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HAZĀRA II. HISTORY

HAZĀRA

Figure 1. A procession of Ḥezb-e Waḥdat forces in Bāmiān during the celebration of the 7th anniversary of the formation of their party, 4 August 1996.

Figure 2. Hazāra migrant workers in Tehran sharing a meal.

Figure 3. Hazāra migrant workers in Quetta, playing a board game during a stopover on their journey to Iran.

Figure 4. The giant Buddha which used to stand in Bāmiān, 22 July 1996.

Figure 5. A decorated stage in preparation for the celebration of the 7th anniversary of the formation of Ḥezb-e Waḥdat, 1 August 1996.

Figure 6. Hazāra migrant workers in Kandahar, October 1995.

Figure 7. A typical shop in the Hazārajāt, October 1995.

ii. HISTORY

THE ORIGINS AND THE EARLY HISTORY

The origins of the Hazāras are uncertain and much debated among scholars

(see Bacon, 1951, 1963; Ferdinand, 1959; Schurmann, pp. 110-58; Gawecki, 1980; Poladi, pp. 1-29; Mousavi, pp. 19-43). Among the Hazāras themselves, three main theories exist: they are of Mongolian or Turko-Mongolian descent (sometimes, they are even considered to be the direct heirs of Genghis Khan's armies); they are the autochthones of the area, representing a stock of population preceding the invasions by Indo-European speaking people (2000-1500 B.C.E.); they are of mixed race as a result of several waves of migration. The Mongol contribution seems difficult to deny considering the common physical appearance of the Hazāras, even if their features are actually very variable.

The term *hazāra* first appeared at the beginning of the 16th century in the memoirs of Babur (1987), the founder of the Mughal dynasty in India. He used it several times to designate people living in different regions, like the Rustā-hazāra of Badaḵšān (Babur, p. 196) or the Turkman Hazāras, a warlike tribe he fought in 911/1506 (Babur, pp. 251-53), and more generally the inhabitants of the mountainous area situated west of Kabul, as far as the historical provinces of Ḡor and Ḡazni (q.v.). Part of their population spoke a Mongolian language (Babur, pp. 200, 207, 214, 218, 221). Babur mentions not only the Hazāras but also the Nik-dārā or Niku-dārā, a term by which he designates people of Mongolian origin (Babur, p. 200). He also uses the word *aymāq* to refer to Mongolian tribes (Babur, pp. 196, 207, 221). The terminology does not seem to be fully defined and, although the term hazāra had different referents, it seems to have already served to designate a population with strong Mongolian elements living in the area known today as the Hazārajāt.

Bacon (1951, 1958) argues that the Hazāras are the descendants of Chaghatay Mongols who came from Transoxania to the highlands of central Afghanistan in successive waves between 626/1229 and 850/1447. Schurmann (1962) refutes the view that the Hazāras are from a pure Mongolian descent. For him, the Niku-dāri Mongols who settled on the eastern fringes of Persia, combined with the local population who spoke various Iranian languages, have played the most important role in the ethnogenesis of the Hazāras. Kakar (1973) considers both theories as plausible: a first contingent of Chaghatay Mongols may have arrived in the Hazārajāt from Central Asia, to be joined over time by later migrating peoples (other Mongols or Turko-Mongols, Ilkhanids driven out of Persia, Timurids), and mixed with the local population of the area who were of Persian origin. In any case, the Hazāras formed a distinct group occupying what corresponds approximately to their present habitat at least since the

beginning of the 16th century C.E. Under the influence of the Safavids of Iran, they converted to Shiʿism between the end of the 16th and the beginning of the 17th century (Mousavi, 1998).

Without taking side in this controversy (see also Ferdinand, 1959, 1964; Mousavi, pp. 28-31), it seems probable historically that the origins of the Hazāras lie with the Mongolian and Turkish groups which progressively penetrated the infertile mountainous region situated between Persia, Central Asia, and India between the 13th and the 15th centuries, mixed with the local population and adopted their language. It must also be pointed out that Turko-Mongolian people, like the Hephtalites (5th and 6th centuries), were already present in what is today Afghanistan and therefore may also have played a role in the ethnogenesis of the Hazāras (Mousavi, p. 38).

Nevertheless, Fredrik Barth's work on ethnicity (1969) has made it evident that group identity is not defined by objective traits and does not follow from a common origin or even a common culture. It is, rather, the result of a constant process of social interaction by which a boundary is created and maintained in an enduring way. There are many Middle Eastern examples where distinct groups were formed by people of heterogeneous origins in marginal regions following a continuing process of inclusion and exclusion and of resistance to central powers (Canfield, 1973a, pp. 10-12 and 1973b, pp. 1511-13). In the case of the Hazāras, the feeling of belonging to one group does not proceed from a supposed Mongolian origin, but from a process of marginalization which started several centuries ago. As mentioned already, the term hazārahas been used to designate a heterogeneous group, including some Sunni groups (for instance in the district of Rustāq, province of Taḵar, or the district of Nahrin, province of Bāḡlān). It seems to refer as much to a social position as to a common historical origin.

THE SUBJUGATION OF THE HAZĀRAS BY AMIRʿABD-AL-RAḤMĀN KHAN (R. 1880-1901)

For most of the period since the 16th century, the Ha-zāras have evaded the control of the powerful regional empires (Safavids in Iran, Uzbeks in Central Asia, Mughals in India). But since the middle of the 18th century and the formation of modern Afghanistan, the Hazāras have faced continual pressure from the Pashtuns which has forced them to abandon vast territories in the Helmand and Arḡandāb basins. Having visited the area in the 1840s, Ferrier (1857, pp. 220-21) highlighted the hos-tility between the Hazāras and the

Pashtuns, who would hesitate to venture into the Hazārajāt. During the second reign of Amir Dōst-Moḥammad Khan (q.v.; 1259-79/1842-63), the administration in Kabul collected taxes in Bāmiān (q.v.) and certain peripheral areas of the Ha-zārajāt (Noelle, 1997). But only his grandson, ʿAbd-al-Raḥmān Khan, was able to subjugate the Hazāras after a difficult war and put to an end Hazāra autonomy.

ʿAbd-al-Raḥmān Khan was brought to power just after the Second Anglo-Afghan war (1878-79), concluded by the Treaty of Gandomak: the territorial integrity of Afghanistan was guaranteed, but the British gained control over its foreign policy. The new amir devoted his reign to the reinforcement of central power and the unification of the kingdom. He was an autocrat and rapidly faced several revolts within his own family as well as the Ḡilzi (q.v.) and Šinwāri insurrections. Once he had consolidated his throne, he set out to conquer the virtually independent Hazārajāt. In the face of strong resistance, he launched a series of campaigns marked by a sectarian and ethnic polarization and many atrocities.

The conflict could have been caused by several major factors (see Mousavi, pp. 115-20), including the following: opposite tendencies towards centralization and decentralization, which led to tensions between the central government and the Hazāra tribal leaders; the amir's desire to reduce the autonomy of powerful tribal chiefs and marginal groups, such as the Hazāras, who represented a threat for security and communications in the state; long-lasting tribal feuds and struggles between competing challengers for central power (ʿAbd-al-Raḥmān spared large parts of southern Hazārajāt, once his authority had been accepted there, and waged war on the Hazāra leaders who supported the previous ruler of Afghanistan, his uncle Šēr-ʿAli).

When ʿAbd-al-Raḥmān's cousin, Moḥammad-Esḥāq, the governor of Mazār-e Šarif, rebelled against him, several of the Šayḵ ʿAli Hazāra tribal leaders joined the revolt. ʿAbd-al-Raḥmān used the sectarian division among the Šayḵ ʿAli tribe (some of whom are Sunnis) to crush this first uprising in 1888. During the following years, he extended his control over increasingly large parts of the Hazārajāt, imposing governmental taxes and dispatching Pashtun administrators, who committed several kinds of abuses: they disarmed people and looted villages, impris-oned, and sometimes executed, tribal chiefs and elders, and appropriated the best pastures in order to give them to Pashtun nomads. A strong Hazāra uprising began in the spring of 1892; according to Mousavi: "The actual trigger for the first rebellion was the assault by thirty-

three Afghan soldiers on the wife of a Pahlawān Hazāra. The soldiers, who had entered the house under the pretext of searching for arms, tied the man up and assaulted his wife in front of him. The families of both the man and his wife, deciding that death was one hundred times better than such humiliation, killed the soldiers involved and attacked the local garrison, from whence they recovered their confiscated arms" (Mousavi, pp. 124-25). Important tribal leaders, such as Moḥammad-ʿAẓim Beg, from Dāy Zangi, a former supporter of ʿAbd-al-Raḥmān Khan, joined the rebellion which soon spread throughout the Hazārajāt. Worried about the direction taken by the events, the amir declared jihad against the Shiʿites, and raised a powerful army of some 30,000-40,000 governmental troops, 10,000 mounted troops and some 100,000 civilians (in particular many Pashtun nomads) assisted by British military advisers (Mousavi, p. 126, referring to Fayż-Moḥammad, 1912-14 and Timurkhanov, 1980). In August 1892, Urozgān, the main center of the rebellion, was captured, and the local population massacred: "thousands of Hazara men, women, and children were sold as slaves in the markets of Kabul and Qandahar, while numerous towers of human heads were made from the defeated rebels as a warning to others who might challenge the rule of the Amir" (Mousavi, p. 126). The repression was so harsh and the Hazāras were treated so unjustly that a second uprising started in early 1893. The rebels took by surprise the governmental forces and quickly regained control over most of the Hazārajāt. Despite the fact they were deeply divided, they resisted the counteroffensive by the amir's troops, and it was only in the summer of 1893, after months of fierce fighting, shortage of food, and the prospect of famine, that Hazāra forces suffered a resounding defeat, though skirmishes continued until the end of the year. Governmental troops did not refrain from committing atrocities, including the killing and deportation of the populations of entire villages.

ʿAbd-al-Raḥmān's strategy to crush the Hazāra uprising fostered hatred between the different groups. The conflict caused a deep ethnic and religious polarization (Pashtuns vs. Hazāras, Sunnis vs. Shiʿites) and led to the forced displacement of populations on a massive scale; lands were confiscated and the inhabitants of entire regions fled or were expelled (especially in the province of Urozgān and the district of Dāy Čōpān, province of Zābul; Kakar, 1973, 1979; Poladi, pp. 229-34, 245-55; Mousavi, pp. 136-38). Basing this statement on the work of Timurkhanov (1980), Mousavi (p. 129) estimates that 15,000 Hazāra families escaped from their land and settled in Afghan Turkistan, near Mašhad (where they are called *Barbari*s), in Quetta (then in British India, today in Pakistan), and even in Central Asia. He estimates that

more than half of the entire Hazāra population was massacred or driven out of their villages (Mousavi, p. 136). It is difficult to verify such an estimate, but the memory of the conquest of the Hazārajāt by ʿAbd-al-Raḥmān Khan certainly remains vivid among the Hazāras themselves, and has heavily influenced their relations with the Afghan state throughout the 20th century. While ʿAbd-al-Raḥmān may have achieved the political unification of the country, he failed nonetheless to incorporate all segments of Afghan society.

THE 20TH CENTURY

ʿAbd-al-Raḥmān Khan's son and successor, Amir Ḥabib-Allāh (q.v.), granted a general amnesty to all who had been exiled by his father. But the gulf lying between the Afghan government and the Hazāra population was too deep; and, during most of the 20th century, the Hazāras have faced severe social, economic and political discrimination.

British travelers Moorcroft and Trebeck (II, p. 384) mentioned the presence of Pashtun nomads in the area of Behsud as early as 1824. Even if Pashtuns had pastured in the Hazārajāt before its conquest by Amir ʿAbd-al-Raḥmān, it was this event that gave them their preeminent position there. They are known to have seized the best grazing land for their flocks, but nomads are not only stockbreeders but traders as well. By loaning money and selling manufactured goods, they were able to gain a further economic advantage over the sedentary Hazāras. Farmers were often obliged to surrender their property to their Pashtun creditors in order to reimburse their debts, and thus became mere tenants on their own lands (Ferdinand, 1962). In consequence, many impoverished Ha-zāra farmers were forced to migrate seasonally in search of employment to the main cities of Afghanistan, or those of Pakistan and Iran.

In spite of the general distrust the Hazāras felt towards the central government, most of them did not support the anti-Pashtun revolt in 1929 led by the Tājik adventurer Ḥabib-Allāh, known as Bačča-ye Saqqā (q.v.; McChesney, 1999). However, local uprisings broke out sporadically in the Hazārajāt against government abuses, the most famous of which was led by the Hazāra rebel from Šahrestān, Ebrāhim Beg, popularly known as Bačča-Gāw-sawār ("son of the cow rider"), in the second half of the 1940s. He revolted against the introduction of a new tax imposed exclusively on the Hazāras, which was payable in cooking oil per head of animal (not only cows and sheep but also horses and donkeys, which do not produce milk for human consumption). Pashtun nomads were not only exempted from taxes but even

received financial allowances from the state administration. The rebels captured and killed several government officials. Confronted with such a violent reaction, the government sent a force to pacify the region and withdrew the tax. The exploits of bandits (*yāḡi*) who revolted against the state's arbitrary treatment are told in popular tales, such as those of Yusof Beg, who is supposed to have evaded the police for nineteen years before finally being captured and executed (Edwards, pp. 208-11; Poladi, pp. 384-85, 396-97; Mousavi, p. 163). All the events are kept alive in folk and revolutionary songs (Bindemann, 1988), in which Fayż-Moḥammad (the Hazāra secretary of ʿAbd-al-Raḥmān, who reported the bloody conquest of the Hazārajāt), ʿAbd-al-Ḵāleq (the young Hazāra who took part in a family and political feud between two Pashtun factions and murdered Nāder Shah in 1933), and Sayyed Esmāʿil Balḵi (an important Shiʿite religious leader who was imprisoned between 1949 to 1964) are all celebrated like heroic rebels against an oppressive power. Hazāra identity is thus reinforced by the evocation of past injustices and protests against social exploitation and discrimination.

SINCE 1978: WAR AND EXILE

In the early 1970s, the Hazārajāt, like other parts of Afghanistan, faced a severe drought, which led to a shortage of food. It was the first step in the series of dramatic events which paved the way for the seizure of power by the Communists in 1978, many of whom were young, recently urbanized and detribalized people seeking social advancement. Within a few months, most of the country was in rebellion, and in 1979 the Soviet Union intervened militarily. A bitter guerrilla war ensued over the next ten years between the Red Army and the predominantly Islamist Afghan resistance fighters, or mujahideen [*mojāhedin*], during which about 1.5 million Afghans died and millions more left the country. The Soviet withdrawal in 1989 and the fall of the Communist regime in 1992 led to an explosion of tensions and expressions of dissatisfaction. While the 1980s were marked by the development of Islamist resistance parties, the 1990s were characterized by the rise of ethnic clashes, which were more a result, rather than a cause, of the civil war.

An accurate account and analysis of the war in the Hazārajāt between 1978 and 1992 may be found in Harpviken (1996; see also Roy, pp. 194-205). Relatively spared by the Soviet forces, the Hazārajāt was the scene of bitter internal conflicts during the 1980s. The main competing parties involved during this decade were: the Tanẓim-e nasl-e naw-e Hazāra-moḡol, a party based in Quetta and inspired by Hazāra nationalists and secular intellectuals

(some of whom were discreetly affiliated to Maoist movements like the Šoʿla-ye jāwid); the Šurā-ye enqelābi-e ettefāq, dominated by the traditional leaders (*mir*s, or tribal leaders, and *sayyed*s, or descendants of the Prophet); the Ḥarakat-e eslāmi, representing non-Hazāra Shiʿites, some *sayyed*s, and secular intellectuals under the guidance of Shaikh Āsef Moḥseni (a Shiʿite scholar from Kandahar); the Sāzmān-e naṣr and the Sepāh-e pāsdārān, who were competing Islamist parties backed by Iran and led by young pro-Khomeini militants.

It was the traditional leaders, the *mir*s and *sayyed*s, who led the uprising against the Communist regime as an allied force, and liberated the Hazārajāt from central control as early as 1979. In the following years, the *sayyed*s backed by the Islamists, turned against the secular forces, including the *mir*s as well as the intellectuals, and took control of most of the Hazārajāt. Between 1982 and 1984, after severe fighting this group lost their position of dominance to the Islamists, who were strongly supported by Iran. The Šurā-ye ettefāq was obliged to take refuge in its stronghold of the region of Nāwor. After the withdrawal of Soviet troops in 1989, Hazāra leaders felt the necessity to bypass their antagonism in order to play a role on the national scene. The Islamist leaders shifted their discourse on ethnic identity in response to this development, and broadened their political legitimacy. This trend was marked by the creation of the Ḥezb-e waḥdat, a vast alliance joined by most of the former Hazāra resistance groups, with the notable exception of Ḥarakat-e eslāmi.

After the fall of Kabul in April 1992, deep tensions did not take long to appear between the different factions. While Ḥarakat-e eslāmi and most of the former Sepāh-e pāsdārān became closely linked with Rabbāni's government, the majority of Ḥezb-e waḥdat (controlled by for-mer Sāzmān-e naṣr leaders) joined the opposition. The Ḥezb-e waḥdat was obliged to beat a retreat from Kabul in March 1995, when their leader, ʿAbd-al-ʿAli Mazāri, was treacherously captured and killed by the Taliban (*ṭālebān*). It was only after the capture of the Afghan capital by the Taliban in September 1996 that the different Hazāra factions were able to unite as part of the wider Northern Alliance, against this common enemy. In spite of a fierce resistance, they were unable to prevent the fall of the Hazārajāt, which became totally surrounded and isolated from the outside world in September 1998. The international intervention following the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks on New York and Washington has removed the Talibanregime from Afghanistan, but the situation is still very volatile.

In spite of all their internal conflicts during this time and the hardships of fighting and exile, war has paradoxically opened new doors to the Hazāras, who have in consequence undergone a process of political and economic empowerment. Today, they have gained a role on the national scene they had never been able to reach since their incorporation into the Afghan state at the end of the 19th century.

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