.

To drive home the need to remember, an image of a woman appears periodically during the film in the lower corner of the screen, accompanied by the words, "*Mo shahidon tarikh hastim*, (We are witnesses of history)". The double meaning of the word "*shahid*" — martyr as well as witness — is important. Hazaras are history's witnesses and its martyrs. This record, of having been martyred, again and again, is their heritage; it makes them who they are.

The latter part of the film, however, takes a hopeful turn. Footage of fighting shifts the focus to Hazara Hizb-e-Wahdat forces. The feeling it brought out in me is that there is still hope for Hazaras somehow to win, even though anyone acquainted with the history of Afghanistan would know that within a few years Mazari will have been killed by the Taliban and that brutal fighting would continue in the civil war and then against the Taliban. Shi'a Hazaras would be targeted by the Sunni Taliban, and more mass killings would occur. The fighting, which the film pairs with triumphant music, will be for nothing. In concluding in this way, does the filmmaker mean to suggest that Hazaras should take up a militant path again? Or that another path of struggle, this one peaceful, is the Hazaras' destiny? Certainly, Bamyan's civil society activists mostly see no future for Hazaras as another militant group; rather, they seek to promote the idea that the Hazaras, as the group which has suffered the most, most seeks enlightened ideals.

Gotthold Lessing makes the point that paintings or images are a particular form of art because they must choose a specific moment in time, a moment that suggests what happened before and what will happen after, and therefore must be the exact moment that the artist or photographer feels to be imbued with the most meaning (1961). Barbie Zelizer expands on this idea, pointing out that the image is also strong because it allows one to believe in the possibility of a “what if,” an alternative outcome from the one that the viewer knows will happen. She makes her point by examining the particular affect-laden qualities of images depicting the moment immediately preceding death (2004). These images allow the viewer a second to wonder if a potential different outcome might have been possible. The film similarly takes us to a moment suspended in time, where the people in the picture frame do not know what will happen afterward. Images of fighters allow viewers to imagine an alternative ending to the story, one where Hazaras avoid the suffering they experienced in the years following Afshar. The images of Mazari speaking can also capture this sense of “what if,” as people wonder what might have been had their leader survived the Taliban years.

When I spoke with others who watched the film, these feelings were expressed and then quickly tamped down. The “what-if” is a brief alternative universe for Hazaras. They quickly return to a world in which they are the premier victims. The narrative they tell of the Hazara people is one that stretches from the circumstances of their integration into the Afghan state to problems that continue in the present, an unbroken chain of ethnic cleansing, mass killing and genocide. Likewise, Mazari, much as he is missed, has gained an importance as a martyr that he likely never would have achieved as a leader. As if to anchor the Afshar scenes in a time frame immune to such wondering about “what if,” and tether them firmly to a construct of historical

truth, only these scenes were accompanied by the reminder, “we are witnesses to history.” To be Hazara is to be a shahid, witness and, possibly, martyr.

### **The Protest March**

The day after the film was shown, the activists organized a march through the center of Bamyan bazaar to memorialize the Afshar events. Fewer people than attended the film were at the march when it began but, as we proceeded through the bazaar, more and more people joined us, chanting slogans in a chain at least one hundred people strong. The entire bazaar was also lined with viewers, who had stopped their daily business to see what the marchers were up to and perhaps pay their respect. I ran along slightly in front of the marchers, trying to film the protest. I look back at the film and see details, but I remember a kaleidoscope of faces, dark winter clothes, banners and placards. As I hurried to keep up, I slipped on some ice, fell into a ditch, righted myself, and ran back with the protestors in time not to lose the activists in the front, who were leading the protest.

The marchers tied the film to the march by mounting loudspeakers to a car and playing music from the film and excerpts of Mazari’s speeches. Quotations from Mazari’s speeches were prominently displayed on placards carried for onlookers to see, along with several political cartoons implicating Massoud and Sayyaf in the event.

The march for Afshar also brought to mind, and followed the same path, as the processions for Ashura, when Shi’as sing mourning songs and chants, wear black, some beating or whipping themselves. The activists wanted the march, like the film, to become a community event. Other protests usually consisted of marchers and watchers, it being very clear who was there to protest and who just to watch. This protest differed in that the activists made a



bigger effort to persuade the watchers to join the march or at least raise their voices in slogans that stressed the suffering at Afshar. The slogans were thrown to the assembly in call-and-response style, and were even practiced with the crowd before the march started. Here are a few:

*Afshar ghareq khun ast, dar khuab Ban Ki Moon Ast:*

Afshar is full of blood, and Ban Ki Moon is sleeping

*Afshar khun e chekan ast, Sayaf dar parlemon ast*

Afshar is dripping with blood, Sayyaf is in Parliament

*Khun e shahid Afshar, metagh mefat bazaar*

The blood of the martyrs of Afshar, is like cheap cloth in the bazaar

The Ashura processions that commemorate Hussein also include imagery of the blood of martyrs, and in some cases, the real blood of those who self-flagellate with chains. If activists were too modern to take part in such beatings, they still relied upon blood imagery to cause this procession to bring Ashura to mind. Many spectators did join from both sides of the bazaar, in response to the activists' calls. The crowd walked the entire length of the bazaar, a little more than a mile, to Alakain (Lantern) square, chanting. There we gathered and listened to speeches.

The speeches once again called to the people of Bamyan to be witnesses to Afshar, and once again, some referenced Karbala directly. The first speaker was Hussein. "My dear citizens of Bamyan," he began. "Twenty years ago more than 4,000 people were killed in Afshar. Their crime was being human, nothing else. They were martyred. Brothers and sisters, the disaster of

Afshar has not been sung, but now you have to sing it, you, who know about Afshar. You have to prove that you have been witnesses (shahidan) in the history of Afghanistan, and you will be after this. (Pause.) It is your responsibility to say loudly (pause).” At this point, another activist shouted, “The blood of the martyrs of Afshar runs through this bazaar!”

Hussein is in yet another way inviting those present to become part of the event. They are witnesses to what happened at Afshar. Yet he is also subtly suggesting that they are martyrs (shahidan), too. Hussein makes an attempt to speak of Afshar as a crime against all humanity; other activists know that it might appeal more to the crowd if he defined it as a crime against Hazaras. Yet the final line also underscores the participation of those present: The blood of the Afshar martyrs is running through this very bazaar. All of those in attendance are witnesses now, and all are also martyrs as part of the larger Hazara community.

Next, Neamat once again speaks. He again directly uses the Karbala metaphor as a way to reach out to the people. I am sure that those in the audience who also viewed the film were particularly affected by this. Neamat, trained as a mullah, opens his speech with a prayer. After a lengthy introduction, in which he documents the injustice of Afshar and many other instances of killing of Hazaras, Neamat says,

If you keep your community united, if you are aware of your destiny, if you know what happened in the last years, you can defend yourselves, and you can prevent the next disasters. Otherwise, you are in trouble, and the history will once again happen to you. But in Bamyān, as the center of Hazaras and Shi’as, voices should be louder than others. Any, all, Hazaras and Shi’as, wherever they are, they are focusing on Bamyān, and they

are belonging to Bamyan. They listen to Bamyan whether Bamyanis are being killed or not.

Neamat is also stressing that people must be aware of history, but they also must be aware of their destiny. He once again focuses on the importance of place, not Afshar, but rather Bamyan, the Hazara homeland. Bamyan occupies a special place for all Hazaras, he says. He brought up place in his speech before the film, and now he is doing it again. He is shifting the importance of one place — Karbala — to another, Afshar. But Afshar is *not* a Hazara place, rather it is a place that they were removed to, as a product of earlier ethnic cleansing. So he must shift again, making clear that it is Bamyan which should be the focus of Hazaras' desire for their own place. Hazaras do not need to make a pilgrimage to Karbala, and they do not need to make a pilgrimage to Afshar. They should associate themselves with Bamyan, the home of their ancient past, the home of the Buddhas, and Shahr-e-Ghoghola, and all that they evoke. He also seems to say that people will be able to avoid further disasters if they are aware of history, although in his next lines, he gives merit to those who are martyred:

As the Holy Quran says, if anyone is killed after being oppressed, we give their parents a very high reward. When Imam Hussein was killed, Zeinab and Imam Sajjad [the sister and son of Hussein] were the most vocal against Yazid. Yazid was sidelined. Zeinab was responsible for all affairs of Hussein's family after Hussein's death. Accordingly, as she did, we have to ask for the remembrance of the blood of our martyrs, those who were martyred in Mazar, Afshar, or Bamyan. And those responsible have to pay attention. (Pause.) We are in a good position because of our martyrs. They keep us in a high

position. We have the right to ask the government to listen to our demands. We went to tell them that the events that happened in Mazar, Chindawool, Afshar, Bamyān, Yakawlang should not happen again. Oppression, genocide, killing, they should not happen to our people. You want your rights. You have to do your responsibility to your martyred people. You should not forget Afshar. As Mazari said, I will never forget Afshar, and neither should you.

Neamat, like the others, calls on the spectators to remember and witness what has happened, but he relates this witnessing to the witnessing and retelling done by Zeinab, the sister of Hussein, after his death. Zeinab and the rest of Hussein's family were held captive and humiliated by Yazid, and here another parallel could be drawn to the humiliation felt by Hazaras for so many years. And yet, Zeinab retains her pride and becomes one of the most important sources as to what happened in Karbala, and one of the most important foundational figures of the Shi'a sect.<sup>60</sup> Neamat believes Hazaras can use horrible events like Afshar to help their movement, just as Zeinab did.

The last of the speakers was Firuzān. After Neamat's speech, I could not help thinking she became Zeinab in the flesh. Firuzān begins by saying, "A person who kills a man on the earth, kills all human beings. This is in the Holy Quran." Firuzān continues by asking for specific actions to be taken. First, she asks that the Afghan government accept a transitional justice process. Second, she asks that the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission research and report on war crimes. Third, she asks that national and international organizations come together and form a truth-seeking court to seek justice for those martyred in Afshar. Fourth, she asks that the government of Afghanistan set aside land in Kabul as a memorial for those martyred in

Afshar. Like Zeinab, Firuzan is shaming the government that has given a post to Sayyaf and honored Massoud and Rabbani. Firuzan emulates Zeinab in speaking out about the injustices her government committed.

Having a woman end the procession and ask for specific actions to be taken is very much in line with Shi'a Islamic tradition. Zeinab, in standing up to Yazid in his court, carried on demanding justice when the men in her family were no longer able. And Fatima, the daughter of the Prophet, wife of Ali, spoke against the selection of Abu Bakr as the first caliph while Ali remained silent (Hyder 2006). Firuzan is most clearly Zeinab, but Zeinab herself, as a woman, was not an aberration. By having two men, trained as mullahs, and then a righteous woman place Afshar on par with, or above, Karbala, the activists are invoking Shi'a religious tradition.

## **Conclusion**

Stories, memory, witnessing and martyrdom seem all bound together with place. Karbala is not just the site of a religious and historical event. It is also a place of pilgrimage second only for Shi'as to Mecca. As the activists focused on the tragedies that had befallen Hazaras, the importance of places ran through all they said and did. The Afshar march began in the main mosque — which is named after Mazari, the rahbar-shahid (leader-martyr). They end at Alakain (Lantern) Square, which was created in protest to infrastructural underdevelopment in Bamyan, perceived to be a result of discrimination against Hazaras and a common location for protests concerning current problems. In remembering both Afshar and Karbala, the links are many. Both are places considered to be soaked in the blood of martyrs. Both tragedies revolved around a major martyred figure, Hussein and Mazari. The martyr and the faithful, the rightful followers of Hussein or Hazaras, the righteous people of Afghanistan, according to the activists, suffer.

Karbala and Bamyan are both places to which people go on pilgrimage, where they suffer, form collective memories and perhaps consolidate cultural trauma.

The Afshar Massacre, although it happened twenty years ago, is both an ancient and a current problem, as the persecution and mass killings, from the Hazara viewpoint, has continued without interruption from the late 1800s to the present. Pierre Nora writes of sites of memory as places where shared memory is lodged and experienced by a group of people, and which bear multiple, connected meanings. Afshar fits into Nora's schema as a site where Hazara transpose Shi'a memorialization of suffering to their suffering as an ethnic group. Bamyan's main mosque, a site for religious worship, takes its name from an ethno-political leader, Mazari. This indicates the overlap of the two registers of perception and analysis, religious and ethnic. Afshar points to current problems, as the past and future are seen as an unbroken line of oppression and suffering, which Hazaras still experience, both qua Shi'as and as Hazaras. Afshar itself was never rebuilt, and is mostly abandoned to this day, obligating Hazaras to find their sites of memory elsewhere, but activists hope for the day when a memorial is established in Kabul. Can Kabul be recognized as a Hazara place, too? Hazaras need ties to a central homeland but they also need acceptance and integration in all of the parts of Afghanistan and the wider region (including Iran and Pakistan) to which they have been scattered. For the activists, this means memorials not only in Bamyan, but in other sites of trauma as well. Collective trauma, as evidenced in the tears of those around me and the pain in the voices raised at the Afshar remembrance in 2013, seems clearly present. Giving Hazaras a place to mourn is perhaps the next step.

## **Chapter Seven**

### **Mazari: The Martyr of the Hazaras**

In discussing Shi'a ideas about martyrs during Ashura, Rustam explained for me how Hazara activists define "martyrs":

According to Shi'ism, there are three types of martyrs. The first is a person who fought and was killed for the rights of an individual or a group of people who had their rights taken from them. The second is a person who is killed without having done any offense to others. The third is someone who escaped from someone who was cruel, who was not giving them their rights, and then died in escape, for example, by hunger. Or who had to commit suicide to escape such a person.

From the Hazara point of view, the fallen leader Abdul Ali Mazari falls into the first category, as did Hussein, of a fighter for rights. Hazaras also hold important some martyrs from the other categories, as well. Collectively, Hazaras might see themselves as a martyred group, according to this schema sketched by Rustam.

This martyr schema, with which others concur, parallels feminist philosopher Diana Meyers' (2011) distinction between "pathetic victims" and "heroic victims" of human rights abuse. Meyers uses this schema to critique the human rights imaginary that requires those whose rights have been violated to be either blameless but passive victims or individuals who stand up for rights and knowingly put themselves at risk. She makes the point that this schema allows certain victims to be excluded from concern, for example, those supposed pathetic victims who

somehow have invited violence against themselves or those heroic victims who have worked to save family members rather than their co-ethnics or co-religionists. Hazara activists seem both to conform to but also push the boundaries of the categorization of the “victim,” which Meyers reads into human rights discourse. Even as Rustam’s schema distinguishes pathetic and heroic victims, it also insists that certain people may be both at one time. It also leaves room for Hazaras to portray themselves as victims of genocide, even when some fellow Hazaras have committed abuses against other groups. And by asserting that they seek to end abuses against their ethnic group, it leaves room for all Hazaras to be heroic victims.

Importantly, Meyers explores the gendered dimensions of this schema, by explaining that pathetic victims are seen as passive and effeminate. In relation to the gender of martyrdom, Hazaras seem to conform closely to Meyers’ analysis. The martyrs they most often refer to as symbols of Hazara victimization are men. In this chapter, I discuss portrayals of three men, Mazari, Jawad Zuhak, and Abdul Khaliq Hazara, who clearly follow the heroic victim model. On the other hand, the three women whose memorializations I examine, Shirin, Shakila, and Shukria Tabassum, fit the model of pathetic victims.

Nearly all Shi’as are shaped by the martyrdom stories they heard since a young age about Ali and Hussein. These martyrdoms symbolize the ultimate betrayal, as Ali and Hussein signify justice, the right path. Assam Moghadam writes, “.....the martyrdom of Hussein at Karbala has become a central component of Shi’a identity and has bestowed an emotive notion of martyrdom on Shi’a awareness” (2007). Karen Armstrong states, “Like the murder of Ali, the (Karbala) tragedy became a symbol for Shi’a Muslims of the tragedy that pervades human life” (2002). The martyrdom of key religious figures and political figures today is interpreted as a replaying of the martyrdom of Hussein and Ali, coloring varied aspects of Shi’a political and personal



identity. Moghadem's point is that through the re-living of Hussein's martyrdom each year through the Muharram ceremonies, Shi'a interpretations of martyrdom become extremely emotional.

The focus and subjective experience of these ceremonies is a topic of debate in Bamyan. In between feeling truly distraught about the wrongs committed against Ali, Hussein, and their families, at one end, and "faking" emotion to show off your religious credentials, on the other hand, is the likelihood that for some just doing these emotional performances provokes very real feelings. Benedicte Grima (2005) has raised this issue in her study of emotions, and particularly *gham*, or sadness, (and also *khushal*, or happiness) among Pashtun women. Both negative and positive emotions not only show empathy with other women but are also expected of them culturally. Grima suggests that displays of *gham* are women's version of *baad*, an important norm of exchange among Pashtuns.<sup>61</sup> Even mandated emotions are assumed to be real (Grima 2005).<sup>62</sup>

In the last chapter, I wrote of how the Karbala Paradigm allows Hazaras and other Shi'as to take on the role of victim, and to elevate their killed leaders to the status of martyrs. This conclusion raises questions as well as answering them. Is the Shi'a and Hazara focus on martyrdom best characterized as a religious frame of signification for recent political events or a secular theodicy? The answer surely depends in part on who is experiencing it. Some Hazaras might actually place Mazari on a plane with their religious leaders. Others, less religiously inclined, see Mazari as a leader in the struggle against injustice without directly relating him to the Shi'a religion.

Earlier chapters have similarly highlighted another contradiction, that between activism and quiescence. Rola el-Husseini (2008) quotes Ayatollah Fadlullah, the spiritual leader of

Hizbollah, as saying that “it is meaningless that those who oppose resistance celebrate Ashura.” Yet this has not always meant active resistance. Taqiya, hiding your faith when you are in danger or are suffering oppression, is, from a religious standpoint, always an option as long as resistance remains in your heart. For Hazaras, resistance to Abdur Rahman led to disaster. By contrast, taqiya is a way to blend in to the greater Sunni community when open declaration of your faith is not an option. Yet, Hazaras feel marked by their ethnicity’s distinctive facial features. Most activists agree that Hazaras were beaten down and kept low until political movements in the 1970s gave them a chance to try to take their destinies into their own hands. According to the stories of the activists today, Mazari was at the center of this opening. He convinced Hazaras to stop fighting among themselves, and turned them into a group that could fight others. Mazari changed what it meant to be Hazara. I was told this over and over. Others played supportive roles: Prime Minister Keshtmand of the communist government, businessmen who began to gain wealth and influence around this time, scholars who began to write histories focused on Hazara. But Mazari was the spark that set off a Hazara revival.

And so, among activists today, Mazari is more than a political figure. Something innate among Hazaras already predisposed them to tolerance, but Mazari showed them democracy, human rights, and gender equality. There was, and is, no one like Mazari, they say.

The martyr dies for the sins of others. His or her death shows them a better path. S/he dies to make an “imperfect” humanity better, more righteous. Just as Imam Hussein died not just because he was betrayed by the Kufans but to make the believers into more holy people, Mazari had to die because his people are “the wrong people” in Afghanistan, outsiders who have occupied the lowest rungs of society. One of Mazari’s most famous quotes is “*Man mikhuam digar Hazara budan Afghanistan joram naboshad* (I want that in Afghanistan being a Hazara

will not be a crime”). This has become the activist slogan, “*Hazara budan joram nist* (Being a Hazara is not a crime”), said in speeches, written on placards and signs, and shouted at protests. Often it is written and chanted in English as well, in a play for international attention. This phrase said for emphasis in a speech can elicit cheers from a crowd. For those who know from whom this phrase originates, it calls to mind both Mazari and the Hazaras’ oppression. In this way, trauma is made collective and woven into Hazara culture. Mazari’s martyrdom amplifies the meaning of this phrase and his speeches, which some Hazaras listen to over and over, passing them from person to person on flash drive.

The only other figure in Afghanistan to have achieved comparable adulation, in this case among Tajiks, and even among some Westerners, is Ahmad Shah Massoud. He, like Mazari, changed the course of history for his people, a brilliant military commander who saved the Panjshir Valley from Russian invasion, first through strategy, and then by making an agreement to refrain from attacking as the Soviets withdrew. And yet Massoud’s fame internationally far outstrips that of Mazari. Fascinating, and I think significant discrepancies mark the remembrance of Massoud among Tajiks as different from that of Mazari. In both places, the martyrs’ followers display their pictures prominently. Yet, by my observation, Massoud is memorialized in picture differently than Mazari. Mazari is displayed in stylized images, iconographic in character, suggesting that he is an otherworldly figure. He is shown surrounded by fluffy clouds or white doves, or is framed by the Buddha niches and other Hazara ancestors. Massoud is almost always displayed as a fighter, and if not that then definitely as a man of action in this life. Mazari’s pictures use colors of whites, light greys and blues that bring to mind the heavens, while Massoud’s pictures tend to earthy colors. Often Massoud holds a gun or wears a bandolier. I never saw a picture of Mazari with a weapon. Somehow even the pictures that show Massoud at

rest, thinking or praying, suggest a man ready to leap into action. In Mazari's pictures, he has transcended this world. His face is beatific, full of love. Perhaps Mazari's gentle mien compensates for Hazaras low standing, their belief that they are looked down on as the biggest misfits in Afghanistan. Who else would consider them worth fighting for, when people of all other groups call them lowly, base, ugly, and worthless?

Even as one martyr may never be enough for the emergence of a "culture of martyrdom," and the Hazaras, in common with other oppressed people, have a significant number of martyrs to call on, Mazari, together with Hussein, are the prototypical Hazara martyrs. Even those who came earlier — Abdul Khaliq Hazara, Shirin — seem to remind people of Mazari's death, and not the other way around. Consider the fora in which Hussein and Mazari blend. The main mosque in Markaz Bamyān is called Abdul Ali Mazari Mosque. It is there where speeches happen on Ashura. The streets are decorated with black gates which rise above the road during Muharram, and upon them are hung slogans and images relating to Hussein and Karbala. Yet at the top of the largest gate in Bamyān, next to the mosque, was not an image of Hussein, or of a riderless white horse (Zuljanah, the mount of Hussein) but an image of Mazari (Figure 1). I asked Khadim after attending events on Ashura, "Was that intentional? I mean, was it done on purpose, to put Mazari in a place where one expected to see Hussein? To relate the martyrdom of Mazari to the martyrdom of Hussein?"

He said, "Yes, yes, I think it was intentional. They want to show that Mazari and Hussein are alike. But they also want to show, we should pay attention to Mazari. Maybe *more* attention to Mazari."

Roxanne Varzi writes that Shi'a political groups have a problem when they do happen to

**FIGURE 1**



*An image of Mazari displayed during Ashura processions in Bamyan, 2012 (source: Melissa Kerr Chiovenda)*

come to power. In the Islamic Revolution of Iran, she writes, those who were oppressed (by the Shah and by the West) became all of a sudden those with authority and power over others. How do they maintain the symbols and narratives that mobilize Shi'a people, when these symbols and narratives focus on martyrdom and oppression? Iran solved this by stressing its status as a wronged pariah nation, bullied by the West and by Sunni nations. Of course, the Iran-Iraq war, in which millions of Iranians died, confirmed this state-promoted narrative. The aggressor now was Iraq, a state led by Sunnis and backed now by the United States (Varzi 2006). Shia's were finally in power, but their status as a victimized group was soon brought back to reality by the sudden and unjustified attack by Saddam Hussein's military.

Hazaras today face a similar problem in as much as many opportunities have opened for them, even as persecution and social exclusion also remain strong. Martyr symbolism may paradoxically become even more important in a moment of relative peace. Hazara leaders may now feel safer in adopting confrontational postures. And spreading cultural trauma, through collective memory events, may motivate people not to become passive but to continue to work for their rights, for recognition of the truth of what has happened to them, and for equality.

In trying to understand Hazaras' love for Mazari, I was impressed above all by their belief that he loved them because they were Hazara. In keeping with Shi'a teachings, he said all people are worthy but he flirted with religious heterodoxy by claiming to love his people, the Hazaras, the most. People say this is why he pivoted politically with abandon, changing allies in a succession of deals with devils. In 1993, he left Rabbani's civil war-era government, joining the Hizb-e-Islami Hekmatyar. In 1995, he supposedly sought a Taliban alliance. Activists, and many other Hazaras as well, seem to believe Mazari did these things out of love for them, just as he went to his death, possibly knowingly, out of love. The religious parallels could not be more

clear.

### **Remembering Baba Mazari**

In Bamyan, stories of Baba (“papa”) Mazari are told and retold. He is the single most important figure for Hazaras today, no matter their class, urban or rural place of residence, or level of education. Many activists describe him as the founder of the “new Hazara.” In this, they claim that Mazari was a proponent not only of Hazara rights but of human rights, women’s rights, and equality for all people. He made it clear that this cosmopolitan rights agenda is part of what Hazaras stand for. Even as activists claim that Hazaras’ descent from an ancient Silk Road culture almost genetically imbues them with these values, they also hold that Hazaras had before Mazari been shackled by a clergy that did not have the people’s interests at heart. Many also contend that the clergy at that time was shackled by Iran. According to the activists, Mazari turned Hazaras’ politics and identities from a sectarian base to an ethnic base. He was also the founder of the “new Hazara” in this way as well, a Hazara who was more concerned with ethnic affiliation than religious affiliation, and by extension, someone more predisposed to universal rights. Strict interpretations of Islam do not allow for rights given by states or international organizations, as it is believed that all true rights have already been given through Islamic scripture. Hence, ethnicities are more likely to have a relationship with states and international organizations in which they demand their rights, whereas religious sects may not to the same extent (although some persecuted sects certainly do seek their rights from states).

Many non-Hazaras revile Mazari as a mujahedin who waged bloody warfare and ordered bombardments of civilian areas. Every Hazara I know denies the more grotesque rumors of cruelty that circulate about Mazari.<sup>63</sup> Hazara activists and others say either that he was justified,

or that people from other groups tell lies.

Mazari “follows” me after my return from Bamyan. I became Facebook friends very soon with most of my male contacts, and some female contacts, too. Later more joined on Twitter and Instagram, so that I am now Facebook friends with hundreds more Hazaras than I ever met personally, many of whom consider themselves to be activists. My daily feed is literally replete with the same themes I encountered in the field. On social media, the face of Baba Mazari is a constant. He is often referred to, quoted, and portrayed in paintings and other artistic renderings. Many of my friends make their identification with Mazari almost literal, by using his image as their profile picture. Social media thus mirrors and amplifies what is common in Hazara majority areas in Afghanistan, where pictures of Mazari are ubiquitous. These range in size and placement from giant billboards to small fliers. Either way, the image also usually quotes a few lines from one of Mazari’s speeches. A holiday calendar refreshes the supply of Mazari imagery, with events which stress Mazari’s messages — his birthday, the anniversary of his death, or the anniversary of the Afshar Massacre — piling on more pictorial reminders of his importance.

Social media, of course, makes possible new exchanges in real life. When Sajjad visited the tomb of Mazari, in Mazar-e-Sharif, the closest city to the village where Mazari was born, he posted a series of photos of himself moving through the tomb, kneeling as if praying, looking about with an expression of anguish. Later, I asked him, “How did it make you feel, seeing the tomb of Mazari?”

“It gave me a huge courage, to do more and be a powerful man,” he answered. “To serve my people, that is the only way.” Sajjad said he needed to emulate Mazari, to become the kind of courageous, influential man he considers Mazari to have been.

During a later phone call, after I had left the field, Sajjad’s voice become sad, and even



desperate, as we prepared to say good-bye. “Melissa, promise me one thing that you will do.”

“What is it?” I asked.

“Promise me you will write about Baba. People don’t know about him. Promise me you will tell them.”

I answered, “I promise I will write what you, and what others in the community have told me.”

### **Mazari the Martyr**

I will start my exposition of Mazari’s continuing symbolic and political importance at his life story’s end, with Mazari’s death. While I was still in Bamyan, I interviewed Sajjad about Mazari. Sajjad is so important in the activist movement, as a compelling orator, but he could be difficult to interview. At times his thinking seemed to move faster than his words. Drawing out his cell phone, he said, “I was here when Mazari died. I watched as they processed through Bamyan. He was thrown out of the Taliban helicopter around Ghazni. People carried him from there, through Bamyan, and then up to Mazar, his home.” He showed me the telephone and I recognized Bamyan, I saw a casket being held aloft. I saw so many people, hundreds, thousands, pushing nearer to the casket. I heard cries of mourning. And then Sajjad shut the phone off. “I can’t show you much. I shouldn’t have shown you anything. You are not one of us. What can you understand?”

“Sajjad, I want to understand. Don’t show me the video, but tell me.”

“No,” he replied. “You won’t understand.”

In a way, Sajjad was right: as a non-religious person, I have no comparable understanding of martyrdom to draw upon. I cannot even fully relate to Christ. I confessed this religious deaf

ear with some friends and certainly with Sajjad, whom I trust and know to be broad-minded enough not to be bothered by this. I think I told him after the incident with the phone. Other Hazara friends thought the episode strange, and assured me that they would have shown me the video. But none of them had it at hand. Some clips of the procession are available on YouTube. For this reason, I am sure Sajjad was making a rhetorical point by halting my viewing of the film clip right after it began. Rather than being genuinely worried about my seeing Mazari's funeral procession, perhaps he was suddenly struck that the sacredness of the event was too great for casual viewing.

Arif, a high school student who lived close to me, and was not really involved in the activist movement, described Mazari's death: "He was tortured a lot. His fingers, arms, and legs were all cut off. While he was alive." Similar stories were repeated, if not so graphically. His fingers were cut off. His ears were cut off. Was he alive, or dead, some wonder openly, at the moment he was thrown from the helicopter? Even Sayed Askar Mousavi, in his book on the Hazaras, contributes to this, as a witness, and anyone who flips through his book can also witness. Photographs show Mazari as he is being tortured by the Taliban. It is unclear what is happening, it seems that his captors are cutting his ears. And yet these photographs are not widely shared on posters and placards of Mazari in Bamyān and Hazara-majority West Kabul, or on Hazaras' social media sites. Most prefer the living Mazari, in icon-like images that make it appear that Mazari simply floated out of this world. Everyone knows, however, about his torture and suffering, inflicted by the treacherous Taliban as he made a last-ditch peace overture to save his people from the horrors of the civil war. One cannot say for sure if Mazari had an idea of what the Taliban were really about. Perhaps he recognized that this fanatically religious group, which based its beliefs not only on the Quran but also on Pashtun customary law, might confront

the Hazaras with their greatest existential danger yet. And so he took a huge gamble, and lost.

Many activists are too young to remember his death. They explain it in somewhat mystical terms, as if to make clear that to them this was no ordinary leader but someone much greater. On a day when I was visiting Jawad in his home, I asked him why Mazari is such an important figure. Jawad started from the practical:

Mazari, he knew we needed a federal system for Afghanistan, to accommodate the needs of the many minority groups. He had a plan worked out for this. He drew a map that showed how he envisioned the different regions of federal Afghanistan. You know, he was the first who really understood that the fighting was not based on sectarian differences, as many have claimed. He knew that it was about ethnicity, and that the actions of the fighters themselves were motivated by ethnicity, rather than sect. For example, once there was an interview with Moulavi Khalis and Mohseni, and the journalist asked them if they didn't have problems cooperating. And they said, no, we get along and cooperate, because we are both Pashtun.

Khalis was known for being anti-Shi'a, as the head of a Hizb-e-Islami faction independent of Hekmatyar's. Mohseni led the non-ethnic based Shi'a resistance group, Harakat, which was a competitor to Wahdat. Mohseni is actually very secretive about his ethnicity, but many, with little solid basis, think he is Pashtun.

Jawad starts with the issue of ethnicity, and the change in importance from sect to ethnicity for Hazara identity. While this was partially an internal change, as the community grew frustrated with Iran and found a new message from Mazari, Jawad also touches upon the other

half of this: that other ethnicities make politics an ethnic issue. This is the problem that Hazaras are encountering today, according to the activists, although there can certainly be an ethno-nationalist tendency among some Hazaras as well. It cannot be said for sure whether other groups dislike Hazaras because of their ethnic difference or whether other Shi'as can blend in, while Hazaras stand out. For Hazaras, there is now an understanding that even Afghans who do not harbor ethnic hatred look at them, the Hazaras, through an ethnic lens. As if reading my mind, the next thing Jawad talked about was the importance of Mazari's statement, echoed now by thousands, that "being a Hazara is not a crime." This, Jawad said, was the most important thing: Hazaras are demanding no longer to be treated as the lowest-class people of Afghanistan. For him, and he implied for Mazari, the divide had always been an ethnic, not sectarian issue. Mazari said this first and said it repeatedly, a repetition augmented logarithmically through the replaying of films of his speeches. The young hear it and echo the cry. Mazari's words and accomplishments while living set the stage for him to be remembered as a heroic martyr and not a pathetic victim.

Jawad continued,

I do remember when Mazari died. When I heard about Mazari being killed, I was a young boy. I was actually tending the sheep with my brother in Shahrstan, Daikundi. We had not yet been sent to school. I am not sure who told us, out in the sheep pasture. I don't even know how I, a small boy, and my brother, really understood the importance of it. We knew somehow, he was a great leader. We were crying so much when we found out. I truly believe, if Mazari were still alive, Afghanistan would be so much better. He would find a solution. The other leaders were all millionaires but Mazari lived modestly. He was

humble. He did not have a large home, and he cared about women's rights and minorities' rights.

At this point, Tahira, Jawad's wife, broke in, "The other day Jawad's nephew, who is about seven years old, was watching a film about Mazari. He was unhappy, angry, and crying. And then he turned to his mother and said that she was not crying enough for the subject of the movie. That she should be unhappier."

Jawad's description of tending the sheep, and hearing about the death of Mazari, and somehow understanding how important it was, even though at that time they knew little about him, and were isolated, in the fields high in the mountains, away from the other mourners, gives the impression that he somehow just knew Mazari was great, and was to be mourned through tears. He does not know where this knowledge came from, implying that it could have come to him through mystical means. Somehow, he also understood that this was a moment when he needed to cry. He then turns to the idea that things would be better had Mazari lived. This might be a common statement whenever a leader dies, but for Mazari, who already has taken on so many attributes of the martyr, it might also link him to Hussein, and create a sort of paradox. Hussein died fighting a tyrant. Would the world have been better had Hussein won, and taken control of the Muslim community? From the Shi'a viewpoint, we can only imagine the answer is yes. Likewise, Mazari is thought, by Hazaras in general, and particularly by activists, to have been the one person who could have improved the situation in Afghanistan. It would have been better had he lived, even though by dying a martyr his figure attained a greater importance than it ever held in life.

Jawad's nephew's reaction is all the more telling. He is watching a film on Mazari, and

he, though a small boy of eight or nine, is moved to tears. Perceiving that his mother's reaction to the film is not as strong as his own, he tells her she needs to cry more strongly, scolding her just as someone might be reprimanded for not crying during a majlis for Hussein. The nephew has already started applying the Karbala paradigm to Mazari.

Muslims reject the idea that any human can in any way also be God. Hussein, Ali, and Mohammad were first and foremost human beings, although human beings who received God's blessings through messages and the foreknowledge of what fate was to befall them. As Imam, Hussein could speak for God, as could the Imams who followed, but they were also men, vulnerable to their human and political weaknesses. Mazari, too, was a man and vulnerable to political weaknesses. Even if Mazari had all the answers, he was still a man, capable of error.

On a cold winter day I met with Qasim, one of the activists who had moved to Bamyan from Quetta, in the house of the family where I was staying. Qasim delved into his thoughts on Mazari when I asked him about the rahbar-shahid (leader-martyr).

People are always working to become better human beings each day, even politicians. Mazari died when he was 47, and until he was 44, he was not doing the right thing. He was part of Nasr, a political group, and Nasr killed many people, people who were innocent. Plus, Mazari was part of the clergy, which in my opinion is a bad thing. But after the age of 44 he really changed himself, and started to do the right thing. He created Wahdat, and he stood up for minorities, and not only Hazaras. And he wanted a decentralized government. He was the first to say that Hazaras were no longer servants and no longer jokes. Like Mullah Nasruddin, Ata Sakhi was a mythical figure people joke about here, a stupid Hazara, stupid as a donkey. In one of Mazari's speeches he says, we

have been a joke for too long, we don't want to be a joke anymore. He helped Hazaras go abroad. He sent them to the West to study. He welcomed back Hazara communists even when other members of Wahdat said they should be killed. He said they were human and they were Hazara, and so they must be accepted.

Mazari's humanity and fallibility did not take away from his importance or appeal as a leader for Hazaras. It made him more important, because the difference between right and wrong was not divinely revealed truth, and yet he chose what was right. Even though he got power initially as a member of the clergy, part of a group sponsored by Iran, Mazari had a realization that Iran did not have the best interests of Hazaras at heart but was playing a geo-political game in Afghanistan. Regardless of what Mazari's motivations were in political maneuvers of this kind, he earned a place in Hazaras' memories as their most important leader, who was willing to give up everything for them.

My friend Khadim, who helped me with translations of speeches, songs, books, and other media, was not a leading Bamyani activist but knew them all. He said of Mazari,

He was intelligent, and he *said* he would *always* be with the people, which he is believed to have done as best as he could until the end. He even continues to be with the people today, spiritually. He stressed that, were he to be put in jail, or killed, he would still be with the people. When the Taliban took him, Fahim or Dostum, I can't remember which, sent a helicopter to try to help him escape. One person who was with him did escape, but Mazari said that he would not escape because he did not want to leave his people. He martyred himself because he told his people that even if he were killed, he would stay

with them.

It is common knowledge among the activists that Mazari was offered a way to escape but turned it down. He would not turn away from his fate. Whether there ever was a helicopter or not would only add or subtract marginally from Mazari's martyrdom; what the helicopter signifies is that, through martyrdom, Mazari would stay with his people forever. His refusal to be rescued only accentuates that part of Mazari's greatness which lay in his, like Hussein, having gone willingly to his death. In sacrificing themselves, both become *qurban*, sacrificial victims, for their people.

How does this relate to collective trauma? Remembering Hussein, and his martyrdom, is something that all Shi'as experience but it is surely not possible to say that all Shi'as necessarily share in a collective trauma because of their faith. However, it is true that many do participate in group mourning events, every year, in which they empathize with the death of a leader who died for what was righteous, cut down by a tyrant seeking to impose a "wrong" version of the faith. This experience might have a positive effect on people's psyches, as described by Mary-Jo and Byron Good (1988) in pre-revolutionary Iran. It allowed them a culturally sanctioned forum in which to express sadness and despair. But it is also possible that others might experience heightened emotional trauma by identifying with and vicariously feeling the pain and suffering of one so righteous and holy as Hussein.

### **The Power of Images**

Images are a sensitive topic in the Islamic world. Pierre and Micheline Centlivres (2010) point out that while images have been used extensively by many Muslim rulers, others have banned some, or all, images of people (Centlivres and Centlivres 2010). While the most extreme Sunni



groups, including the government of the Taliban, ban all images, other religious authorities have made use of certain images to enhance their power. The Centlivres make the case that photographs occupy an ambiguous space in this ban on images of the human figure, because they are a mechanical reproduction of reality and not a depiction created by human hands.

On Facebook, homages to Hazara martyrs, images of Mazari feature prominently, whether as profile pictures or in postings that feature things he did or said, particularly around the celebration of his birthday or the anniversary of his death. Mazari's mother passed away in April 2016, and she, too, is something of an on-line saint. No one spoke to me of her while I was in the field but since then I have seen many pictures of her on Facebook and other social media, with praise her for her kindness and strength. One person I know had visited her, and proudly posted a picture of them together.

Mazari's suffering is not highlighted in visual media, even though photos do exist of his torture after being captured by the Taliban. The images of him in wide distribution show him with a slight smile, looking into the distance. He retains a dignity that would be undercut by public display of the torture scene photographs, in which Mazari looks not just hurt, but confused. By contrast, Hazaras have no hesitancy to show images of the bloodied bodies of women and children on social media, every time a mass killing of Hazaras occurs.

Images of the holy men, Hussein and Ali, provide the template for public portraits of Mazari. Both are shown in the bloom of life in these images, looking beatifically into a distant point situated outside the picture frame (Figure 2). I am not including the headless "body" of Hussein sometimes borne through the streets during ta'ziya performances, as this is more a symbol than a representation, nor the veiled actors who portray the living Hussein in the same ta'ziya. But painted images of Hussein are common. In most of the images, Hussein's face is

perfect (marked perhaps by one cut across his forehead). Even as believers bloody themselves through self-flagellation, Hussein's image transcends the flesh.

Images of Mazari occupy the same glowing aesthetic as images of Hussein. In some, Mazari truly is in another world, surrounded by clouds and doves, which brings to mind paradise. The image in Figure 3 looms large above the bazaar in Bamyan, as if Baba Mazari is always looking over the Hazaras, his children. A Quranic verse is written, "God will not change your destiny, you can change it for yourself." This is a message to those who read it, but it might also be a description of what Hazaras believe Mazari has done for them, changing them first from slaves to fighters and then to fully participating members of society.

Another image of Mazari (Figure 4) seems in some ways similar to images of Hussein: in this, his head is wrapped in a turban, similar to the turban or hood of Hussein (such a turban is what many Hazara men, whether of high status or humble workers, wear daily). The Afghan flag flies behind him, but the parts that are most clearly visible are green and red. Green represents Islam, and it is the color in which Hussein is nearly always portrayed. Red represents bloodshed experienced through war. Hazaras, with their particular past, might intentionally foreground such color. Mazari remains dignified in appearance but unlike Hussein, he seems fatherly: Mazari really has assumed the role of "baba," friendly, welcoming, with a twinkle in his eyes. This calm, smiling, kind figure is the diametrical opposite of the mujahed, the aspect of Mazari activists downplay, who killed and ordered men to go to their deaths.

**FIGURE 2**



An image of Hussein displayed in Karbala, Iraq (source:  
<http://quotesgram.com/img/quotes-about-prophet-muhammad-imam-hussian/7121811/>)

FIGURE 3



*A billboard of Mazari in Bamyan's bazaar (source: Melissa Kerr Chiovenda)*

FIGURE 4



*An image in Bamyān's bazaar advertising a commemoration of the 18th anniversary of Mazari's death (source: Melissa Kerr Chiovenda)*

Elsewhere, this same photo of Mazari (Figure 5) was paired with the words, “*Haq khuastan na ma’ni dushmani bo kesi nist* (To ask for rights does not mean that you are then enemy of someone”). The words added to Mazari’s portraits consistently implore Hazaras to continue to work for their rights. Another poster (Figure 6) features the words, “*Mo huquq mardom khud ro mikhuaom wa anhasor ro namikonim* (We want the rights of our people, and to not have limitations on these rights”). Mazari’s kindly demeanor underscores that, even when demanding rights for his people, no violence is implied.

Activists did not always know who was distributing these flyers. A little research would usually lead us to an activist friend with whom we were close. Activists, should they work through a civil society network with enough funding, will print and distribute such images, which most Hazara shopkeepers are happy to display. Competing *Wahdat* parties also post such images, often superimposed with images of their own leaders, to position themselves as the political descendants of Mazari. Larger ones, such as the billboard in Figure 3, are no doubt placed by the local government. The images are common enough that people do not spend too much time dwelling upon them. Baba Mazari has become a sort of ever-present, always watching individual, who is always with his people.

### **Jawad Zuhak**

When I arrived in the field to do my preliminary research over the summer of 2011, I was met by an acquaintance, Zamina. Zamina is a young woman who has studied abroad as a high school student. As I arrived in 2011, she was preparing to begin a BA program in the United States. She had kindly agreed to help me set up a place to live, find a language tutor, and make some initial contacts. Zamina’s family were returned refugees from Iran, and her mother had secured a fairly



FIGURE 5



An image of Mazari displayed in a shop in Bamyan (source: Melissa Kerr Chiovenda)

FIGURE 6



An image of Mazari displayed in a shop in Bamyan (source: Melissa Kerr Chiovenda)



high position in the local government. When we met, Zamina was visibly upset. I asked her what was wrong, and she said, “You know, not too long ago, something terrible happened here. The head of our provincial council, Jawad Zuhak, was killed traveling back from Kabul. Everyone loved him here. He was somewhere in Parwan, and the Taliban stopped his car, took him out, and beheaded him. Now everyone is so scared.”

All that summer, people were asking, “What will happen to us Hazaras?” The United States was planning to withdraw or significantly decrease the number of its troops in Afghanistan. Bamyan itself was protected by a New Zealand Provincial Construction Team Base, which was also staffed by a detachment of Malaysian military medical personnel. It was not clear, however, how long New Zealand intended to continue its mission. That whole summer, people approached me to ask about withdrawal, and I felt frustrated to be unable to give them an answer. At some point in these exchanges, I would be told, in panicked voices, “Once you leave, the Pashtuns will sweep down here. They will kill as many of us as they can!” Hazaras expected to be the ones attacked first. Even though Bamyan has little strategic importance, people were jumpy. In an echo of Mazari’s martyrdom, Zuhak had just been killed.

One day, in talking about Mazari with Zahra, with whom I met to trade lessons in Farsi for English practice, we slipped into a discussion of Zuhak.

Zuhak *also* worked for the people, you know. He worked to try to solve our lack of electricity. He was integral for the creation of Alakain (Lantern) Square, a symbol of our lack of electricity. He made the award, it is a plaque, for the donkey who brings Hazaras

water from the river, since even here in Markaz Bamyan we have no running water. He paved all the streets with mud, to make the point that they should have been paved with asphalt. Things were going very well for Zuhak. All the people followed him. I think that perhaps Mohaqeq or Khalili (two of the most important Hazara political leaders) were responsible for his death.

Questioned on Mazari, Zahra slipped into a discussion of Zuhak, seeing both as people who worked hard and been killed trying for the betterment of the Hazara community. Her Yazid, however, has a different face: she was sure the villain was a Hazara political leader. The community was divided on who was really behind Zuhak's death, some believing it was the Taliban, others pointing to local politicians. Either way, Zuhak was still a martyr, who, though lesser in stature, reminded people of Mazari.

Some Hazaras see Zuhak as a martyr, like Mazari. I visited my friends Nahid and Shakila, shortly after Nahid had moved from Yakawlang to Bamyan to join her new husband. As a child, Nahid had walked an hour and a half each day to go to school. When I met with them, she was enrolling at Bamyan University. Shakila was also studying, and had taken a holiday to help Nahid settle in. About Zuhak, Nahid said, "He worked with and followed Mazari, and like Mazari, he was very smart. Like Mazari, he lost his blood for his people (*khun khud ro*). He became head of the Provincial Council, and he made many annoyances for the government."

Shakila cut in, "Yes, he told the government that the main issue for us was that the eye of the government was not on the Hazaras (*cheshm dolat kur ast, hamon cheshm dolat mardom Hazara miz ast*). He was killed because he achieved his goal of becoming head of the Provincial Council. He was good because he was like Mazari. He said the same things as Mazari." It was

not clear if the girls were speaking of the local Hazara government or the central government but, here again, the image of government is one of corruption and possibly brutal violence.

Khadim, the student from Daikundi who helped me with translations and language training, also spoke to me about Zuhak. “I was not here when Mazari was martyred, but I was here when Zuhak was martyred. When Zuhak was martyred, it was yet another Ashura of the people, once again.” Struck by his directly relating Zuhak to Hussein (through the reference to Ashura), I questioned Khadim further.

It is because of the importance placed on unity, on the importance of a people sticking together, even if it means dying. It has to do with Shi’a beliefs, and the way that we worship God. It has been the same in all cases. In the time of Ali, the father of Hussein, the Shi’as and the Sunnis were separated. Since Hussein, all Shi’as have the same way of worshipping. If the people, in the time of Hussein, were oppressed and killed, also in the time of Mazari they were oppressed and tortured and killed; and of course their leader was the main symbol of this. Mazari was tortured by the Taliban before being killed. Zuhak was pulled behind a motorbike while still alive before he was killed. This is in line with the suffering and torture Yazid carried out on the followers of Hussein.

Mazari would always be remembered for founding Hizb-e-Wahdat but it is his death which has made him more than simply a great political leader. In the two years I was in Bamyan, I saw people’s view of Zuhak change from important man to martyr figure.

Some activists seem uncomfortable with this elevation of Zuhak to martyr, pointing out that Zuhak took credit for things really carried out by the activists, such as the paving of the

roads with mud. Others criticize the very symbolic nature of his actions, saying that someone in his position as head of the Provincial Council should have been finding real solutions to problems and not carrying out protests; for them, he was too much an activist and not enough a politician.

None of these backstage criticisms kept Zuhak from being mourned in public. Several activists published a short book on Zuhak's life, similar to a longer one they wrote about Mazari. Some told me they had visited his grave to pay their respects. The gravesite was located a short distance from my house, and so I accompanied Sajjad on one of his visits there. It was twilight, the sky changed from blue to mauve to brownish-grey as the light disappeared, the sun sinking behind the mountains. Other mourners were there. Perhaps as many as 30 had stopped by on their way home for the evening. The graveyard was dedicated to those who had lost their lives in Afghanistan's many wars, so it was unclear how many came to remember Zuhak, and how many came to remember family members, friends, or other victims of the country's many years of violence. But a number, at least five, did stop in front of Zuhak's grave, although they may have visited other graves as well. Zuhak's grave marker was large but not ostentatious. The dirt mound of the grave was enclosed with black and rust-colored iron fencing, about four feet high. The marker featured his picture, a photograph of Zuhak looking into the distance, the same as one on display all about the bazaar. He is wearing a suit, and looks dignified, although the picture has faded somewhat. Writing accompanied the image, although I did not manage to jot it down. Sajjad was subdued and somber, and I did not want to upset him or the other mourners by bringing out my notepad. Other grave markers were marked with flags of different colors, green or red, to denote whether the person was killed in the war with the Soviets or the Taliban. Those killed in the Saroa-e-Syob massacre by the Taliban had another sort of memorial. This long row

of graves were marked by rock slabs, were fenced in, and decorated with many-colored flags. I watched people arrive, pick up a rock, and knock on one of the gravestones, either entering the massacre memorial's gate or stopping at one of the other graves.

“What are they doing?” I asked.

Sajjad answered, “They knock on the grave so their dead friend or relative knows they have not forgotten about them” (See Figure 7).

Islam is a religion that requires pilgrimage. For Shi'as, as for all Muslims, Mecca is the most important site of pilgrimage but a journey to Karbala is a close second. There are also other shrines throughout the Shi'a world, such as the shrines to the Head of Hussein and to Zeinab in Damascus. Informally added to this list of pilgrimage sites for Hazaras in Bamyan is now Zuhak's grave, that of someone else killed in the fighting, and, of course, the grave of Mazari.

### **Abdul Khaliq Hazara: Martyr or Assassin?**

As I sought to understand the importance of figures such as Mazari and Zuhak, I began to ask people who were their most important heroes. Activists never answer Hussein or Ali, or even Mohammad, but not surprisingly always mention Mazari first. Zuhak is also mentioned. A third name is Abdul Khaliq Hazara.

I was stumped the first time I heard this name but, once I was told of his importance, I remembered exactly who he was. It probably added to my confusion that a number of Hazara men are named Abdul Khaliq. Where I had read or been told this name before, I do not remember. Abdul Khaliq is not even mentioned by name in Mousavi's book on the Hazaras. But he shows up in every history of Afghanistan. Normally he is referred to simply as the young student who assassinated King Nadir Shah in 1933.

**FIGURE 7**



A mourner “knocks” on a grave of one of the victims of the Saroa-e-Syob massacre, contained by a larger memorial area (Source: Melissa Kerr Chioyenda).

Barfield (2010) describes Nadir Shah's assassination as an act of revenge. In 1929, the Tajik rebel Habibullah Kalakani became the first non-Pashtun ever to occupy Afghanistan's throne, if only for nine months. Capitalizing on Pashtun tribal politics, Nadir deposed Habibullah, only to keep the throne for himself. Abdul Khaliq carried out the assassination during the visit of a group of students.

For many a scholar, Abdul Khaliq is little more than a footnote to history; for Hazaras, Khaliq means more. People in Bamyan dispute that he was a mere instrument of Pashtun rivals for the throne but say he assassinated Nadir Shah for keeping Hazaras in subjugation and pushing through an ethnic Pashtunization of the country. For Hazara activists, then, the simple fact that the target was a Pashtun ruler and the killer, a Hazara, make this a sort of rebellion by Hazaras. Khaliq's death was horrible. According to some reports, his eyes were gouged out and his tongue cut off, before being bayoneted to death. Repeatedly, people in Bamyan stressed not only that Khaliq had been killed but the horrific way it happened. No one mentioned issues of succession between Pashtuns. It was said instead that he had sacrificed his life to protest wrongs brought upon the Hazara people. It was also said that his family had been made to watch as this was done, another link to the original martyr, Hussein.

Tahira, the wife of Jawad, was the first to tell me Khaliq was one of the great Hazara heroes. She told me he had been featured in one of the songs by Daoud Sourkhush, a beloved Hazara singer living in Europe. She said that she then researched, and found out who this great Hazara was.

The death of Khaliq is an honor for his mother

From whom his life blood was created

He gave his blood like water to the plant of love  
See, all the springs are like blood  
He gave himself and his heart for his country  
Because of his bravery we sing this song  
That his blood created from life  
There are a thousand people who are in a pool of blood, who are martyrs, and they are the  
best  
Their names are countless  
We were not afraid of the face of oppression  
We are dealing with all these black things  
I kiss the injured friends  
Stand up, those who remain  
And finally, there is a solution for the problems  
Mother, don't be upset about all the things that happened  
There are thousands of people (Hazaras) around you

-*Khaligho*<sup>64</sup> by Dawood Sarkhush, translated by Burhani Alizada and the author

This song, listened to by uncounted Hazaras, confirms not just Khaliq's status as a martyr but the symbolic importance of martyrs to Hazaras, generally. Khaliq's mother is encouraged not to be upset, for many Hazaras may someday benefit from Khaliq's death. Significantly, the song says that Khaliq gave his blood "like water to the plant of love," prefiguring the blood that Mazari would later shed for Hazaras.

Some activists now avoid speaking of Khaliq, wishing to maintain that they advocate



purely peaceful action. Others point out that Khaliq, like Mazari and Zuhak, who fought in war, sought through violence to protect the rights of others, against an oppressive ruler.

Khaliq, too, is commemorated on Facebook. On the last anniversary of his death, I was surprised to come across a picture of him, which I had seen before, likely in a book on Afghanistan, after he has been captured. The picture is hard to look at. He sits shackled, in a striped shirt, and his face and eyes speak of unbearable pain. Those who look at this picture are expected to feel sympathy for the suffering of Khaliq.

### **Can Women be Martyrs?**

Early Shi'a interpretations of Islam have a place for women martyrs. Fatima was Mohammad's daughter, married to Ali. When Abu Bakr was declared Caliph over Ali, Umar, who would become caliph afterwards, went to Ali's house to demand he, and his followers, pay his respects to Abu Bakr. They refused, and Umar's followers stacked wood around the house, intending to burn it down. First, though, they did try to force open the door. Pregnant Fatima attempted to hold the door closed. When Umar's men broke in, several of her ribs were broken, leading her to miscarry and die (Hyder 2006). Fatima might be considered a martyr for harming no one and defending the rights of the oppressed.

Tahira mentioned Shirin, when asked who she thought the Hazara heroes were. So did Aziza, a good friend who worked at one of the local radio stations. Later, Firuzan, the career activist and later politician, also told me of Shirin. In fact, most of the women whom I asked mentioned Shirin, and many men, too.

Some of the women who named Shirin also made mention of another Daoud Sarkhoush song, his "*Shirin Oye Oswahi Pikor Tarikh* (Oh! Shirin, The Hero of History)":

Shirin, you are like a column in history

You are martyred and you are still alive and fruitful, (meaning: having an impact on the people)

You are like a crown of 40 girls

Your name will be in history, like a friend we will follow faithfully

You didn't accept the oppression of the enemy

You are free and you were awakened to do what was needed in history

From your blood and that of all the girls who were with you

History will be colored by your blood

Shirin, you are a heroine and a girl of the Hazaras

Your name will be always in history

This period of time took our Shirin, hundreds of our Shirins

(Translated by Burhani Alizada and the author.)

Tahira and Aziza both told me that Shirin had been the bravest of Hazara girls, and that she lived during the time of Abdur Rahman. As Abdur Rahman's troops approached her village, Shirin persuaded forty other girls to run away with her. Reaching a mountain top, they had nowhere else to go, and valuing their purity over their lives, they threw themselves off the mountain.

Some place Shirin further back in time. For example, a blog about a women's shelter states that she lived when the Mongols invaded, and was, in fact, "Bactrian."<sup>65</sup> Others told me that she lived recently, during the Taliban's rule. But as Abdur Rahman embodies the worst villain for Hazaras, it is not surprising that most versions have Shirin flee from his soldiers.

Oddly adding to this temporal confusion, stylized paintings of Shirin often have the pursuing soldiers dressed in First World War-era uniforms (Figure 8).

Parallels can be drawn between Sarkhoush's song and the Baroye Tarikh documentary film about the Afshar Massacre. The first stanza, "You are like a column in history," suggests that Shirin is a "shahid" in both of this word's senses, as martyr and witness. A column remains and reminds its viewer of the past after other ruins have been flattened. "You did what was needed in history" points to Shirin's stand not just for purity but against sexual slavery. And like Afshar, Sarkhoush makes clear Shirin will not be forgotten: "History will be colored by your blood." When I asked Firuzan why Shirin was so important to her, she said, "Because she saved her purity. She saved the purity of the Hazara girls." Firuzan's answer is ambiguous. Has she saved the purity of the forty girls who accompanied her, or that of all Hazara girls, whose purity is put into question by cultural differences as well as ambient racism, compounded by a past of slavery?<sup>66</sup>

Shakila, the young murder victim whose case was discussed in a previous chapter, was, besides Mazari, the person most talked about as a "martyr" during the time of my fieldwork. She was killed allegedly because of the sexual exploitation she was experiencing at the hands of a powerful man. Many Hazara activists went to great pains to explain that this was not an ethnic issue. At issue in the case, even so, is the deference widely accorded to Sayeds, as descendants of the Prophet Mohammad. This high status of the alleged murderer, the important politician Sayed Wahid Beheshti, is said to have enabled him to escape being brought before the law. Shakila, in any case, became a symbol of the wrongs committed against Hazaras and against Afghan women. There was absolute clarity that Shakila was the innocent, killed after being abused and having harmed no one. No one suggested that Shakila had done anything to provoke Beheshti's

**FIGURE 8**



*This depiction of Shirin jumping to her death is widely shared by Hazaras on social media (source: author's research notes)*

violence. Even if, as some of Beheshti's supporters implied, she became pregnant and killed herself, she is still a martyr, having taken her own life to escape an abusive situation.

Images of Shakila's grey, lifeless face (Figure 9), in a photo taken of her before she was buried, seemed to be everywhere while I was in the field. The picture was featured on placards and on fliers, and circulated on Facebook and Hazara-focused websites. This seems to be the only picture of Shakila available for activists to put to use.

On social media as well as in local protests, Hazaras make extensive use of images of people killed in attacks. At times, images of the living person and the dead are juxtaposed. At other times, a photo of the living person is displayed. All of these images demand that the viewer consider what was lost.

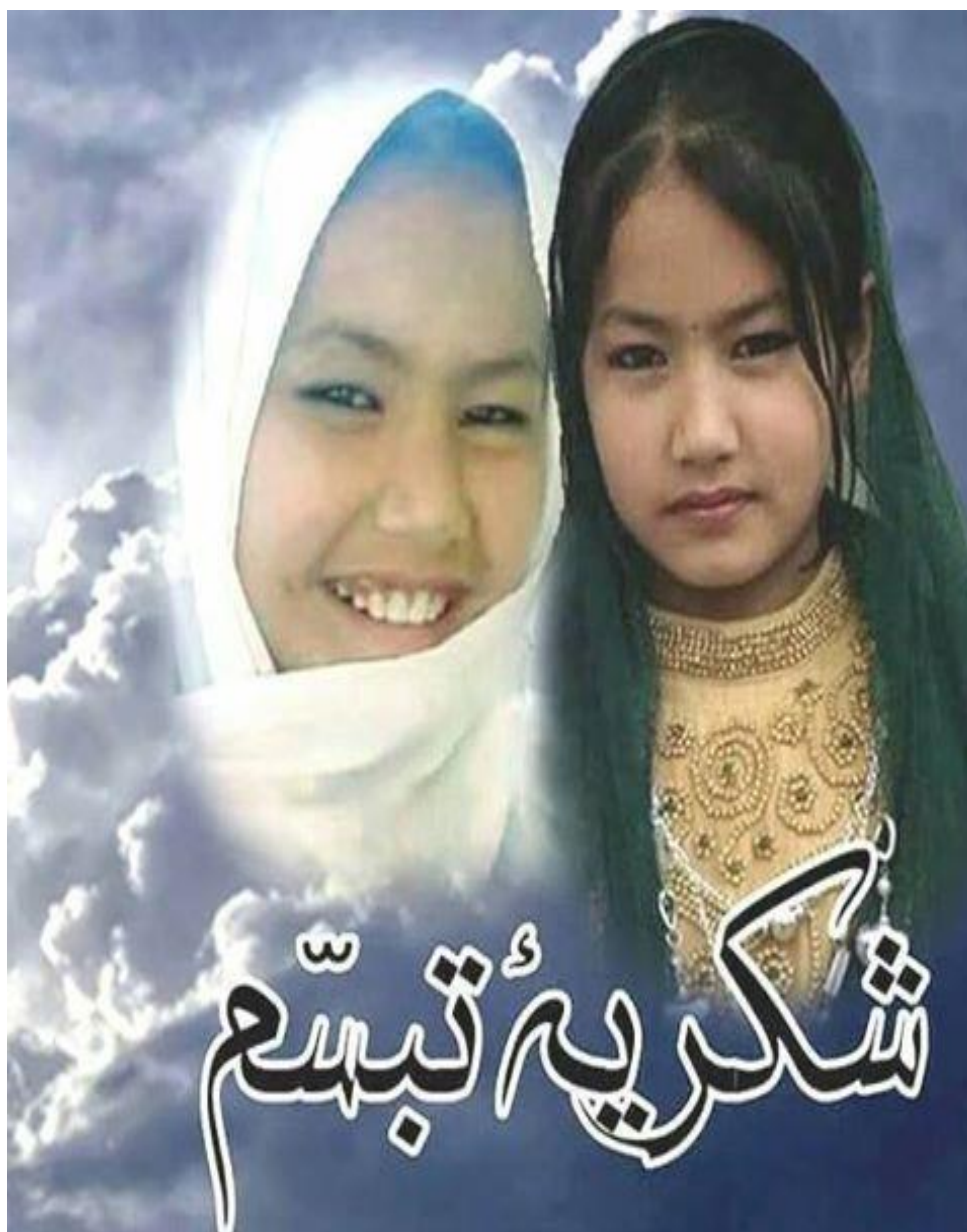
In 2015, seven Hazaras, including a nine-year-old girl, were held hostage for a month and then their throats were cut with wire or kite string coated with glass (reports that they were beheaded were apparently a mistranslation, which many activists picked up on). The incident happened amid fighting between the newly operational ISIS group in Afghanistan and the Taliban. The nine-year-old girl was named Shukria Tabassum. I remember initially that a few photos were shown after her body was recovered. But it was the photo of her living face that went viral in on-line media (Figure 10). Most of the activists I know shared her photo, which many changed to their profile picture. In some of the photos she is smiling. The most widely shared is one in which she stares seriously into the camera. The killing sparked massive protests in Afghanistan, as Hazaras and others took to the streets demanding that the government provide better security. Shukria is the ultimate example of the martyr killed in spite of her innocence. What harm could such a small child have done?

**FIGURE 9**



An image of Shakila displayed during a protest by civil society activists, demanding her murder case be re-examined (Hazara International Network, <http://www.hazarapeople.com/2012/07/31/kabul-demonstration-condemning-killing-hazara-girl-shakila/>)

**FIGURE 10**



This stylized image of Shukria Tabassum was widely circulated on social media following her death (source: Hazara International Network, <http://www.hazarapeople.com/2015/11/15/shukria-tabassum/>)

The women “martyrs” whose stories I have come to know — Shirin, Shakila and Shukria — had one theme in common, the preservation or defilement of purity. If Shirin died to save her purity and Shakila’s purity had been taken from her by a powerful local leader, nine-year-old Shukria, just a child, was the most innocent of them all.

While some might say this reduces women martyrs to “pathetic victims,” the ambient context, in which Hazara women have historically been enslaved and abused by Pashtuns, suggests that such representations may carry an edge of gender-based critique. The emphasis on purity may be a way of contesting negative stereotypes of Hazaras held by other Afghans.

The existence of Hazara martyrs indicate several aspects of the activist movement in Bamyan. The remembrance and mourning of Hazara martyrs are an indication of the Karbala Paradigm among the activist community, as well as the greater Hazara community. While other Afghan groups also remember their dead as martyrs, I found that the Hazara way of speaking of martyrs reflect that of Shi’as. The classification of martyrs as sketched by Rustam at the very beginning of the chapter, indicate that they also can be used by Hazaras to claim the role of pathetic and heroic victim simultaneously, as some martyrs seem to fill both of these roles, and as all martyrs, both pathetic victims and heroic victims, stand for the entire Hazara community. If martyrs stand for all Hazaras, a collective trauma is indicated, and if a people have been so shaken that they see themselves in the faces of their martyrs, which are widely displayed, it can also be supposed that they have suffered cultural trauma. And in a final twist, exactly because pathetic victims are linked with femininity, they allow Hazaras to exhibit a form of agency, and perhaps even resistance, when such is supposedly outside of the purview of what a pathetic victim is. By insisting upon the purity of Hazara women martyrs, Hazaras struggle against a history of sexual slavery and stereotypes about Hazara women’s sexuality that continue even to



the present.

## Chapter 8

### Activists' Interpretation of Hazara and Afghan History

Several months into my fieldwork, I was sitting in one of the few coffee shops in Kabul with a well-known Hazara activist, Kanishka. The shop is frequented mainly by foreigners, many hunched over laptops, working intently, while others talk and laugh quietly. Kanishka had worked for foreign organizations, and recognized the coffee shop as a space where an Afghan man and a foreign woman could meet without problems. While the environment was relaxing — cushioned chairs, local art and carpets hanging on the walls — the conversation was difficult. Well educated, with an MA in sociology from a university in Iran, Kanishka is a leading Hazara activist. He has an important social media following, in Afghanistan and globally. We discussed Marx, Kafka, Dostoyevsky, and Agamben, before I turned the conversation towards my research.

When I asked him to tell me his views on how Hazaras talk about their history, he did not give me a narrative of this history but shared his perspective on what history is.

“Hazara,” Kanishka said,

is an invented identity. And all history is a construction. So this Hazara history we talk about, it is also constructed. But what does that matter, since we start from the premise that all history is constructed? Our real history was lost, destroyed by the Pashtun rulers. We talk about this all the time. All we can do is *reconstruct* our history. If we talk about this too openly, many will criticize us, but that is what they did, too, when they destroyed our history to construct their own.

During my time in Bamyan, activists sought me out to tell me their history, at times making it explicit that they wanted me to bring this history to a Western audience. They said the history of Hazaras had been forgotten, that oppressors had tried to erase it, but it was not completely lost. They thought their history was recoverable, and voiced the hope that I could assist them in presenting it to the world. I told them that I would be conveying how they talk about their history and trying to understand why they do so; but even with this understanding that I might make their words an object of analysis, they were eager to talk to me. They knew that I would write about certain things: the genocide of Abdur Rahman, the enslavement and other forms of abuse suffered for generations by Hazaras, the mass killings under the Taliban, and continuing problems and discrimination. In writing, my disagreement with some of what Hazara history-keepers regarded as fact is an unresolved tension, although I have tried to present the Hazara explanations about their history without making apparent my own skepticism.

I was also struck by the underlying tensions concerning history's ontological status. Some activists believe that they are uncovering an authentic, real history, while others, more ideologically inclined, such as Kanishka, know they are presenting at least a partially imagined history, a construct. That construct echoes important truths but will also assist Hazaras in their efforts to claim rights and escape oppression. In their view, history's constructed-ness does not make it false; it makes history a thing that will in the future be shaped by Hazaras and shape their future. Those who construct a history with a more instrumental view believe Hazaras have been passive agents, to whom others have assigned an identity. From this standpoint, building history is a part of becoming active agents in the creation of their own identity.

Jonathan Friedman (1992:194) writes, "History and the discourse about making history is

positional, that is, it is dependent on where one is located in social reality, within society, and within global process.” Hazaras find themselves in a position as a historically oppressed people, who, until recently, had little to do with writing their own history. Gaining access to independent education, activists now realize that the history they find in state schoolbooks is either inaccurate or not helpful in establishing themselves as legitimate inhabitants of Afghanistan and framing the kind of narrative about themselves they want to disseminate among Hazaras, Afghans, and internationally. The history-making project is an important one for them in order to position themselves as knowing subjects of Hazara realities.

It is hardly surprising that a historically oppressed people should be left out of the “official history” of a nation-state. This situation reflects not just ethnic but class-based biases, equating history with the doings of political elites and not subalterns. Only relatively recently have historians begun to inquire into the history of those who lived under the rulers and kings, to create a “subaltern” history of non-elites and the oppressed.<sup>67</sup> Olivier Zunz (1985:6) writes that social history “should illuminate the complex interplay between large structural social changes and alterations in the character of the dynamics of populations, social hierarchies, and routine social life.” In essence, attention paid to these last three points is what Hazara activists want, all of which have changed drastically due to the Afghan state aggression. In keeping with this trend, Hazara activists are critiquing an elite-based history of Afghanistan in which elite Pashtuns are highlighted and servile Hazaras are overlooked, underscoring the ethnic turn of the larger Hazara revival.

The identity Hazara activists seek to create through history telling relates to trauma in several ways. In content, the activists choose to focus upon a history that almost always deals with past traumas. Some of these episodes are well-known, as with the conquest of the Hazaras

by Abdur Rahman. Yet even events from a more distant and tangentially-related past are cast by the activists as tragedies for the Hazaras. Activists speak of Arab invasions of Afghanistan of the seventh century, not only as destruction and looting of cities and artwork by the Muslim invaders but as the end of a way of life in which people of different religions and groups lived together peacefully. This is recounted as a loss for Hazaras although there is only a tenuous link between today's Hazaras and the people who lived on the Bamyān plateau at the time. Loss and subjugation mark even this deep history, for many activists, as something which *feels* legitimately a foundation of their heritage, justifying a sense of connection to the previous Buddhist inhabitants of the area.

The attention given to the Arab invasions is consistent with a larger trend among Hazara activists and intellectuals to focus on a few events of symbolically heightened importance from the distant past. The implicit goal is to establish their belonging in Afghanistan, not as outsiders, descendants of Mongol invaders who brought destruction and killing, as they have long been portrayed.<sup>68</sup> Rather, activists tend to deny Mongol descent and claim that the Hazaras suffered also at the hands of the Mongols. This even as they invoke connections to a more distant Buddhist tradition, which they claim as part of their own history and the destruction of which they lament.

The common features of this Hazara exceptionalist history include: (1) a focus on Hazara belonging to the land on which they currently reside; (2) the establishment of an inherent tendency towards peacefulness; which (3) contrasts with the supposed martial tendencies of those they view as their main enemies, the Pashtuns. Hazaras, then, are not the warriors who took over much of Afghanistan, killing its inhabitants. They are, rather, the descendants of early inhabitants of Bamyān, who interacted with people of many religions and ethnicities during the

Silk Road era, peacefully and not aggressively, as opposed to the Pashtuns. All this helps endow Hazara with a cultural competence in multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism, qualities which again Pashtuns are claimed to lack.

### **How to Construct History: The Epistemological Conundrum of Hazara Activists**

When Hazaras re-tell their history focusing on particular events as defining their place in Afghanistan, they rely upon a mix of oral tradition and an amalgamation of historical sources they have read. Starting in the 1970s and continuing to the present, a number of Hazara scholars have trained as historians in the West and in nearby countries such as Iran, as well as in Afghanistan. At the same time, Hazaras recall legends concerning their origins and the Bamyān area, some of which incorporate Islam, and some of which do not. Activists interested in history read the academic versions and make sure they know the oral myths. They then often retell these histories to others. Hence, their history can take on an appearance that to outsiders may seem more mythical or legendary than historical.

As they are emphasizing their place as martyrs in Afghanistan today, often this history emphasizes the martyrdom of the main players. Hence, an emphasis on the violent deaths of the inhabitants of the Bamyān plateau unites accounts of Arab, Mongol, and Taliban invasions. Sometimes the telling is more mythological, as in the story of Shireen, the girl who, realizing she was going to be raped by Abdur Rahman's soldiers, throws herself off a cliff with forty other girls. Other tellings are clearly historically documented, such as Abdul Khaliq Hazara, who assassinated Nadir Shah in 1933. The particularity of Hazara tellings here is that Abdul Khaliq is a hero, not an assassin, for killing one of the Pashtun rulers whom Hazaras hold responsible for their oppression. Evidence of Khaliq's elevation to hero status is all around, in songs about him

and the naming of many men after Abdul Khaliq.

In this chapter, I will explore how Hazaras give new meaning to certain historical events. Specifically, I will discuss many activists' claims that Hazaras are descended not from the Mongols but from an autochthonous Turkic or possibly Persian people. History keepers at times betray an awareness that the historical narratives they tell partake of both myth and history, to outsiders' ears, when they tailor their accounts to fit what they believe their listeners will find most appealing. Straddling this divide between elite-validated and subaltern-preserved knowledge, Kanishka might be said to play the role of a "cultural broker." He obtained a master's degree in Iran, held a position as a guest researcher in a European country for several months, is familiar with leading Western social theorists, and is also very aware of differences among the various audiences to whom he reaches. To me, he seemed equally at ease giving a speech to a group of Western academics as he was in speaking to Hazara activists of all educational levels. He could balance and mediate between Hazaras' needs, on one hand, to create a history that would establish their place as rightful inhabitants of Afghanistan, and Western and non-Hazara Afghan academic standards of validity, demanding evidence from reliable sources.

### **History and Myth: Oppositional or Complimentary?**

What is myth? And what is history? Oral historians and anthropologists coincide in not just blurring but politicizing the frontier between the two. Jan Vansina (1985) and Richard Price (1983), for example, have shown that oral histories from Central Africa or the Guyana rainforest, which a casual listener might dismiss as "myths," may on closer study be revealed to contain many independently verifiable overlaps with "facts" drawn from the archives but also bear their own independent value as irreplaceable addenda to the written record. To this uncertainty, about

which aspects of myth might be verifiable and which, not, must be added similarities in their social functions: history is interpreted and utilized with its present instrumentality in mind. If the same can be said of myths, then the convergences as well as the differences between the two categories become a valid object of ethnographic study. If history is chosen from a variety of narratives with the intent of accomplishing something in the present, and if myth or legend seeks to explain something about why the world is the way it is today, then the two may not actually be that different. The difference is our own Western bias in favor of validating narratives about the past through written sources, not oral sources, unless the latter can be independently verified.

Or not: for Westerners, too, love their own kinds of myths. Certainly, American politicians and activists love to tell stories that turn certain figures from American history — the framers of the U.S. Constitution and other “founding fathers” come to mind — into mythical figures. Stories about their lives are put to use to achieve certain political aims. The question, then, might not be which societies have history and which, myth, but rather how people within all societies use and react to different types of “histories,” populist as well as academic. Every nation, after all, has had to embark on some degree of myth-making (Hobsbawm 1983). Possibly those who command a state can call their myths “history,” while those, such as Hazaras, who have little power are just “myth-makers.” Outside of academia, “history” and “myth” may overlap and bear similarity to each other, as I will show with Hazaras.

Similar themes emerge from Joanne Rappaport’s (1998) account of the telling of history by rights activists among the Nasa, an indigenous people of the Andes. Nasa activists instrumentalize their history to work against their subordinate position in Peruvian society, to spread knowledge of the subordination they have suffered, to inform their fellow Nasa about their legal rights, and to re-define who they are as a people. The Nasa know there is a power in



controlling history. Echoing a refrain common among Hazara activists, Nasa rights activists feel that their history had been stolen, or erased, by those in power.

Pierre Nora relates the same problems set out by Rappaport but sees Western societies, too, caught in similar contradictions. He writes:

[T]he “acceleration of history,” then, confronts us with the brutal realization of the difference between real memory — social and unviolated, exemplified in but also retained as the secret of so-called primitive or archaic societies — and history, which is how our hopelessly forgetful modern societies, propelled by change, organize the past. On the one hand, we find an integrated, dictatorial memory — unself-conscious, commanding, all-powerful, spontaneously actual-izing, a memory without a past that ceaselessly reinvents tradition, linking the history of its ancestors to the undifferentiated time of heroes, origins, and myth — and on the other hand, our memory, nothing more in fact than sifted and sorted historical traces” (1989: 8).

Among “primitive” or “archaic societies,” for Nora, memory, myth and stories of heroes are all ways to recall the past. This was the way that history was passed on before modern, Western, academic ways of understanding history came to be. Nora posits that the “acceleration of history” explains the change from one to the other but that in *lieux de mémoire* (places of memory) earlier modes of remembering the past are retained. A place can be an archive, an object, or an actual location which holds memory, much as the Nasa rights activists, described by Rappaport, read the landscape for evidence. As Hazara activists navigate both the older, mythic, memory-based history, and the modern academic history, certain *lieux de mémoire* come to hold

an important place in their imagination, such as the sites of the destroyed Buddha statues or the ruined city that myth tells us was destroyed by Mongol invaders.

James Wertsch (2002), drawing on Halbwachs, Nora and Novick, locates similar tensions between history and collective memory. Maurice Halbwachs (1980, quoted in Wertsch 2002: 41) contends that a significant difference between collective memory and history is that collective memory focuses on the “stability and continuity of the group and often resists the idea it has changed over time.” This tendency, placing emphasis on group continuity, may be evidenced in Hazara activists’ insistence that even ancient history (for which they have very little concrete evidence) demonstrates that Hazaras are more open-minded and concerned with peace and equality than other groups. This sort of continuity “demonstrates” that they are “inherently” more predisposed to uphold these values than other groups in Afghanistan. Hazara history-telling, as Nora (1999: 8) writes about “collective memory,” is “memory without a past that ceaselessly reinvents tradition, linking the history of its ancestors to the undifferentiated time of heroes, origins, and myth.” Of course, the point is that this is not something that tries for “objective historical truth” (a chimera that likely does not exist anyways). Some among the activists know this, and speak of constructions of histories, while others do believe they are discovering a truth that has been hidden. This complication reflects divisions in what activists think, and in what they are willing to disclose to an outside anthropologist. These discrepancies arise when one thinks in terms of history, but become more consistent if we consider this history to be also their present collective memory (understood by activists to be history, whether truth or construct, as the phrase “collective memory” did not arise in my conversations with them). Novick (1999: 3-4), writing of outside knowledge of the Holocaust, indicates that history at least tries to deal with multiple and competing perspectives, whereas collective memory sees events from a “single

committed perspective.” “Memory....has no sense of the passage of time; it denies the ‘pastness’ of its objects and insists on their continuing presence. Typically a collective memory . . . is understood to express some eternal or essential truth about the group — usually tragic” (1999:4). Hazara activists, in telling their history, are repeating stories that intend to demonstrate what they consider essential truths about the group, that they are as not just oppressed but also culturally exceptional, and hence stand apart from the other peoples in Afghanistan. What defines them as an exceptional people, from the Hazara standpoint, is not just the unending persecution they have suffered but their inherent “goodness.”

Building upon Salomon (1982), Rappaport (1990:2) claims that “Nasa interpretations of the past are..... ‘chronicles of the impossible’, indigenous attempts at integrating their own brand of historical and cosmological thought with Western discourse, both of which are effaced in the process because they contradict each other.” Hazaras also mix types of historical traditions, and in so doing seek to escape conventional binaries, in which history either bases itself on hard evidence to explain things that really happened or is a mythological exercise based on what people’s ancestors know to have happened. The Hazaras are already straddling both worlds, mythical and academic, and try to make use of both. In some cases, there is a lack of written historical sources. Knowledge about the Buddhist empires that once inhabited Bamyān is scant. Hazaras’ exact relationship to the Mongols is based mainly on linguistic (and now genetic) evidence. Even historical records about Hazaras in the centuries immediately preceding their full incorporation into the Afghan state is limited. But sources do exist, so Hazara activists might not only rely on myths to infer history but use history to create myths.

I, too, then, have to straddle both worlds in order to make some sense of the history they tell. I am not a cultural broker like Kanishka, who can give a talk on Hazara history to a Western

audience in a way that would make sense using Western theory, and then turn around and talk to a Hazara audience about overlapping themes of Hazara history in ways that help them make sense of the place they hold in Afghan society. Yet I have addressed both kinds of audiences, and hence know of what I speak in a sense as a participant and not just an observer: I have spoken about the Buddha statues' destruction and its coverage in the media both in an academic journal and in a speech to room packed with over 100 Hazaras. And I know on this basis that what I say here will be understood and questioned differently by a Hazara audience in Bamyan than by a Western audience. My focus in what follows is not to judge the merits of Hazara history telling but to examine *how* Hazara activists in Bamyan make use of both Western academic and mythical/legendary types of histories, depending on audience and setting.<sup>69</sup>

Like the Nasa (Rappaport 1998), activist Hazaras understand that there is power in *controlling* history, and so they have made this a key part of their project. At one end of this ongoing project of seizing control over their own history are historians, including Sayed Askar Mousavi, Hassan Poladi, Kazim Yazdani, and others, who do research and publish books in apparent conformity with Western conventions. The books published by these individuals are read by some in the activist community, and then are told and retold orally, both informally and in more formal events such as speeches. At this point, formal history, done in Western academic styles, meets up with the other pole of the Hazara history project, involving the oral retelling of history. In a fashion similar to how the Nasa patch the "holes" in their historical memory, through myths and cyclical images (Rappaport 1998), Hazaras fill the gaps in their history, which they claim has been intentionally erased by Pashtun rulers of Afghanistan, with reference to cyclical images or themes.

An example of this tendency to recast history as myth emerged during a meeting I had

with Nawruz, a Hazara activist well-versed in Hazara history, the events of which I recorded in my field notes as follows:

I met my friend Khadim in a dorm room where we were going to listen to something about Hazara history from a “local expert,” Nawruz. I should clarify that by local expert, I do not mean someone with a degree, who has done their own archival research. Nawruz was a university student, slightly older than many, in his mid-twenties with a family and several children. He was a bit heavy-set, with a round face, and he spoke slowly, enunciating his words in his deep voice. He had read a lot of the books that have been written about Hazara history, committed a sort of amalgamation of them to memory, and would recite this history.

On this day, we were in a men’s dorm room. Actually, in Bamyan, there is no men’s dormitory. Male students rent rooms in the bazaar which are extremely basic. The buildings are made of mud plaster. They cover the dirt floors with plastic rugs, sleep and sit on thin padding (tushak), and cook on small propane stoves. They usually have one lightbulb, either attached to a solar panel or a nearby generator they pay in to. They squeeze as many men into these tiny, squalid rooms as they can, in order to keep the cost of rent down.

Nawruz was sitting on the one raised bed in the room, and me next to him. Everyone else gathered around on the floor. All in attendance were interested in what he had to say, and told me they held these informal history lessons quite often. It was not something done just for the sake of the anthropologist.

Nawruz started in ancient history, stating that two groups could be considered

ancestors of Hazaras, “the Aryoyi (Aryans) who ruled in Balkh to the north and the Kanishkans or Kushans, who would be the group who built the Buddha statues. Hazaras are more closely related to the Kushans, and they came at such an early time that Hazaras can be considered the original (boumi) people of Central Afghanistan. Hazara slang is similar to that of the Aryoyi, but they look more like the Kushans, so they are likely more closely related to Kushans, with whom they also have some cultural similarities. Of course,” Nawruz continued, “Hazaras have mixed with other peoples, such as Mongols, later. But their likeness to the Buddha statues is unmistakable, and the Kushans are the ones who built them, so they had the strongest impact on early Hazara ancestry.”

At this point, Nawruz’s narrative began to wander, as he recounted several of the troubles faced by Hazaras. He made a big jump in time as he said Hazaras might be one of the earliest inhabitants of Afghanistan, but many were forced out of their homeland during the time of Abdur Rahman in the late 1800s. “Many went to Mashhad, Iran, others to India, to Kashmir, to all the Central Asian countries. They blended in completely in all these places, while it is in Afghanistan they do not blend in.” Then Nawruz jumped again, this time backwards. “The coming of the Mongols was a tragic time for Hazaras. It brought down the whole Hazara nation, nearly destroyed it, and we see these effects in the ruins of Shahr-e-Gholghola.

“Hazaras are the original (boumi) people. The correct question is not where Hazaras came from, but where others came from and who mixed with Hazaras. Many of the groups that later came to power in the region, the rulers and the kings, they were from Central Asia and from South Asia. The Hazaras were always here, through all of these changes. Hazaras live in the central part of Afghanistan, so this shows that they are

original, and were beset from the outside by others. For example, the Pashtuns came in the 16<sup>th</sup> or 17<sup>th</sup> Century from South Asia. They pushed the Hazaras inwards, to the central mountain areas where they now live. But Hazara areas are the ones that are full of ancient places and (heritage) sites. This is another way Hazaras know they are the original (boumi) people of Afghanistan.

“We must recognize, there is no such thing as a pure Hazaragi nation. Ours is a nation of mixing, built upon the original (boumi) people of Afghanistan. This mixing has contributed to the changes and improvements Hazaras have made over the last ten years. The fact that we are a mixture of different peoples and integrated backgrounds is why we are more likely to be more open-minded, free thinkers. We are more tolerant, more accepting of change, because we are a mix of different peoples from different histories. We have a strong connection to Buddhism in our culture, but when Afghanistan became Islamic, so did we. However, we chose Shi’a Islam, because it allowed us to have more choices, more freedoms.”

Nawruz went on to describe in more detail the period of Abdur Rahman, and other even more recent issues. Two aspects of his description of ancient history struck me, particularly. First is a myth-ification of events familiar from written histories of Afghanistan and Bamyan. He takes bits and pieces of historical fact, and ties them together in a new way to create a myth or legend, which explains why Hazaras are the way they are today. Second is an emplacement of history. He centers his story around the place where we were at the time — Markaz Bamyan, the site of the destroyed statues and the remnants of Shahr-e-Ghoghola — even though he himself comes from the neighboring province of Daikundi.

Partaking as much of origin myth as history, the story Nawruz told has several aims. It explains why Hazaras belong in Afghanistan, but also why they are different, more “open-minded” than the people of other groups. Crucially, it circulated through several eras of suffering, at the hands of Abdur Rahman and the Mongols. As he continued to speak that day, he also touched upon other aspects of suffering in more recent times, during the civil war and Taliban periods. The impression that I was listening to an origin myth, and not to history, was surely compounded by the setting: a dorm room of mud brick walls, dim lighting, and a ceiling made of reeds, with young men crowded about the floor, while bazaar sights and sounds went on outside. This sense, that I was witnessing something not academic but “traditional,” if not ancestral, left me questioning why Nawruz’s skill as a historian had been touted. Only when I took a step back, and considered Nawruz’s and others’ more mythologized histories as being different in style of presentation and emphasis, rather than content, than the histories presented by Kanishka in presentations in the West (or even the histories presented in books by such scholars as Oxford-trained Mousavi), did I realize this was too simple an understanding of Hazara history-making. Conversations I had with individuals such as Kanishka on the very *nature* of history only confirmed the over-simplification of my initial impression that I was hearing “mere myths.”

About a month later, I received an early clue concerning my own oversimplification when the elections for the president of the United States occurred. Jawad asked me to give a talk about the process at his English resource center. I agreed but then became unsure what to expect of this event when I learned that Nawruz would also be speaking. I saw Nawruz give a very different presentation than the one I had heard him give to his fellow students in the dorm room. Nawruz and I were in a brightly-lit room with white-washed plastered walls, speaking to students



lined up in neat rows of chairs. The walls were covered in posters showing famous places from the United States and United Kingdom. We had a computer and a projector, and spoke on a slightly raised platform with a podium. After my talk, Nawruz began to speak of the similarities between Hazaras and African Americans. He spoke of the enslavement and oppression of African Americans, and also spoke, using well-substantiated details, about the similar history of the Hazaras. His main point was that if Barack Obama could be president in the United States, then a Hazara could one day be president of Afghanistan. At no point did I notice the kinds of questionable embellishment that marked Nawruz's dorm room talk, and, instead of making bold leaps across time, he stuck to a narrative timeline much more familiar to me as "history." This talk, then, was very different, even as some of the students in attendance were the same ones who met in the dorm room. Nawruz, like Kanishka, seems adept at this sort of code-switching. Nawruz's expertise, then, is not simply history but in making the adjustments to audience demanded of a cultural broker and being able to straddle the worlds of myth, memory and history.

Nawruz was also participating in historical retellings that took place for different reasons. In many cases, activists were clearly instrumentalizing historical narratives to bring about some sort of current political change for Hazaras. The talk about American elections was clearly done with this intent. Sitting with students in their dorm room, however, seemed to be simply an enjoyable activity for my informants, without a clear political goal. The students were enthralled by Nawruz's recitation of Hazara history. They remained seated, listening, for at least an hour. It might be true they were, in part, drawn by the presence of a foreign researcher, but similar situations where I was present seemed to attract listeners for shorter durations of time. The students seemed to genuinely like spending their free time learning about their past.

### **The Buddhist and Mongol Eras as Topoi of Hazara Activist History-Telling**

Greta Uehling (2004), in her work on deported Crimean Tatars' efforts to repatriate to the Crimea after the fall of the Soviet Union, stresses the importance of place in forming social relations. She describes how Crimean Tatars demanded rights upon return to Crimea, and how relations with other residents of Crimea, and the Ukrainian state, came to be framed in understanding of an ethnicity's ties to a place. The Hazara historical project is similarly concerned with place, establishing ancient ties to the central highlands which are today considered the heart of Hazara homeland, and also with staking a claim to a larger portion, even the entirety of, Afghanistan. The place is important to activists because certain landscape features, such as the giant Buddha statues which were destroyed by the Taliban in 2001, are reminders of history. If you control the telling of history and insert yourself into the history evoked by landscape in a certain place, you can then tie yourself to that place. Even though people who consider themselves of Tajik ethnicity have also lived for long periods in Bamyan, the province is considered without contestation to be Hazara, and Bamyan remains important to Hazaras in other regions of Afghanistan and the diaspora. Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson (1992) assert that the idea of a homeland may become more and not less important as people's relationship with a place becomes more tenuous as they live in diaspora. Quettan Hazaras and those who were raised as refugees in Iran remember Bamyan and increasingly seek to return.

I will focus on two time periods that are of particular importance to the Hazaras, the Mongol and the Buddhist eras. The Mongol invasion is important because Hazaras are widely identified by others, and sometimes themselves, as Mongol, an identity that often works against their acceptance as Afghans. Faced with the negatives surrounding Mongol heritage, Hazaras

must either recast the Mongol invaders in a positive light or recast themselves as non-Mongols who also suffered from the invasion along with other “autochthones.” On the other hand, the fame of the Buddha statues, in the place the Hazaras consider the center of their homeland, means that Bamiyan is most known for being a formerly Buddhist area. When history represents Hazaras as the descendants of Mongols, it tends to deny them a claim to the Buddhist past. In response, Hazara activists strive to re-invent themselves as descendants of the Buddhists who once inhabited the area. Through this reinvention, they attach to themselves positive associations attributed to the Silk Road period, when Buddhists lived in Bamiyan, and to positive associations commonly attributed to Buddhists by outsiders.

Hazara activists’ choices of what eras of history to focus on, and what to exclude, emphasize efforts to streamline their historical narrative. Hazaras want to connect themselves to only certain of the great dynasties which have previously occupied and controlled the land in which they currently reside. They choose to focus on the Buddhist empires of the past. One familiar with the history of Afghanistan might ask, why not claim ancestry from the Ghoriid dynasty, which rose to prominence in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, by a Persian-speaking people who were presumably Buddhist before converting to Islam? This empire played a key role in Afghan history, and yet activists are largely silent about it, choosing instead to focus on earlier Buddhist dynasties. Why do they not position themselves as descendants of the Ghoriids, particularly when Hazaras became well-known as inhabitants of the later Ghor Province of the Afghan state? I can only conjecture, as most of my informants only ever mentioned the Ghoriids in passing. But I imagine that the choice to focus on descent from earlier Buddhist polities has at least two reasons. First, focusing on earlier inhabitants stresses more the autochthony of Hazaras. Second, Hazara activists are aware of, and to an extent participate in, Western prejudices

concerning the dangers of Islam as a political and extremist force. The Ghorids chose to become Muslims and were Muslim for most of their rule. In electing to identify with earlier rulers who were Buddhists, rather than Muslims, Hazaras may be playing on Western impressions that Buddhism is somehow inherently peaceful, while Islam is the opposite.

Marshall Sahlins (1985), in his introduction to *Islands of History*, explains the interaction between culture, understood as the structure that undergirds a society, and history, understood as a series of events experienced by a people. Sahlins holds that all historical events are understood through the lens of a certain culture and mythologized. These events, on the other hand, inevitably modify the underlying structure of cultures. “Culture is therefore a gamble played with nature, in the course of which, wittingly or unwittingly — I paraphrase Maurice Bloch — the old names that are still on everyone’s lips acquire connotations that are far removed from their original meaning” (Sahlins 1985: ix). Such a play of old names and more recent connotations can be identified behind the two main historical questions with which Hazara activists grapple: Were the Buddhist statues idols, or important symbols of a more glorious, cosmopolitan past? Were the Mongols ancestors of Hazaras, or conquerors of the Hazaras’ ancestors, who mixed with them as a consequence of violent conquest?

How do such “radical innovations” (Sahlins 1985: ix) occur? Sahlins writes about Polynesian encounters with European colonials and conquerors, encounters which surely also were traumatic. Just as Hazara activists may be said to be constructing cultural trauma, Sahlins describes innovation in history as a process carried out through the agency of the conquered. “The effects of such risks can be radical innovations. For finally, in the contradictory encounters with persons and things, signs are liable to be reclaimed by the original powers of their creation: human symbolic consciousness” (x). Sahlins argues that this is an organic process but also one

driven by individuals: “Meanings are ultimately submitted to subjective risks, to the extent that people, as they are socially enabled, cease to be the slaves of their concepts and become their masters (x).” One way of describing the process by which Hazara activists are attempting to change society is to say that they are, as they construct new historical meanings, becoming “masters of certain historical concepts.” Hazaras have ceased to be literally enslaved in Afghanistan, and now they seek to escape figurative enslavement under a “received” history, which erases their past.

### **The Buddhist Era**

Jawad became one of my closest friends during my time in Bamyan, and neither of us was reticent when it came to expressing our emotions. One evening we were enjoying a dinner with an activist who had traveled to Bamyan from Kabul. We had a lively discussion, but I could tell something was bothering Jawad. I asked him what was wrong, and he told me that he had an unpleasant run-in with a Tajik bank teller that day.

He had gone to the bank to collect his salary, and waited for close to an hour as the teller served people who had come in to the bank after him. Finally, losing his temper, he went to the teller and told him that this was no way to treat customers.

The teller told him he was out of line, and should not speak to him in that way.

“I looked at him, a Tajik,” Jawad said, drawing himself up to his full height, squaring his shoulders, and seeming to relive the moment when he put the teller in his place. He continued, “I said, ‘who do you think you are? My people have been here for 2,000 years. My face is the face of the Buddhas. The Buddhas are my biography. You may not speak to me in this way!’”

I wondered out loud if the teller was a Tajik originally from Bamyan, and also might

think that his ancestors had lived in the area for a similar amount of time, as my local Tajik friends claimed.

“No, he comes from Kabul or something. He is just here for the job,” Jawad replied.

This was the first time I heard anything about the Buddha statues being important to Hazaras in situating themselves as natives in Bamyan, but I would later on hear similar stories. Only later did I discover that I had read a similar narrative as I was preparing for fieldwork. Sayed Askar Mousavi has written one of the most comprehensive books on Hazaras, *The Hazaras of Afghanistan: An Historical, Cultural, Economic, and Political Study*, available in both English and Dari. Dr. Mousavi attended Oxford University and, though well respected in Afghanistan, some non-Hazaras complain that he displays a distinct ethnic bias. I was fortunate to meet him in Kabul, where he had returned to teach, and he was very encouraging of my research. Mousavi’s use of historical documents, especially when referring to the more recent history of Hazaras, starting with the period of Amir Abdur Rahman, seems authoritative. I have made extensive use of his work to provide historical background for this dissertation (Mousavi 1998).

Mousavi treads on shakier ground when he writes of the more distant past and critiques various theories concerning Hazara origins.<sup>70</sup> Mousavi reviews three theories put forward by Western scholars concerning the origin of Hazaras: one, that Hazaras are autochthonous to Afghanistan; the second, that Hazaras are descended from Mongols; and the third, that Hazaras are a mix of different peoples who have lived or passed through Afghanistan. He provides a strong argument against the first two possibilities, and then embraces the third, offering a rationale that he claims is different from any hitherto proposed (Mousavi 1997: 21-31). Mousavi begins by asserting, “Any anthropological research on the ethnography of the peoples in the

region requires a step-by-step academic journey back into, and along, the migratory patterns and ensuing geographic boundaries of the region” (Mousavi 1997: 37). This seems an antiquated assertion from an anthropological study published in 1997, and while such a journey into the distant past might be helpful for some ethnographies, it is certainly not a requirement for current anthropological work.

One possible explanation is that Mousavi takes up this topic precisely for reasons that link up with my discomfort with Nawruz’s history-telling in the Bamiyan student quarters: he wants to straddle the division between Western academic requirements and Hazara mythological/legendary explanation for their origins. On the statues’ importance in tracing the history of the region, Mousavi writes, “In order to do this (fully understand the origins of the Hazaras) we need to look into the ancient history of Bamiyan, centre of Hazarajat, and its ancient Buddha statues” (Mousavi 1997: 37). With this assertion, Mousavi skirts the realm of myth. For him, the key to the mystery of the Hazaras can be found in place in Bamiyan:

From the coins found in Bamiyan, the paintings on the temple walls and walls around the Buddha statues, the paintings of the last Kushani kings available, together with the physical features of the statues, it can be said that the inhabitants of the area were, until approximately 2300 years ago, of the same facial and physical features as today’s Hazaras. Thus it becomes possible, if not irrefutable, to trace the Mogholi appearance of the Hazara inhabitants of northern Afghanistan much further back in history, long before the incursion on Changiz Khan and Amir Timur (Mousavi 1997: 38).<sup>71</sup>

Mousavi goes on to provide further evidence for the autochthony of Hazaras, based on the idea,

also championed by my informants, that Hazaras are a Turkic, not Mongol, people, or Turkic Ephthalites, who later came to the region and also displayed similar facial features. Turkic words appear in the Hazaragi dialect, as many as, if not more than, Mongol words. There is a reference to a place called Barbaristan in Firdowsi's famous *Shahnama*, the most ancient example of written Persian, which Mousavi claims is referring to Hazarajat. Mousavi then allows that people of other origins, certainly Mongols and Turkic people, as well as Iranic Tajiks,<sup>72</sup> have mixed with Hazaras during later historical periods.

This reliance on the physical features of the Buddha statues as evidence, if not proof, of Hazara ancient ties to the area echoes Jawad's assertion that he looks like the Buddhas and hence the Buddhas are his "biography." This was something that I heard repeated often by Hazaras, activists and non-activists alike. More, by saying that they are descended from the Buddhas *themselves* ("the Buddhas are my biography"), the Hazaras stake a symbolic claim to be made from the same mud and earth as the Buddhas. According to this metaphor, the Hazaras are of the land in the sense of not only living in the Hazarajat but being inseparably tied to it.<sup>73</sup>

Hazara traditional houses, made of mud plaster, sometimes mixed with straw, at times also seem to merge with the earth. On one of my frequent visits to the family of my friend Sakhi, in their village in Yakawlang district, we relaxed on cushions and pillows one summer evening in the one-hundred-year old house of Sakhi's mother. I noticed one of the sisters had a giant black beetle crawling along her hand. She seemed mesmerized by its movements. While I knew these beetles lived in the walls of my own house, I held an extreme, irrational fear of them. Seeing my gaze, the teenaged girl moved towards me. I jumped away in fear, shouting, "Keep it away, don't put it on me!" I expected to be laughed at, but instead she looked at me with incredulity and a bit of sadness. "Melissa, it is of the earth (*az hak ast*), it is harmless, it will not



hurt you.” Traditional farmers up in these mountains are always surrounded by earth. They spend summers outside, working the earth, and winters inside earth houses. They spend all summer on the land, caring for their crops, their animals, weeding, irrigating, ploughing, digging, and most have only hand tools.

Once, the mother of this same family went with me for a walk on the plain that ran along the narrow river valley near their house. She looked seventy, but was likely closer to fifty-five or sixty. She wanted to cross the shallow river and spryly got a running start and bounded through. Unsure about the depth, the mud, and leaches, I resisted. I ended up wrangling a nearby grazing donkey and riding across (luckily my squeamishness is made up for by considerable equestrian skills). We laughed and laughed. These people are not just metaphorically “earthy” but live close to the earth, intimate with it in ways with which I found it impossible to identify, in spite of my family’s rural Tennessee roots.

The Buddha statues have, if anything, gained symbolic potency after being destroyed. As an absence rather than a presence, but one which is still clearly remembered by all adults from the Bamiyan area, the wreckage of the statues now symbolize the traumas of the Hazara past more clearly than when they were whole. Perhaps in the controversy that surrounds the prospect of their being rebuilt, the statues also point to the chance for Hazaras to be something different in the future.

When I first arrived in Bamiyan I lived in a guesthouse, where I had long conversations with its proprietor Mohammad, and his wife, Fatima. Mohammad does not consider himself to be an activist, and expresses wariness of some of the more ethno-nationalist aspects of their projects, and yet he considers many of the activists his friends. Relaxing in their common room one chilly afternoon, I asked him what Hazaras thought about the Buddha statues. He told me

that there was a myth concerning them which was also a possible foundational story of Hazaras.

Melissa, you know the Buddhas had names. Salsal was the male, the larger statue, and Shahmama, the female, was smaller. We have a story about them, and where they came from. Salsal fell in love with the daughter of a king who lived nearby here, in the area of Band-e-Amir.<sup>74</sup> But back then, there was no lake. The king told Salsal, if he wanted to marry Shahmama, he needed to do a task. So Salsal built Band-e-Amir. The marriage was then happening in Bamyan. Salsal and Shahmama were behind a curtain, about to be revealed to the people. When the curtain was removed, the people saw that they had turned into the two statues. And from these people, descended the Hazaras.

A slightly different story also confirms the statues' generative potential; according to that story, the two statues were built in the form of Salsal and Shahmama because they were such a beautiful couple. I do not know for how long the Salsal and Shahmama myth has been told in Bamyan, but the names of Salsal and Shahmama were recorded by some of the early Western explorers (Moorcraft 1825, Masson 1836, and Burnes 1842). Many Bamyan people refer to the statues by these names instead of as "Buddhas."

When the activists with whom I worked link the statues with the founding myth of the Hazaras, that move merges easily with their belief that the Hazaras share the statues' facial features. They can easily believe that once Hazaras were Buddhists, who built those statues, and later became Muslims. Equal weight attaches to "mythified" accounts of the historical Buddhist past and the mythical status of Salsal and Shahmama as Hazara founding ancestors.

The coming of Islam, of course, complicates the way that Hazaras now view the statues.

To many Muslims, the statues are “*but* (idols,” in Dari), and hence belong to a heretical polytheistic pantheon. After I had lived for several months in Bamyan and my understanding of the language was stronger, I realized that some people speak of Buddhas while others speak of “*but*.” All civil society activists call them Buddhas, or refer to them as Salsal and Shahmama. Others are just as likely to refer to them as *but*. At times, this felt more factual than judgmental: they call them idols because this is what they understand them to be. While no one ever told me outright that they did not like the statues, some seemed unwilling to talk about them much, a slight shifting of the eyes or posture when I raised the topic at times suggesting some unease. An Islamic country should have no *but*, but because it was the Taliban who destroyed them it was impossible for anyone openly to express approval for ridding the region of the *but*, even if they might have felt it justified on religious grounds. The commonly accepted attitude is to mourn the loss of the Buddhas as a travesty against world heritage and an attack on themselves.

I once asked Robert Canfield, one of the foremost anthropologists to have studied Hazaras, how people viewed the statues when he was there in the 1970s. He said that he rarely spoke to people about it, but did remember one occasion when they became the topic of conversation. He was in the bazaar, drinking tea with a farmer. He asked the farmer about some economic difficulties the community had been experiencing, and whether he knew why they were occurring. The farmer replied, “I don’t know. Perhaps it is because of the statues. But I just don’t know.” Similarly, I did ask some of the activists what the more general population thought of the destruction. They provided a similar answer. Jawad told me, “most want reconstruction, but some don’t. No one likes that the Taliban did it. But there are those who do not want them rebuilt, because they were *but*, un-Islamic. They think it is better they are gone, anyway.”

The idea that Salsal and Shahmama were founding ancestors, perhaps an ancient prince

and princess, surely makes them more palatable to devout Muslims than talking about them as Buddhas, and hence, symbols of a distinct religious tradition. Calling them Hazara founders further enables Hazaras to identify the destruction of the statues as part of a larger pattern of anti-Hazara aggression, running from Abdur Rahman to, some say, the current president, Ashraf Ghani, for his alleged support for kuchi seizures of Hazara land.

And not only devotion to Islam but opposition to religious intolerance can make efforts to rebuild the Buddhas contentious. There are many reasons to rebuild: it would restore beauty to the area and attract tourists. And it would show the Taliban that they did not win, after all. There are also reasons not to rebuild: money should be spent on people, not statues; the statues will be targeted again; the cliff face into which they were built is too unstable. But, besides pragmatic, financial considerations, one of the strongest reasons to leave the statues as ruins is symbolic.

One evening, I walked with Akbar, who worked in a radio station, as the sun set near the niches. The light was golden but the niches, dark. I asked him, “What do you think, about rebuilding?”

“They should never do it,” he said. “The monument is now in the destruction. The monument is in the evil that was done against us. The monument must remain how it is, so that all can remember what was done to us. So that the genocide against us is remembered. So people find out about it.”

In fact, one serious rebuilding effort, the project called “Two Afghanis Donation for Salsal and Shahmama,” led by well-known activist Shukria Neda, calls for only one statue to be restored, Salsal. Shukria says that she agrees with those in the community who think that one niche should remain empty, as a reminder of the evil that has been done. But she also believes that there is powerful healing in rebuilding, and that this has been done in many other war-torn

areas, including the Mostar Bridge in Bosnia and the Temple of the Sacred Tooth Relic of Buddha in Sri Lanka. Two statues gives the ability to address both concerns. Rebuilding Salsal will give Hazaras hope that perhaps things can improve. Leaving the empty niche of Shahmama will be a constant reminder to all who walk across the plateau of the wrong that has been done. Shukria believes that the empty niches only provide a message of suffering and collective trauma. As Shahmama is female, proposing to leave her statue in ruins is envisioned as a testament also to the suffering of Afghan women.

While the Buddha statues hold mixed meanings — when thought of, variously, as foundational ancestors, idols, works of art, a cultural heritage site, images of Buddha, or, through their destruction, symbols of collective trauma — identifying today's Hazaras as descendants of the Buddhists who once lived in the valley situates the Buddhist period, for civil society activists, as a positive time. Sajjad, the university student who grew up in Quetta, is extremely involved with activism, gives fiery political speeches, and is little concerned with upholding appearances of Muslim piety. He would often share his thoughts with me about how the past impacted the future, his words often getting frantic as he worked his thoughts into speech. Even as he talked about Hazara identity, he also always seemed to be discussing his own, personal identity. In the time that I knew him, he changed his last name (a common practice) several times to reflect this.

On one occasion, meeting in the sunny meeting room of a civil society organization office, I sipped green tea, basked in the sunny light which bathed the room, and followed Sajjad's thoughts. "I am not a nationalist," he said.

Nationalists believe the world starts and ends with religion. Although, Islam has been harmful to us. In some ways it is a weakness. Hazaras are peaceful. We believe in

brotherhood and equality. This comes from our Buddhist past. Before, Hazaras were creators of art and beauty. Gandhara belonged to us. Islam taught us to fight and kill. You know, before, I was an extreme Shi'a. I thought, because the Sunnis took the right to rule from Ali, because they killed Zahra (referring to Fatima, Ali's wife), that it was just to kill them. I didn't think about the general history of humanity. Hazaras changed with the coming of Islam. Before, they were very open to learning from other religions. This was part of Buddhism.

Sajjad said that he never thought about what it meant to be Hazara until he started reading books by Mazari and the Soviet ethnographer Temirkhanov. Once he accessed this knowledge, he realized that Hazaras were great, and that he must work on behalf of Hazaras, and not Shi'as.

At this point I jumped in, and asked how he learned about what books he should read.

Melissa, in school in Quetta, a girl who was *namahram*, not related to me, sat next to me and I became so angry. My teacher, who was a woman, reprimanded me. I went home and complained to my father that my teacher was not Muslim, but was Hazara, and he became angry and told me, no, we are all Hazara. I went back to my teacher and she started to guide my learning, told me what books to read. I became proud of my history, my culture, of Buddhism, of the Silk Road. These are the reasons Hazaras are more open minded than others in Afghanistan. Our history is the humanity of the Buddhists. We are descended from all the people who mixed on the Silk Road. Because of this, we are more open to other people. But Hazaras have lost their connection to the past. There is a loss of identity, a loss of history. We have to find our identity in our peacefulness, in our links to

the past.

As often happened with Sajjad, we talked late into afternoon. As dusk began to fall, I took my leave and rapidly walked home through the early autumn potato fields in harvest, hopping over drainage ditches, and circling fields that had not yet been harvested. Taking a path up to the plateau of the village where I lived, I could see, through the gloom, the cliff faces and the dark shadows of the Buddha niches. My anxiety subsiding about being out later than I should, I reflected on what Sajjad had said and remembered similar things I heard my friend Tahira, the wife of Jawad, say a week before: “We Hazaras are a mix of people. We were on the Silk Road. People from India, China, other places came here. We built the Buddhas. Hazaras were here before Islam. We are more open minded than the others.” The linking of open-mindedness with awareness of Hazaras as a group, even if it is a group which has mixed extensively with others, was a common theme. Sajjad remembers himself as narrow-minded, as subject to a gender bias that he now fully rejects. What ended his self-perceived narrow-mindedness, what in his view opened his mind, was not only the wisdom of his father and his female teacher, but exposure to information about who Hazaras are. Once he understood the truth about who Hazaras are, and from who they descend, he himself was able to overcome his past and set his life upon a new direction.

What set the Hazaras apart from Afghanistan’s other peoples, in all these accounts, is that claims to a Buddhist past lay available to them. This fits with the larger equation of history with identity and the more specific contention that Hazaras have lost their history. When speaking of the Buddhist era, that history was peaceful, cosmopolitan, and innovative. This is how the activists want their fellow Hazaras, and the world, to understand their exceptionality in

Afghanistan.

### **The Mongol Period**

In March 2001, when the Buddha statues were destroyed by the Taliban, the event received a significant amount of attention in the international news. Most of the stories covering the destruction focused on the loss of an important art and cultural heritage site for the entire world, some focused on the loss for Afghanistan, and some even focused on the loss for Buddhists (who no longer live in Afghanistan). Very little attention was given to how Hazaras might have felt about the loss of a key piece of their landscape and the heroes of the legend of Salsal and Shahmama. One reason for this indifference to local perspective was the belief that the locals were indifferent to the statues' destruction. Paula Newberg, then serving as an adviser to the United Nations, said in an interview with the *New York Times* that neither group involved in the region had any sort of historical ties to the area (Crosette 2001). In the case of the Hazaras, the most commonly accepted story about their origins is that they are descendants of Mongol soldiers.

In a Skype conversation, a Hazara anthropology student studying in Mongolia smiled wryly and asked me, "Surely, you have noticed that most international news stories concerning Hazaras at some point mention this Mongol heritage? Foreigners are fascinated by the idea that we are the left-overs of one of Chingiz's units." Western scholars have presented evidence of this based on linguistic similarities of the Hazaragi dialect of Farsi with the Mongol language.<sup>75</sup> An early Hazara historian, Faiz Mohammad Kateb (1912), who served in the court of Habibullah from 1901-1919, also reported that Hazaras were Mongols.<sup>76</sup> DNA mapping has shown that Hazaras and Mongols share a high degree of genetic similarity (Hellenthan 2014). But activists



are highly suspicious of several such studies, and several in the diaspora have had their own DNA analyzed, which they claim shows they are more closely related to Turkic groups from the Caspian Sea, which they point out is also called the Khazar Sea. They also cite a DNA study that claims to show they are more closely related to the Turkic people of Central Asia (Begona 2011). The question of descent from Mongols will not be definitively resolved by DNA tests, at least as far as the activists are concerned.

Among non-activists, it is harder to say whether they believe in Mongol descent or even think about this at all. Many people simply consider themselves Hazaras. Some reject the idea of descent from either Mongols or Buddhists. The question of Hazara origins came up over lunch at the workplace of my friends Khadija and Parvin, who do not consider themselves activists even though they work as translators for an American project to train judges and lawyers.

Khadija said, “The idea that Hazaras came from somewhere else, that they are Mongols, is not true. Pashtuns made this idea up.”

I asked, “So where do Hazaras originate?”

Parvin jumped in, “In the beginning of Islam, after the Prophet died, Ali was made leader. But the friends of the Prophet did not agree with this, and so they fought against Ali. This was the split between Sunni and Shi’a. Hazaras were among the Shi’a, and after this happened, they came to Afghanistan.”

Parvin can’t imagine Hazaras as not being Shi’a Muslims. She therefore places the beginning of Hazara as a people at the same location, temporally and geographically, as the beginnings of Shi’a Islam. Others told me many Hazaras reject the idea of either a Mongol or Buddhist past, based on the assertion that Hazara identity is inextricably linked to Islam. Thus, many simply accept that they are Hazara and Muslim, have always been so, and do not seek

answers about the past.

Other Hazaras disagree. I once made a weeks-long visit to the family of my friend Sakhi, the guesthouse owner who also worked for an international development organization, where only his mother and five sisters were currently staying. Even though there was an autumn chill in the outside air, the family home was kept cozy by an underground heating shaft, connected to the tandoor oven, bringing heat up through the floor. Sakhi's mother was a thin, energetic woman with a wrinkled, kind face and dark, twinkling eyes. I told her about some of my experiences in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, and we compared the holidays and traditions of these groups with those of Hazaras. All of a sudden Sakhi's mother, almost mischievously said, "Well, we Hazaras are Mongols, after all. That must be why we do some of the same things as Kyrgyz." I was rather surprised, because Sakhi's mother is fairly religious. Yet she did not seem to find any problem with being of Mongol descent and Muslim faith. I later found others who also share this view.

Sakhi himself disagreed with his mother, saying he did not believe Hazaras descended from Mongols. Pushing his shaggy hair back from his eyes, he said, "She never told *me* about this! I didn't know about it!"

I asked several other activists what they think about Hazaras who claim Mongol descent. Several saw this as Pashtun lies. "Melissa," said Jawad, "the foreigners have written we are Mongol. I know this. But they got their information from Pashtuns, who wanted others to believe this about us."

I soon found out, however, that the issue of Mongol ancestry remains unresolved among activists. In a meeting with Sajjad, Firuzan, and Soraya, to talk about a protest, our conversation strayed to the question of the origins of the Hazara people. Sajjad, having grown up in Quetta, Pakistan said,

When Hazaras were conquered by King Abdur Rahman, in the late 1800s, he used two things to get people to fight against us. First, he said we were infidels, because we were Shi'a. Then he said we were descendants of Chingiz Khan, those Mongols who destroyed so much when they invaded Afghanistan. But he was wrong. Ninety percent of Hazaras are more Turkic than Mongol. Turkic people originated in Afghanistan, they have been here for at least 5,000 years, this has been proven by ancient archaeological artifacts. Maybe ten percent of Hazaras are fully Mongol, and there has been some mixing, but mostly, we are Turkic.

But then Firuzan, who later became a Provincial Council Member, chimed in, "You are wrong. We are descended from the Mongols, and that is fine. I actually respect Chingiz. He wanted to extend his empire as far as he could, and he succeeded. He was strong."

Soraya, who had lived most of her life in Iran, added, "I didn't like it in Iran. Iranians always called us children of Chingiz. In school, when they wanted to give an example of a criminal or murderer, they talked about Chingiz, and looked at us. They didn't care that we were Shi'a, only about how we looked."

Some offer meta-commentary on the meaning of Mongol descent. Being world conquering fighters but also responsible for the deaths of many people is a legacy that can be spun in a negative or a positive way. It was pointed out to me on several occasions that when Hazaras had to fight, as they did during the civil war and Taliban periods, being of Mongol ancestry was an asset. Fighters need a strong image, and who was stronger than Chingiz Khan? This was seen as a counter-image to the Pashtun, one of the "martial races" according to the

British Empire, always ready for a fight, and counterbalanced the “Hazara as victim” narrative. In Quetta, the image of Hazaras as descendants of Chingiz Khan seems to have remained stronger, possibly because Hazaras in Quetta were more in danger than Hazaras in Afghanistan.<sup>77</sup> Sajjad actually said, “Yes, in Quetta, probably it will come to the point that we must fight. In Afghanistan, we still might hope for peace.”

For civil society activists who wish to give emphasis to the idea that Hazaras are victims, the idea that Hazaras are world-conquering Mongols seems out of place. Add to this the experience of people like Soraya, of being called “Mongol” in a derogatory way in Iran, and it is understandable why many want to shed this identity. The insult “sons of Chingiz” is also used in Afghanistan by other ethnic groups, particularly when discussing atrocities alleged to have been committed by Hazaras. The civil society activists want to promote the idea that they are peaceful and respectful of human rights. They also want to promote their victimhood, to show they are the most downtrodden people of Afghanistan.

Shahr-e-Gholghola, being visible from much of Bamyan, would be commented on by my friends, who strove to bring the city’s tragic fate in line with their present sympathies. Not wanting to identify with the destroyers of the City of Screams, they align themselves with the residents of this city who were victims of the Mongols. One catch is that the story holds that the Mongols killed everyone in the city. Latif, a reporter from a village next to Shahr-e-Gholghola called Sayedabad, told me that not everyone was killed by the Mongols; some escaped and later returned. But some Mongols also stayed and mixed with the locals, while other Mongols stayed “pure.” According to him, his village, next to Shahr-e-Gholghola, had the most Mongol families in Bamyan, about 20 percent. He told me this the first time I went to his house to interview his parents.

A few minutes later, I noticed a cow whose face was covered in warts being led by a couple of people who looked, to me, like Hazaras. “What’s wrong with the face?” I asked.

Latif answered, “Them? Oh, you can tell! They are Mongol!” In my confusion, I did not manage to explain that I was talking about the cow, but the miscommunication taught me something about relations between those who consider themselves Hazara, and those considered to be “pure Mongol.”

Sajjad perhaps most clearly illustrates the ambivalence Hazara activists feel toward being the descendants of the Mongols. In his case, it was probably enhanced by his having come from Quetta. Sajjad gives rousing speeches, which spur other students to action. When he gives public speeches, I feel I am in the presence of a great leader, even if that potential has not been fully realized. Sajjad is adamant that Hazaras are the original people of Bamyan and that they are of Turkic descent. However, Sajjad recently changed his last name to Mughal, which is said to be one of the few Mongol tribes that settled in the Hazara homeland, and his brother has a name that incorporates Chingiz.<sup>78</sup> I asked him why, since he had previously strongly upheld the Turkic origins of Hazaras. “You must understand, only five percent of Hazaras are Mongol, and they come from several tribes. A Hazara sociologist in Quetta has researched this. I, unfortunately, know that I descend from one of these tribes.” Competing identities can be difficult to reconcile, as the changes in Sajjad’s explanation of his own genealogy illustrate.

### **Arguing Turkic Descent and Indigeneity in Afghanistan**

In discussing transnational memory-making in the Solomon Islands, Geoffrey White (1995) demonstrates that local histories are not accounted for in the narratives of foreign World War Two veterans, the Solomon Island government, or tour operators. Local voices are heard in the

construction of this history, but they must fall in line with the dominant transnational narrative. Hazaras have, similarly, had very little opportunity until recently to construct their own written history, perhaps with the exception of Faiz Mohammad Kateb's *Torch of History*. And yet now they are trying. One aspect of this is the activists' attempts, while I was in the field in 2012 and 2013, to stress a Turkic identity. Turkic-ness is recast as, not the result of one of the many waves of migration which came from further east in the relatively recent past, but rather as the marker of indigeneity in Afghanistan. I will give a condensed version as to how Hazaras have woven a Turkic past into their history, although much of the following comes from several discussions with and from speeches by Nawruz.

Hazara activists who want to construct a different, non-Mongol identity almost all state that they are "*boumi*" or "*asli*" (original or indigenous people) of Afghanistan. Not everyone professes to be Turkic: some claim Aryan descent, while others treat Hazara as a completely separate, unrelated category. But the majority who are interested in history assert they are Turkic, although this assertion takes different forms. Sajjad told me that Turkic peoples originated in Afghanistan, and when I asked if there was a chance they had moved to Afghanistan from somewhere else, he repeated that Turkic Hazaras are boumi. Sajjad finds it difficult to reconcile the many strands of his personal and family history, as a person of Yakawlangi origin, which many Hazaras believe to be the most "pure" in its Hazara tradition, who had even so never known a home other than Quetta until coming to Bamyan for university. He feels deep ties to Bamyan and Yakawlang, and yet believes himself to be descended from Mongols.

The Hazara recounting of their Turkic-ness can result in more than just individual confusion. It is common knowledge that Turkic people came from farther east and rode with

Chingiz Khan (making Turkic blood conceivably also related to the Mongol invasion). In contrast, the early people of the Bamyān plateau, the Kushans and latter Buddhists, are understood not to be Turkic. In reconciling their Turkic background with an autochthonous tie to their land, Hazara history keepers seem to want to turn “either/ors” into “both/ands.” If at one moment they assert they are indigenous, Turkic, or both, then in the next they may celebrate their mixed heritage. Much seems to come down to purported “core” heritages: at core, they are Turkic; or something else; or something uniquely Hazara. No one even so denies that over the centuries they have mixed with other groups: no one claims to be purely Hazara, or purely Turkic, or purely anything. They take pride in their mixing, in their Turkic-ness and in their Hazara-ness.

A number of activists claim that it is exactly this mixing which makes Hazaras different from the other ethnic groups living in Afghanistan. They have acquired, they say, the good qualities of all of their ancestors. This celebration of mixing also helps them in creating ties to their land. They are proud of a Silk Road heritage, which is associated with the interaction and mixing of many peoples. Travelers have come and gone, and mixed genetically and culturally with their hosts, while the autochthones who were the ancestors of the Hazaras remained in place. Thus, Hazaras are exceptional in claiming to be boumi but exceptional, too, in claiming to be mixed. Hence, too, the coexistence of variant strands of history outside of the Mongol narrative. Hazaras seem to be in no hurry to establish their own historical orthodoxy, to reject what they or others might consider irreconcilable linkages, and are content to pick and choose from what parts of history best serve their favored narratives. The stress on mixing and the stress of Turkic-ness might seem a paradox but to my informants it simply shows that the roots of their identity are plural.

One evening, Sajjad spoke in greater depth about his roots, suggesting perhaps some psychic conflicts about his background. During the few hours of electricity that I had each evening, I worked at completing field notes and getting other necessary writing done. I was also online, via a USB hotspot, and sometimes took time to chat.

Sajjad began a Facebook chat. He started the conversation by saying, “Did you see I changed my name, Melissa? I was Sajjad Sargij, now I have taken the last name Mughal. Do you like the change?”

I expressed confusion, remembering he had told me “Sargij” indicated someone who was confused, or confusing.

Sajjad said, “I took the name Mughal, because the grandson of the great Chingiz was important here.”

“So you decided you want to take a name derived from the people of Chingiz? Why, I thought you said Hazaras are not descended from Mongols.”

Sajjad answered, “It is my tribe, Melissa. I do not like to put myself with Chingiz. But this is the truth. Most Hazaras are from the original people here, but there are some, from other tribes, who joined later. Today, there are two Hazara tribes descended Mongols. Most people in Yakawlang belonged to one of these two tribes.”

Confused, I asked what he meant by this, whether all of the people of Yakawlang belong to these two Mongol tribes?

He explained he meant most of the people had submitted, or been subdued, or politically dominated, by those belonging to these two Mongol tribes. “Only .01% of Hazaras are related to these two tribes,” he wrote, “and 95 percent are Turk.”

At this point I began to feel like I was back on familiar ground. He went on to say the



other, just under five percent, are made up of a mix of other nations: Tajik, Sayed, Baloch, but all consider themselves, and are accepted, as Hazara.

“But,” I asked, “you, in particular, are you Mongol?”

“I don’t want to be this,” he reiterated, “but I can’t escape the truth. This is what I am. I am Mongol, and Hazaras are Turk, but now I am Hazara and of clean heart and pure human.”

Of course, I later questioned Sajjad about his assertions, and how it was he came to have such exact numbers of Hazaras who were Mongol versus those who were not.

Sajjad began by saying that he, in fact, loves Chingiz Khan. “Chingiz, after all, did nothing different from what other kings did. He conquered. He got more land.” Chingiz here might be compared to Abdur Rahman, who also conquered and brought many peoples under his direct control. “Only five percent of Hazaras are Mongol, though,” he continued, upping the number slightly. “The rest are Turks, the original people.”

I asked him where he got these exact percentages, and he told me that one of his Quettan teachers had conducted surveys in many villages throughout Hazara areas in Afghanistan; by asking the people what they considered themselves to be, these are the numbers he got. Leaving aside the methodology of these surveys, the example shows again that there is no definitive Hazara consensus as to whether they are of Mongol ancestry or not. Sajjad’s story confirms also that the understanding of Mongol’s meanings — whether bloody, ruthless killers or strong, courageous warriors — is in flux in Afghanistan. What was once used as an epithet is now recoverable as identity. Activists’ views, both in general, based on what I have read in social media, and in personal, one-on-one interactions, towards the idea of Mongol descent, varies, sometimes becoming more popular, and sometimes rejected. Even as Bamyani activists push one narrative arc, and activists in Quetta push another, they are in constant communication with each

other.

Not long before I left my field site, my landlord, an officer in the army, stopped by. Out of the blue, he said, “You know, I know a lot about history, and there is a big question right now as to whether Hazaras are descended from Mongols or not. We are not, although we mixed with them some when they came here. You can tell those Hazaras who are descended from Mongols by their faces.” This, of course, is reminiscent of the evidence given as to how we know that Hazaras are descended from the early Buddhist inhabitants: by the way their faces appear, as well as Latif’s assertion about Mongols’ particular facial features in Sayedabad.

Hazaras, lacking a written history that refers to them explicitly, are filling in the gaps as best they can. They rely on the books of Hazara experts, they rely on talks and speeches given by activists, and they rely upon their very bodies’ appearances. This is not surprising, considering the degree of racialized prejudice they face in Afghanistan. This, too, they have learned to turn to their own purposes.

## **Conclusion**

In taking control of the telling of their own history, Hazaras have taken a two-pronged approach, on one hand writing histories in keeping with Western narrative styles and source conventions, and on the other giving heightened credence to oral and traditional sources. Hazara history keepers have conflicting attitudes also toward what kind of knowledge history represents. Some say history is always a construct, their own history included, while others maintain that they are uncovering hidden truths through their new histories of the Hazaras. Rapapport’s (1998) discussion of Nasa activist history, who borrow from both Western and indigenous models of history, redefines these two traditions as distinct but juxtaposed “codes.” Kanishka and Nowruz

exemplify activists who are very adept at switching between these codes. I have found that all types of Hazara history making, whether in a rigorous academic style or a more mythologized, oral style, focus on two main ideas. One, that Hazaras have long been victims in Afghanistan's history, has been referenced throughout earlier chapters. The second, that Hazaras are autochthonous to Afghanistan, has been the focus of the second half of this chapter.

In the second part of this chapter, I dealt more specifically with two ancient historical periods that Hazaras have had to interpret in their project to show that they belong in Afghanistan. More recent historical events fall easily into the narrative mold of the Hazaras as a victimized, traumatized people. When it relates to ancient Buddhists and Mongols, Hazara historians claim more latitude in "mythifying" history, there being fewer sources and less certainty concerning how today's Hazaras relate to these ancient people. These histories also serve a double, paradoxical purpose. On one hand, historical events are interpreted (perhaps "over-interpreted") to position the Hazaras as victims of traumatic events. Their Buddhist past was destroyed by Islamic invaders, they say, making Bamyan a more enclosed and less open society. And by positioning Hazara ancestors as the victims but also descendants of Mongol invaders, they become at one and the same time original inhabitants and invaders, peaceful people and warriors. By promoting and trying to reconcile both narratives, Hazaras achieve a double hybridity, positioning themselves as both victims and exceptional people, inheritors of cultural traits without match in the rest of Afghanistan. And it is exactly the murkiness of their history and the lack of reliable written sources that make possible not just code-switching between a Western historical tradition and locally meaningful frames of reference to the past but a blending of the two to form a new mythified historical past, which appeals to Hazaras for both sounding authoritative and speaking to questions that matter to them.

## **Chapter Nine**

### **Conclusion**

On July 23, 2016, twin suicide bombers attacked a large, peaceful Hazara protest in Kabul. The attackers killed over 85 people and seriously wounded more than 200. This was the deadliest single attack since the Taliban fell in 2001. Daesh, or ISIS, claimed responsibility for the attack. Members of the Hazara activist community maintain even so that the Afghan government likely had a hand in it; they note that many of the killed and wounded were hit not by the blast but by the fire of security forces who shot into the crowd, ostensibly to stop a third suicide bomber. The body of a third bomber was found but again protesters find it mysterious how the security forces even knew he was there. Many feared the government had turned against Hazaras.

The protesters were members of the Hazara-led Enlightening, or Enlightenment Movement. In the months leading up to the July 23 attack, this movement staged a number of highly visible protests, some of which were attended by hundreds or even thousands. The protests began in Bamyan and then spread to Kabul, with smaller protests occurring in other cities, as well. Earlier in 2016, the ethnic Hazara second vice-president, Sarwar Danish, released information indicating that the government had made the decision, because of cost and logistics, to reroute an energy transmission line: Bamyan was to be bypassed and instead a route through the Salang Pass, along which two other major electricity lines already ran, was to be used. The line is known as TUTAP, or TUTA (Turkmenistan-Uzbekistan-Tajikistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan, with Pakistan eventually bowing out from the proposal). Many Hazaras responded that this decision to by-pass Bamyan was a clear case of ethnic discrimination. Protests against the TUTAP re-routing started in Bamyan and were held in Kabul and by diaspora groups around the

world.<sup>79</sup>

<sup>80</sup>I followed the protests from the United States via social media. Many of the protesters were acquaintances and friends. Even knowing how much of the rest of Afghanistan lacks electricity, I was sympathetic to the issue. Bamyan is the symbolic homeland of the Hazaras. The lack of sufficient electricity is perceived there as an ethnic-based slight designed to keep Hazara-majority areas from advancing. While I understood that many other provincial centers of similar size suffer from similar difficulties, Bamyan is central to the feelings and perceptions of the entire population of Hazaras.

### **The Enlightening Movement: From Bamyan 2012/2013 to Kabul Today**

Alakain Square, or Lantern Square, makes multiple appearances in this dissertation. At one end of Bamyan bazaar, this square features a large blue lantern statue. It is an important intersection: one road heads north to Shahr-e Nau, one into the bazaar, and two others head out in the direction of nearby villages. For the residents of Bamyan, the lantern symbolizes their lack of reliable electricity. During the time of my fieldwork, most Bamyan residents relied on community generators, small solar panels, micro-hydro power stations, or gas lamps. Most businesses were unable to run office equipment: solar power was too weak, and generators, too expensive. I learned from activists that the history of their work in Bamyan started largely with protests concerning infrastructure. They spoke of unpaved roads, a lack of clean water, but more than anything else, of electricity. They pointed to Alakain Square as a symbol of this. They indicated that while they had moved on to what seemed more pressing issues — security, justice, and acknowledgement of their genocide — the lack of electricity was always there. A tacit reminder was that most protests were held in or ended at Alakain Square. When I did a bit of

research on the issue of electricity, people had so much to say that I wrote an article on Hazaras' perception that their lack of electric power symbolized their marginality (Chiovenda 2014).

A major complaint among Bamyan residents was that electrification was promised but never completed. A hydro-electric dam to be built at Shash-Pul, a few kilometers from Bamyan, never got beyond the planning stage. A USAID employee gleefully told me of his plan to create underground generators to power the bazaar but it never got beyond planning either. A New Zealand organization did implement a larger scale solar project but this, people in Bamyan later told me, brought electricity to homes and did not support any sort of industry. Thus a succession of disappointments had already happened by the time Hazaras learned that government planners had considered routing the TUTAP line through Bamyan but then switched the route elsewhere.

At the same time, the protests were about more than electricity. Kidnappings and killings of Hazaras were increasing, making already risky travel by road seem in some areas to be truly putting one's life in God's hands. Word of every killing spread through social media, and people were afraid. It was against this background that the Enlightening Movement was born, demanding that TUTAP be routed through Bamyan as well as asking for security, rights and equality for Hazaras.

### **Experiencing the Attack in Athens**

On July 23, I was not in Afghanistan but in Athens, Greece, conducting pilot research for a future project with Hazara refugees. I knew a big protest was planned, and so I followed social media reports throughout the day. When news of the explosion was first reported, it did not, at first, sink in. But after some minutes had passed, I began crying. I told myself I was over-reacting. Yet this seemed a direct attack on my field site. Many activists I knew personally had

moved to Kabul since I was in Bamyan. As the numbers killed rose, I started trying to contact everyone I knew who might have been on the scene.

I slowly contacted my friends. No one whom I know was killed but several were injured, and many had lost friends or family members. I watched on Facebook as friends “checked in,” and then recorded their movements as they collected the bodies of their relatives and journeyed with them to their home province for burial. The next day, I ventured out to meet the Hazara refugees I was working with in Athens. They were in shock; one had lost a cousin, and several had family or friends injured. The Greek Hazaras recounted the event over and over. They huddled around cell phones showing videos of the moment of the explosions. Videos showed people running away from the bombs, and then back towards the site to attend to the wounded and dead. Others showed people screaming and crying into the camera about what had happened. Still photos showed bodies ripped to shreds and body parts. One Greek Hazara said, “This is our people. This is what they do to us.”

We prepared a candlelight memorial protest that evening. Standing and sitting on the busy Athens sidewalk near Syntagma Square, across from the Greek Parliament, refugees held candles, lit candles on the ground that spelled “Kabul,” scattered roses around, and in the back, stood in a line holding pictures of the ripped and torn bodies of the victims and placards with slogans such as “Stop the Hazara Genocide.” Some refugees journeyed into Athens from outlying camps. Passersby barely took note, only a few stopping for a moment before continuing on their way.

I later went back to a bar where we often met and talked (men who came to Greece as teens or in their early twenties being not too worried about Muslim prohibitions against drinking), the refugees, the foreign researchers, the foreigners there to provide aid, and some

Greeks who were close to the refugees. It felt like a sort of wake. This happened also to be my last night in Athens. We were all grieving but also remembering all that we had done together, to help the refugees in Greece in some way. We were remembering so many Afghan tragedies. For these refugees, their very lives were a sort of tragedy, stuck in Greece, with little positive to look forward to. Sadness was on everyone's face, but as the night wore on and people drank, we could joke and recall happy moments as well. I went to bed very late, and the next day left Athens, as planned.

A few days later, I was in Afghanistan, on my first return visit since my fieldwork. I had planned this visit much earlier but found that I was returning under very different circumstances than hoped.

### **A Return to Afghanistan**

When I first got to Kabul, after the attack, in August 2016, I did not know if I would be met with happiness or sadness by my activist friends. Some met me with joy. They took me to a memorial poetry reading for those killed. I was surprised to find I had become a sort of celebrity. People I had never met recognized me. Through helping activists with English language editing of announcements, articles, press releases, and so on, I had come to occupy an ambiguous space, part local, part outsider.

After a few days in Kabul, I went to Bamyan. Returning to Bamyan was a rush of memories, a constant search to see what had changed and what had remained the same. At one level, nothing was different. The Buddha niches still looked out across the plateau. Farmers still harvested potatoes and threshed wheat using oxen and hand tools. Shahr-e-Gholghola still rose from wheat and potato fields. The bazaar had some new shops, and many of the same old ones.



More roads were paved. The airport had a terminal building, making it not simply a stretch of gravel people walk across unless closed for an arriving flight.

The activists with whom I met were also a mix of old and new. Some whom I knew from 2012 and 2013 were still there, their roles little changed. Some had moved to Kabul, to the United States or elsewhere. Some who were young students just getting involved when I did my fieldwork had become leaders in the activist community.

In Bamyan, it was almost as if a return to that land, that air, that sunlight, was a renewal, taking my mind back to a time before my work with refugees, before the July 23<sup>rd</sup> bombings, and even before I took on my new roles of mother, Hazara and refugee expert, and university instructor. Bamyan seemed to enfold me. People greeted me everywhere, took up all my time to discuss politics, walk with me to heritage sites, and laugh and cry and try to cope with the terrible attack of just a few weeks before. I stayed in a friend's guesthouse that is situated directly below the larger Buddha niche, and when I wandered the flowery courtyard the niche of Salsal loomed above. I avoided Gholghola, choosing to see it only in the distance. I spent a long time walking along the Azhdar, or dragon, ruins. The dragon was a rock formation split in half, once a fearsome beast that Ali had killed to save the local people. His eye is a sulphur spring from which he eternally cries. We climbed high up the hills to touch his tears, a strong wind blowing dust into our eyes and hair. I dined with friends, had meetings with new and old friends, went to a calligraphy exhibition, and met with the new governor. One day I went to Band-e-Amir and jumped, fully clothed, off a swan paddle boat into the shockingly cold water. I let myself sink, felt the pressure change, then kicked my way upward into the light, feeling free. What kind of paradise could this be, once freed of violence and its memory?

Experiencing Bamyan again reminded me that, for Hazaras all over Afghanistan and the

world, Bamyan is a symbol of their people. As a colonized and contested space, Bamyan also symbolizes the Hazara history, which also has been colonized and taken from them. As home to Salsal and Shahmama, Bamyan may be most famous for what it has lost. Much of this dissertation has been an argument that Hazara activists also seek to make Hazaras famous for what they have lost. Cultural trauma means more than the experience of a threat or disruption; it begins with the desire never to forget what has been suffered and lost; it grows by showing your fellow people and the world that this loss is felt and is the key to the group's collective identity. The attack in Kabul of July 23, 2016, fits seamlessly into this view of Hazaras' place in Afghanistan.

People were hurting and scared. They did not know in the immediate aftermath of the attack if they could continue their protest activities. But the protests continued, albeit in a more subdued way. The memorial poetry reading was not done in secret but in a restaurant where activists are known to congregate. Forty days after the attack, a significant remembrance day for Muslim mourners, Hazaras stood on their roofs and held candles. "We can only be safe if we protest on our roofs," I was told. Hazaras from all over Europe traveled to Brussels in September 2016 to protest the NATO meeting about Afghanistan. Currently, a large protest in memory of Shukria Tabassum is in planning stages for late November 2016.

### **Collective and Cultural Trauma**

As I have been writing this dissertation, presenting at conferences, giving talks, and submitting article manuscripts for publication, I have been repeatedly asked, "Is cultural trauma actually spreading among the larger Hazara population? Is the activist project working?" The answer remains uncertain and to a degree stands beyond Hazara control. What seemed clear, as

thousands of individuals marched in Kabul before July 23, was that Hazaras had indeed been persuaded that they need to take action. Taking action, sadly, caused more trauma: physical, psychological, collective, and probably cultural. Only time can tell if July 23 takes on the same symbolic weight as Afshar carries.

Trauma is used to describe a range of experiences. Its narrow meaning is severe damage done to the body, yet even physical trauma has the potential to leave scars not only on the body but the mind. Conversely, an emotionally disturbing experience might induce lasting psychic harm even if no physical damage is experienced. And when a person is part of a group whose members experience widespread individual trauma, then even people not directly present at the scene of violence might collectively experience indirect, psychological trauma, by hearing others' testimony and seeing photos and videos of the event.

In all these ways, the events of July 23, 2016 were traumatic and increased substantially the number of Hazaras who have experienced traumatogenic events. More than one told me that they had been at the protest site in Kabul, had seen body parts and articles of clothing lying about, had picked these up, lain them on a massive Afghan flag used in the protest, and later transported these for mass burial. Even hearing this be told can inflict psychological distress. Judging from the reactions of the Hazaras I was with that day in Athens — shock, tears, sadness, sometimes yelling against injustice, sometimes becoming unable to talk — I can say that collective trauma is real and that it can be transmitted via stories, pictures, videos, and emotively persuasive words. For many, the scars may remain for years.

Cultural trauma also indicates that, in some way, some defining characteristic about the group is under threat, attacked, or even lost. A shocking event, or series of events leads members of that group to believe they, or their way of life, are threatened. But for a cultural trauma, or in

fact any collective trauma, to spread, work must be done by mediators who deliver the message of trauma to larger numbers of individuals. Sometimes, more people experience psychological trauma through the work of mediators than through the events themselves. As horrific as the attack of July 23 was, then, it matters also that Hazara activists have become skilled in collective-trauma generation. They create images, slogans, cartoons, and carefully edited film clips aimed to initiate maximum affective response. The Enlightening Movement has added to this, publicizing this traumatic event in Afghanistan and throughout the world using social media and relying on Hazara activists and allies to participate in protests in numerous countries. With this attack, especially, I came to appreciate the power of media to traumatize people virtually, from afar.

While July 23, 2016 may currently be the defining moment for Hazara civil society activists, it will no doubt eventually blend in among the many tragic events that activists call upon to claim their trauma. It fits *so perfectly* with the already established narratives that I have discussed. The bomb attacks highlight the purity of Hazara victimhood, through their adherence to nonviolence in the face of government neglect and anti-Shi'a atrocities. Not warlike children of Chingiz, they are the peaceful, original people of Bamyan. They take to the streets in peaceful protest, carrying a giant Afghan flag and saying they only want to be equal citizens of Afghanistan. Having suffered violence at the hands of Abdur Rahman, other Pashtun kings and the Taliban, and having lived in an under-developed area for generations, they now raise their voices simply ask for *human* rights, the rights they know should be theirs. In asking for the trauma to end, they expose themselves to further trauma.

## **Schisms and Fractures**

In August 2016 I began to learn about some of the cracks and splinters which were emerging due to disagreements about the future of the movement, disagreements that were already emerging about the planning of the July 23 demonstration. Some I was already aware of. I knew quite well that some activists in Bamyan criticized others for relying too much upon the government or nongovernmental sector. Tensions also emerged surrounding the question of who has the right to speak for Bamyan. The organizers for the July 23 protest and of protests and memorials that followed were not only Kabul Hazaras but also returned members of the diaspora, people who hold two passports. Non-Hazaras speculated that people in Bamyan did not want problems, and that it was really these outsiders stirring up trouble. My activist friends in Bamyan rejected this notion, a position confirmed by the large turnout for protests held in Bamyan. People in the Afghan government expressed the opinion that those movement leaders who did not stop the protest are at fault. This criticism tacitly consigns the Hazaras to the “pathetic victim” paradigm, who bring killing upon themselves if they stand up for their rights, and hence are not really victims. Movement organizers continue to try to straddle both pathetic and heroic victim paradigms, acting as both downtrodden victims and rights defenders.

In Kabul, during summer 2016, I met with Farid, whom I had known in Bamyan. He had also been on the edges of the attack when it happened. He told me, “I supported their movement, but not this protest. They played with people’s lives. They played, and they lost. People are dead.”

Another activist, studying in the UK, asserted the same. “I just can’t support it anymore, Melissa. What they did was wrong. So many people died. They didn’t have to die.”

In fact, the Afghan government had given protest organizers intelligence there would be an attack, and the organizers decided to proceed all the same. I asked why. “Melissa,” Najib said,

“they said that about every protest we had before, and there was no attack. They did not give us any solid intelligence, they just gave us some vague warnings. They wanted to prevent the protest from happening. That is why they tell us there will be an attack. The Hazaras in the government, Mohaqeq, yes, he did not go, but we thought he was abandoning us. We really thought we did the right thing.” My conversations with several movement leaders confirmed that no one sent junior activists to their deaths alone; senior leaders were present right where the blast happened and several were injured. Sooner than seeking martyrdom for themselves or others, they seem to have misjudged how risky the situation was.

The opposite scenario seems more likely, in which Hazaras will be too scared to demand their rights and choose instead to stay home.

Possibly fragile, too, is Hazaras’ adherence to human rights, non-violence and cosmopolitan coexistence. One Greek Hazara told me, “My biggest dream, truly, is to pick up a weapon and fight for my people.” Several activists in Bamyan said similar things, some saying Hazaras had to start arming themselves against the Taliban, Daesh, and possibly even the Afghan state. So far, armed Hazara militias have limited their actions to guarding more stretches of dangerous road than before. But I was surprised to hear that several of my friends in Bamyan armed themselves in preparation for a trip to Band-e-Amir. This is but one example of how 2016 seems different and darker than 2013.

For now, however, Hazara activists still want their past to be the Silk Road’s mixing of peoples and the peacefulness of the Buddhas, and want in the future to speak the international language of human rights. Even as they hold that their culture was lost, as a result of the repeated external aggressions they have suffered at the hands of the Mongols, Abdur Rahman, and the Taliban, they believe they can recover this culture by becoming the people of peace, who have

suffered a genocide and responded by defending human rights. In this, the Hazara protest movement's balance between ethno-nationalism and cosmopolitanism is generalizable. All over the world, political contests and armed conflicts are cast as a competition between these two opposing spheres. Yet in each region where it plays out, it takes on the particularities of local histories and myths.

## End Notes

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<sup>1</sup> It is worth pointing out that a group might not physically be at risk, but their core values could be perceived to be under threat. One might argue that the reunification of Germany had the potential to create a cultural trauma for those who identified as East Germans, even as the reunification was largely viewed as a positive occurrence at the time it happened. Yet many East Germans clearly feel that an integral part of who there are has been lost, and children of individuals who lived in East Germany can also express these feelings of loss even if they did not experience life in East Germany (Berdahl 1999). The same might be said for the transition from communist to post-communist experienced by many Soviet and Soviet bloc nations in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Sztompka 2004).

<sup>2</sup> Novick 1999, *The Holocaust in American Life*, is another work that demonstrates how the Holocaust came to be understood after the fact, how it should be remembered and memorialized. Of course, this is always an ongoing process. In the case of the Holocaust, meaning is still discussed, and real and fictional accounts in the form of literature, films, and television, continue to mediate the subject. This is extremely clear in the case of the Holocaust but could also be the case for any collective trauma.

<sup>3</sup> It could also be said that I am siding with Eyerman, as I do believe he is attempting to take a trauma that is clearly of long duration and make it “fit” into the model developed by the theorists, which suggests a shorter duration by using inability to integrate rather than slavery itself as the memory of the trauma.

<sup>4</sup> A parallel between cultural trauma as described by Alexander, et al, is *The Birth of African American Culture* (Mintz and Price 1972). This book argues that will the slave trade enslaved people from many cultures, the trauma of slavery, and even earlier, the actual passage on slave



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ships, began to form a new culture based not only on an amalgamation of beliefs, but also the fact that such crisis, becoming enslaved, the horrific journey, and slavery itself, was shared.

However, as with Hazaras, certain remnants did remain, were picked through and what was useful was kept as that which was eventually became part of the “new,” trauma-based culture.

<sup>5</sup> In fact, the project should technically be called “TUTA” because the Pakistan portion has been dropped. However, it is usually popularly referred to is TUTAP. The decision concerning routing is based on the report of a study by a German organization, the Fichtner Group. As the report explains advantages and disadvantages to both routes, it is used as “evidence” by both sides in the disagreement over the routing of TUTAP. No social scientist appears to have worked with the organization to include potential social problems or aspects relating to one route or the other.

<sup>6</sup> Of course, people from all ethnicities, Hazaras, Pashtuns, Tajiks, and others, engage in activities that both create a sense of a shared Afghan nation and that work to the detriment of this feeling of shared nation. In my now seven years of experience monitoring online discussions of Afghan, and researching in Afghanistan with both Hazaras and Pashtuns, this has become abundantly clear.

<sup>7</sup> Twelver Shi’as are the most populous Shi’a group, who believe that after Prophet Mohammad, twelve Imams lived who were his successors on earth. However, the last Imam, the Mahdi, went into Occultation, or was hidden from view in this world, in 873. They believe that he will return and usher in a period of peace. Other Shi’a sects include the Ismailis, and Zaidis, who believe that there have been different numbers of rightful Imams.

<sup>8</sup> This is a different usage of the term from that of Arjun Appadurai, who coined it initially. According to him, ethnoscape as an idea allows a conceptualization of the way that in the world we currently live, people are constantly moving, shifting, due to tourism, migration, and so on. A

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person's ethnic "home", then, is not necessarily geographically bounded, or they may not live within a recognized geographical homeland. See Appadurai (1996).

<sup>9</sup> This was despite the fact that some encroachments were made at this time, some of the most fertile areas of land was lost, and the first withdrawing into the mountain strongholds of the Central Highlands began (Ibrahimi 2009a).

<sup>10</sup> Canfield (2004) discusses the idea that, up until a certain point, it was somehow "common knowledge" that Hazaras were difficult, uncivilized people, and that these suppositions were largely unfounded.

<sup>11</sup> I often return to my time at Georgetown because a very real, alternate possibility to my life trajectory would be that I also might have embarked upon one of these career paths, and worked in Afghanistan. What I learned in the class would have made up the base of my knowledge about the country.

<sup>12</sup> In fact, the families of *mirs*, *khans*, and *begs* did not disappear. They simply faded into the population. Today, Hazaras know who comes from one of these families, and might even joke about it, but I was told that generally remembrances of such titles carry little political power or social capital.

<sup>13</sup> The assertion that *kuchis* cooperated with the Taliban is not an unfounded one, particularly as *kuchis*, who during the years of the Soviet occupation and civil war, were unable to collect arrears in rent payments owed by the Hazaras, after their traditional lands were legally given to *kuchis* by Abdur Rahman. The Taliban has been known to make use of *kuchi* land claims to arm and encourage *kuchis* to fight against Hazaras, particularly in the Behsood districts (there are two of the same name) in Wardak province. For more on this see Ibrahimi 2009a.

<sup>14</sup> Many also point out that a Hazara, Sultan Ali Keshtmand, also served as Chairman of the

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Council of Ministers twice in communist Afghanistan. However, activists rightly points out that the inclusion of one person in a high government position, and slightly more access to education during the communist period, did not reverse what decades of discrimination had accomplished.

<sup>15</sup> Problems with Sayeds today are compounded as other ethnic groups consider Shi'a Sayeds from Hazara regions to be Hazaras, even as Hazaras consider them to be a non-Hazara, more privileged ethnic group. When a Sayed gains a position of power in Parliament, for example, the state counts him as a Hazara but the Hazaras do not. This feeds into Hazara ideas that they are underrepresented.

<sup>16</sup> The ethnic identity of Mohseni, today one of the most important ayatollahs and *marj-e-taqlid*, or source of emulation, in Afghanistan, is shrouded in mystery. From predominately Pashtun Kandahar, he is assumed by most I have spoken to be Pashtun, and in fact claims to be a native Pashtun speaker. Yet, in a personal communication with Solaiman Fazel, a PhD student in anthropology at Indiana University who had an official meeting with Mohseni, his self-identification is apparently intentionally obscured. Mohseni was careful not to answer the question regarding his ethnicity. However, Fazel told me that Kizilbosh in Kandahar, a Shi'a ethnic group which has long been a large minority in that city, are divided. Some claim Mohseni is a Shi'a Pashtun, of which there are a significant number, many of whom hide their faith. Others claim that he, like them, is a Kandahari Kizilbosh. Today, Hazara have tense relations with Kizilbosh, who often occupy high positions as an educated, politically connected group in Afghanistan.

<sup>17</sup> In fact, the interaction between these two groups is a bit more complex. Nasr had been supported, even instigated, by Iran's Foreign Affairs Ministry since 1980, but the determination was made that it was not effective. Pasdaran, which was supported by the Iranian Pasdaran

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(Revolutionary Guards), then became an alternative group, and the two vied for power in Afghanistan, reflecting power struggles taking place in Iran.

<sup>18</sup> More than a few Afghanistan experts, and so-called experts, have argued this point, as well as non-Hazara Afghans, stating that Iran did arm Wahdat and support it financially. There is probably some truth in the middle. Iran likely gave some support, but it was not nearly at the level of that which was funneled to Sunni groups via Pakistan, especially as Iran became embroiled in the devastating Iran-Iraq war. Wahdat, on the other hand, likely accepted whatever was on offer, as do Hazaras to this day. But activists who want to foment ties with the United States and other Western countries will surely downplay such assistance, or paint it in a sinister light.

<sup>19</sup> It is worth noting that in Kabul, in 1989, around the same time, Hazara elites and businessmen, including Keshtmand, set up the Sherkat-e Khurasan, a business venture-alliance with a clear intent to foster greater opportunities among Hazaras.

<sup>20</sup> This is not the current section of the city known as Shahr-e Nau, but rather what is currently simply known as “the bazaar”.

<sup>21</sup> The Communist period preceding the invasion also witnessed a slight improvement in Hazaras’ situation. A slightly increased number were able to attend university and school. Furthermore, a Hazara, Ali Kishtmand, served as Chairman of Council of Ministers from 1981-1990, and briefly as vice-president from 1990-1991. Kishtmand is often invoked by those of other ethnicities as proof that Hazaras did in fact have upward mobility, although the preponderance of evidence shows that most Hazaras suffered from social exclusion.

<sup>22</sup> Critiques of this approach are many, including Hesford and Kozol 2005, Farrell and McDermott 2005, Davis 2005, and Kandiyoti 2007. Such critics point out that, in addition to the

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apparent disingenuity whereby Afghan women are used as an “excuse” for military actions, development projects focusing on Afghan women often relegate them to a domestic sphere when they may traditionally carry out more extensive roles in agriculture and other means of production, meaning that their knowledge is overlooked. Furthermore, those very same military actions cause great harm to women and children victims of collateral damage.

<sup>23</sup> This discussion took place in the context of a talk given by the author on February 26, 2016 for the Friday Morning Seminar on Culture, Psychiatry, and Global Mental Health. The title of the talk was “Collective Trauma Among Shi’a Hazaras in Afghanistan: Variations on the Karbala Paradigm.”

<sup>24</sup> To give an example, a colleague who is collecting various dances from Afghanistan learned early on that this is a touchy and even politically issue. She highlighted such Hazara dances such as *pish-po* and *Hazaragi* on a website she made, as well as dances from other ethnic groups. Of course, she also featured the prototypical Pashtun dance, the *attan*, which many other ethnic groups do now also dance. She was taken aback when she began receiving angry comments on the site from Afghans, presumably Pashtuns, insisting *all* Afghan dance was *attan* and that she had missed something very important in her research.

<sup>25</sup> This reflects a change in development practices generally from large scale infrastructural projects, which were found to potentially increase stratification, to more targeted, grassroots-initiated projects. For example see Gardner and Lewis 2000, Gardner and Lewis 1996 and Ellen 2002.

<sup>26</sup> Of course, both Sunni and Shi’a outside stakeholders are playing a geopolitical game as well—they are not simply spreading messages relating to religion, but are also trying to maintain influence in a region which seems to be increasingly dominated by US interests. Furthermore,

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there are other players. For example, China has economic interests, particularly in mining operations in the country, for which it has received criticism for potentially not respecting and caring for archaeological, particularly Buddhist artifacts — for which Hazaras have a particular affinity. And India maintains strong ties to Afghanistan, contributing aid and supporting scholarship programs, ostensibly to counter Pakistan’s influence and also to establish itself as a regional and world power.

<sup>27</sup> The assertion that songs had been forgotten, and that people no longer played these instruments because of the Taliban was one of the many times that informants seem to have compressed a historical enemy into “Taliban”, “Pashtuns,” “kuchis”, or some other group as a sort of shorthand. The Taliban were only in control of the central government for about six years, and never did manage to control all of Bamyan province. Hence, it is unlikely that songs or the ability to play traditional music were wiped out because of their actions.

<sup>28</sup> The first instances of oil painting happened not in Europe but rather in the Bamyan valley during the Buddhist period (Barry 2008).

<sup>29</sup> I am not making the case that Pashtun internal colonization is necessarily the reason these aspects of Hazara culture are lost. For example, weaving a carpet is more labor intensive and more expensive than buying a plastic mat made in China. This might be the real reason traditional weaving is disappearing, but in Hazara narratives of trauma all sins are placed at the feet of the Pashtuns. And in some cases Pashtuns might be given some responsibility: for example, Klaus Ferdinand showed that nomadic Pashtun kuchis imported the shalwar kamiz, a type of clothing typical in Pakistan and among Pashtuns (1962). Hazaras, according to this narrative, in debt to the kuchis, were coerced into buying such goods. Today, most Hazara men do wear either the shalwar kamiz or Western style clothing, although they can describe, and upon

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occasion, wear their “traditional” garments. Likewise, women often wear their version of the shalwar kamiz in towns, although it is less common and in village more traditional style dresses are favored, albeit in brightly colored imported fabrics.

<sup>30</sup> I realize there is a slight discrepancy as they claimed every living thing in the valley was killed, but, that was what I was told, and when I questioned, I was told a *few* escaped and may have intermarried with Mongols and others from nearby who re-occupied the valley.

<sup>31</sup> Shujayi’s current status is something of a mystery. In later 2014, I received a mysterious email message from someone claiming to have been in the US military. He stated that he was interested in a short piece I had written in which Shujayi was discussed. He also claimed that Shujayi had been killed in action. This person expressed in interest in continuing to discuss my experiences with Afghanistan, but as he did not have an official email, and I had no way to know who he actually was, I was reluctant, and he soon ceased contact. Meanwhile, Hazara activist informants insist that Shujayi is still alive and still carrying out operations, although with very few resources.

<sup>32</sup> This same group of local police were attacked by the Taliban, and when they asked for back-up from the Afghan National Army, little to none was received. They suffered extremely high casualties. This incident was, for many Hazaras, yet one more instance of discrimination against them as an ethnicity.

<sup>33</sup> The independent nature of the other civil society organization Abdulhakim referred to meant that it relied almost completely on the funds which members were able to donate. It had to borrow office space from other organizations. Most of its projects were focused on awareness building, such as protests, marches, speeches, and sometimes publications of newspapers.

Therefore, the group itself did not intend to address community problems directly, but rather to

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mobilize community members to demand rights and improvements in Bamyan. Once a year the group did take up a collection to buy firewood for people being held in the local jail.

<sup>34</sup> The description of non-participation by Susan Greenberg (2010\_ concerning morality and politics is similar to this argument, albeit with one main difference. Based upon her work with Serbian youth, Greenberg suggests that individuals can leave moral responsibility with the politicians by avoiding any participation, or possibly even association, with politics. Not engaging allows them to take a moral high ground and avoid criticism. Hazara activists view politics as corrupting, but that does not mean that they avoid contact. They confront political issues head-on and demand that the state improve itself, even as they seem to have little faith that this can actually become a reality.

<sup>35</sup> Whether they actually are universal is questionable. They may be classified as similar to the “North Atlantic Universals” described by Michel-Rolph Trouillot.

<sup>36</sup> Iran is, for example, currently sending detained asylum seekers as well as Afghans born in Iran but without proper paperwork, to fight in Syria for Assad’s regime, partly by playing on their Shi’a sympathies and partly by way of coercion (<https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/01/29/iran-sending-thousands-afghans-fight-syria>).

<sup>37</sup> While Firuzan sees the situation of Hazaras as quite desperate, Hazara women, when compared to women in other areas, for example, Pashtun rural areas, seem to have much fewer restrictions placed upon them by their family members. Generally, they are less restricted to the house, can interact with members of the opposite sex in more situations, and have more opportunities for education. Among the remaining serious problems are that many Hazara girls still do not go to school, and girls’ and womens’ lives are still mostly restricted by their families. A problem with Shi’a family law in Afghanistan, which concerned rights activists greatly, is that



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it rules out the possibility of marital rape. All this while rural Hazara women seem overall to have more mobility and choices than rural Pashtun women.

<sup>38</sup> Many non-Hazara friends also issued such declarations, and turnout in the election was high across Afghanistan.

<sup>39</sup> Hazaras were well represented in the Electoral Commission, but despite this, many of my informants believed that it was not enough to prevent this particular type of voting fraud.

<sup>40</sup> Hazara activists claim that their “open-mindedness” stems from several sources. First, they maintain that their heritage is mixed, inclusive of a pre-Islamic Iranic group, early Turkic groups, as well as later Mongol interlopers. This mixing, further mixing brought by the Silk Road, and possibly a Buddhist background, are all given as reasons some activists say Hazaras are naturally more “open.” Second, Hazaras often say that because they have been an oppressed group for so long, they have no reason to remain closed off to ideas that might benefit them; their ancestral way of thinking and doing things having been largely destroyed by Afghan cultural imperialism, they must then seek new ideas. Finally, many cite Mazari as a strong influence, quoting speeches and writings in which he stressed equality and justice for all peoples of Afghanistan. Certainly Mazari was most concerned with the situation of the Hazaras and his own political situation, but in achieving his goals there are plenty of sound bites and excerpts speaking of equality, women’s rights, education, and justice for all peoples, alongside calls that Hazaras specifically no longer be discriminated against.

<sup>41</sup> Also, Fatima, the wife of Ali, has been compared to the Virgin Mary for her purity and the suffering she went through. Though she did not live to see her son’s martyrdom, she is all the same a symbol of purity and suffering. She protested Abu Bakr as the first caliph, and as she and Ali were confronted in their house, a door was pushed open upon her, causing her to miscarry the

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child she was carrying and then die (Hyder 2006).

<sup>42</sup> For example, Canfield 1076; Dabashi 2011; Deeb 2006; Hyder 2006; Pinault 1992.

<sup>43</sup> There were other Shi'a splinter groups that followed a different path, such as the Ismailis, well known for being led by their current Imam, the Agha Khan. Because of a dispute over succession, they have maintained a living Imam through the present. Now, the Agha Khan is a wealthy European with one of the biggest, most effective, aid and development organizations in the world. They have come a long way from their positions several centuries ago, the *hashishiyan* (hashish eaters), rendered assassins in English, who carried out assassinations from mountain stronghold against the Twelver clergy in an attempt to promote their own position. The Zaidi's are slightly different. Zaid ibn Ali claimed his descent as fifth Imam was rightful, rather than his half-brother Muhammad al-Baqir, whom the Twelvers recognized. Zaid led an uprising against the establishment and was killed, yet his followers continued his anti-quietist views (Pinault 1992). Today they are most well known as making up the Houthi rebels in Yemen.

<sup>44</sup> See Varzi 2006 on Iran; Deeb 2006 and Norton 2014 on Lebanon.

<sup>45</sup> For example, Iran's Shah feared the influence of the *ulema*, or clergy, and banned most processions (Varzi 2006).

<sup>46</sup> Mary-Jo Good (1988) has pointed out that the transfer of Ashura rituals in Iran from a private practice, banned in most areas by the shah, to a public, required practice, initially resulted in an increase of depression. The "work" as the cathartic nature of the rituals, and their dependence upon being practiced by those persecuted, made people extremely uncomfortable. In short, the rituals as private were the work of culture, as defined by Obeyesekere (1990). One they were could no longer be accomplished under state-sponsorship; instead of dispelling negative emotions through these rituals, mental health problems increased.

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<sup>47</sup> There are obviously other *ayatollahs* located in other areas, but they are not the most influential, and at any rate, they all have spent time training in at least one of these two cities.

<sup>48</sup> *Vilayat-e-faqih* signifies “Guardianship of the Jurist.” Although interpreted in several ways, in essence, it gives the jurist, or clergy, guardianship over governance of the people during the time that the Imam, the one who should truly govern, is in occultation.

<sup>49</sup> Although Fayoz has not visited, and likely will not because of his age, a conference devoted to his achievements, hoping to spread his ideas more broadly in Afghanistan, was held in 2014. His son and several other of his Najafi followers were sent in his stead (Suroush 2014).

<sup>50</sup> In Iran, as well as in Iraq before the Baathist regime, and likely again today, *taziyah* actually take the form of a theatrical play, whereas in South Asia, according to Hyder (2006) there are theatrical story-telling events in which one speaker conveys meaning through intonation and gesture, but *taziyah* refers to replicas of Hussein and his followers’ tombs. In Afghanistan, at least in Bamyan, theatrical plays did not take place, nor were there replicas of tombs, although whether this was because Hazaras were more in line, although not completely, with the South Asian tradition, or because they had not been allowed to carry on this tradition, was unclear to me.

<sup>51</sup> Human Rights Watch has documented that at least 80 people were summarily executed, that 700 were kidnapped, and while 100 of these were possibly released after ransom, the fates of the rest were unknown but that they likely were killed. These numbers do not take into account those killed in the bombardment before the ground attack began. See Shuja 2015

(<https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/02/11/dispatches-afghanistans-afshar-agonies-remembered>), Human Rights Watch 2005 (<https://www.hrw.org/reports/2005/afghanistan0605/4.htm>).

Activists in Bamyan stated between 4,000-7,000 were killed. These high numbers were not

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replicated elsewhere, although they clearly also intended to include those killed in the bombardment.

<sup>52</sup> According to Maley (2009) the reason for the Wahdat break with Rabbani was clearly because of Massoud's desire to disarm them, hoping to achieve a monopoly of violence. Maley is very much willing to give Massoud the benefit of the doubt as someone who was a great military strategist, but not a great political strategist. My own informants mentioned the disarmament, but also stated that several Wahdat members had been killed without provocation by Massoud's forces, so for the Hazaras, who had long felt vulnerable, this was the last straw. Incidentally, Hazaras were one of the earliest groups most thoroughly subjected to (albeit willingly) the Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) campaign after US and NATO forces invaded in 2001, and this is one reason they currently feel so vulnerable.

<sup>53</sup> Official Human Rights Watch estimates, for example, suggest that many more Hazaras were massacred at the hands of the Taliban in Mazar-e-Sharif in 1998 than were killed in Afshar, and yet in my experience, Afshar got much more attention.

<sup>54</sup> These individuals were referring to the 2013 memorial event in particular, as I was asking them about it and may have hence caused them to attend. There is also the possibility that because this was the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the event, it was particularly large. Unfortunately, I have not been able to attend another Afshar memorial. Activists tell me they always give it such emphasis as it had in 2013, but I am unable to confirm this myself.

<sup>55</sup> Activists who stated this were demonstrating their knowledge that the word *holocaust*, which has come to be almost exclusively associated with the Jewish genocide of World War II, can also refer to mass killings, particularly carried out with burning, more generally.

<sup>56</sup> Massoud was a military genius, and he was aided by the narrow bottleneck entrance of

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Panjshir which was otherwise completely surrounded by mountains. He also, at a certain point, made a deal with the Soviets to stay out of Panjshir if he would not go on the offensive, something which is not often mentioned by those who laud him, but something for which he cannot be blamed, either. See Rubin, 2002.

<sup>57</sup> What likely happened was, as the many factions in Kabul, including Massoud's, Sayyaf's, Rabbani's, Mazari's, and Hekmatyar's, shelled the city in a struggle for control, particularly intense shelling emerged from West Kabul, where Hizb-e-Wahdat was located. Massoud as defense minister made the decision to heavily shell and send in ground forces to quell the attack. The leadership of the ground forces was given to Sayyaf, however, whose Wahabbi leanings no doubt predisposed him to take out a particularly cruel revenge for the shelling done by both Hazaras of West Kabul and Hekmatyar's forces.

<sup>58</sup> Rabbani had been seeking peace talks with Taliban, and two men professing to be Talibs interested in these talks planned a meeting with him in his home in 2011. One had an explosive device hidden in his turban which he detonated, killing Rabbani and four other members of the High Peace Council. The Kabul Education University was then named after Rabbani.

<sup>59</sup> I was unable to ascertain exactly who Paik was, despite extensive questioning of Hazaras in Afghanistan and in Europe, and online searches. Many thought he was a Hazara living somewhere in Europe who had been close to Wahdat leadership, but that was the most information I was able to uncover. His film is so widely circulated, that pretty much every Hazara who is even slightly politically involved knows of it.

<sup>60</sup> Lara Deeb (2006) has written that in traditional Islam in Lebanon, Zeinab was portrayed as a mourning, grief-stricken mother, as her child was killed at Karbala. However, she demonstrates that an "authenticated" reading of the literal textual and historical sources is carried out by many

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of her informants, and this interpretation shows Zeinab in this stronger position I have described.

<sup>61</sup> Baad can refer, among Pashtuns, to the practice of exchanging girls in marriage to atone for wrongs done to a lineage. Those wronged receive girls without the customary brideprice, whom the young men must marry. *Badal* refers to revenge, and is also derived from baad, for it, too, is a type of exchange, of harms rather than of goods. Badal is, according to Grima, the most common exchange among men, while gham and khushal visits are the most common exchange among women.

<sup>62</sup> For more on similar themes, see Rosaldo 1980.

<sup>63</sup> A story circulates among non-Hazaras that he would behead enemies, pour gasoline into the neck cavity, and light the body on fire, to make the corpse do the “dance of the dead.” I have also heard this attributed to a Hazara, named Mazar, who mutilated the corpses of Taliban in this way, the close resemblance of the names raising the possibility that this rumor is based on mistaken identity.

<sup>64</sup> *Khaligho* is the name “Khaliq” pronounced in Hazaragi, the Hazara dialect of Persian.

<sup>65</sup> See <https://gyrovague.wordpress.com/2011/03/17/the-tale-of-forty-maidens/>

<sup>66</sup> Hazara women practice a form of purda, the segregation of the sexes, less strict than purda among Pashtun women. They can be seen by and interact with men who are not their immediate relatives. The strictest Pashtuns restrict all such interactions. These looser purda restrictions combine with ambient racism and a past of sexual slavery to make many non-Hazaras look down upon Hazara women as having “loose morals.”

<sup>67</sup> Much has been written on subaltern studies, starting with the Subaltern Studies Group, which sought to focus more on the history of the subordinated and colonized “masses” rather than the

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elite, with an emphasis on South Asia, although of course these concepts can, and have been, applied worldwide (Chatterjee 1993; Guha and Spivak 1998; Guha 1994; Stokes 1980 and 1986).

<sup>68</sup> Bacon 1951 and 1958; Fox 1943; Schurmann 1962; Thesiger 1955.

<sup>69</sup> See Shryock 1997 for more on the issue of the ways informants shape their stories, particularly for the anthropologist, concerning Bedouins in Jordan.

<sup>70</sup> Mousavi focuses rather on reconstructing the origin of the Hazaras and their immediate and distant ancestors, in spite of limited historical or archaeological data. In personal discussions, Adam Kuper has told me that such projects were encouraged at Oxford University in the 1990s.

<sup>71</sup> It must be pointed out that the statues wore wooden “masks” which were destroyed long before current memory, meaning that no one really knows what the faces of the statues looked like. Those who claim to “look like” the Buddhas are usually drawing on the oil paintings found in the caves surrounding the statues, and their own supposition as to how the faces must have appeared.

<sup>72</sup> He does not specify what he means by *Tajik*, a people whose identity in Afghanistan is negative in that it refers to Iranic speakers who are *not* members of any other ethnic group and who, in reality, seem to identify more with a particular region than a shared ancestry. In fact, in Afghanistan most people do not refer to *Tajiks* but rather to *Farsiwan*, or Farsi speakers, for the group of people referred to commonly as Tajiks by outsiders. Farsiwan can be found in all regions. In the north, and in Bamyan, perhaps because ethnicity issues are stronger there, they might be called Tajiks. They also, however, are found in Pashtun regions. Not speaking Pashto, they are not considered by Pashtuns to be Pashtun, but they follow Pashtun cultural norms in most other significant ways. In Kabul, Farsiwan can be part of a more particular Kabuli identity, and the same can be said for those in Herat, who claim to be Herati, first and foremost.

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<sup>73</sup> The claim that they are “of the earth” may also counter Sayed’s claims that as descendants of the Prophet they are made of *nur* (light), while Hazaras are made of soil. Hazaras take this assertion and turn it into something positive and useful.

<sup>74</sup> Band-e-Amir is a lake complex of incredible beauty that since 2009 is also Afghanistan’s first National Park. The lakes are located 75 kilometers northwest of Bamyan.

<sup>75</sup> See references in note 2.

<sup>76</sup> Several activists discounted this report, saying that Kateb was beholden by the court to write a particular point of view. All the same, he is considered a hero of the Hazaras for his work as a scholar during a time when such positions were almost all closed to Hazaras.

<sup>77</sup> Not only were Hazaras regularly targeted by Sunni extremist groups in individual shootings or group shootings, usually when a gunman on a motorbike would approach a vehicle and spray it with bullets, but on three occasions in 2013 large-scale suicide attacks were carried out in Quetta. In January, 115 people were killed, in February, 73 were killed, and in June, 33 were killed in such attacks. During the period of my fieldwork, Hazaras in Afghanistan stood in danger of being kidnapped or killed during travel but mass killings were rare. The only large scale suicide attack against Hazaras happened in Kabul in 2011, in which 54 were killed, while four others were killed in an attack in the northern city Mazar-e-Sharif.

<sup>78</sup> Electively changing last names is very common in Afghanistan, and people often choose a meaningful name, such as a “kosha”, deriving from the verb to try or to strive, “buda,” in a nod to Bamyan’s Buddhist history, or “kia,” king or defender.

<sup>79</sup> The Afghan government, headed by president Ashraf Ghani, replied that the decision to reroute the line was actually made by the Karzai administration, and that provisions were all the same in place for Bamyan to benefit from electricity, if only at a slightly later date. Activists



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responded that the plan of the government would not provide enough power to foment any sort of industry development, which is what activists really want.

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