



## Introduction

What interests us in an account of the Afghanistan resistance movement? Has this movement already receded into the past, its history to be written as an obituary? Such resignation in the face of a defeat which has not yet occurred presupposes a specific view of history: that nothing can stand in the way of the Soviet system and that when it has steamrolled its way across a country steeped in the age-old traditions of Islam, something fundamentally new will be born, obliterating the past. This is the posthumous triumph of Marxism over those very people who oppose it, yet accept that its ultimate victory is assured.

Even though the resistance movement cannot hope for a clear-cut military victory, no-one can deny that guerilla wars are political wars and that in the end the slow wearing away of a colonial power may still be decisive. Whatever the outcome of this war, the Soviet system is evolving, as is the contemporary world of Islam. The Afghan resistance movement lies at the intersection of these two histories. Far from being a mere spontaneous revolt, it has its roots in the popular Muslim uprisings of the past and also in the current of Islamic reformism, which runs from Shah Waliullah to the contemporary so-called fundamentalists. This story, as yet untold, will increase our understanding of the link between Islam and the popular movements. Finally, whether the armed resistance is successful or not, the lines of force which it embodies will necessarily be present in the Afghanistan of the future, whether that Afghanistan is free or is under Soviet control.

The various liberation movements have struck a chord in the West because they appeared to echo a universal concern with the workers of the world or the liberation of the Third World. Western intellectuals, who started by vehemently supporting movements which they saw as embodying the onward march of history, soon settled for more ethical protests in the name of human rights, and, by so doing, often ignored historical development and even the concrete reality of the events they condemned. This shift of focus is evident when we compare the support for the Palestinians, the most recent embodiment of a universal value,

with the affair of the "boat people", who, as passive victims, were almost overlooked. However, the Afghan resistance movement is very much a historical phenomenon. A people of victims and martyrs they may be, but they are also a people with a long history who have grasped the meaning of their struggle.

To many people, the Afghan resistance movement seems to be a survival from the past, a struggle in pursuit of narrow sectional interests. The mullah and the warrior are two stereotypes which the media present in their accounts of the war. Tribalism is seen as a survival from a folk past, hence sub-political; fundamentalism is defined as fanaticism, and thus as politically retrograde. It is precisely the link between these two sets of ideas that this book sets out to question, because what is at stake is not only the question of the Afghan resistance but the whole issue of politics in Muslim countries – the rebirth of tribalism, of the *asabiyya*, in the heart of modern states such as Syria and the Lebanon,<sup>1</sup> the spread of Islamic revivalism in all its forms, ranging from the Iranian revolution to the preaching in the mosque in Regent's Park. The emergence of nation-states founded on secular ideologies may once have seemed to be the route which societies must necessarily take if they were to undergo modernisation, rejecting tribalism as a form of primitivism and confining religion to the inner world of the individual. But the movements of the last few years show that matters are not so simple. The Iranian revolution has taken the state as its political unit and has developed policies of regional expansion by means of warfare and the patronage of Shi'ite minorities in the Lebanon and Afghanistan (a status which those same minorities have been unwilling to accept). On the other hand, in the states called modern because they are secular, sectional interests based on geography, religion or race have developed, and their proponents are ever ready to appropriate state institutions to their own ends – a development which clearly calls into question the whole idea of the development of the universal nation-state. The Palestinians and the Kurds alone seem to be striving to give expression to a national identity. Even in the "progressive" movements we find traces of the old *asabiyya*: aristocracies in decline in the case of the Iranian Tudeh (dominated by the Qadjar princes) or the Baluchi *sardar* of the National Liberation Front; tribal rivalries at work in the Afghan Khalq and Parcham; or the identification of the community with a political party.

This rapid survey of the politics of the Middle East (to limit ourselves to the Muslim world) shows that the definition of what constitutes modernity is not as clear-cut as it might once have seemed, and so we are led to question commonly accepted ideas. There is no need to invert the usual pattern in order to redefine modernity as traditionalism; rather, we

should reflect on the concepts of the “revival of religion”, “fundamentalism”, “the development of political society” and of “civil society”. Since the structure of society in Afghanistan has not been undermined by colonialism, it provides us with an excellent opportunity of testing the validity of these concepts. But before embarking on a more detailed study we should define the terms we shall be using.

Obscurantism, the Middle Ages, fascism, clericalism . . . the most arrant nonsense has been written on the subject of the religious revival in the Muslim world. The West has long been haunted by the spectre of Islam. The different phenomena that are usually lumped together under the heading of “fundamentalism” are many and varied and should be regarded as quite distinct; in fact, only one of these movements (Islamism) is totally new. We should see the revival of Islam not in terms of our own recent history, which typically views the modern state as the end-product of a process of secularisation within society, but in the light of the historical and social context of the Muslim world.

By traditionalism we mean the desire to freeze society so that it conforms to the memory of what it once was: it is society as described by our grandfathers. In this vision history and tradition are merged; the historical development of society is effaced in favour of an imaginary timeless realm under attack from pernicious modernity. Traditionalism can never provide the basis for any coherent political programme; it is riddled with nostalgia and its politics naturally incline towards all that is conservative. At the same time it is quite capable of profiting from economic development, and the nostalgia is concerned more with morals than social justice. It embraces social customs: the veiling of women, filial obedience, and respect for hierarchies. The social stratum which is the vehicle of this ideology is the landed gentry, and in Afghanistan the *khan*, who still feels ill at ease in the town.

Fundamentalism is quite different: for fundamentalism it is of paramount importance to get back to the scriptures, clearing away the obfuscation of tradition. It always seeks to return to some former state; it is characterised by the practice of re-reading texts, and a search for origins. The enemy is not modernity but tradition or rather, in the context of Islam, everything which is not the Tradition of the Prophet (the *sunnat*). This is true reform. In itself fundamentalism sits uneasily within the political spectrum, for the “return to first things” may take many different forms. First, there is the return to strict religious practice, found most frequently in emigré circles. A return to the carrying out of the injunctions of the scriptures (the study of the Qur’an and the *hadith*) is the fundamentalism of the *madrasa*; while a return to the religious law, to the practice of the *shari’at*, is the fundamentalism of the *’ulama*. The

return to the scriptures brings with it the birth of a new tradition and the establishment of a new system of exegesis which obscures the text as much as it illuminates it. Thus, this search for origins has not the same meaning for an *'alim*, who interprets what he reads in the light of a tradition of scholastic commentary, as for a young intellectual who seeks exemplars from the like and times of the Prophet upon which to model his life. Not only does the definition of fundamentalism vary greatly (a return, yes, but a return to what?), but the political implications of fundamentalism will also differ according to the cultural context. In a country like Afghanistan, where everyday life revolves around Islamic religious practices and where common law in the non-tribal zones is impregnated by the *shari'at*, fundamentalism is not very different from traditionalism. On the other hand, where fundamentalism appears in urban environments or in countries where the social structure has been disrupted by modernisation, as in Iran, it opposes the status quo and evolves towards political Islamism. I have previously compared fundamentalism to sixteenth-century protestantism;<sup>2</sup> there is the same complexity in the way in which the Reformation influenced the social movements of the period so that it became a vehicle for the German aristocracy, as there is in millenarian peasant revolts or bourgeois republics which fabricate modern democracy. It is important to avoid automatically identifying the religious attitude with its political expression. Within the body of the *'ulama* we encounter a certain reserve towards fundamentalism. All that can be said is that in Afghanistan fundamentalism, defined as a desire to get back to *shari'at* as the sole authority, is the natural attitude of the educated clergy, the *'ulama*, whereas the mullah of the villages, who have not mastered the whole corpus of the law, are traditionalists and not fundamentalists.

This leads us on to the question of clericalism: can we not see fundamentalism as an expression of the political ambitions of the clergy and scholars, that is to say those who have an expert knowledge of the sacred texts and exercise control over their exegesis? This line of thought leads to the paradox that those who stand to gain by a return to the sacred texts are precisely those whose existence is nowhere envisaged within those very same texts: there is no such thing as an established clergy in the Qur'an, no rock on which to build the church. The clergy as an institution dates only from the Middle Ages. The *fiqh*, the concrete application of the *shari'at* to society, is the product of a thousand years of commentary, a process of reading and re-reading. The text itself has been lost, and the *fiqh* is usually taught by means of summaries of commentaries on other commentaries.

Sunni Islam has no organised clergy. The clergy are not a social body

with a clearly defined set of interests. It is not mere chance that it is Sh'ite Iran which has seen the dominance of the clergy, whereas nowhere in the Sunni world has the *'ulama* gained power. Even in Wahhabite Saudi Arabia the attitude of the *'ulama* to politics is more secular than one might think, since they are willing to acknowledge that there is such a thing as a legitimate de facto political power, something which the Sh'ite clergy are unwilling to accept. The fact that there is an officially constituted branch of the Islamic religion in the USSR is an indication of this. Yet, if fundamentalism is defined as being a return to the Holy Scriptures of Islam, this poses the problem of the relation between the corpus of Holy Writ and its exegesis. There is little in common between a Qadhafi, for whom the only sacred text is the Qur'an, and a classical *'alim* for whom fundamental texts (such as the Qur'an and *hadith*) could not possibly exist without the commentaries and their interpreters (the *'ulama*). This explains why the fundamentalism of the *'alim* is essentially juridical and not political.

The fundamentalism of the *'ulama* conceives society as being governed by law: social space is regulated by objective norms, which are as independent of the whims of the prince as is the doctrine of positive law in the West (that is to say neither more so nor less). The West's criticism of the *shari'at* (its harshness, its primitive quality) should not blind us to the fact that it is, nevertheless, a system of law. There is no such thing as totalitarianism (the reduction of civil to political society) in Islamic countries, in so far as in Islam the development and interpretation of law does not depend on the state. By definition, a return to the *shari'at* can be neither fascist nor totalitarian (which does not mean that it is therefore democratic). Western criticism of the *shari'at* brings into play different cultural values. We will not involve ourselves in this debate (which is often sterile and in which each of the parties is frequently guilty of hypocrisy), but will merely note that it rests upon a consensus which recognises that the concept of society governed by law involves the further concept of a code of law, personal freedom and limits to despotic powers. Furthermore, and particularly in the countryside, the legal order established by the *shari'at* is seen as a protection against economic injustice. Even if, in reality, it fails to fulfil this role (for example, because of corruption), what is important is that it provides a spiritual resource for the peasant when faced with injustice and, in the final analysis, if driven to revolt he will find in it the blueprint for a political organisation compatible with his cultural universe.

Some commentators see fundamentalism as the negation of the tradition of spirituality which is so typical of Islam, as if it were true to say that the letter kills the spirit.<sup>3</sup> There is, however, a complication here, in

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that the study of Islam by Europeans has traditionally focused on Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia, in which countries the great figures of nationalist fundamentalism, such as 'Abdul Krim and Ben Badis, were very much opposed to Maraboutism, which they condemned for its heresy and its collaboration with the colonial powers. It is possible to find forms of Maraboutism in the tribal areas of Afghanistan, but the form of Sufism which predominates in that country is fundamentalist by tradition, just as it is in the Indian subcontinent, a point to which we shall return. In the same way the great anti-colonial movements have nearly always resulted from a tribal uprising, accompanied by the emergence of a charismatic leader, originating from a Sufist background. In this respect Afghanistan is different from North Africa, in that here Sufism, fundamentalism, millenarianism and the anti-colonial struggle go hand-in-hand. Thus it is clear that fundamentalism embraces the whole spectrum of attitudes, ranging from tradition to political opposition.]

On the other hand, a new phenomenon came into being in the thirties, both in Egypt and in the Indian subcontinent: the movement known as the Muslim Brotherhood.<sup>4</sup> Forty years later, many students of Muslim religious movements have come to the conclusion that it is no longer possible to interpret the politics of the Islamic world by restricting themselves to concepts such as fundamentalism and traditionalism; for which reason the term "Islamism" was coined.<sup>5</sup> What is meant by this and in what way is it new? First, with regard to the social origins of the militants: far from having emerged from the clergy or traditional circles, they are to be found within the modern institutions of society (colleges, faculties of science, and in general in the urban environment). Next, there is the political connection: the Islamists speak of Islamist ideology rather than of religion in the strict sense of the term. The great challenge that faces them is to create from Islam a political model capable of competing with the great ideologies of the Western world. In the forefront of their thinking is the problem of the state (the "Islamic republic"). They have worked out a theory concerning the nature of the political party, and their political militancy goes hand-in-hand with a sense of history. Instead of wishing, like the *'ulama*, to manage civil society, their ambition is to reconstruct society, starting with the state. It is, therefore, not surprising that relations between the Islamists and the *'ulama* are marked with a mutual mistrust. Islamism is not a form of clericalism, for the simple reason that, except in Iran, its members are not drawn from the ranks of the clergy.

In one sense, the fundamentalism of the Islamists is more radical than that of the *'ulama*: what they seek is not a return to the *shari'at*, which is a means not an end, but the total reconstruction of political relations on the

lines of the first Muslim community. No longer state and law but utopia, the millennium and revolution. In this context, the return to first things makes it possible not only to circumvent the accretion of tradition, but the social stratum which manipulates that tradition, namely, the clergy. Although their hoped-for reconstruction of society is based upon a mythical model, it nevertheless provides a pre-eminent role for a new kind of "cleric" – the intellectual. For the difference between the intellectual and the religious scholar is that the former takes the state as his ultimate point of reference. Whether or not he finds himself in militant opposition to the status quo, his political dialogue is conducted with the state, for his education (the school), his position in the political process, and his place in society (he is frequently a civil servant) all presuppose that there is such a thing as the state. The *'alim*, on the other hand, is indifferent to the state, for he belongs to a stratum of society which does not depend on the state for its continued existence. The intellectual justification for his existence, the Muslim *umma*, represents a corpus of writings which is quite independent of the secular state. In the Muslim world, civil society is a society ordered by religious law and it is the state which, in the final analysis, may appear narrow and "fanatical". This is the fanaticism of "might is right" and the refusal to accept that the individual has certain inalienable rights; the fanaticism of the *asabiyya* which can only maintain itself in power by opposing all other social forces. The particularism of the state explains why it can be personified: the theme of the "good ruler" or the good guide is of great importance in the Muslim world. Though tyranny is possible, there is no place for totalitarianism, and the Islamists have been made aware of this in the face of the cohesion of the *asabiyya* and of a civil society administered by the *'ulama*. At least, this is how things stand in Afghanistan, where there is a constellation of closely knit groups (the *qawm*) and a society founded upon religious law. The two social systems (Syria and Libya) which have seen the emergence of dictators are those in which only *asabiyya* comes between the individual and the state. In Iran the clergy have taken upon themselves the task of asserting Islamic rights, this being due to the particular nature of the Shi'ite clergy. In this case there is no distinction between the *shari'at* and Islamist ideology, which fact, as can never be sufficiently emphasised, has only served to undermine the *shari'at*. As evidence of this, consider the eccentric system of legislation at present in force in Iran, which borrows its external symbolism from the *shari'at* but is, at heart, secular; further evidence of this is provided by the confusion between the clergy and the revolutionary party. As ever, Iran appears as the exception and not as the prototype of the "Islamic republic".

Since the Islamists have no intrinsic means of exerting political

leverage on secular society, the way forward must lie in their links with the *'ulama*. The only alternative tactic for exercising influence in secular society is that of attempting to make political capital out of people's everyday grievances, which, as experiments carried out by the local communist parties have shown, only pays short-term dividends. In fact, Afghanistan provides a rare and instructive example of cooperation between *'ulama* and Islamists, probably because the Afghan Islamists were not cut off from traditional society. To be more explicit, among Afghan Islamists one finds neither a hatred of the West nor the anti-semitism which is so characteristic of those groups in Egypt which go under the same name. This, no doubt, is one of the advantages of not having been subjected to the colonial experience, but it is also due to the profound mistrust the Afghan rebels feel for the PLO, which is seen by them as being pro-Soviet.

Value judgements on Islamism need to be revised, and its modernity must once more be emphasised. To say this is not to adopt a partisan stance as far as Islamism is concerned, nor to accept that it has all the answers to the crises which afflict Muslim societies today; but rather to affirm that its goals, like its social origins, are certainly contemporary. Its outdated views on social customs need not engage us unduly. The most controversial question, the role of women, involves a cultural element which goes far beyond Islamism, and even Islam itself; while extreme puritanism often comes to the fore during revolutionary periods. The fact that such attitudes are commonplace in Muslim countries leads to the conclusion not only that the problem is often posed out of context, but that the virulent polemics one hears so frequently in the West concerning the treatment of Muslim women conceals a deeper preoccupation. In any case, we should make a distinction between two quite different things: the position of Muslim women in traditional society, which cannot be blamed on Islamism, and the way in which Islamism is attempting to ensure that urban, educated – and therefore emancipated – women should come to accept the dictates of Islam.<sup>6</sup>

I am in no doubt that the key to understanding modern developments is first to grasp the importance of the transition to political society. But the perspective within which we should view this transition is clearly not purely religious, nor even ideological. Afghanistan illustrates well the problems of the transition to political society, particularly with regard to the question of tribalism, the state and more universal implications.

In Muslim countries, with the exception of a few states (such as Egypt, Iran and Morocco) which have an indigenous tradition that strongly emphasises the role of the state, loyalties are divided between the more localised community (*asabiyya – qawm* in Afghanistan) and the *umma*, the Muslim community. The "Arab nationalism" of Baathist ideology is but

one variant of this. The development of modern states exhibits the same tension, and this fact explains the many short-lived unions which have been arranged between different states (here Libya holds the record, but Syria is another case in point). It also helps us to understand why the state apparatus has often been captured by one communal group or another, whether religious or tribal. Afghanistan provides a particularly rich field of study for the transition. First, in the period when the state came into existence through the formation of a tribal federation (1747–1978), secondly, the moment of the communist *coup d'état* of 1978, and finally the resistance. Each of these breaks with the past was carried out in the name of a universal ideology (nationalism, Marxism, fundamentalism, mingled with Islamism), but the forms they took are evidence of the persistence of communal groups. Let it be stated here quite clearly that there is no possibility of a stable Marxist regime emerging from the present conflict. If the resistance is defeated Afghanistan will be a Soviet province, without any firm basis in law. As far as the resistance is concerned, matters are more complicated. The future of the resistance depends on the outcome of the rivalry between the traditional divisions of society and the development of state structures such as political parties, a rudimentary army and the beginnings of a unified administration.

It is interesting to compare the Afghan resistance with the Rif war (1921–6), the only comparable movement, although the former differs in that it involved Sufi brotherhoods. The question has been raised whether the Rif war was the “last colonial campaign” or the first revolutionary war.<sup>7</sup> In the same way, one might ask whether the Afghan resistance is the last war waged by the *basmachi*, traditionalist rebels fighting a rearguard action against Soviet expansion, or the first stirrings of an Islamic revival within the Soviet Empire, which will go on to invent new forms of organisation that are, at one and the same time, both modern and rooted in tradition. The members of the Afghan resistance are no longer *basmachi*, just as the Russians are no longer Bolsheviki. The war in Afghanistan certainly marks a turning point in the history of Central Asia; it can be illumined by the past, but we should acknowledge innovations even though, as with ‘Abdul Krim, it is the connection with traditional society which is most apparent.

This reality will be the object of the present study, which will focus on structures rather than events. In a country where the pace of life is slow, where dates and names are often confused, and where dust is something more than a figure of speech, we often lack the most elementary facts. Nevertheless, certain things are becoming clear, so that it is now possible not only to shed light on the origins of the Afghan resistance, but also to set in a broader context the historical forces which are at work far beyond the frontiers of Afghanistan.

## State and society in Afghanistan

The spontaneous uprisings against the communist regime which broke out in 1978 and 1979 were directed as much against the state itself as against the Marxist government. The imposition of communism on the country may be seen as a new and even more radical phase of the penetration of the countryside by the state bureaucracy. These two dimensions, opposition to the state and the rejection of Marxism, are closely interlinked. Yet the attitude of the countryside towards the state has always been more ambivalent than might at first appear: the Afghan state was born in the tribal lands; the symbols of authority which it exercises are not foreign to peasant experience and many of the leaders of the resistance movements visualised a state – for them an Islamic state. At the same time the recent history of Afghanistan is one of revolts against the central power and of resistance to the penetration of the countryside by state bureaucracy.

To oppose state and society is always somewhat artificial. Yet in Afghanistan this separation is rooted in everyday experience. It is apparent in rural villages, where the administrative buildings are set apart from the people's dwellings. It may be seen in the clothes worn and the general behaviour of individuals performing their roles in society. And it makes itself felt in the patterns of everyday speech.<sup>1</sup> For the peasant the state is alien, and the relationship between the peasantry and the state official is characterised by a profound and mutual contempt. In fact, there is only one real town, Kabul, the capital, where, of course, the distinction between state and society is blurred. But there are really two Afghanistans: first there is the town (*shahr*), the place of innovation (*bid'at*); this is the natural environment of the civil servant, the teacher, the soldier and the communist, all "intellectuals" and "bare-heads" (*sar-luchak*), held to be unbelievers and arrogant; and secondly the province (*araf*), the home of religion, tradition (*sunnat*) and values which stand the test of time.

The game of politics is played out against each of these two backdrops. In the town, politics (*siyasat*) is followed attentively by students and the

urban and rural politics

middle classes, whose very existence is bound up with the state, whereas it holds little interest for the peasant who only gets news of what is happening in the town when he fiddles with the knobs on his radio in search of music. The "double-dealing of kings" (*padshahgardi*) only affects him when it threatens to disturb the pattern of his daily life in some way. In the countryside the drama of politics revolves around the struggle for local pre-eminence carried on by the *khans*. They strive to enlarge their patronage, to be deferred to as judges in local disputes and thus increase their wealth and extend their family connections.<sup>2</sup> In tribal zones this struggle is sometimes violent, but it is carried on behind closed doors; whatever the outcome it never has any effect on the traditional social structure.

There is constant interaction between these two social worlds. The form it usually takes is the gradual wearing away of rural society by the growth of state institutions and the tapping of state resources for the private use of groups within the community. Or it may take the more turbulent form of a cultural revolution instigated from above, as was the case with King Amanullah from 1924 to 1928, and under the *Khalq* regime in 1978 and 1979), accompanied by a general uprising in the countryside in the name of *jihad* (as in 1928 and 1979). In these times of crisis ideological divisions transcend the narrower village and tribal groupings, which nevertheless still make themselves felt in the forms of political organisation (including that of the communist party).

What distinguishes the two camps -- neither of which can be described as stable or homogeneous -- cannot really be defined in sociological terms; it is their relation to the realm of politics that counts. The stereotype which equates the town with progress and the countryside with tradition has little basis in reality. In both town and country there is a wide range of diversity; they are both constantly changing though there is a core of continuity. Urban society has changed a great deal since the time when it consisted almost entirely of a royal court and a bazaar; now, besides the aristocracy, there is a new state bourgeoisie of officials, students and soldiers whose very existence depends on the institutions of the state, though it must be added that real power within these institutions eludes them.<sup>3</sup> Another stratum of the middle class which has been of importance since the thirties comprises those who make their living by trade. In the countryside a complex pattern of different ethnic groups, whose identity is not clearly defined, is the basis for subtle inequalities of status and different relationships with the state. They range from the dominant ethnic group, the Pashtun, to isolated groups such as the artisans in tribal zones, who have only a negative identity, for they are placed even lower than the lowest rung of the ladder of ethnic

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groups.<sup>4</sup> Since the end of the last century, migrations, evictions and modifications occurring in the social structure itself have thrown the country into turmoil, especially in the north. The introduction of a market economy, the increase in population and the intervention of the state have all accentuated divisions within society and created the conditions for the emergence of a class of well-to-do property owners and entrepreneurs living around the towns; radios and lorries mean that news now travels faster. We should also distinguish between the tribal and the non-tribal zones, even if the line between the two is often blurred. Every Afghan is linked to the past by a line of ancestors traced back through his father. He is also conscious of belonging to a larger entity which takes the form of a more or less endogeneous community (the *qawm*), whether its sociological basis is tribe, clan, professional group (*qawm* of the mullahs or of Barbar), caste (the *bari* of Nuristan), religious group (the *sayyad*), ethnic group (*munjani*), village community or simply an extended family. We will reserve the term 'tribe' (*qabila*) for the *qawms* having traditional rights and customs, a system within Islam of autonomous values (honour, vengeance, etc.), and a complex of specific institutions. These are essentially the Pashtun zones of the east where we find the *pashtunwali* (which is at one and the same time both a code and an ideology) and the institution of the *jirga*, the assemblies of all the men in the tribe.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, the great tribes (Mohmand, Jadran, Jaji, etc.) have territorial bases. For the Pashtun of the west, essentially the Durrani, the case is more complex. There is certainly a tribal memory, in the sense that belonging to the tribe and the clan is something of which people are well aware and quite happy to talk about. Their allegiance is directed towards the great families, such as the royal family, or, in the case of the Popolzay tribe, the Karzay; they also respect the tribal mythology of the great *jirga* and the principle of egalitarianism. However, Durrani tribal institutions are nothing like as strong as those of the tribes of the eastern part of the country, or those of the Ghilzay. On the other hand the influence of the *ulama* is stronger amongst the Durrani. Is it possible, then, to speak of a process of detribalisation? In fact, it seems that the Durrani have never been as conscious of their tribal affinities as people in the east;<sup>6</sup> having always had a closer relationship with the structures of the state (Safavides, then the Amir of Kabul), they have, in a very short time, developed a kind of aristocracy reinforced by gifts of land made by the monarchy (this is the system of *jagir*). Yet the Durrani form an integral part of the Pashtun tribal world, and are looked upon as its cradle.

Although there has never been such a thing as an Afghan nation, there is certainly an Afghan state whose history can be traced. In this respect the locus of power may be pinpointed. But it is more difficult to document in political terms the ways in which society has attempted to evade, to

tribal and community groups and their identity in relation to nomadic and sedentary behaviour.

influence of clergy is stronger among the Durrani, which sets them closer to non-Pashtun counterparts.

clergy class emerges with the de-tribalisation of the tribes.

infiltrate or even to radically oppose the state, in so far as the latter has not suddenly emerged as an abstract entity, but is historically rooted in a specific sector of society: the tribal confederation. We shall, therefore, now trace the history of the state back to its origins and consider the interrelationship between state and society.

## The origins of the Afghan state

### *The tribal confederation*

The Afghan state was established in the eighteenth century, when a tribal confederation developed into a dynastic state. In 1747 Ahmad Shah, of the Saddozay clan of the Popolzay tribe, led an Abdali confederation, now known as the Durrani, in the conquest of the area between Persia and the river Indus.<sup>7</sup> The Saddozay dynasty was to be followed in 1818 by another Durrani dynasty, the Muhammadzay clan of the Barakzay tribe, which held power until 1978. The confederation (*ulus*) was held together by the common aim of conquering neighbouring areas with a view to pillaging or exacting tribute. The political and military forms of this period were characteristic of tribal warfare. War was a short-lived affair and decided upon by the council of clan chiefs (a limited *jirga*); the troops that went into battle were selected from the total number of warriors under arms (*lashkar*). The framework was that of traditional society, but the *lashkar* usually had a supreme and temporary leader whose room for manoeuvre was limited, for he was always suspected of favouring his own clan. He was first and foremost a warrior chief,<sup>8</sup> with whom his followers entered into a contract. His right to lead was based upon the fact that he had been enthroned by a great tribal *jirga* (an assembly of all the warriors). The great *jirga* was the founding myth of the Afghan state and was to be re-enacted in periods of crisis (as for the enthronement of Nadir Khan in 1929). There was no spirit of patriotism, but a profound sense of cultural identity. One's allegiance belonged to the restricted group and the tribal code (*pashtunwali*), not to the Pashtun community or to the state; to join the enemy in order the better to affirm the tribal values (vengeance or self-assertion) was not seen as constituting treachery. "To exercise *pashtu*" (to identify oneself with values) was more important in the context of the tribe than "to be a Pashtun" (to be identified with an ethnic community or a nation).<sup>9</sup>

council of clan chiefs is usually led by Amir

characteristics of Amir

source of legitimacy to Amir's leadership and power

### *From the Amir to the state*

The relationship between the tribal confederation and the centralised state is not to be compared with the relationship one finds in Morocco

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state and stadium  
seems to have the  
same purpose

between *dar as-siba* and *dar al-makhzan*, that is to say between a tribal zone which is autonomous and a zone which is controlled by the central power. The Afghan tribes (especially the Durrani, but also the Ghilzay) see the central power as their representative; it manages on their behalf the conquests that they have made together in order that the material benefits or the glory may be later shared out. The tribes see the state as existing on the periphery, responsible for administering land whose boundaries are constantly fluctuating on account of conquests carried out by the tribal confederations, in respect of which the state is no more than the means of continuity. As far as their own territory is concerned, the presence of the state would seem to be redundant and totally unnecessary. The historical mission of the Afghan state may be summarised as an attempt to reverse this relationship in order to pass from the periphery to the centre. But the state was never to escape the implications of the original principle which gave it legitimacy and, even when it became most Westernised, it was to remain tribal and Pashtun.

state is seen on  
periphery

The history of the Afghan state (*dawlat*) from 1747 to the present is bound up with the search on the part of the state bureaucracy (*hukumat*) for autonomy from the tribes. The state bureaucracy has escaped the influence of tribalism in the sense that individual tribes no longer retain specific responsibilities, but it is still subject to the patronage of the *qawm*. The summit of power in the state still belongs to the Muhammadzay establishment. The development of state institutions has brought into being new social strata (intelligentsia, army, a state bourgeoisie), a product of the government education system which has experienced considerable growth since 1950. (The number of students has grown from 450 in 1945 to 7,000 in 1975, 90 per cent of whom are destined to become employees of the state.)<sup>10</sup> These new social strata are not easily absorbed by traditional society, but at the same time they wield little influence within the state to which they owe their professional and ideological existence, for the state is, as it were, the reason for their existence. In the process which has seen state bureaucracy extend to the whole of the country (both tribal and non-tribal zones), the state has made use of three modes of persuasion in order to gain legitimacy: tribalism, Islam and nationalism.

When the Durrani dynasty was founded in 1747, a specific and autonomous locus of power was established. The state that was created was a prize to be competed for in accordance with certain relatively precise rules. One clan was certain to provide the sovereign (Saddozay until 1818 and Muhammadzay until 1978), then matrimonial alliances between families were created, from which there sprang up a complex pattern of factions intriguing against each other. This brought tribes

marriage has been  
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other than the Durrani into the picture, usually through the mothers of the pretenders to the throne. The responsibilities of state were shared out amongst the great Durrani families (this was to remain true until 1973, at least as far as the army was concerned). There was no shortage of pretenders, who usually sprang from the immediate family (brothers and cousins),<sup>11</sup> since Muslim law does not recognise the right of primogeniture. The choice was made either by consensus (the *jirga*) or by having recourse to arms. The conflicts were often symbolic and, because all the pretenders were members of the Durrani, the decision was taken by the non-Durrani Pashtun tribes. The original tribalism was reinforced by matrimonial alliances, in which only the wives which had come from distinguished families had any political influence. Thus an establishment came into being based upon Durrani aristocracy and the great families which had become linked with it. This establishment was cut off from its tribal origins in the sociological sense: neither the tribal code, nor the attachment to tribal zones, nor the Pashtun language retained any relevance. But the mythological reference to the tribal past which legalised their position still had a large part to play, as did the influence of groups under their patronage and genealogies. It is in this sense that we may speak of a tribal state.<sup>12</sup>

From the very first right up to the present, the state has been the driving force behind modernisation, provided support for new ideas and legitimised them. Until the reign of Abdurrahman (1880-1901), the institutions of state were indistinguishable from the court, though even by the time of Dost Muhammad (1835-63) the need for an army which was something more than a simple *lashkar* had become apparent.<sup>13</sup> The reforms carried out by Abdurrahman were not based on any reformist ideology. His conception of modernisation was purely pragmatic: to rationalise the institutions of the state to make them more efficient, without thereby affecting traditional society. New techniques were adopted and key sectors were reformed, but in a piecemeal fashion. Nevertheless, this started a slow process of modernisation which filtered through the body of society; but this process was a by-product and not an end in itself. Increasing state power meant starting with the army; for that it was necessary to increase the supply of weapons and money, to create a manufacturing industry and to rationalize the fiscal system. Overnight, the state began to intervene in the economy and divide the country into neat blocks for administrative and military purposes. At the same time, the Amir, in order to curtail the influence of tribalism, for the first time focused attention upon the legal function of Islam: as Amir by divine right and defender of the faith he imposed the *shari'at* in order the better to enforce state laws.<sup>14</sup> He attempted to integrate the clergy with

case for matrimony  
engaging the state  
power

the secular institutions of state by control of the *madrassa*, the *waqf*, and of their wages, even going so far as to intervene in the theological domain.<sup>15</sup>

The introduction of these purely pragmatic reforms was carried out within the framework of the traditional exercise of power in medieval Islam: the de facto power of the Amir, who had come out top in the contest within the tribe, was legalised by the consensus of the tribes and by the ceremony of enthronement carried out *a posteriori* by the *'ulama*. In his turn the Amir was charged with the responsibility of ensuring public well-being (*maslahat*) and with the task of defending the religion. Within this framework the technical reforms carried out by Abdurrahman did not arouse any opposition. It was not just the introduction of piecemeal modernisation within state institutions which was to bring society face-to-face with modernity. In Afghanistan, as elsewhere, it is not modernisation (the introduction of new technological methods or the rationalisation of some state institutions) which brings problems, but modernity, the hypothesis which holds that modernisation must necessarily involve a "cultural revolution", a transformation of the way of thinking and the adoption of new social paradigms.

A new policy was adopted under Amanullah (1919–29): faced with the fact that modernisation had met with certain insurmountable obstacles, the state attempted to reshape and reintegrate civil society. The arguments used, borrowed from the European Enlightenment and from the *salafiyya* (a reformist movement), in favour of education and progress, but spiced with a certain anti-clericalism, were authoritarian in nature and tended towards state control. In Afghanistan, the main lines of thought of modernist elites were laid down as early as 1911, with Tarzi in the newspaper *Seraj-ul Akhbar* (1911–19), and were to remain unchanged by later groups including the communists, for whom the main obstacle in the way of progress was the alienation and the illiteracy of the peasants. A complete revolution of outlook, controlled at a distance by the central power, was the condition of progress. The question of education became the recurring theme in progressive rhetoric.<sup>16</sup> From 1924, the consensus between state and society, which rested largely upon a mutual indifference, was broken. The result of the slow process which resulted in the separation of the institutions of the state from society was the creation of a new political space, an urban space whose denizens were moved by values imported from a West which was more imagined than real.<sup>17</sup> It was then, and only then, that a "tradition" came into being in response to the ever widening gulf between the people and those who held the reigns of power. In one sense, traditional society, far from existing in its own right, now became the pole of opposition to the state. Conversely, it became the shadowy projection of all the state was not, for, in order to

arrive at a definition of itself, the state was forced to invent a changeless, frozen world which had remained the same for centuries, incapable of coming to full consciousness of itself without "enlightenment". Here we see the significance of such metaphors as dawn, light, torch (*seraj*), which became current at the end of the nineteenth century as a challenge to a seemingly obscurantist rural world. The status of the intellectual rose at the expense of that of the religious scholar. A good example of the views of the intelligentsia, whether liberal, Marxist or even radical Islamist, is to be found in the *Kabul Times* of 29 August 1970 (the constitutional and royalist period): "What our peasants really need is for all those quaint ideas to be flushed out of their brains . . ." <sup>18</sup>

*The concept of the nation proves elusive*

The state of the Amir of Kabul was given stability by foreign imperialism. Afghanistan became a nation-state because it was a buffer-state. The state was only able to impose its will upon the tribes and occupy its own territory thanks to the financial subsidies and weapons which were freely provided by the English between 1880 and 1919. The establishment of the frontier was carried out more or less single-handedly by the British, in agreement with the Russians. The English forced the Afghans to accept the Treaty of Gandamak (May 1879) and the frontier formed by the Durand line (1893), the Russians dictated the settlement of 1888 (Amou-Darya) and that of 1895 (Pamir); all of these were underpinned by the St Petersburg Anglo-Russian agreements of 1907. The frontiers thus defined were purely strategic and did not correspond to any ethnic or historical boundary. As an English analyst noted:

What was meant by the term scientific frontier in this connection? . . . it would have been impossible to demarcate on the north-west of our Indian Empire a frontier which would satisfy ethnological, political and military requirements . . . What was meant by a scientific frontier was the best strategical boundary which could be used as a line of defence against invasion from the direction of Central Asia. <sup>19</sup>

How do the Afghans themselves see their territory? As Elphinstone commented in 1809, "these people have no name for their country". <sup>20</sup> There are two possible interpretations: the first, a territorial and dynastic view, identified Afghanistan with the area ruled by the Amir of Kabul (thus a reference to the tribal origin). The other, seeing things from a religious perspective, identified the country with the area which had remained Muslim, surrounded as it was by the kingdoms of the infidels (Britain and Russia) or the heretics (the Persians); this was the *millat*, the

“nation” in the sense given the term in Ottoman law, that is to say a religious community. The *millat* is a geographical sub-region of the *umma*. This is how the great majority of the Afghan peasants have always understood the idea of the nation. Until 1924 (the date of the abolition of the Ottoman Caliphate and the first series of reforms by Amanullah), the means by which the Amir legitimised the authority of the state was to rouse the people in defence of the Muslim *millat* threatened by the infidels. But in 1924, with Afghanistan recognised by the European Nations and the Caliphate abolished, such ideas became outmoded; the state thereafter attempted to promote a spirit of nationalism which would be purely Afghan. The national flag and the celebration of a national day had already appeared during the reign of Abdurrahman,<sup>21</sup> and these were followed in the succeeding reign (Habibullah, 1901-19), by a national anthem.<sup>22</sup> The constitution of 1923 defined Afghanistan as a nation in which every resident had the right of citizenship whatever his religion (no reference was made to the Muslim *millat*).<sup>23</sup> The rupture with Islamic forms of legitimisation was also marked by the quest for a pre-Islamic “Indo-Aryan” past (hence the importance of archaeology), and the invention of a folklore comprising a number of incongruous elements (the “national” sport was supposedly a Turkish game known as *bozkashi*; the “national” dance, called *atan*, was provincial, and came from Paktya). History was rewritten as if the political unit “Afghanistan” had existed from the earliest times. The school was, of course, the principal vehicle of this nationalist ideology.

But the state always oscillated between the concepts of an abstract nation, defined on the basis of its own sovereignty, and the historical reference to a Pashtun nation defined as an ethnic group which had not yet achieved its nationhood (the only possible outcome for the other ethnic groups was to become Pashtun). While the first of these two definitions had no implications for any of the groups within the nation, the second worked to the advantage of those Pashtun who were not Durrani (and therefore did not belong to the tribal aristocracy). They now found in Pashtun nationalism an ideology which gave them an opportunity to improve their social lot and the means of wresting the monopoly of power from the establishment. This group gained recruits especially amongst the young educated elite (particularly those who came from the Ghilzay) who had recently moved to the towns and were rapidly losing their tribal customs. It was amongst these that the Khalq tendency of the communist party took root, the last phase of an extreme Pashtun nationalism which, however, had only minority support, even within the linguistic community of the Pashtun. After the Soviet invasion, the resistance gathered strength and the idea of the *millat* was revived.

*The expansion of state bureaucracy*

We turn now to the policy of extending the state bureaucracy from the reign of Abdurrahman up to the date of the communist coup; it is this policy that the Babrak regime and the Russians hope to reinstate. The Khalq regime of 1978 attempted to bring all social relations within the ambience of the state. They considered society to be no more than an aggregate of individuals incapable of controlling their own destiny and bereft of all social ties now that feudalism, as they defined it, had been abolished. Up to then the state had come to terms with civil society, and had even recognised that it had a positive value.

Even though the state was born out of conquest, it did not impose itself by brute force. On the one hand it used the traditional networks of power in order to connect up with society and to transform the way those networks operated. On the other, it manipulated legitimising symbols which were recognised as such by the peasants.

Since the state did not have at its disposal enough officials to be able to spread out from the capital and divide the countryside up neatly into administrative areas, it was obliged to delegate some of its functions to people of standing in the local community, who thus became intermediaries between the state and the people; by this means their power was enhanced for they had become, in the eyes of the state, the representatives of their community. These people of standing were not necessarily *khan* (or *bay*), whose power, based on their wealth and the power of the *qawm*, was both greater and more informal. They were more likely to be *malik* or *arbab*, terms sometimes translated as village chiefs; they represented, in fact, a local *qawm* (there could be several *maliks* per village) and were elected by heads of families. They received a remuneration from the families they served, and sometimes a payment from the state, and in return they acted as registrars, dealing with census returns, conscription and the collection of taxes; they also assisted those within their administrative area in their dealings with the authorities. The position of the *maliks* was somewhat ambiguous, for they represented the state to the community and the community to the state; in the years immediately prior to the coup, they tended to use this ambiguity to strengthen their personal position. But they were considered by the peasants to be one of them. On the other hand, as far as the administration of justice was concerned, the state had embarked upon a course of systematically removing from the village assemblies all their authority, and the *qazi* who were not appointed by the government were deprived of the right of making judgements.<sup>24</sup>

Over the years, the symbols used by the state to legitimate its authority

have varied. The original symbol, that of tribal legitimacy, was, of course, only valid in tribal zones, especially those of the Durrani, and there it retained its force. It was in the name of tribal solidarity that Abdurrahman asked the Durrani to people north-western Afghanistan<sup>25</sup>, and Amanullah made an appeal from Qandahar in order to regain his throne in 1928. It was in the name of tribal solidarity that Nadir Khan retook Kabul from Bacha-yi Saqqao in 1929 (see p. 67). In these cases, legitimacy was conferred by the ritual of enthronement carried out by the great *jirga*, the founding myth of the Afghan state. A second legitimating symbol consisted simply in the actual possession of power, since, for the peasant, such power is automatic, and is held to exist as soon as it manifests itself; power is recognised simply because it exists and because no-one is attempting to gainsay it. The existence of the state was, therefore, not at issue; what was at issue was its right to encroach upon the country. With the exception of the tribal zones and Hazarajat, Afghanistan has always been subject to a central power, whose legitimacy, ever since the Muslim conquest, has been symbolised by the minting of money and the *khutba* (the Friday sermon) in the name of the sovereign; the constitution of 1923, article 7, ratified these two outward signs. It mattered little which individual became the incarnation of this de facto power (a question asked after the communist coup was: "Is Taraki the new king?"). The existence of the state is not what is at stake for the peasant, whose chief concern is to resist the encroachment of state bureaucracy, which will endure whichever regime or sovereign is in power.

The third source of legitimacy is Islam. The need to have a strong central power to defend the community of believers against infidels is recognised by everyone and always becomes more important in periods of crisis, receding into the background in the absence of external threat. Of course, this source of legitimacy only comes into play if the sovereign is seen to be Muslim. The final ground of legitimacy is provided by the nation itself, although this only has significance for the detribalised Pashtun, since the others are more receptive to the tribal myth; non-Pashtun exclude themselves from this conception of the nation (an Afghan will never define himself as an Afghan if he is not a Pashtun as well).

### **The elusive society**

#### *The exclusiveness of the state*

The fact that the state exists outside and apart from civil society has, as we have already said, its basis in everyday experience. The machinery of



contact with the life of the village. The administration often sends officials on a mission to the villages. The villagers always suspect that the mission has an ulterior motive and they attempt to convince the official to leave as soon as possible. Ethnologists have related how a harmless pair of officials from the Ministry of Agriculture, who had come to see how locust control was faring, were astonished to find themselves being given a lump sum by the village people, on the condition that they should never ever set foot there again.<sup>27</sup> In this sense, the proverbial hospitality of the Afghans is also a form of defensive screen. The guest, assigned to a precise place (the *hujra*) which he dares not leave without offending his host, is enmeshed in a formalism in which the ceremony of greetings and the ritual of the meal leaves little place for the exercise of authority or even simple investigation; those ethnologists and tourists who have the misfortune to be mistaken for civil servants know something about this. The foreigner finds himself confronted by an endless series of evasions, procrastinations and side-stepping of the issue. The person who is responsible is always somewhere else, the horses are in the mountains and the truth is in the depths of the well.

But what is there to hide? Does village society have a real existence, an autonomous life which establishes it as an entity in its own right, bracing itself to resist the unwelcome arrival in its midst of state bureaucracy? This is at the heart of the question concerning the relations between state and civil society. First, an individual's desire to avoid the attentions of the state does not necessarily mean that he lives outside the state. Peasant society does not mount guard at the frontiers against an invader, for it has no frontiers. Secondly, there is no such thing as a totally self-sufficient economy, and thus it is impossible to describe the introduction of the market economy as a violation; the community does not have its own territory to guarantee its separateness. Finally, and above all, there is no locus of power within civil society which can be the object of a strategy of control. The locus of power, the administrative post and the *malik* co-opted into the ranks of officialdom, are, as it were, invented and defined by the state. This, then, is the arena in which the fight between society and state is waged, and in which the latter is the more vulnerable because its people and its buildings are highly visible targets. In guerilla warfare the insurgents know what to take and whom to kill; the inverse is less often true.

Power in Afghan peasant society resides neither in a specific locality nor in a person, but in an elusive network, which needs constant maintenance and reconstruction. It is a network which depends upon patronage, where one's degree of prestige is proportionate to the largesse distributed. Power is granted by consensus and is not necessarily given to a man for life; this is not a world of vassals, of allegiance entered into by

oath. Afghan society is not feudal. It resembles more the constant disequilibrium which characterises social relations in the *potlatch* than the stable architecture of the feudal system. A *khan* depends for his power on the consensus of his *qawm*, except when his authority has been superseded by a state nominee, which has been the case amongst the Durrani since the eighteenth century through the institution of the *jagir* (the *iqta'* of classical Islam). Although this has never been the general rule, it has become more frequent in recent decades, when economic wealth has made it possible for the rich to gain the favour of the administration. The *khan* must always show, by his generosity and his availability to those who need him, that he is the only person worthy of fulfilling this function: "there is no *khan* without *dastakhan*" (without "a tablecloth", that is, without keeping open table).<sup>28</sup> Elphinstone has expressed this idea well: "Power consists in the number of a man's relations".<sup>29</sup> And if the son inherits prestige from his father, he must maintain his status according to certain informal but demanding rules: he must provide food for others, arbitrate in their disputes and be unflinching in the defence of the interests of his *qawm* in the clash with the state.<sup>30</sup> In fact, the state has been forced to transform the village communities into abstract entities – units within the system of administration which can thus be managed with the help of their *malik*.<sup>31</sup> More precisely, this is one of two possible options: either the community is made into an abstraction, and the state imposes order upon the patchwork of *qawm*, assisted by the fact that it alone is able to transcend tribal fragmentation (which has been the policy of the kings and the Soviet Union); or the village community is crushed, and the government deals directly with individuals with no group-consciousness (the policy of Amanullah, the Khalq, and perhaps the radical Islamists). Traditionally the state has always treated the village communities as a unit: taxes are levied collectively for such things as the maintenance of roads passing near the village, or the construction of the school; when there are rebellions or crimes which remain unsolved, fines are imposed on the community. By making the *qawm* into an entity which it can only approach through the mediation of the *malik*, the state has strengthened the authority of the latter, who now has at his disposal other weapons than the traditional consensus: he can help people to avoid military service, and he can act on their behalf when they have taxes or fines to pay.

#### *The insubstantial state*

At the very moment when the state institutions were attempting to establish themselves, to rationalise and integrate the village com-

hand, the *qawm*, as a solidarity grouping, is able to penetrate to the very heart of the state.

The existence of peasant communities in Afghanistan presents a problem, and the response of writers when faced with this problem is either to deny outright that they exist, or to apologise for them.<sup>34</sup> I do not intend to become involved here in the finer points of this debate. It is, however, necessary to distinguish two things: the village community and the power networks. It should be stressed that the solidarity grouping does not exist only in a precise geographical space; the essence of rural society is to be found in a cultural whole which cannot be reduced to the "village community". The social practices which exemplify group solidarity in the villages and on which writers like to base their definition of "village communities" may seem banal: they include the existence of "common land" for pasturage, people working for the common good in the digging out of irrigation channels, internal settlement of quarrels, and the fact that people can rely upon one another to help in times of crisis. There is nothing here which suggests a basis for an alternative centre of power. In addition, local society finds ways of regulating its own activities to deal with situations which are somewhat out of the ordinary: for example, when, as often happens in summer in the centre of the country, temporary bazaars are held, the two principal communities (Durrani and Ghilzay) each elect, with the blessing of the administrative authorities, a *malik* who is responsible for keeping order.<sup>35</sup> It is only in the zones where tribalism is still strong that villages have institutions endowed by long custom with a specific authority, which exercise pressure towards conformity:<sup>36</sup> only in these cases is it possible to speak of an autonomous village community. But the existence of group solidarity does not mean that there is an alternative centre of power in opposition to the state, since such groupings are easily absorbed within the state structure. The essence of Afghan civil society is not to be found in the autonomy of the village community, but in those elements which, at the very heart of civil society, have as their point of reference a state, which as yet exists only as an ideal and is quite different from the actual one.

Afghan rural society is a society regulated by law. There is a body of law, the *shari'at*; formally appointed judges, the *qazi*; and legal authority is vested in Islam. It is not important whether this legal system functions in reality. During the period of the old constitution when the legal system was in competition with the power game being pursued by the *khan* and was being taken over by the state, references to Islam, in the main, were merely symbolic. But it was precisely this symbolism which helped to resist the onward march of state institutions by the creation of a space

within which real autonomy was possible, in that the appeal to a broad unifying principle implicit in the use of the term "*umma*" was backed up by another idea having the same force, at least for the Persian-speaking zones. This was the direct link created with the culture of classical Persia, which was nothing if not a culture centred upon the idea of the *state*, but a state of much greater antiquity than the modern Afghan state. (The Persian spoken in Afghanistan – a more literary language than the dialect spoken in Iran – was known as *dari*, "the language of the court".) Paradoxically, the whole cultural emphasis of the Pashtun state of the Mosahiban (the family of Nadir Khan and his brothers), in power from 1929 onwards, like that of the communists, has been to encourage a culture which can best be described as "popular" (the oral literature of the Pashtun, codified by a "Pashtun Academy" was set up in 1935); while the resistance of Persian-speakers to this attempt to make the whole country conform to Pashtun culture has been carried out in the name of a more sophisticated culture, spread abroad in scholarly books such as the *Panj-kitab*. Neither peasants nor scholars view the role of the present state as the manifestation of the ideal of a united society; the only function that they are willing to allow it, besides the maintenance of public order, is to be a symbol of a unity conceded long ago, as demonstrated by the *shari'at*, and classical culture. If it sets about imposing its own norms, then the state is considered to be no more than the instrument of sectional interests.

To understand this, it is necessary to realise that the space between the village community and the state is occupied by another social network, that of the scholars: the *'ulama*, *qazi*, scribes and poets of the villages. This network has its own educational institutions: Qur'anic schools and *madrassa*. It would be wrong to think that these institutions provide a purely religious and legal education. The Afghan clergy is imbued with a knowledge of the Persian humanities; many of the religious leaders have come from the mystical Sufi movement, and combine a sense of the importance of legal formalism with a spiritual and literary dimension. Until about 1950 all the clergy and most of the officials came from the social network of the *madrassa*. In the next chapter we shall consider in some detail the curriculum and intellectual background of the Afghan *'ulama*, but in brief it has to do with Muslim universalism. Somewhere around 1950, the state was establishing not only a network of government schools, but also a faculty of state theology: judges were appointed strictly from the ranks of the graduates of this institution. The network of non-government *madrassa* has not been abolished, but it has been much reduced in importance, both socially and politically. Government institutions are now staffed by intellectuals, whose thinking, whether

they be Islamists or communists, is state-centred, while the *'ulama* are concerned only with knowledge, and the question of power is peripheral. Thus, the opposition is not between rural particularism and the universality of the state, but between the religious scholar and the intellectual,<sup>37</sup> both of whom claim to be the vehicles of knowledge which can unify society. Now, it happens that the links between the *qawm* and its individual members are much looser in the case of the scholar than in the case of the peasant, even when the intellectual's social origins are in the countryside. The function of the scholar, as far as the peasant is concerned, is to represent a principle of universal worth: if he were too closely linked with any particular community his standing would be in jeopardy, whereas, by definition, the *khan* only exists within the context of a specific *qawm*.

As we have said, the rivalry of the *khans* is carried on behind closed doors: it does not upset the order imposed by the state – indeed it may even serve to reinforce it. On the other hand, the *'alim* provides a principle of unity which the state can only use when it is confronted by the non-Muslim world. In normal times, the state finds it necessary to attempt to reduce the power of the clergy, and the influence of Islamic doctrines, in order to prevent people questioning its right to exist; it hopes, of course, by this means to suggest that it alone has access to a modern, secular creed which can act as a basis for social unity. In seeking to orientate himself the peasant oscillates between these two landmarks of rural life: the *khan* and the *'alim*, the *hujra* and the mosque. The first assumes importance in tribal zones and the second in non-tribal areas; but Islam always reasserts itself in times of crisis.

To understand rural society it is important to see it not as a so-called village community but as a space within which law and institutions exist, even though these norms are, to a great extent, imaginary. Consider the political vocabulary used by the peasants: *siyasat*, politics, suggests the town and the state (*dawlat*); *zolm* means the arrogance of power, de facto power, tyranny, epitomized both by officials representing the state and by the local *khan*. The term *sunnat*, "tradition", recalls the example provided by the Prophet: this is an ethical model and not a state of society. It is impossible to speak of "traditional society" in its usual sense for the *sunnat* is not the opposite of "modern" society; modernity has the sense of innovation, and thus irreligion. This of course does not prevent the peasant from enjoying the products of the modern world, such as radios, since for him they do not have such connotations.

Islam conveys an ideal of social justice, but it does not, in itself, have a blueprint for a state to rival the state which actually exists. It does not promise a utopia that involves upsetting society, for the peasant is not revolutionary, neither does it present a political programme of the kind

espoused by the Islamists, because the peasant regards the reform of personal behaviour as being more important than the transformation of social structures. He sees "true" Islam as enjoining upon its followers a number of very specific rules, obedience to which ensures economic and social justice (for example there is the condemnation of usury). It is an ethical vision, for at the same time the arrogance of power (*zolm*) and corruption are seen as natural. It little matters that very few people who exercise power act justly. What is important is that the peasant should be able to judge, and, even when he is defeated, refuse to approve of injustice.

Thus, when the peasant appeals for justice it is on ethical grounds. He has little knowledge of the intricacies of the *shari'at* and they do not interest him; for him it is sufficient that a concern with justice should characterise the "Muslim". On the other hand, the *'alim* is inclined to see the *shari'at* in a formalistic, almost casuistic, fashion. The fact that civil society in Afghanistan is something more than a mere aggregate of rural communities, whose status is unclear, is also due to a particular characteristic of Muslim law. Its validity does not depend on the existence of any given state since it is grounded in the absolute, and it has proved capable of developing its own hermeneutic tradition, including the education of those upon whom that tradition depends, outside the institutions of the state. This is why the differentiation between civil society and the state is very marked in those Muslim countries which have not been colonised.

The idea of Islam as a countervailing authority to the despotism of the state is not of recent origin, but it gained in importance after 1924 when the state embarked upon a process of secularisation, accompanied by the growth of state bureaucracy. The removal of the *'ulama* to the fringes of social life meant that they became isolated from the centres of power, and thus of corruption, which, in turn, gave them an aura of integrity which would certainly not have been theirs if they had been given official posts. On every occasion, even when the state is acting with the best intentions, its edicts are seen as tyrannical, because they remove from the peasant overall responsibility for the conduct of his affairs. The intellectual explains the peasant's unwillingness to accept reforms as a consequence of his alienation, while the peasant actually feels alienated because the state is intent upon relating him to the process of production.<sup>38</sup>

The essence of civil society is to be sought, therefore, not in the village community, but in a wider context which transcends the fragmented *qawm*; because of the social problems of its human agents, and educational networks, this essence is firmly rooted in traditional society. There can be no doubt that Islam is fundamental.

## Chapter Two

# Islam in Afghanistan

Apart from a few thousand Hindus and Sikhs and a few hundred Jews, all Afghans are Muslims. Eighty per cent of these are Sunni of the Hanafite rite, and the rest are Shi'a of the Jaffarite rite, with a small Isma'ili minority of one to two hundred thousand people. In a country like Afghanistan, where the concept of the nation has developed but recently, where the state is seen as external to society and where people's allegiance is directed primarily towards their local community, the only thing which all Afghans have in common is Islam.

Afghan peasant life is permeated by religion. It provides the intellectual horizon, the system of values and the code of behaviour, even though occasionally this may involve a clash with other codes of conduct, such as the tribal system; it provides the only source of legitimation based upon universal values. Nevertheless, the social basis of this religion varies according to whether the context within which it exists is tribal or non-tribal, rural or urban, and in the same way the link between ideology and religion varies according to whether a group is secularised or fundamentalist, traditionalist or reformist. Thus one finds different forms of religious expression, each with its own dynamic and symbolism. In this context, we should distinguish between the village mullah, the *'alim* (doctor of law), the *sayyad* (reputed to be a descendant of the Prophet), the *pir* (a charismatic figure sometimes to be found at the head of a Sufi brotherhood) and finally the Islamist intellectual. Amongst the different forms of religious expression, we should distinguish between popular devotion, the legal orthodoxy of the *'ulama*, the mysticism of the Sufis and the political Islam of the Islamists. Recent developments have seen a gradual erosion of the influence of the *'ulama*, which has been going on since the last century, though this has suddenly been reversed because of the present war. There has also been a schism in Sufism between the orthodox orders in the non-tribal zones and the non-clerical orders in the south. Other developments have been the decline in the influence of the *sayyad* and the charismatic leaders, and a crisis in the relationship between *shari'at* and custom in the tribal zones. Finally, the Islamist

movement, led by young intellectuals, has greatly increased its power and influence.

### **Popular religion**

It would be a mistake to make a stark contrast between the religion of the people, the legalistic Islam of the *'ulama*, and the political Islam of the Islamists, if only for the reason that the last two categories also form part of what, for want of a better word, we call "popular religion". It is not so much a difference of content that we are concerned with here as a difference of approach. Included in the concept of "popular religion" are such things as the way in which religion structures everyday life, the way it constitutes a language, a meaningful experience, a cultural identity. The way it stabilises a relationship with the sacred world is quite different from that offered by "official" theology – although in Afghanistan it would be very difficult to identify an "official" Islam as opposed to an unorthodox Islam.

By "popular" I do not mean a religion which has its origins in the people as opposed to the scholars (*'ulama*) and the Islamist intellectuals, but rather one which derives from a world-view common to all these social categories, which provides the basis for the more intellectual constructions of the *'ulama* (the Muslim law) and the intellectuals (Islamist ideology).

### *Islam in the village*

The mosque is the centre of the village; it is also the only suitable place for communal gatherings, although the larger villages will also have tea rooms, and the *khan*'s residence has its guest room (*hujra*). The mosque is, of course, used for the performance of religious rituals; collective prayer (*jama'a*) is regarded as having greater spiritual value than personal prayer – an example is the Friday gathering, when the whole village comes together at midday. But the mosque is also the place where men can meet to discuss various matters and swap news; it is the place where the venerable elders come to discuss problems and resolve conflicts. It is also here that strangers passing through the village are accommodated, when there is no man in the village rich enough to provide hospitality.

Religion structures space and time. The space of the village is centred upon the mosque, but there is also a world-space, with its concentric circles of the *umma*, of other religions and finally of unbelievers. The rhythm of the day contains the five prayers, and the meals which have something of a sacrament about them; the rhythm of the year has its

feasts which culminate in Ramadan; the rhythm of the language has time-hallowed forms of address and expressions of courtesy which invoke the name of God. Anyone attempting to rid his speech and expressive gestures of all reference to the Deity would be unable to convey his meaning to others. The mullah is, first and foremost, the mullah of a particular village and not of the clergy;<sup>1</sup> he is not a member of an institutionalised body and has scarcely any links with his superiors (the *'ulama*). He is not appointed by them, neither does he depend upon them for his income. When it becomes necessary to appoint a new mullah the village will come to a collective decision, choosing someone on the grounds of his piety and for his wisdom and one who, frequently, comes from a family which traditionally provides the mullah; this is particularly the case in tribal zones, where the mullah may almost be said to belong to a professional caste.

The mullah is often poor and his "job" is a way of supplementing what he earns growing crops – an activity which continues to take up part of his time. In Afghanistan there is no longer any *waqf* in the form of land or property owned by the mosque; the only *waqf* in the village is the mosque itself and its outlying buildings, which are not enough to provide an income for the mullah's needs. Sometimes he becomes a kind of employee of the village, paid yearly in kind (this is the case in tribal zones),<sup>2</sup> and in these instances he is considered to be a craftsman specialising in religious ritual in the same way as the barber and the carpenter each have their own specialisations. He will then be paid once a year on a contractual basis; or he may be provided with money from the Islamic taxes (*'ushr* and *zakat*) as well as a payment for the work he has performed.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless the people give as they are able; there is no pressure upon them to do so and the gifts never reach the upper limit provided for by Islamic law. Naturally, the rich play a greater part than others in supporting the mullah, but it is unusual for him to depend directly on the *khan* for his upkeep.

The social status of the mullah, then, varies considerably: it is low in the tribal zones, because of his exclusion from the tribal community and his inclusion in professional groups which are looked down upon (except by the Durrani); it is higher elsewhere according to his knowledge and the traditional esteem granted to his family. The mullah has a monopoly on all religious activities such as prayers at the time of baptism, circumcision, marriage and burial, childrens' catechism, and the conduct of the Qur'anic school. In the small villages the mullah is frequently the only educated person. Even though he may never have any political power, he acts as a mediator in disputes. Sometimes he provides services which may best be described as on the fringe of religion, or even as quite

straightforward magic: dispensing medicine, the use of talismen, or exorcism. The rivals of the mullah in this field are the quacks, the doctors and other workers of magic, but in another direction he is also in competition with the teachers at the government school and all the newly educated members of the population, who do not have much respect for him.

From casual conversation you might get the impression that anti-clericism is rife amongst the people, but this would be somewhat misleading. It may take the form of upgrading the mullah's role while remaining sceptical about the ability of the one who fulfils that role: in jokes, the mullah appears as ignorant, lazy and greedy. But this reaction has nothing to do with free thought. The level of education of the mullah varies a great deal: he is able to read and write (but there are a few who are illiterate), he knows by heart the prayers and the quotations from the Qur'an in Arabic (but he rarely uses that language), and he also has some knowledge of the rudiments of Muslim law and classical literature.

*Religion: is it a normative system or an ethic?*

Islam provides a system of norms, a code regulating human relations, in a word a social morality. But by insisting too much on this aspect, one is apt to forget its spiritual dimension, which manifests itself in behaviour and which opens up a transcendental sphere, for inner meditation, and access to the universal beyond the everyday rules of community life. The approach of Western anthropologists, like the utilitarian understanding of Islam which one finds in the writings of certain Muslim modernists,<sup>4</sup> and the way in which some of the *'ulama* insist on a purely legalistic interpretation of the religion, go too far towards reducing Islam to a system of rules.

As we have seen, the idea of tradition conveys to the peasant not something static, but the aspiration to live his life in accordance with an ethical model: by imitation of the Prophet (*sunnat*), and in his behaviour, gestures and dress.<sup>5</sup> It does not matter very much that this tradition is more imaginary than real, that there has been constant change or that the ethical standard is often scorned by the very person who claims to live by it. The rhetoric of tradition in no way rules out a certain pragmatism in everyday life. This rhetoric gives meaning to the world, provides the peasant with a means of expression, and access to the universal. In Islam, truth is something that you arrive at less by interpretation than by imitation. This fact inevitably means that the development of political thought is inhibited but it also strengthens personal morality. Thus, one finds moral conformism (unquestioning obedience to the norms) as well

as the practice of spiritual exercises in pursuit of piety – the interactions of social norms as well as the creation by the individual of an inward space for meditation – a practice which some may accept and others refuse.

Religion also provides access to a universal through its use of language: the words used by those taking oaths, words which signify shared values, words which refer to a world common to one or more speakers. Even though the right to speak reflects the hierarchical relations within society, and this, in effect, means that scholars are a privileged elite, the peasant may say what he thinks before the *qazi*. There are certain principles held in common and he is able to speak without any intermediary. However, when he finds himself face to face with a government official, he may feel insignificant and ill-at-ease and remain silent, involved as he is in a set of procedures which are foreign to him and whose overall purpose escapes him. In such a situation he usually gets the *malik* to act as a go-between. Far from being imprisoned within the narrow confines of a religion shot through with a sense of fatalism, the peasant finds in this same religion a useful tool of analysis, a means of comparing one thing with another and of making sense of his own personal universe.

Religion also puts the peasant into contact with the universal, because it provides access to a transcendental sphere through which he is able to speak of the world in general, of humanity (*bashariyyat*), of good and evil. Now dialogue with the stranger is made possible, whereas if Islam were nothing more than a set of rules the other would be incomprehensible to him. It is this mixture of formalism (and thus of latent sectarianism) and profound humanism which outsiders find baffling when they come into contact with Muslim peasants. Behind the mistrust of the stranger, behind the fear of moral contamination and the evil eye, behind the age-old tradition of hospitality which travellers find so engaging and yet which, even as it welcomes them, manages to neutralise any potential threat, behind all this formalism of human relations, there is a desire to understand and engage, on the deepest level, in a dialogue made possible because of a shared humanity. This is a conception more firmly rooted in the believer than in the unbeliever, for whom irreligion is but the latest fashion imported from the West. In Afghanistan atheism signifies the adoption of Western ways, and thus it constitutes a form of alienation; so, it is not mere chance that of the two forms of communism in Afghanistan one, the Khalq, is driven by a suicidal and destructive lust for violence, the other, the Parcham, is slavishly pro-Soviet.

#### *Islam, traditional law and the tribal code*

Throughout Afghanistan, Islam is far from being a single system of norms. While state law (*qanun*) is alien to the country communities,

customs (*riwaj*, *adat*) and superstition, often of pre-Islamic origin, exist everywhere. Furthermore, a certain number of institutions, such as the counsel of the venerable elders, and *mirab* (see appendix 2), have developed without any direct link with the *shari'at*. In particular, a complex but precise system of common law has gradually evolved in the countryside. But, as far as the non-tribal zones are concerned, the general framework of penal law and of common law is still provided by the *shari'at*.<sup>6</sup> And even though reference to the *shari'at* is often purely rhetorical, no positive system has come to take its place.

The situation in the tribal zones is quite different: here there is a positive system, comprising the tribal code (*pashnunwali*) and the assembly (*jirga*). *Pashnunwali* is at one and the same time an ideology and a body of common law<sup>7</sup> which has evolved its own sanctions and institutions. Political power in the tribes is secular in origin (that is to say not dependant upon religion) and, on the level of law, the tribal code and the *shari'at* are clearly opposed. We have already seen that the status of the mullah is low in the tribal zones. Even if his native tongue is Pashtu, he would never say that he was a Pashtun. The son of a *khan* would never engage in religious studies (at least in the twentieth century, for the situation seems to have been different in earlier times).<sup>8</sup> To be a Pashtun is to be integrated into a tribal structure. Priests are outside the tribal system, either below it, or above it. The village mullah is placed below, above are those people who have *barakat*, the *myan*, *sayyad*, *pir* and charismatic leaders. Thus, the mullah is in the same category as the artisan: since the family from which he comes is usually considered to be outside the tribal group – the position of mullah is often handed down from father to son – he is dependant upon his own particular group. In the zones where the tradition of tribalism is still strong, such as Kunar and Paktya, he does not take part in the *jirga*, though elsewhere (for instance, in Wardak) he attends but as a “technical counsellor”. If he attempts to go beyond his function as a person entrusted with the task of managing rituals, an anti-clerical reaction will always follow: “the mullahs to the mosque”. Later, we shall consider the status of charismatic leaders. But in each case the representatives of religion exist outside the tribal structure, a fact which has had important consequences with regard to the way in which Islam found political expression during the war and to the influence exercised by the political parties which make up the resistance movement.

The tribal code and Muslim law are in opposition. Adultery (*zina*) should, according to the *shari'at*, require four witnesses if it is to be proven; for the *pashnunwali*, hearsay (*peghor*) is sufficient, for what is at stake is honour (one's self-image) and not morality (defined by the *shari'at* as what is permitted as opposed to what is not). Women in the

tribes are not allowed to inherit property, for that would contradict the principle of strict patrilineage, which is the very basis of the tribal system; while the Qur'an grants to women half the share of the male. The dowry, a sign of prestige, frequently exceeds the limits set by the *shari'at*, while, on the other hand, the repudiation of a wife by her husband, something which, according to the Qur'an, presents no difficulties, is practically impossible in the tribes, for that would be an insult to the wife's family. Vengeance (*badal*) is commended within the tribal code, while the *shari'at* attempts to limit the occasions on which it can take place. The *wesh*, the usual way in which land is redistributed, is contested by the mullahs on the grounds that landed property is something intangible.<sup>9</sup> It would be possible to provide many more examples to illustrate that it is not a question of reinterpreting the *shari'at* to satisfy particular interests, but of two positive systems which are quite frankly opposed to each other, because they each present a different image of social order. The *pashtunwali* has as its goal the maintaining within the tribe of an equilibrium which is always under threat – as to the definition of the tribe, this is arrived at by a consensus of opinion. A Pashtun defines himself in opposition to everything which is not Pashtun. The *shari'at*, on the other hand, attempts to transcend specific groups such as tribes, *qawm* and other *asabiyya* in the universality of the *umma*.

The tribal code is more democratic but more restrictive; it does not attempt to transcend the particularity of the group, but makes appeal to the consensus of the tribal community. As far as political life in Afghanistan is concerned, the tribal code tends to isolate the Pashtun community, while the *shari'at*, which does not recognise that ethnic groups have any ultimate reality, envisages a more universal social order. For this reason the work of the *'ulama* is seen as a threat to the identity of the tribe, in so far as they wish to replace the *pashtunwali* by the *shari'at* and to minimise the role of the *khan*, whose power rests entirely upon secular foundations. The village mullahs are often closer to the tribal community than the *'ulama*, and are careful not to interfere in these matters; the charismatic leaders are quite willing to make use of the tribal code so that they may act as mediators.<sup>10</sup> In due course we shall observe how the idea of *jihad* suddenly becomes prominent in times of crisis in tribal zones and how this brings with it a restoration of the power of the *'ulama*. Although the various forms that Islam takes in the countryside have nothing to do with the degree of intensity which the individual brings to his private devotion – and certainly these form an important aspect of life in the tribal zones – they explain to a large extent the differences between the north and the south which have become apparent during the war, differences which cannot be explained on ethnic or

religious grounds, but which spring from the different relationship that exists between Islam and politics in these two zones.

*Holy men and barakat*

*Barakat* is a form of holiness which brings blessing to all who come into contact with it and which emanates from certain people, places or objects;<sup>11</sup> it is an inherent power which may be transmitted. Sacred objects may be talismen, pages of the Koran, relics; sacred places: may be the *ziyarat*, the tomb of a *pir*. Certain individuals may have *barakat*: the *sayyad*, who, whatever his personal merits, continues to possess and transmit a part of the aura of the Prophet; and the *pir*, the spiritual master, sometimes incorrectly translated as "saint", though in Islam there is no parallel to the Christian theory of mediation, and the *pir* sanctifies others not by his personal intercession, but by contact. The *pir* is most often associated with a Sufi order.

The tombs of the *pir* become places of pilgrimage; a guardian (*muwajer*), living from the offerings of the faithful, looks after the *ziyarat*. Pilgrimages are very much a family affair; many *ziyarat* have a reputation based on their ability to cure specific illnesses: that of Ofyan, in Koh-i-Daman, for instance, was renowned for its power to cure rabies. The attitude of the orthodox clergy towards these manifestations of popular religious sentiment is one of reservation, which is more marked amongst the more highly educated clergy. On the other hand, the village mullahs share wholeheartedly in these practices, and the Afghan clergy show no signs of being opposed to the *pir* in principle.

The concept of the holy man is a broad one, ranging from the *malang*, a vagabond, to the highly respected *pir* who has become an *'alim* of a great *madrasa*. Here, too, there is no clear frontier between popular Islam and other more sophisticated forms. The *malang* or *qalandar* are vagabond preachers, half-crazed and half-naked; they are story-tellers who sell charms and they come originally from outside Afghanistan – often from India; they hang around the *ziyarat* and go freely from mosque to mosque, living on the fringe of a society which does not concern itself over much with the question of its borders.

The *sayyad* are reputed to be descended from Muhammad and the *khwaja* from Caliph Omar. In their social life they benefit from a kind of symbolic circus value, without being necessarily men of religion. They have no political role save that given them by their position in the social structure and their personal qualities. Thus, in tribal zones, the *sayyad* is, by definition, set apart from the other segments of society. Even if his mother-tongue is Pashtu, he will not be thought of as a Pashtun: his *qawm*

is *sayyad*, that is to say "Arab". This position of neutrality vis-à-vis the agnatic rivalries implicit in the tribal structure makes him, by definition, the mediator.<sup>12</sup> Many *sayyad* have been able to take advantage of their position to obtain local political influence, and it is for this reason that people, especially the more educated amongst them, exhibit a certain ambivalence towards them, particularly when their ignorance of religious matters is too obvious.

The charismatic mullah is a figure who provides an insight into the social milieu of the tribe when it is undergoing upheaval and suffering from disunity; he emerges at times of crisis, when the ideology of the *jihad* transcends tribal divisions. At such times a figure often comes from outside the world of the tribe to unify the various factions: a *sayyad*, a *pir* or simply a mullah, such as the Somali "mad mullah" of the British raj.<sup>13</sup>

The *pir* are spiritual masters surrounded by their disciples (*murid*). Each region of Afghanistan has its own local *pir*, and when he dies a *ziyarat* will be erected on his tomb. Hermit, healer, or simply "a holy man" in the sense that this term is used in the countryside, his prestige may be limited to his own village or it may reach throughout Afghanistan. Most frequently *pir* are linked to a Sufi order. The dividing line between the *'alim* and the *pir* is indistinct, especially in the north: many of the local *'ulama*, completely orthodox in background and theology, are revered as *pir*, and in the course of time establish a reputation as healers. In Afghanistan, the *'ulama* have never persecuted the *pir*, except, of course, when the latter adhered to extremely unorthodox forms of Islam (like the *rushani* in the sixteenth century). With the *pir* we have reached the institutionalisation of *barakat*. It is no longer a question of "popular religion", but of Sufi orders whose role in the history of Afghan Islam and in the resistance has been very significant.

### **Sufism**

Sufism, which, in essence, is embodied in three orders (*naqshbandiyya*, *qadiriyya*, *cheshtiyya*), flourishes in Afghan society and is especially influential in the middle classes of the larger villages and the suburbs of the towns. The great centres of Sufism are Kabul and Herat, but the whole of the north of the country and the region of Kandahar have been very much influenced by Sufism. While Sufism may have experienced an overall decline amongst the intelligentsia of Kabul, it has retained a number of zealous but discrete devotees amongst the intellectuals educated in the classical school and also amongst the scholars of towns such as Herat, which still retain something of the older culture. Many *'ulama* are attached to a Sufi order.

Sufism makes a contrast between two forms of revelation: the former is exoteric (*zahir*) and the latter esoteric (*batin*). To reach the truth through the latter path, it is necessary to receive a spiritual initiation from a master (*pir* or *murshid*). Each pupil (*murid*) must follow the pathway (*tariqat*) in order to attain a knowledge of the divinity, a knowledge which is not discursive but intuitive. The love of God is the merging of the self with the divine infinite; the "orthodox" school (*tariqat-e shari'ati*) maintains that there is a separation between creature and Creator (*wahdat al-shuhud*), the unorthodox school states that there is an essential unity between the two (*wahdat al-wujud*). To reach this stage, the *murid* carries out spiritual exercises, the form of which varies with the different orders. Generally this consists of continuous intoning of one of the names of God (*zikr*), which may be recited either out loud (*qadiriyya*) or silently (*naqshbandiyya*). The authentic Sufis have an intense spiritual life, but one that is not ostentatious. They generally meet in small groups in an out of the way place (*khanagah*), often linked to a *madrassa*, where they practise recitation under the direction of the *pir*. The Sufi keeps to a strict daily programme of mental discipline, which, although it does not cut him off from social life, nevertheless ensures that he stands aside from it.<sup>14</sup> The link between Persian literature and Sufism is very strong, and particularly so in the case of authors such as Ansari, Jami of Herat and Rumi of Balkh, all highly regarded in Afghanistan. Nevertheless, Sufism was introduced into Afghanistan, as elsewhere, in two very different forms. It is necessary to enlarge upon this point, for Sufism has played an important role in the Afghan resistance, while in the fundamentalist movements (Wahhabism in particular) of the Arab world it has often been decried.

#### *Orthodox Sufism*

Orthodox Sufism does not set out to rival formal religion, but offers the believer the opportunity to strengthen his spiritual life, while at the same time scrupulously respecting dogma and the *shari'at*. The *pir* is in this context an *'alim* as much as an initiator. Even if the tradition of his family plays a great part in his decision to seek membership of the *tariqat*, the *murid* is always a member in his own right, undergoes a spiritual initiation and owes a personal allegiance to the *pir*. The members of the *tariqat* regularly attend the meetings of the *zikr*, under the guidance of the master. The religious novice is not cut off from social life; on the contrary, the *tariqat* sometimes strengthens the feeling of solidarity which exists within professional bodies (the corporations or *senf*) by overlaying it with another form of solidarity – that of co-religionists.<sup>15</sup>

The brotherhood constitutes a sort of club for spiritual exercises. This form of Sufism, which originated in the reforms of Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi (Mujaddid Alf-e Thani) and of Shah Waliullah,<sup>16</sup> is not in any way in conflict with the more formal Islam of the *'ulama*. Most *pir* are perfectly orthodox *'ulama* and carry out, at one and the same time, both exoteric (*fiqh, shari'at*) and esoteric teaching. The relationship between *pir* and *murid* exists in tandem with that of *'alim* and *talib*. To clearly establish their orthodox status, these brotherhoods call themselves *tariqat-e shari'ati*, "a brotherhood which adheres to the teachings of the *shari'at*". Naturally, the *pir* is something more than an *'alim*: he is considered to be endowed with *barakat*, the succession is hereditary and the corporate *murid* may even constitute a *qawm* whose political influence in the area may be considerable. We shall find evidence of this in the networks which form the substratum of the various groups within the resistance.

The orthodox brotherhoods are, above all, *naqshbandi*, but there are also some *cheshti* and some *qadiri*. These have become established in the north and recruit members from the traditionalist and cultured bourgeoisie, from small craftsmen and officials as well as peasants living around the great cultural centres such as Herat, Kabul, Maymana and Mazar-i Sharif. There are also some examples in the provinces amongst the Aymaq, and in some parts of the south, such as Kandahar and Zabul.

#### "Marabout" Sufism

"Maraboutism" is the collective allegiance of a clan or a tribe to a family of "saints" reputed to be endowed with hereditary *barakat*, which family may act as a channel to sanctify the community. In this case there is no personal commitment, and there are certainly no instances of individuals receiving initiation or involving themselves in meditation. There is a clear distinction between the community and the family of the saint, who alone is supposed to give himself up to the practice of *zikr*, but who, in practice, usually limits himself to manifesting to the community at large his possession of *barakat* by healing the sick, or pronouncing blessings. The disciples call themselves *mukhlis* rather than *murid*, the term implying a less firm relationship with the *pir*. The principal act of devotion of the *mukhlis* consists in an annual visit to the *pir*, to whom they bring presents, in exchange for the *pir's* protection and hospitality, in a relationship of interdependence. The spiritual relationship is replaced by a veneration which can only be described as superstitious. The clan or the tribe is represented in their dealing with the *pir* by the great families and not by the mullahs or by the *'ulama*. In Maraboutism the *pir* is never an

'*alim*, and Sufism is strongly marked by anti-clericalism. This is one way in which the tribes may reconcile their need for religion with their desire to assert the specific character of their tribe with regard to the *shari'at* which does not accept common law. In the tribes, Sufism is the expression of secularised politics, while in the north of the country it is the contrary – the affirmation of a strict orthodoxy. Among the tribes, it is rare to find a mullah who belongs to the *tariqat*.

This type of Sufism has, then, established itself in Pashtun tribal zones. The brotherhood which has most members is the *qadiriyya*, which, in the tribal zones, has the Gaylani family at its head. The *naqshbandi* groups, which have been established in the same areas, may belong to either category. To distinguish between these, it is necessary to know if the *pir* is an '*alim* or not; if not he is called *ruhani* and the brotherhood is always a Marabout one. In the south, the distinction between *ruhani* and '*alim* is very clear-cut (whereas the two words have the same meaning in the form of Persian spoken in Iran), and there are very few people who belong to both at the same time. In the north there is no *pir* who is not also '*alim*. The nomads, who are very often linked to a *pir*, always adhere to the Marabout sect, which is only to be expected where the tribal structures are strong. I should mention in passing the interesting and little-known instance of gangs of lawless youths, in Kabul (*zoka*) and Kandahar (*payluch*), who have their own hierarchy and initiatory tests. There is no vestige of Sufism in these groups, but it is possible that they may have been influenced by it.<sup>17</sup>

#### *The pir travellers from Aymaq lands*

All attempts at definition must be somewhat arbitrary and the sharp contrast made above between orthodox and Maraboutic brotherhoods should, in reality, be seen as two poles between which there exist innumerable permutations. In particular, Aymaq territory (in Ghor province) has witnessed a great growth in the teaching of a Sufi doctrine which combines aspects of each of the two types mentioned above. The *pir* are '*ulama* and are not at all opposed to the orthodox clergy of which they are members. But their members come mainly from certain subgroups within the tribes. Based at Purchaman (Farah province) and being a *naqshbandi*, the *pir* (the last of whom, Baha'uddin Jan, was killed under Taraki) delegated *khalifa* (representatives) throughout Aymaq territory to preach to the *murid* and to collect the donations of the faithful. Membership of this movement was, in general, collective: but the *qawm* of the *sayyad* of Khwaje-Hashtomin (Faryab) belongs as a body to the *tariqat*. Far from being in opposition to orthodox Islam, these groups

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joined the Islamist parties (see p.112) when the resistance movement came into being. It seems that the phenomenon of the travelling *pir* exists throughout all the northern marches of the Hindu-Kush.

#### *The brotherhoods which go to make up Sufism*

##### *The qadiriyya*

The tomb of the founder of the order, 'Abdul Qadir Gaylani (sixth century AD) is at Baghdad. His descendants were closely linked to the Ottoman regime, which granted them the title of *naqib ul-ashraf*, and it was to Baghdad that the *mukhlis* from many different countries came to visit them. In the sixteenth century, the order was established in India and it was through this route that it reached the Ghilzay Pashtun, in particular the Sulaymankheyl and the Khugiani. The order has a great number of different branches led by descendants of the original founder. Hazrat Naqib Saheb, father of the present Afghan *pir*, left Iraq in the twenties and established himself at Chaharbagh, in Nangrahar, to exercise closer control over the local order. At his death in 1947, his son, Sayyad Ahmad Gaylani, known as Effendi Jan, succeeded him. Very soon the family had formed close links with the royalist establishment (Ahmad Gaylani married a Muhammadzay in 1952) and invested the money which it received from donations in activities which were wholly secular: Ahmad Gaylani was the Peugeot representative at Kabul. While the *pir* made concessions to the external symbols of religion (allowing the water which he had used to wash his hands to be distributed to the sick), he permitted the order to become secularised and it was transformed into a network of dependents. Nevertheless, the prestige of the Gaylani family is still as high as it always was amongst the Ghilzay (in particular with the nomads) and the Wardaki. The Gaylani family provides a perfect example of Maraboutic Sufism. But the *qadiri* in the north and the west, except, of course, those who emigrated from Ghilzay, are not linked to the present Gaylani family and lead a far more genuine religious life: they are associated with other branches, such as the *silsila* of Abdurrahman Ibn Auf at Shindand.

##### *The naqshbandiyya*

The *naqshbandiyya* was founded at Bukhara by Baha'uddin Naqshband (1318-89). This is the order with the most members in Afghanistan, where there are several branches and two different influences can be felt. The western and northern branches are linked to the birthplace of the order, Central Asia, and include the branch known as "Khwaje Ahrar";<sup>18</sup> the branches in the east and in Kandahar are directly linked to the

Mujaddidi family, descendants of the reformer of the order, Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi.<sup>19</sup> This family, which came from India, established itself at Kabul at the end of the nineteenth century; a branch of the family went to live in Herat, but never had the political influence that the Kabul family had. In the capital the Mujaddidi founded a *madrassa* and a *khanaqah* at Shor Bazar, from whence stemmed the title of the head of the family, *hazrat-e shor bazar*. The *naqshbandi* of Kabul have followed the Mujaddidi family in accepting orthodoxy; in the tribal zones of Ghilzay, the tribes have adopted Maraboutic ideas; the *naqshbandi* of the north and the west are "orthodox" and do not follow the Mujaddidi family. We shall find these divisions within the resistance.

Unlike the Gaylani, the Mujaddidi have played an important political role. As purely orthodox *'ulama*, they first supported the pan-Islamism of King Amanullah, but later they opposed his reforms. The two strands in the political campaign waged by the three sons of the first Hazrat of Shor Bazar were anti-imperialism and anti-modernism. They were involved in the revolt at Khost in 1924, where a *murid*, 'Abdul Ghani, roused the Sulaymankheyl in the neighbourhood of Mulla-i Lang. In 1928, after the arrest of the Hazrat, his brother Fazl Umar, known as Shir Agha, stirred up the Ghilzay tribes in support of Nadir Khan, after having supported Bacha-yi Saqqao (see p. 67).<sup>20</sup> At the beginning the alliance between the new dynasty of the Musahiban (Nadir, his brothers and his son Zahir) and the family was very tightly knit: Fazl 'Umar was Minister of Justice, and the third brother, Sadeq, was ambassador in Cairo; in 1936, the King granted them the domain of Qala yi Jawan. Through the Osman family, they now had matrimonial links with royalty. Relations became tense again after Daoud's ministry in 1953; members of the family moved to Egypt and there established close links with members of the Muslim Brotherhood, such as Sebghatullah, the present leader, and Harun, who was later arrested by Nasir. Sebghatullah came back to Kabul to teach, joined the Islamist opposition and was arrested and exiled to Denmark in 1959. From the death of Fazl 'Umar in 1956, the new *pir* was Muhammad Ibrahim ("Shir Padshah"). He was executed with all the males of his family in January 1979 by Taraki; Sebghatullah Mujaddidi, who was himself not a *pir*, then succeeded him.

Thus, contradictory influences are at work within the Mujaddidi family. They are linked to the royalist establishment but view the westernisation of the country's customs and legislation with distaste; they are wealthy, but stand outside the capitalist forms of development; they occupy official posts, but they form part of the political opposition; they are conservative, but are also linked to certain radical currents (political Islamism) within Islam.

Yet, as I have said, the Mujaddidi family is far from typical of the Afghan *naqshbandi*. Herat, Purchaman and Karukh are very active *naqshbandi* centres. In the regions, the *naqshbandi* network is identified with that of the *madrasa* and the 'ulama: thus, the Hazrat of Karukh, whose authority stretches from Herat to Maymana and whose title is Sharafatuddin, is a *Shaykh ul-islam*, and therefore an 'alim. His authority is bound to be obeyed by his subordinates, as for example, when the Hazrat of 1856 pronounced a *fatwa* to defend Herat against the Iranian Shi'a.

#### *The cheshtiyya*

This brotherhood, which was founded by Maudud-i Cheshti (1142–1236), is most firmly established in India. In Afghanistan it is very much a minority group, and is mostly to be found in the Hari-rud valley, around Chest-i Sharif. At present, the *cheshtiyya* has two *pir*. The 'ulama of the region are *cheshti*; the peasants see the brotherhood as being a *qawm of sayyad*, to which most of the people of the town belong. Until 1981, the brotherhood, a typical example of the *tariqat-e shariati*, ran some twenty *madrasa*, each of which had its own library. Here the identification of *pir* with 'alim and of *murid* with *talib* is complete. Devoting all its financial resources to pay for the needs of teachers and students and the upkeep of the buildings, the brotherhood lives quite apart from the modern world.

In the north the brotherhoods are all orthodox and are therefore usually *naqshbandi*, but it is also possible to find *qadiri*, *cheshti*, *sohrawardi* and *ghausi*. These are very decentralised. In the south, the *qadiri* and *naqshbandi* brotherhoods, usually Maraboutic, follow the Gaylani and Mujaddidi families. The *naqshbandi* of Kabul, who are orthodox, also follow the Mujaddidis. There is no Sufism amongst the Shi'a. The differences between the different forms of Sufism are connected with the division between tribal and non-tribal zones. We shall find these networks appearing again when we talk about the resistance.

#### **The 'Ulama**

As in other Sunni countries, in Afghanistan there is no such thing as an organised and hierarchical clergy. Nevertheless, there is a very clear distinction between the village mullahs and the more educated clergy. This "higher clergy" is defined as a body by its education and not by its place in the political institution. Having emerged from medieval Islam, this body has resisted change, in its study and in its general world view, to the present day, although its importance has been much diminished by the process of westernisation.

### The madrasa

The 'alim is called *mawlawi* in Afghanistan. After having left the village Qur'anic school (*maktab*), the religious student (*talib*) spends several years studying with a dozen other students under a local *mawlawi*, in an ordinary mosque transformed into an "upper" religious school (*madrasa*), whose prestige depends on the personality of the master. The study is carried out at a pace which suits each individual and consists in learning a certain number of didactic books in a fixed order.<sup>21</sup> When he has got the diploma, (*ijaza*) the graduate can open his own *madrasa*, or leave to continue his study in a school of higher learning. In Afghanistan, there has never been a *madrasa* capable of offering a first-rate education, in spite of the attempts of the Amirs to bring one into being. The most gifted Afghan 'ulama used to go to India, in particular to the great *madrasa* of Deoband; and after partition in 1947 Peshawar became the centre where the traditionalist 'ulama pursued advanced studies.<sup>22</sup> Until 1917, the 'ulama from the north used to go to Bukhara, to the *madrasa* Diwan Begi.

Parallel with this network of private *madrasa*, the state has attempted to establish a government network so that it can shape the education that the 'ulama receive, and play a key role in their selection. In 1951, a faculty of theology (*fakulte-ye shariati*) was set up with the help of Al-Azhar University in Cairo, and large *madrasa* were opened in the more important towns. This network has been integrated into the secular education system: the faculty of theology is part of the University of Kabul and the provincial *madrasa* function like ordinary secondary schools, with regard to the selection of pupils and the curriculum, with the exception, of course, of religious subjects. The difference between the 'ulama who have been educated in the private and the government networks is very clear: the former, who are still clearly in the majority amongst the Afghan clergy, are more traditionalist, while the latter are more modernist in approach and closer to the intelligentsia. The difference between the two networks has nothing to do with the "secular-religious" divide. The state is concerned to monopolise religious instruction, not to destroy it, and has always attempted to restrict the sphere of activity of the 'ulama who have been educated abroad. Conversely, the private network also provides a secular education, including such subjects as classical literature and traditional medicine. The private *madrasa* cover more or less the whole country, while the government network only exists in the towns.

The 'ulama are scholars and not intellectuals.<sup>23</sup> They follow the age-old curriculum common to the whole Muslim world: classical Arabic,

theology (*kalam*), interpretation of the Qur'an (*tafsir*), traditions of the Prophet (*hadith*), and Muslim law (*fiqh*). The 'ulama feel that they belong to the Muslim community, the *umma*, rather than to a particular nation. It is true that what is being transmitted is a culture based on commentaries inculcated by repetition, but it is a culture which escapes the confines of parochialism; nevertheless it is ill-equipped to provide an ideology capable of making sense of the modern secular world. As in all Muslim countries, the 'ulama seem incapable of adapting to the modern world and have allowed power to slip into the hands of new elites.<sup>24</sup>

*The decline in the influence of the 'ulama in the twentieth century*

Although at the end of the last century there were references to great 'ulama belonging to the tribal aristocracy, this is no longer the case. The majority of the 'ulama come from the non-tribal country areas (but there are as many Pashtu-speakers as there are Persian-speakers). On the economic level, the partial nationalisation of the *waqf* (religious possessions) by Abdurrahman at the end of the nineteenth century deprived the 'ulama of their financial autonomy, for unlike their brethren in Iran, the Afghan clergy have never owned extensive lands or property. In the towns, the 'ulama generally depend on stipends and government salaries; in the countryside, like the mullahs, they live from gifts and payments in kind made to them in the form of the *ushr* and the *zakat*; but the families of the *mawlawi* are generally better off than those of simple mullahs.

The growing secularisation of the legal system, and the fact that a professional body capable of administering the law has come into being, whose members are graduates from the faculty of law, has deprived the independent 'ulama of their legal responsibilities. In addition, the network of schools has already slipped from the control of the *mawlawi*; in instances where the small Qur'anic school was able to survive, it had to face the competition of the government primary school, where religion was also taught, but by students from the state secondary school. Many young people preferred to continue their study in the secondary schools or even the state *madrasa*, which guaranteed them work as state employees when they finished, whereas the diplomas awarded by the private *madrasa* were not recognised by the state.

The decline in the political influence of the 'ulama has occurred more recently in Afghanistan than elsewhere. Until the end of the fifties, the monarchy could not do without their support. It was the 'ulama, in alliance with the tribes, who caused the downfall of King Amanullah in 1929. The consensus of the tribes and the ceremony of enthronement carried out by the body of the 'ulama were the two sources of legitimacy

available to the sovereign. In 1932, King Nadir institutionalised the 'ulama in the form of the *jama'at ul 'ulama*, a council of the principal 'ulama.<sup>25</sup> But the adoption of a policy of modernisation by Minister Daoud in 1953 rendered it powerless, and replaced it by the myth of the nation-state. The gulf between the government and the 'ulama began to widen, while the tribal elites remained close to the regime: the coalition of the tribes and the 'ulama which took place in 1928 was shortlived. In any case, the 'ulama have never held the reins of political power.

The influence of the 'ulama has also been reduced by their integration into the structure of the state as employees: where the state did not have enough people to take their place, the traditional *qazi* have become state officials. The clergy in the large towns now receive a salary. The creation of *jama'at ul 'ulama* is purely symbolic: this council may only give its opinion as to whether new laws are in conformity with the *shari'at*. More subtly, the monarchic state has attempted to draw the great religious families into the vast network of dependents, at whose centre is the royal family, by means of marriage, posts as ambassadors, and gifts of land. But when this policy of integration has been seen to fail, the state has not hesitated to have recourse to force: witness the arrests of the members of the Mujaddidi family in the late fifties and the great round-up of *mawlawi* in April 1970 at the Pul-i Khishti mosque (see below).

Finally, the 'ulama network had no clearly defined centre: the Mujaddidi family which led the revolt of the clergy in 1928 lost a great deal of its influence. There was no specific place where the clerical opposition might come together, for the faculty of theology was in the hands of the Islamists (see chapter 4), who were regarded with some suspicion by the traditionalist clergy. Although in the elections of 1965 twenty-five *mawlawi* were returned as deputies, they did not constitute a party (theoretically forbidden) nor even a unified pressure group. Nevertheless, some kind of reawakening of political consciousness did occur amongst the 'ulama of the towns, faced as they were with the rapid increase in support for Marxist political parties during the liberal period of 1963 to 1973. In December 1966, there was the famous occasion of the row which broke out within the parliamentary precincts between Muhammad Nabi Muhammadi and Babrak Karmal. In April 1970, following the publication by *Parcham* journal of a poem by Bareq Shafi'i, using, in order to celebrate Lenin's centenary, a religious benediction (*dorud bar Lenin*) which was reserved in Afghanistan for the Prophet, a demonstration by a number of *mawlawi* took place in the Pul-i Khishti mosque. This was the first occasion when the clergy and the militant Islamists worked together. The demonstration was violently repressed. At this time, at the instigation of the Mujaddidi family, two 'ulama

movements were created: the *harakat-i 'ulama-yi muhammadi* and the *khuddam ul-forghan*, the first by Sebghatullah, the second by his uncle, the *pir*. In spite of all this, when the communist coup took place, there were many networks of *'ulama*, but with no political organisation.

*In the countryside the prestige of the 'ulama remains high*

Thus, the decline in the influence of the *'ulama* has occurred only recently and is by no means complete. In the small towns and in the countryside, where state institutions have made only a partial impact, they are still active, especially in the non-tribal zones. They leave the business of local politics to the *khan*, a fact which has usually led to sociologists underestimating the importance of the *'ulama*.<sup>26</sup> The private *madrasa* have continued to exist in those places where the network of government schools is fragmentary. Thus, the *'ulama* have fallen back upon the countryside, where in earlier times they were less well established. Perhaps it would be true to say that a revival of Islam has occurred in the countryside as a result of the return to the villages of those *mawlawi* who were unable to find employment in the towns, where the government was busy replacing them with young people educated in the state system. In any case, the *mawlawi* are close to the rural world. There are several reasons why the prestige of the *'ulama* has remained high.

As we saw in the first chapter, the *'alim* embodies a principle of universality in a country which is highly fragmented, a principle which is both cultural and religious. In the non-tribal zones, the *'alim* is the only source of political legitimation: the nation-state has not taken root because it is, first and foremost, Pashtun. The *'ulama* also embody a principle of historical legitimacy: they have always been the ones to rally the people with a clarion call for a *jihād* and have always been in the forefront of the resistance to colonialism. They even, when necessary, opposed the more pragmatic Amir,<sup>27</sup> to such a degree that Abdurrahman forbade the *'ulama* to preach *jihād*.

Deprived of *waqf*, the *'ulama* have little in common with the new class of big property owners and modern capitalists, whose social origins lie in those influential groups open to secular ideas. Moreover, those more negative aspects of progress (destitution, the breakdown of social structures and the increase in bureaucracy) give a certain resonance to Islamic preaching on social justice, conceived not in revolutionary terms but as a result of moral reforms carried out in the name of laws accepted and understood by all. In opposition to the infiltration of social life by the state and the rhetoric of Marxism, which also emanated from the seat of power (the army and the teaching profession), the preaching of the *'alim*

portrayed a familiar, stable, just universe and offered a guarantee of personal salvation.

*The political vision of the 'ulama*

Why were the 'ulama not able to build upon this trust in order to create a political movement to be reckoned with? Nostalgia for a past which existed only in their imagination, withdrawal into a narrow legalism (even though, on the personal level, this was accompanied by an intensely spiritual life), and the inability to view the modern world as anything other than a source of alienation all contributed to the 'ulama being unable to present a coherent political programme.

The 'alim as such does not seek political power. Here we should examine more closely the idea that Islam knows no separation between spiritual and temporal. Islam has always recognised that there is such a thing as a de facto power (the Sultan) based on force, which may bring into being the whole machinery of the state (*hukumat*) with its own legal system (*qanun*) and its penal sanctions (*ta'zir*). While able to command its citizens' loyalty, to be legitimate this power must work for the defence of Islam (and thus receive the approbation of the 'ulama), and it must promulgate the *shari'at*. The Sultan must act in accordance with the teachings of Islam, but this very willingness to conform to religious teaching presupposes that the ruler exists apart from and outside religion, an idea which the Islamist is unwilling to accept. The duty of the scholars is to ensure that the policies (*siyasat*) of the prince are in accordance with the *shari'at*, for this purpose they act as the prince's counsellors, and provide him with legal advice (*fatwa*). Public order, which is a prerequisite of all that is socially desirable in society (*maslahat*), has always seemed, to the 'ulama, preferable to the demand that politics should be completely open to the promptings of religion. It is easy to imagine a number of compromises with the ruling power entailed by such an attitude on the part of a body which has no other means of enforcing its will than censure or the call to revolt.

This view of politics has nothing to do with the era of the first four Caliphs (the *rashidun*) who were, at one and the same time, both religious and military leaders. 'Ulama politics are "medieval" and go back to the period when the body of the 'ulama was first emerging as an institution, and when the secular – that is to say virtually non-religious – power was being established. When the sovereign becomes simply the cornerstone of an ordered society and no longer has any inherent legitimacy (through being linked to the Prophet or being placed on the throne by the *umma*), then it is necessary to provide a counterweight to possible misdirection by

embodying a principle of legitimacy in some other institution to ensure that no abuse of power occurs. In the final analysis, the weaker the claim of the government to represent the duly constituted authority, the more closely do the *'ulama* become identified with that very same principle of legitimacy. Except amongst the Shi'a, the *'ulama* have no ambition to create a theocratic state.

In Afghanistan, the *'ulama* have never opposed the power of the Amir and have rarely become involved in his appointment, something which (except in 1919 and 1929) has been left to the tribes to decide. What concerns the *'alim* is civil society and not the state. The state must promulgate the *shari'at* within society, and outside it he must defend the Muslim *millat*. The *'alim* is thus a fundamentalist in the strict sense of the term: he seeks to get back to the original scriptures and the practice of the law. His is not a political role: he can allow the form of the government to vary. Opposition to the state after the fifties came not from any assertion on the part of the *'ulama* of their right to power, but from the fact that the government justified its authority not by appealing to Islam but on other grounds, which automatically removed from the body of the *'ulama* their function of underpinning the legal authority of the government. But even in this conflict, the *'ulama* can only be described as reacting to events, not directing them, and thus their position is essentially a negative one. One has to go to the Islamist intellectuals to find an alternative conception of the state.

### **The Shi'a**

The Afghan Shi'a belong to the Jaffarite branch, that is to say they recognise, as do the majority of Shi'a in the Muslim world, the twelve *iman* starting with 'Ali, the son-in-law of the Prophet and the fourth Caliph. The Shi'a represent about 15 per cent of the Afghan population. They include almost all of the Hazara ethnic group, living in the central part of the country, but they also form substantial urban minorities in Kabul and Ghazni and at some time in the past still others migrated to Quetta and to the eastern part of Iran. The second Shi'a group comprises the *qizilbash*, descendants of the soldiers and officials who were brought to Afghanistan in the eighteenth century by the Shah of Persia, Nadir; although this group, which lives mainly at Kabul, is few in number, they are well educated and have always played an important role in the life of the urban intelligentsia. There is a third group, whose native tongue is Persian, in Nimruz province, living in the marshes of Seistan and in the plain of Khashrud; known as *fars* they are virtually indistinguishable from the Iranians across the border. There is also a Persian-speaking

Shi'ite minority at Herat, a relic of feudal times when Herat belonged to one of the vassals of the Shah of Iran. Finally, there are small Shi'ite groups, the *khallili*, whose native tongue is Pashtu, at Kandahar, in Logar and in the north. The Isma'ili, few in number, are considered by the Shi'a to be heretical: they represent a Hazara subgroup at Kayan (near Doshi), whose leader (the *sayyad* of Kayan) is the leader of all the Isma'ili, and also of all the other linguistic minorities of Pamir (the Tajik of the mountains: *munjani*, *shughni*, *rushani*, *ishkashemi*, *wakhi*). In general the Isma'ili are very poor, not particularly zealous and are regarded with suspicion by the others. The Shi'ite minority has always been far removed from the centres of power; they have been looked down upon and, until 1963, were practically outside the law. Their religious practices (praying with palms upraised, the procession of the *moharram*) were forbidden and the Jaffarite law was not recognised by the state. It was impossible for them to pursue a career in the army or in politics. The Shi'a living in the towns worked hard at building up their businesses and gained a great deal from the development of education from the fifties onwards. Shi'a students were very politically aware and formed the hard core of the Maoist movements. The educated Shi'a are very conscious of their position as a minority and are noted for political activism, but the Hazara peasantry are untouched by the modern world.

#### *The clergy and the influence of Iran*

Amongst the Afghan Shi'a there is a tendency to adopt Iran as a model, but this has nothing to do with the political regime in power there at the present time. In the inns of Hazarajat where, ten years ago, you would have found a portrait of the Shah of Iran, you will now find that of Khumayni. The educated Shi'a speak a form of Persian influenced by usages current in Iran (the use of "sir" (*gha*) and patronymics ending in *i* (Tawakolli, Beheshti)). A large proportion of the Afghans working in Iran are Shi'a.

Nevertheless, Iranian influence has not made itself felt amongst the traditional clergy, which has nothing resembling the hierarchy to be found in Iran. It is hard to tell the difference between a Shi'a and Sunni village mullah. On the other hand, the *'ulama* (called *shaykh*) are educated either at Qom, or at Najaf in Iraq (but by Iranian teachers); they return provided with a certificate awarded by an Iranian *mojtahid*. Personal relations between the Iranian clergy and the upper levels of the Afghan Shi'ite clergy are therefore very close, but no Afghan has ever been awarded the title of Ayatullah, even though the desire to model themselves upon Iran has caused certain *shaykh* to adopt the title for

themselves. Nevertheless, the influence of the Iranian revolution has been very marked amongst the young Afghan Shi'a since 1978, and this applies both to those who have worked in Iran and to those who are members of the clergy. They have adopted Iranian religious practices (*taqlid*: the choice of a moral counsellor) and the politico-religious slogans of the revolution. Relations between the traditional clergy and young people who have returned from Iran are very tense.

For the Hazara, their ethnic (*qawm*), political (*millat*) and religious (*mazhab*) identity are often one and the same thing. The three terms are often employed interchangeably, though *qawm* in Hazarajat means ethnic group rather than extended family. This feeling of cultural identity has developed, especially amongst the young intellectual émigrés, into Hazara nationalism.

#### *The Shi'ite religious revival*

Until the fifties the Shi'a community was politically dormant. At that time there spread through the community a revivalist movement, the instigators of which were certain religious leaders who had returned from Najaf (Iraq). The movement, which began as a preaching campaign and which was marked by the opening of *madrassa* to produce a clergy better equipped for their tasks, soon became an assertion of cultural, social, and even political rights. The mosques were transformed into cultural centres, dispensing community welfare at Kabul and Kandahar, and the Shi'a demanded their political freedom. Around 1953 there was even a Hazara uprising at Kezel. The whole Shi'ite movement was repressed by Prime Minister Daoud, who continued to meet Shi'a demands with further repression when he became president.

In the sixties, several Shi'ite *madrassa* were opened in the provinces and those already existing in the towns experienced a revival. In Hazarajat, Sayyad Beheshti opened the *madrassa* of Takht-i Waras, which secondary school pupils also attended during school holidays. In Kabul, Wa'ez, who was later to be assassinated when Taraki was in power, was the head of the *muhammadiyah* *madrassa*, and he founded a cultural association which was very influential with the young Shi'a; he was arrested under Daoud's ministry, and wrote *Khaterat-i زندان* (Memories of prison). Kandahar produced the greatest living Shi'ite religious leader, Shaykh Asaf Muhseni, a former disciple of Ayatullah Khuy at Najaf; he was in charge of the *husseyniyya* *madrassa* and founded the *subh-i danish* (dawn of knowledge) movement, which at first had purely cultural goals. But under the influence of a disciple from Kabul, networks were set up which bore a close resemblance to those of the Muslim Youth organisation. A

large number of small Shi'ite groups were established, ranging from the Iranian *mujahidin-i khalq* tendency to Maoism and representing all the subtle gradations of politico-religious ideology. Shi'a youths were introduced to radical thinking by their membership of cultural associations. We should not forget that young educated Shi'a are noticeably more politicised and more assertive in their demands than their Sunni contemporaries. We shall meet these movements again in the resistance. Nevertheless, the Shi'ite clergy of Herat and the Shi'ite population of Nimruz in general, very much influenced by secularism, have stayed outside the Shi'ite revivalist movement.