# HAZĀRA III. ETHNOGRAPHY AND SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

**HAZĀRA**

iii. ETHNOGRAPHY AND SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

TRIBAL ORGANIZATION

Apart from the scholarly work of Elphinstone (1815) and the writings of diplomats, officers, and travelers of the 19th century (Burnes, 1834; Moorcroft and Trebeck, 1841; Masson, 1842; Ferrier, 1857), among the best sources on the Hazāra tribal system prior to 1892-93 are the reports of the Afghan Boundary Commission, in particular those of Lieutenant-Colonel Maitland (1891), who was a member of the mission in Afghanistan between 1884 and 1886. He reported an oral tradition according to which the Hazāras were originally divided into eight tribes: Dāy Zangi, Dāy Kondi, Dāy Čōpān, Dāy Kalān (the modern Šayḵ ʿAli), Ḵatay, Behsud, Fōlādi, and Dahla (Maitland, p. 284). He added that the first five tribes are always mentioned, while any one of the last three is sometimes replaced by the Dāy Mirdād.

At the time of his visit, Maitland (p. 286) gave the following list of tribal and territorial divisions of the Hazāras: Behsud (region of Behsud, east of the Hazārajāt), Dāy Zangi (region of Dāy Zangi, to the north and northwest of the Hazārajāt, with Yak-awlang), Dāy Kondi (region of Dāy Kondi, west of the Hazārajāt), independent Hazāras (southeast and south of the Hazārajāt, in

today's province of Urozgān and nearby areas, including the Dāy Fōlādi, Dāy Čōpān, and Qalandar), Ḡazni Hazāras (Jā-ḡori, Moḥammad Ḵᵛāja, Čahār Dasta, Jaḡatu Hazāras), Šayḵ ʿAli Hazāras (northeast of the Hazārajāt, including Karam-ʿAli, Dāy Kalān, Karluq, ʿAli Jām, and Turkman Hazāras, some of whom are Sunnis), Hazāras of Bāmiān (only small sections are given, including the Tatars of Kahmard and Dō-āb), Hazāras scattered in Afghan Turkistan.

This list is heterogeneous, and several terms stand merely for a regional unit. It suffices to say that it would be misleading to present a fixed and definitive image of the main Hazāra tribes, as the affiliations are changing over time and the designations reflect the political situation. Furthermore, the incorporation of the Hazārajāt into the Afghan state has disorganized the tribal system of the Hazāras considerably. As several scholars have remarked, previous tribal names—like Behsud, Dāy Kondi and Jāḡōri—tend today to become territorial designations (Schurmann, p. 121; Gawecki, 1986, p. 16). Lineages (*ḵān(a)war*) have kept their social relevance, but wider tribal affiliations are no longer the main way of self-identification.

HABITAT AND LAND USE

In most of the Hazārajāt, settlements consist of small hamlets (*qaria* or *āḡel*); fortified farms (*qalʿa*) dominate in the south, while smaller houses and huts (*čapari*) are found towards the north. The basic territorial unit of social life in the Hazārajāt is the *manṭeqa* (literally "area, region"). In most of the region, these communities are made up of several descent groups—often, though not always, claiming a common ancestor—which are split into separate hamlets. They have external kinship ties and maintain local solidarity with their neighbors (Monsutti, 2000a; 2002, pp. 111-66). In some areas of eastern Hazārajāt where non-irrigated agriculture dominates, factionalism may be expressed in the form of sectarian alignments between Twelver Shiʿites and Ismaʿilis (Canfield, 1973a and 1973b).

The Hazāras dwelling south of Kuh-e Bābā are mostly highland sedentary farmers. Those who live to the north (between Yak-awlang and Bāmiān) have a more pastoral economy. However, on the northern part of the Hazār-ajāt, high altitude settlements (*aylāq*) are distinguished from permanent villages situated in the valley (*qešlāq*). Irrigated land (*zamin-e ābi*) may be worked jointly by a group of brothers or even cousins (especially due to the fact that several male adults may have left), but it tends to be owned privately by an individual. However, it may not be sold to strangers, and the members of the

owner's descent group have a pre-emptive right to it. Most grazing land (*čarāgāh*, *zamin-e ʿalafčar*) is held communally and used by the inhabitants of the same hamlet, or sometimes by the members of the same lineage. Many farmers cultivate land they do not own: they customarily keep a quarter of the crop and give three quarters to the landlord, who normally also provides the water and the seed.

Wheat is the main crop. Irrigated wheat may be classified into two groups: autumn wheat (*gandom-e termāhi*), which is sowed in autumn and harvested in summer, and is common in the south; and spring wheat (*gandom-e bahāri*), which has a shorter cycle (it is generally sowed in April and harvested just before the winter) and tends to be predominant in the higher and colder areas of the center and the north of the Hazārajāt. Non-irrigated wheat may also be found; it is considered to be of better quality but has a much smaller yield.

The economy of the Hazārajāt is not self-sufficient but depends on migration and remittance networks. These have been set up throughout the 20th century, but have played an increasingly important role since 1978 (see below).

KINSHIP AND MARRIAGE

The domestic group typically consists of a man, his wife, his sons as well as their spouses and children, and the unmarried daughters. The family's heritage may sometimes be divided up even while the father is still alive, or it may remain as one whole even after his death. As long as there are no serious conflicts, brothers are reluctant to split up the heritage. There is actually no compelling rule on this matter.

Male and female roles are strongly differentiated. The public sphere is the domain of men, and the domestic one is the realm of women. Women take care of young children, cook for the household, and clean the house. They may have a small garden to tend and a few chickens. They weave and sew and, in some areas, make rugs and felt. In a peasant family, men look after the sheep and goats and plow, sow and harvest, thresh and winnow the crops. Among both rural and urban people, a man must not stay at home during the day. War, however, has led women to take over many traditionally male duties, while men who have migrated abroad have had to learn to cook, sew, and do the laundry.

Hazāragi has a very rich kinship terminology (Heslot, 1984-85; Monsutti, 2002,

pp. 407-11), and its social use is very flexible. Cooperation is not exclusively determined by kinship and lineage. There are multiple registers of solidarity, especially in the context of migration. Relationships of trust and rivalry overlap. Three social domains emerge: agnates; other collaterals, affines, and friends; external relations. Patrilateral kinship determines the strongest level of solidarity but is also the arena of intense conflicts. It is structurally opposed to friendship and, to some degree, to matrilateral kinship and alliance, which are the domain of connivance, freedom of speech, and, very often, of trade partnership. Because of their intensity, they are all distinct from the external relations with strangers, which are unpredictable and dominated by hostility. Face-to-face rivalry between patrilateral cousins differs markedly from the general distrust between strangers. Among the Hazāras—as in many parts of Afghanistan and the Middle East—relationships between close agnates are alternately dominated by solidarity or hostility. Generally in Afghanistan, patrilateral kinship terms imply respect, but also rivalry, competition, and jealousy at a given generational level. They may even be characterized by avoidance behavior. Indeed, the main stakes and conflicts arise between the heirs of the same man, especially among sedentary farmers. They will, for instance, fight over land and water resources. Heavy obligations also imply acute tensions. Paradoxically, the circle of solidarity is also the most frequently violent.

Matrilateral kinship terminology does not imply the same degree of formalism, and interpersonal relations are often more affectionate between distant members of one's lineage, matrilateral relatives and affines, than between close agnates. Cross cousins (*bačča-ʿamma*, or father's sister's son, and *bačča-māmā*, or mother's broth-er's son) represent a positive social sphere where solidarity and affection dominate relationships. This feature may derive from the strong ties which exist between brother and sister. These are the persons of choice for borrowing money and for setting up a joint venture. Matrilateral parallel cousins (*bačča-ḵāla*, or mother's sister's son, or *bola* in Hazāragi) also play an important role. The relationships between *bola* (sons of two sisters) and *bāja* (husbands of two sisters) are symmetrical and affectionate, a light-hearted kind of classification of kinship. They seem to be rarely the basis for building commercial partnerships, and their way of interaction has similarities with friendship. Another interesting term is *ḵʷār-zāda* (sister's son or sister's daughter)—or *jeya*, the term used in some places such as Šahrestān—which Hazāras tend to use for every man whose mother is from their own lineage, even if they are older (especially for the father's

sister's children). Schurmann (1962, p. 140) considers this to be a legacy of the Omaha terminology of the old Mongols.

Marriage is considered an obligation, and divorce is rare and stigmatized. Polygamy is uncommon and occurs primarily when a man feels obliged to marry the widow of his dead brother. The general pattern is to marry kin, although families also try to diversify their social assets through marriage. Marriage between patrilateral parallel cousins seem to be less common among the Hazāras than marriage between cross-cousins (Monsutti, 2002, pp. 139-42). In such a cultural context, cross-cousins, distant collaterals, and also affines are preferred to agnates for borrowing money and setting up commercial partnerships. Some long-term relationships, grounded in a common interest as well as friendship, have also been developed with members of other Afghan groups or with host societies (guides, transporters, smugglers, etc.), even if war and exile have generally deepened social fragmentation and distrust.

SOCIAL AND POLITICAL STRATIFICATION

Hazāra society is stratified. The descendants of the Prophet, or *sayyed*s, form a sort of religious aristocracy, even if many of them are simple farmers. They receive external marks of respect, tend to practice endogamous marriages, and play an important role as mediators, relying on prestige rather than personal wealth. The tribal chiefs, or *mir*s, were very powerful until the end of the 19th century, but their influence has been undermined during the 20th century by the increasing penetration of the central administration system, even if local communities are still dominated by the richest landlords. In today's Hazārajāt, people use the term *ḵān* rather than *mir* for men whose influence is based on kinship, social capital, and personal wealth. The village headmen (*arbāb* or *malek*), who work as intermediaries between their local communities and government officials, are often chosen from among the family elders (*riš-safid*,or *muy-safid*). Since 1978-79, all these leaders have lost part of their power to the commanders (*qomāndān*) of the resistance parties and the leaders of the militant religious groups formed in Iran (usually called *šayḵān* in the Hazārajāt). Hazāra society is thus facing a dramatic evolution and political roles follow increasingly new patterns (Roy, pp. 194-205; Harpviken; Monsutti, 2000a).

RELIGIOUS PRACTICES AND LIFE-CYCLE CEREMONIES

The great majority of Shiʿites in Afghanistan are Ha-zāras. David Edwards

(1986, p. 204) has commented that “their practice of Islam was one that had little connection to scriptural traditions” and was characterized by “the development of an insular tradition focused on the person of ʿAli.” There are no real mosques in the Hazārajāt. The religious life of the villages is centered on a build-ing called the *membar* (from *menbar*, the pulpit of a mosque), which fulfils the function of a prayer hall, meet-ing room, and guest room, and is sometimes used as a classroom as well. Isolated from the intellectual Shiʿite centers, Hazāra religious practice is dominated by reverence for saints (*pirān*), whose authority comes from their ability to transmit God’s blessing, and is expressed by visits to their shrines. Most of these saints were also *sayyed*s. Village mullahs in the Hazārajāt receive the basic level of religious education required to enable them to at least teach children and lead the Friday prayers. Since 1978-79, an Iranian-type of clerical hierarchy has slowly emerged, introducing a new kind of religious leader: the young militant Islamist. Often born into a modest family, they challenge the authority of traditional practitioners and propose a more political conception of religion.

Besides the commemoration of the martyrdom of Imam Ḥosayn, the Prophet’s grandson through his daughter Fāṭema and his cousin ʿAli, which is the most important event in the religious calendar for the Hazāra Shiʿites (see below), the community also observes the Persian New Year (*nowruz*), the fast of Ramażān, and the two main Muslim festivals, or *ʿid*s (called locally *ʿid-e qor-bān* and *ʿid-e ramażān*). Other major social and religious events are the various rites of passage which mark the life of each individual: birth, circumcision for the boys, marriage, and death (the Hazāras have very specific mourning songs).

The commemoration of the martyrdom of Ḥosayn ebn ʿAli (q.v.; see also ĀŠURĀ) is an event of central importance for all Shiʿites in the world. While it seems to have not been of major relevance among the Hazāras until the last decades of the 20th century, it has become increasingly significant since then. This is because it has become part of a larger process of politicization, serving as an occasion to remember the injustice and violence that the Hazāra community too have suffered, as they see their own painful history reflected in the tragic fate of Imam Ḥosayn. Repressed under the Taliban regime, the most spectacular expressions of the commemoration of Mo-ḥarram are found in urban centers (Kabul and Mazār-e Šarif in Afghanistan, and Quetta in Pakistan), rather than the Hazārajāt. At the beginning of the month of Moḥarram, flags (*ʿalam*) are put up on each side of the entrance of the

religious centers, signaling a period of sorrow for the whole community, during which, for instance, no wedding is celebrated. Men wear black or green shirts and white pants as a sign of mourning, and women avoid dressing in elegant clothes. All music is forbidden during this period except for dirges (*nawḥa*). Other activities are now suspended, as if time has stopped for the sake of the events organized to commemorate the martyrdom of Imam Ḥosayn. If they have the means, many families take advantage of this period to organize meritorious meals for the needy and the pious (*naḏr*, or more specifically *naḏr-e emām Ḥosayn*), and every evening people gather to pray. Specialists (*ḏāker*) invoke the name of God and narrate, day by day, the detailed unfolding of the events as they are reported by tradition, until reaching the paroxysm on the tenth day of the month of Moḥarram, the ʿĀšurā (q.v.), which is the anniversary of Ḥosayn's death. Groups of penitents (*dasta*) form a procession, some flagellating themselves with razor blades and chains. After three, seven, and fourteen days following the ʿĀšurā the Hazāras again commemorate Ḥosayn's death but in a less spectacular and public way, and forty days later a new mourning ceremony takes place, the *čelom* (*čehelom*, lit. the "fortieth"). Thecommemoration of Moḥarram can be seen to function as a kind of outlet for tensions and frustrations accumulated during the year; and, within the sermons (*rawża*), the sufferings endured by the Hazāras are constantly compared with those endured by Ḥosayn and his family. For instance, the thirst which tortured the Imam's companions when they were prevented from getting water from the Euphrates is compared with the blockade of the Hazārajāt by the Taliban between the summer of 1997 and the fall of 1998, and the profanation of Ḥosayn's body is compared with the tragic end of ʿAbd-al-ʿAli Mazāri, the Hazāra leader captured and killed by the Taliban in March 1995. More generally, the fate of the victims of Karbala is compared to the past and recent massacres suffered by the Hazāras (e.g., the slaughter of several hundred civilians in Afšār Minā, a district of Kabul, by troops allied to Aḥmad-Šāh Masʿud in January 1993, and the mass executions by the Taliban in Mazār-e Šarif in August 1998).

The Hazāras identify strongly with the suffering of Imam Ḥosayn, and also declare that they are ready to fight for him and for a return to justice. By mortifying themselves, they hope to expiate their sins and accelerate the coming of an era of justice. Sadness and mourning thus open a more positive perspective on the basis of the conviction that a better future will follow. The ʿĀšurā, is thus not only the occasion to mourn the martyrdom of Imam Ḥosayn but also to declare oneself ready to seek revenge. In the conception that many

Hazāras have of the end of time, there is a pronounced emphasis on revenge. The Hidden Imam will come back then to punish the guilty and redress injustices. The world is corrupted, and the faithful must remain attentive to the sign of its destruction.

## MIGRATION AND REMITTANCE NETWORKS

During the past 20 years, Afghanistan has been torn apart by war and civil strife, which have generated the largest refugee population in the world. Like most Afghan groups, the Hazāras fled in large numbers after the coup of April 1978 and the Soviet intervention in 1979. Most of them went to one of the neighboring countries of Afghanistan. Migrants and refugees have thus come to overlap and can hardly be distinguished from each other. Their movements follow various patterns: thousands of farmers from the Hazārajāt migrate every winter to work in coal mines near Quetta for a few months, while young men migrate for longer periods to Iran to take on me-nial jobs. During the last two decades, the Hazāras have formed very efficient migratory and economic networks, based on the dispersion of relatives in Iran, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. Each place has its own advantages and drawbacks. In Iran (especially in the big cities), it is relatively easy to find a job but almost impossible to settle down on a long-term basis with a family; on the other hand, in Quetta, Hazāras can move freely, but very few employment opportunities are available to them; however, in the Hazārajāt, social, political, and economic prospects are grim even if one's family possesses its own property and farmland (Monsutti, 2000b, 2002).

Hazāra migrants and refugees in Iran cannot use the official banking system, since many of them are illegal workers and therefore unlikely to have any recognized documents as proof of identity. In any case, banks do not operate in the Hazārajāt itself. Therefore, when they wish to send their savings back to their families in Afghanistan, they must entrust their money to a businessman who specializes in remittances (known locally as a *ḥawāla-dār*). Various actors are involved in a typical case of the *ḥawāla* (credit note) system, the three main ones being the migrant worker (*kārgar*; Afghans often use *mosāfer*, lit. "traveller") who wants to send his savings to his family left behind in Afghanistan, the remittance specialist, and a middleman (*dallāl*), when the migrant worker and the remittance specialist do not know each other already; the middleman collects the migrant worker's money and gives it to the remittance specialist, who is usually also a trader. The middleman, as a type of broker, takes a commission which generally amounts to 1 percent (0.5 percent

from the remittance specialist and 0.5 percent from the customer). Once he has collected the money of the migrant worker, the remittance specialist based in Iran, passes on a letter to a partner in Pakistan, stating the details of the transaction, and gives the equivalent of a credit note to the customer himself, to send it on to his family in Afghanistan (usually via a friend going back home). In Pakistan, a merchant (*tājer*) associated with the remittance specialist (they are always close relatives) retrieves the money sent through the official banking system. He may invest the money in different commercial activities and may also work as a moneychanger (*ṣarrāf*), as this is a way to invest the money that they collect and thus diversify their sources of income. This merchant in Pakistan purchases some goods (wheat, rice, cooking oil, sugar, tea, shoes, cloth, cooking pots, etc.) and dispatches them by truck to the family's village in the Hazārajāt, where a third partner runs a shop. This shopkeeper (*dokkān-dār*) receives the goods, sells them, and uses the proceeds to reimburse the migrant's family. In the meantime, they have been independently informed that they would receive this money from the shopkeeper, by the migrant worker's associate on his arrival there from Iran.

These categories are ideal types. In practice, themiddleman and theremittance specialist in Iran, themerchant in Pakistan and theshopkeeper in Afghanistan may even be the same person. If they are different individuals, they are invariably close relatives. However, if the migrant worker and the remittance specialist do not know each other, the mediation of a middleman becomes necessary. As the amounts remitted increase, the more the functions tend to be differentiated. In such cases, theremittance specialist sometimes collaborates with an important trader (who may be Iranian) to transfer the money directly to a bank in Pakistan. Finally, it should be mentioned that the entire remittance system could not function without transport contractors and smugglers, most of whom tend to be Baluch, between Iran and Pakistan, and Pashtuns between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

There are three main sources of profit for the remittance specialist: (1) his commission; (2) exploiting advantages in the exchange rate between the different cur-rencies (*riāl*, rupee, and *afḡāni*); (3) profits from the sale of the merchandise purchased with the money collected from the migrant. Usury is in theory prohibited for Muslims; interest on money, whether it is a loan or an investment, is illicit. But commercial transactions do not exclude the payment of a fixed commission, which is considered as the fair recompense for services rendered. Usually, the commission does not exceed 5 percent, and ranges from

2 to 3 percent among the Hazāras between Iran, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. The remittance specialist's profit is earned mainly from the transaction itself and depends on factors such as how distant the deadline for repayment is and how close his relationship is with the migrant worker for whom he is providing this service. Since most Hazāra remittance specialists do not keep any precise accounting records, and the different local currencies tend to get devalued very quickly, it is very difficult to determine the profit made in a single cycle of a *ḥawāla* credit transaction by the individual participants in the different locations. All of the commodities are much more expensive in the Hazārajāt than in Quetta.

The wide networks of transfer of funds set up by Hazā-ras and other Afghan refugees and migrants, which serve to facilitate sending their savings back to their families in Afghanistan, provide the basis for many economic and trading activities. All of the shops of the Hazārajāt operate according to this system, which provides them with all of their supplies. Its significance extends beyond its economic dimension. Migration is not only a response to violence, war, and poverty, for it has also become a systematic strategy by means of which a community, such as the Hazāras, can widen their social and cultural horizons. The transfer of funds is both a means of survival and a way to structure a transnational society. Indeed, it serves as a most efficient tool with which to reproduce social ties in the face of war and the dispersion of members of each domestic and solidarity group. Despite the trauma of war and exile, the Hazāras have thus managed to take advantage of their geographic dispersion and the resulting economic diversification, by developing new transnational cooperation structures.

Facing a very difficult situation, Hazāra refugees and migrants, like other Afghans, have demonstrated their ability to adapt. Using their existing cultural assets, while moving constantly between Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, and beyond, they have been able to open new social, economic, and political perspectives. The multiplicity of the registers of solidarity, which are not limited to lineage or tribal affiliation, the diversification of the basis of cooperation, the multidirectional migratory displacements, and the vast amount of money remitted to Afghanistan are some of the most striking features of the social strategies employed by the Hazāras in recent times.

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