



Afghanistan Historiography and Pashtun Islam: Modernization Theory's Afterimage

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Abstract

In contrast to major developments in general South Asian historiography, the historiography of modern Afghanistan has largely persisted as something of a scholarly throwback to the 'modernization theory' trend of the 1950s and 60s. The way Pashtun experiences of Islam have been treated in history writing draws heavily upon this larger modernization-oriented thematic, which in turn has existed in a dialectic with journalistic and policy-oriented writing. This article analyzes a number of scholarly works in which questions of Islam and social change in Pashtun politics form a major focus. The article focuses on works focusing on the pre-1979 situation, which has been examined only perfunctorily in works of authors employing more current analytical techniques. The article identifies a number of appropriate thematic questions in existing work which could improve our understanding of the cultural history of pre-1979 Islam in Pashtun areas of Afghanistan, and raises a few new questions worth investigating.

The US has directly involved itself in the domestic politics of a *jihad*-torn Afghanistan off and on for around two and a half decades, especially the Pashtun-majority regions notorious in western public opinion for being the heartland of the Taliban movement. One might expect that during this time, US and western-based scholars would develop a sizable body of literature on the historical experience of Islam in Pashtun societies predating the war, and that this literature would have kept pace with contemporary trends in historiographical literature. Curiously, the opposite seems to be the case, perhaps in part *because* of the effects of the particularly closely linked nature of various intellectual genealogies in Afghanistan studies throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, and (often imperial) statist policy concerns generally. A reappraisal of the field might then be warranted, especially given the modest upswing in Afghan studies since the commencement of the latest, most overtly involved phase of US-spearheaded western involvement beginning in 2001.

Also around two and a half decades ago, Ranajit Guha published his seminal essay 'The Prose of Counter-Insurgency' in *Subaltern Studies II*. That journal devoted to the history of non-elites in India has since opened a number of doors in the social and cultural historiography of colonial South

Asia, and has influenced historiography of the so-called 'Third World' more generally, away from evolutionary theories and modernization theory in particular. In the sense it is used in this article, the term 'modernization theory' is not simply a matter of charting the development of 'modernity' (a contestatory term which shall be laid aside for the moment). Specifically, modernization theory is a particular genre of writing about societies through the lens of qualitative progress; and in this article it more broadly refers to what Partha Chatterjee would call a 'thematic', an 'epistemological as well as ethical' set of propositions which tacitly assume a particular historical role for various types of actors, regardless of differing interpretations of discrete events.¹ As dynamic elites in governments, nationalist movements, or global organizations introduce changes designed to modernize their societies, the argument goes, those societies and the people who compose them undergo a variety of regular, predictable, and inter-related changes. They either accept these changes or react against them, but non-elites are rarely portrayed as initiators of any meaningful social or intellectual change. Among a set of transitions including the shift from 'patrimonial' to 'public' politics, a gradual move away from 'religion' to other overarching narrative-creating paradigms was assumed by scholars explicitly or tacitly informed by modernization theory, working in a variety of frameworks ranging from Weberian to Marxian to Durkheimian.²

When dealing with political and especially social movements which did not conform to western expectations, modernization theory historiography seemed unconvincing to many who did not accept the proposition that non-elites essentially lacked social impetus, and were destined to always either follow or react. When dealing with questions of cultural and especially religious history, modernization theory seemed all the more ill-equipped. In many cases, the theory was able to portray the majority of religious expression, and especially religious activism, more or less only as the non-modern refuge of recalcitrantly static populations belonging to the 'mass', a vaguely differentiated peoples whose agency was reactionary if it burst from the narrative margins into history proper.

Over the late 1960s to the 1980s modernization theory lost a good bit of its former influence, after the widely varied interventions of the 'history from below' trend and the *Annales* and the Subaltern schools in history writing; the cumulative impact of feminist and critical theory; and a broader cross-disciplinary redefinition of the terrain of cultural studies to include non-elite modes of experience and expression.³

As alluded to above, the historiography of Pashtun populations, particularly in Afghanistan, has by and large been an exception to this shift away from modernization theory. And nowhere is this state of affairs more persistent than in the historiographical literature of pre-1978 Afghanistan in which questions of Pashtun Islam loom large. This article will examine a number of works featuring the dominant modernization-influenced paradigm to a greater or lesser extent, whether explicitly or implicitly. It will do so while

situating these texts as exemplary of several recurrent genres of Afghan Pashtun historiography. The article will also focus on ways in which a number of scholars have attempted to complicate or, sometimes, overcome the paradigm, some more successfully than others. It will conclude with a number of suggestions for extending promising, already-existing lines of inquiry into Pashtuns' historical experiences of Islam, and a few suggestions for lines of inquiry which have not been addressed in the context of Afghanistan.

Insurgency in the Forefront

This article began by invoking Guha's 'The Prose of Counter-Insurgency' not simply as an acknowledgement of that essay's influence on historiographical trends. Rather, it is cited for the insights Guha raises into the nature of discourses about non-western mass populations in contact with both colonial and nationalist elites. Guha points out that though there is a good bit of disagreement between the two camps over the moral implications for state policies, both have tended to foreground the dynamic role of elites whether colonial or national, in contrast to a reactionary and superstitious, and static, mass who either follow or reject the path shown to them by 'their' leaders. Both camps have adopted a view of the mass seen primarily through the lens of *raison d'état*. Guha was certainly not alone in developing this critique of paradigms broadly allied to modernization theory; other historians did so contemporaneously or earlier, and one will recall political scientist Joel Migdal's arguments, among others across disciplinary boundaries.⁴ Above all, the importance of 'Prose' for this section is that essay's implicit suggestion that chief among the concerns of state-centric historiography in India, at any rate, was the refusal of mass populations to adopt elite forms of rationality in the face of their own rationalities, and to mount armed resistance around alternative ideologies: that is to say, peasant and/or tribal insurgencies utilizing religious symbolisms and rationalities, among other things. Of these, 'Islam' seemed especially worrisome to elite power.⁵ Quotidian religion was simply unremarkable and not part of history in this perspective, inasmuch as it did not, in the state-centric view, appear to influence events, the *real* stuff of history.

In historiography surrounding modern Afghan Pashtuns, it seems singularly difficult for scholars to write accounts addressing Islam, even before the anti-communist *jihad* period, that do *not* focus on insurgency. Those outlining a more broad-based account of Islam in society, whether it be institutional, genealogical/intellectual, phenomenological, or structuralist, are so few and far between as to be conspicuous in their uniqueness. This is, incidentally, often the case even in Afghan-language historiography available in print (leaving aside the vast quantity of normative religious texts). There are a few fascinating works built around a problematic other than insurgency, such as M. Wali Zalmay's *Notables of Kandahar: Sufis,*

Gnostics [*Ārifān*], and *Shrines*, which discusses a number of lesser-known local spiritual guides and their genealogies in and around Kandahar. However, the anti-communist resistance, in combination with the state-centric dominant paradigm's inroads into Afghan intellectual culture, was to give rise to many more works in the vein of Sayyid Muhammad Nadir Khurram's monograph *Independent Sufis; or, The Embattled Mujaddidis*.⁶ The Mujaddidi spiritual family customarily enjoyed a good bit of influence in southeastern Pashtun tribes. Khurram's work traces the family from their 16th-century ancestor, Shaikh Ahmad of Sirhind, through to the late twentieth century, generally placing the family in a perpetually oppositional role to secularist, unjust state authority. The modality of such works is itself interesting as perhaps an example of a retrospective prose of counter-counter-insurgency, operating on a logic of inherited spiritual power as narrative rather than modernization. As such they are beyond the scope of this article. Such works do, however, uphold the overriding focus of the dominant problematic of insurgency for those western researchers who devote the time to read them.

In western historical work on the subject, insurgency dominates the literature to a greater extent. There are two major sub-motifs here which are worthy of note: (1) insurgent 'religion' as a subset of the index 'traditional', which in the Pashtun-related literature is intimately linked to that other concept of static tradition, 'tribalism'; and (2) religiosity of the masses as explicitly or implicitly attributable to local leaders using religious symbols to gain or maintain power, thus obstructing the progress of a national history larger than themselves.

Historical anthropologist David Edwards, in *Heroes of the Age*, remarks on this latter motif in colonial texts about the 1897 Pashtun uprising in lower Swat and Malakand, led tactically by the so-called 'Mad Mullah', but supported by the Sahib of Hadda from Nangrahar, Afghanistan.⁷ Edwards also examines colonial archival material produced more or less at the time of counterinsurgency, as does Guha in 'Prose'. Also like Guha, Edwards examines a text at a second layer of removal from the action: the retrospective writings of Winston Churchill, who fought in the campaign. In these writings, in which Churchill steps back from the immediacy of policy decisions and inserts events into a historicizing narrative, he gives thought to the motivations of insurgents. In so doing, he develops fairly explicitly an instrumentalist idea of religious leaders and a mass conceived of as pliable and gullible.

While the case of Churchill's writings is fairly extreme, ideas of low-caste *mullās* using religion to move up in the world are pervasive. Even more widespread is the idea of religion being somehow traditionalist in nature, and the religious component of insurgencies being attributable to the desire of 'traditional' authority to maintain its place in the face of a modernizing elite. This is the most common explanation given for the 1929 revolt against King Amanullah, seen by the dominant paradigm as Afghanistan's great (if unsuccessful) 'modernizer'. How scholars deal with the Amanullah episode

provides something of a window on the issue at the heart of this article; therefore this section is largely devoted to a discussion of the literature surrounding it. However, the role Islam is portrayed as playing in this episode is a trend which holds for the historiography of other periods, though less visibly, up to 1978. Furthermore, the fact that the attentions of scholars interested in questions of Islam in Afghan history have disproportionately gravitated to this particular episode indicates the power of the problematic of religious Pashtun insurgency in Afghan historiography.

At least since Vartan Gregorian's 1969 book *The Emergence of Modern Afghanistan: Politics of Reform and Modernization, 1840–1946*, scholars seem to have largely agreed that

[i]n the face of a tribal–feudal–religious–traditionalist coalition in opposition, [Amanullah] was unable to find the necessary support in a strong urban middle class or in an economically healthy peasant class.⁸

This view was echoed by Leon Poullada in *Reform and Rebellion in Afghanistan, 1919–1929: King Amanullah's Failure to Modernize a Tribal Society*.⁹ Poullada differed slightly in that he dismissed the importance of Islam as instrumental, an ideology articulated by *mullās* to give direction and cohesion to a traditional tribal uprising. For Poullada, the uprising resulted from Amanullah's failure to maintain traditional sources of authority (including Islam, again an instrument) long enough for his reforms to be irreversible.

More recent works have attempted to address the fact that Islam is more than instrumental for its adherents. Several authors introduced elaborations on the integrated theme of ideological–social opposition evidenced in the above works, but brought Islam back to center stage as a social force. In her discussion of the Amanullah episode in *Islam and Politics in Afghanistan*, Asta Olesen emphasized the cultural discontinuity of traditional Islamic social mores with the social habitus of the king, his enclaved capital city (where 'traditional' clothing was prohibited), and most of all his unveiled wife Queen Sorayya.¹⁰ Olesen presents evidence that gender mores constructed as Islamic formed one of the most pressing issues for the council of scholars who presented a list of demands to the monarch, and became something of a persistent bugbear for modernizing rulers over the rest of the twentieth century.¹¹ Olesen also mentions that religious personnel spread unsubstantiated rumors of Amanullah's alleged alcohol consumption, contrary to the Islamic law, as a self-interested means of chipping away at his legitimacy and bolstering their own in contrast. The account parallels discourses on devious and cynically self-interested charismatic leaders remarked upon by Edwards in the context of Churchill, and by Guha regarding both colonial and Bengali nationalist accounts of the Santal *hool* uprising of 1855.¹²

Finally, Senzil Nawid, in *Religious Response to Social Change in Afghanistan, 1919–1929: King Aman-Allah and the Afghan Ulama*, looks for clues as to why Islam was so conspicuous in the Amanullah episode in terms of the historical experience of the Afghan tribes with British imperialism.¹³ Nawid

argues that Islam in modern Afghanistan developed in tandem with anti-imperial movements, such that Islam in Afghanistan had a well-entrenched militant streak by the time Amanullah began attempting reforms of 'tribal' society. Nawid also, unlike a good number of other works, is careful to draw distinctions between the elite scholars (*'ulamā*) in Kabul who enjoyed widespread Pashtun support in the mountainous southeast, and local religious specialists (*mullās*) with different sources of authority. Along with Olesen, Nawid adds to our understanding of the elite Sufi leaders (especially the Gilani and Mujaddidi families) as not *always* contributing to uprisings. From her account they also seem to have been useful to the monarchy in maintaining support in less contentious periods, as were the traditionally educated gentleman scholars who essentially built the modern state's cultural infrastructure before the 1940s or so. Indeed, in a fairly balanced view of instrumentalism and Islam, Fazal-ur-Rahim Marwat points out at least one incident in which the interests of the Mujaddidi family, the Afghan monarchy, and the government of Pakistan all coincided in raising an uprising aimed at defusing a bourgeois-inflected grassroots Pashtun nationalist trend in the early 1950s.¹⁴

This aside, the strength of the problematic of insurgency, and the blind spots to which it gives rise, are perhaps attested by Nazif Shahrani's 2005 review article regarding works surrounding the Amanullah episode. For Shahrani, Nawid's account offers affirmation of 'points already known about the dynamics of Pashtun religio-political culture on the eastern tribal zone'.¹⁵ Among these he includes Nawid's point about anti-imperial movements creating a space for 'warrior mullas'. Besides this, a tense relationship between *pashnunwali*, the Pashtun ethical and common-law code, and the Islamic *sharī'a* may have contributed to anti-Amanullah activities, as tribes feared that rigorous Islamic law as practiced by a central state would interfere with their tribal practice. For Shahrani, this reading of Nawid leads him to argue that Islam is in fact instrumental for 'tribal' people and is deployed to rationalize claims.¹⁶ Such is the pervasive appeal of the tacit state-centric thematic that these 'already known' points appear to require no research in any archival material except metropolitan newspaper sources for their confirmation. An inquiry into the lived experience of even insurgent Islam is not required either, much less the long-term daily lives of those who, momentarily, became insurgents.

Perhaps responding to this gap in the literature, Edwards presents an in-depth look at the sources of the charismatic authority of the Sahib of Hadda, juxtaposed with texts exemplifying the bases of monarchic and tribal ideologies, what are for him the other major (often opposing) axes of power in modern Pashtun society.¹⁷ Beyond his Guha-like attempts to inject reflexivity into the discussion of insurgency as discussed above, Edwards has made the rare effort to look in oral narrative as well as local archives in order to understand the subjectivity of Muslim Pashtuns beyond insurgency. He discusses legendary accounts of miracles surrounding the Sufi master's *baraka*,

or power, which have little to do with insurgency as a problematic in and of themselves.

Edwards's discussion of religion, which forms the focus of two chapters in *Heroes*, also contains a wealth of information about Islamic institutional practice in Pashtun regions of especially eastern Afghanistan. We read extensively of the Hadda Sahib's *langar* (charitable kitchen), and find interesting comments about the highly itinerant nature of religious learning in Afghanistan, where knowledge was fragmented among far-flung specialists and students would travel great distances to study specific fields.¹⁸ Nonetheless, Edwards's choice of the Sahib, and the 1897 insurgency which he played a large role in organizing, seems to reinforce the dominance of Pashtun insurgency as the central problematic in a historiography of Islam as experienced in Afghanistan, despite the welcome deconstruction of Churchill. A few other scholars have attempted to move out of this framework entirely by inquiring into other aspects of Pashtuns' experience of Islam entirely; for example, Ashraf Ghani. In 'Islam and State-building in a Tribal Society', Ghani discussed the centralization of the *shari'a* court structure, and the steps taken by the Amir Abdurrahman to socially insulate judges from their local communities, in order to render them more responsive to Kabul's dictates.¹⁹ In his 1983 article, 'Disputes in a Court of Sharia, Kunar Valley, Afghanistan, 1885–1890', Ghani used a chance find of a cache of rural legal decisions as a springboard to illustrate that small merchants and traders, always a major occupation among Pashtuns particularly in agriculturally poor hill regions, had a stake in the regularization of Islamic law and its application in matters of contractual law.²⁰ This in turn appears to have had important consequences in domestic-oriented law. This sort of work pushes the limits of traditional archival work in drawing a more complex view of rural Pashtun society and its interaction with Islam, in rather marked contrast to works drawing an undifferentiated picture of the Pashtun 'mass' and rely instead on untested assumptions about 'tribalism' or, too often, an ingrained fanaticism. Indeed, it is a trend which Ghani himself addresses explicitly: speaking of reasons why scholarly writing about Islamic law did not, as of 1983, regularly reference actual cases, he invokes researchers' dependence on

the blurred notion of 'traditional' society. As obedience to norms in such societies was supposedly automatic, the researchers [felt that they] could legitimately focus on ideals instead of the complexities of concrete behavior.²¹

This protest, that research must not rely on assumptions of 'modernity' and 'tradition' but rather on empirical information in available sources, is at least as important as his efforts to find alternative sources.

Kabul-Centrism and the 'Black Box' Effect

Reasons why Ghani's discussions are a little less satisfying lie in another aspect also attributable to a broad modernization theory-inflected thematic,

alluded to above. That is, especially in 'Islam and State-Building in a Tribal Society', there is a trend to an administration-centric view shared by the vast majority of historiography of Afghanistan; a trend to focus exclusively on even 'the most obscure details of the Afghan monarchy, British colonial invasions, the short-lived Afghan republic, Soviet-era . . . rulers, *mujahideen* resistance parties, [etc.]'²² The focus on state institutions (in this case courts), and especially on their subordination to the central power of the monarch, maintains the place of the state as the tacit historiographical subject of Afghan Islam even as Ghani's Islam-focused works represent a departure from that other major state concern, insurgency. To be fair, 'disputes' begins to bring in a discussion of the stakes of people, even rural women, who are nearly totally missing from conventional narratives. It is a trend which should be encouraged though not much appears to have been done to follow in its path; while the title of his earlier article, 'Islam and State-Building in a Tribal Society', indicates that work's place in more familiar territory.

Ghani's Kabul-centrism is, as alluded to in the 'Insurgency' section, not unique to him; indeed, in his work it exerts a rather muted effect compared to a majority of other history writing on Afghanistan. This speaks more directly to the core assumptions of modernization theory: the historian's focus remains centered on the state as the agent of social change, whether implicitly or explicitly. This trend emerges fairly clearly in Olesen, which is among only a very few works devoted specifically to the long-term history of Islam in modern Afghanistan in periods of insurgency *and* otherwise, and which is therefore of intrinsic value.²³ Olesen explores a number of institutional developments over the twentieth century especially, including the role of Islam in the constitutional development of Afghanistan; changing articulations of the interaction between ideas of divinely ordained and popular sovereignty; and the role elite '*ulamā* (scholars) and aristocracy played in hammering out ideological compromises.

Outside the center, Olesen explores changing balances of power between the state and heads of the main Sufi orders, paying special attention to attempts by the state to co-opt these heads, and attempts by elite Sufis to maintain their ideological independence. The discussion is less satisfying in its lack of attention to lesser-prominent religious specialists. Olesen tends to use the word 'mullā' not as a specific term for a local ritual specialist, but as a shorthand for any activist operating with Islamic symbolism. It is a part of a larger tendency in modernization theory-influenced scholarship to focus on elites close to state bureaucracy as agentive, individualized actors operating in the sphere of 'Politics', while the mass is the realm of a more or less static, archetype-based 'Culture' based on long-standing scholarly assumptions. Thus, Olesen casually asserts that there is no concept of citizenship in Islam, a blanket statement which suffices to explain the behavior of the mass as well as 'mullās',²⁴ just as Nawid had recourse to a well-entrenched *mullā*-based Islamic militancy in Afghan society, even

though insurgencies appear less common than consensus or a balance of power, however volatile, over the long term.

Others have remarked on the overriding tendency in the historiography of Afghanistan to resort to 'black boxes' when questions of the mass are concerned: master concepts into which data is fed, and which seem to produce answers, though the actual mechanism within the 'box' is not visible and is left unexamined. This reliance on black boxes is the point at the heart of Shah Mahmoud Hanifi's extended, and occasionally overly harsh, criticism of Nawid.²⁵ Hanifi argues that reliance on such assumption-based concepts as tribalism, *pashtunwali*, *shari'ah*, and even 'the state' as the answer to their own question not only reifies categories that may be more fluid than they appear, but also obscures more interesting historical phenomena. For example, places such as Katawaz generally considered peripheral to historical processes, always existing in one-way flows of influence from the center, were in fact 'epicenters' of Pashtun cultural production, and 'vital nodes' in nomadic networks of circulation of goods both material and cultural.²⁶

The amount of historical work predating the anti-communist *jihad* which deals with rural social dynamics over time is truly limited; that concerned with Islam is even more so. Though it may not include enough breadth in political-economic context to satisfy some social historians, Ken Lizzio's 2003 biographical article on the Sufi *shaykh* Pir Saifur Rahman must be mentioned.²⁷ Based on oral narrative, Lizzio's article brings into the discussion such issues as the high degree of mobility of religious specialists: this includes a fairly unrestricted flow of scholars from British India (later, Pakistan) to Afghanistan; the itinerant life of students; and the differential social practice of the same religious practitioner in the Pashtun heartland of Nangrahar as opposed to the newer Pashtun settlements of the north. Lizzio also discusses the progress of a *shaykh's* spiritual licensing, as well as the political dimensions of practicing and teaching several different orders at once.

In terms of extended discussions, once again, David Edwards's *Heroes of the Age* also offers promise of circumventing the traditional modernization-inflected thematic. Edwards uses the examples of three historical persons to illustrate the symbolic inner workings of ideologies. The discussion is less satisfying in that Edwards's selection of individuals widens the view outside Kabul, but is still concerned with rural men of authority, leaving aside questions of *why* less influential people would follow ideologies, and to what extent would they internalize or contest these supposedly totalizing social frameworks. The selection of these individuals as archetypes embodying discrete, self-contained moral systems also reifies the same black box categories of tribalism, state, and charismatic Islam as the most salient social categories in Pashtun social history. Important as these features of life may have been, their repeated emphasis overshadows a number of other issues both social and ideological, and presenting them in this fashion reinforces the idea that these systems are in some way self-contained, despite evidence in the book that they are not.

Other Directions

In terms of purely intellectually oriented writing, the work of philosopher Sayyid Bahauddin Majrouh opens up a number of questions worthy of investigation. In his epic *Ego-Monster*, written over the 1970s and described by some as the most important work of literature produced in 20th-century Afghanistan, Majrouh does posit organized and charismatic religion as cynically instrumental, opiates of the masses and tools employed by the state to enrich itself.²⁸ However, in contrast to modernization theory-influenced assumptions placing peasantry or tribesmen as particularly prone to charismatic leadership, Majrouh and his interlocutors often focus on an extreme distrust of organized religion evidenced in Afghan and Pashtun popular culture artifacts such as folklore. For Majrouh, this antipathy comes from a deeply self-reliant form of 'honest' Islam drawn from the collective unconscious of a Buddhist past,²⁹ the spiritual teachings of classical Sufism, and folk wisdom; and is exemplified in the ascetic itinerant *malang*, a figure of clear social significance about whom information is sorely lacking.

Works more oriented in the direction of social sciences which disrupt the dominant historiographical thematic are also available, though few are monographs. In one possible direction for non-state oriented narratives, Olivier Roy's insights into the shifting configurations of solidarities could be extended to periods before his focus, which is generally the war period until present. Roy's 1986 *Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan* is still, in various updated editions, a good work on the subject, though it tends to 'black box' explanations on occasion. Later work by Roy focusing on networks and other forms of solidarity from family through nation, and the ways these interact, is more compelling, though he has expanded his focus beyond Afghanistan; readers may refer to his *Groups de solidarité au Moyen-Orient et en Asie centrale: Etats, territoires et réseaux* for a particularly well-developed example of his work on solidarity.³⁰ Even here, however, a focus on solidarities and networks may obscure massifying tendencies in some of the ideologies in play, no matter how mediated they may be by tribe, ethnicity, and other solidarities. Indeed, it seems difficult for many researchers to conceive of the possibility of something like rural 'public' opinion in the pre-war period, except as an ahistorical and assumption-based foil to the state narrative. There are, however, some sources which may support research into the dynamic processes of some forms of public culture, including some preliminary social science literature.

Much of this work is built on the suggestion of other potential archives than the traditional sort influenced by *raison d'état*. In the process they demonstrate a concern with the subjecthood of those operating in reflexively 'Islamic' modes, a concern absent from accounts seeking to assimilate or co-opt those people into narratives removing them from an active role. In David Edwards's discussion on Islamic pamphleteering, ideology is visible in a dialectic with the processes of its transmission and consumption – that is, print.³¹ Edwards suggests an outward radiation from solidarity groups to

their textual production as crucial in the articulation of an 'imagined community', increasing the reach of the solidarity as well as transforming the bases for that solidarity from network to something more diffuse and intangible: a public.

Focusing on print is natural, in that it is easier to research than non-visual material. Others research suggests that networks of print production and dissemination need not be the only media form enabling this dialectic. Awaz-ud-Din Siddiqi's collection of popular cassette poetry contains a number of examples of religious ideology articulated in cassette culture during the anti-communist civil war, as does Edwards's article on protest poetry using strongly religious language embedded in ideologies of patriarchy-lineage.³² The well-developed rhetorical structure of the poetic genres evidenced here, as well as what little we know of cassette and other circulation prior to the war, suggest a longer heritage of poetic dissemination of grassroots religious discourse worthy of investigation. One will note the collection of versified Friday sermons by 'Abd-us-Sattar, a deputy (*khalifa*) of the Sahib of Hadda whose works were widely remembered and transmitted orally for decades.³³ Outside the higher echelons of religious infrastructure, Zakariya Mlatar's biographical dictionary of religious student (*tālibān*) poets stretching back to the early 20th century is valuable.³⁴ It suggests that face-to-face networks themselves can be the vehicles for dissemination and consolidation of public text-artifacts beyond localness, removing the role of mass production altogether yet still extending the view beyond the network itself. This latter point gives new dimensions and importance to Lizzio's and Edwards's brief discussions on the itinerant nature of much religious learning in Afghanistan.

In discussions of circulation and consumption of distinct cultural artifacts reflexively articulating ideology (in this case religious), the techniques of researchers working in linguistic anthropology and cultural studies in other geographic fields might shed further light on questions of agency in the Afghan materials: for example, W. Flagg Miller's writing on the circulation of Yemeni poetry and the transmutable assignation of cultural value, or Sandria Freitag's discussion of the personal agency involved in the act of cultural consumption of visual media with special reference to India.³⁵

The social and cultural history of Islam in Afghanistan could also be opened up in scope by reference to the historiography of the Pashtun-majority North-west Frontier Province of British India and the successor state of Pakistan, which has enjoyed a bit more sophisticated attention from local and western scholars. A number of authors have written on the dialectical relationship between the ideological foundations and social bases of the Khudai Khidmatgar (Servants of God) movement led by 'Abd-ul-Ghaffar Khan in the 1930s and 40s. In particular, Sayed Wiqar Ali Shah has contextualized the role which certain Islamic ideals, institutions, and religious specialists played in the movement, in contrast to other observers who wished to emphasize *exclusively* the Pashtun nationalist

dimension, or the movement's formal political links to Gandhianism.³⁶ The unfortunately as-yet untranslated memoir by Dr. Waris Khan, *The Freedom Movement*, surrounding Waris Khan's childhood as well as his experiences in the movement, might open up discussion of rural, non-elite discourses, grounded in the empirical quotidian reality of society generally, as well as in internally differentiated and hierarchical social movements particularly.³⁷ In terms of processes of ideological dissemination and opinion formation, it also points to a powerful social role for poetry in places, but even more, the memoir deals with less formalized modes of social communication in an unusually reflective fashion.

Scholars who wish to inject a comparative dimension might find it fruitful to combine this data with techniques such as Shahid Amin's 1988 discussion of popular piety and social reformism in a semi-autonomous yet subordinated social stratum in 'Gandhi as Mahatma'.³⁸ Like Amin, Waris Khan's memoir mentions religion in politics and society without positing either an instrumental or an overarching role for religion, and avoids conflating it with traditionalism or tribalism. The memoir, as well as the Khudai Khidmatgar movement, also has a bit of direct relevance for Afghanistan. The Khudai Khidmatgars' theological ideal of *huqūq al-'ibād* – the right of God's creation to be served by society, as a proxy to the right of a self-sufficient God to be served by His worshippers – is reminiscent of certain strains of liberation theologies developed or adopted elsewhere by peasant movements, as in Latin America. But while we know that the ideal of *huqūq al-'ibād* seems to have been particularly resilient in subaltern registers of 20th-century political expression in the NWFP, it seems no less relevant to the agriculturally rich Pashtun regions in eastern Afghanistan, such as the area around Jalalabad. There it is strongly evidenced in popular poetry since the early 1940s, and this ideal furnished local subaltern poets with an indigenous vocabulary of human rights, as well as a vocabulary for articulating a form of national citizenship.

In this article I have argued that the dominant trend in historical scholarship about Pashtuns' experience of Islam in pre-1978 Afghanistan has been one closely linked to modernization theory, which bears strong historical as well as conceptual ties to the practical investments of imperial and other state structures in their attempts at ruling Pashtun populations. I have also argued that this view obscures other, potentially more interesting, aspects of the social life of Islam in Pashtun populations, by rendering invisible the lives and the concerns of non-elite rural populations. Inquiry into the links of populism and Islam in the 20th century, allied against aristocracies and unaccountable governments, is still quite rudimentary in scholarship about Pashtuns outside the context of the Khudai Khidmatgar movement. This is an unusual state of affairs in a time when linkages of reflexively 'Islamic' discourses and populism seem to be strongly resurgent in Pashtun areas and the world in general. It is a line of inquiry needed in order to update our study of Afghan history, as well as improve our collective

understanding of the current state of affairs in Afghanistan beyond endless repetitions of the same 'thematic' framing discussed earlier in this article. However, this line of inquiry is indeed possible at present, given even the published sources available in Pashto and other regional languages, and given some promising threads of innovation in the scholarly literature.

Short Biography

James currently has sixteen entries forthcoming in *The Oxford Companion to Pakistan History* (ed. Ayesha Jalal) related to the North-west Frontier Province of Pakistan, and a forthcoming literary translation and sourcebook edition of the psycho-social thought of Afghan philosopher Sayyid Bahauddin Majrouh. He is presently preparing two research articles on the cultural history of Afghanistan for publication, both dealing with issues of ethnicity, social communication, and differential construals of the nature of public space. He is preparing a third article for publication on the shifting discursive relationships between religious scholars, social classes, and a nascent 'massified' society in late 19th-century north India.

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Notes

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¹ P. Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?* (London: Zed Books, 1986), 38.

² Cf. W. Spohn, 'Multiple Modernity, Nationalism, and Religion: A Global Perspective', *Current Sociology*, 51/3-4 (2003): 265-86.

³ Cf. C. Mukerji and M. Schudson (eds.), *Rethinking Popular Culture: Contemporary Perspectives in Cultural Studies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991) for an overview.

⁴ Cf. J. Migdal, *Strong Societies and Weak States: State-Society Relations and State Capabilities in the Third World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988) for his critique most relevant here.

- ⁵ Cf. R. Guha, 'The Prose of Counter-Insurgency', in R. Guha and G. Chakravorty Spivak (eds.), *Selected Subaltern Studies* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1988 [1983]), 59.
- ⁶ M. W. Zalmay, *Da Kandahār Mashāhīr: Sūfiyān, 'Ārifān, Mazārāt* (Pashto: *Notables of Kandahar: Sufis, Gnostics, and Shrines*) (Kabul: Ministry of Information and Culture Printing House, 1970); S. M. N. Khurram, *Sūfiyān-i Wārīstā yā Mujaddidiyān-i Mubārīz* (Persian: *Independent Sufis; or, the Embattled Mujaddidis*) (Peshawar: 1987).
- ⁷ D. B. Edwards, *Heroes of the Age: Moral Fault Lines on the Afghan Frontier* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1996), ch. 6.
- ⁸ V. Gregorian, *The Emergence of Modern Afghanistan: Politics of Reform and Modernization, 1840–1946* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1969), 269.
- ⁹ L. Poullada, *Reform and Rebellion in Afghanistan, 1919–1929: King Amanullah's Failure to Modernize a Tribal Society* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1973).
- ¹⁰ A. Olesen, *Islam and Politics in Afghanistan* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 1995).
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, 135–40.
- ¹² Edwards, *Heroes of the Age*, ch. 5; Guha, 'Prose of Counter-Insurgency', 71–84.
- ¹³ S. Nawid, *Religious Response to Social Change in Afghanistan, 1919–1929: King Aman-Allah and the Afghan Ulama* (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 1999).
- ¹⁴ F.-u.-R. K. Marwat, *The Evolution and Growth of Communism in Afghanistan, 1917–79: An Appraisal* (Karachi: Royal Book Co., 1997).
- ¹⁵ M. N. Shahrani, 'King Aman-Allah of Afghanistan's Failed Nation-Building Project and its Aftermath (Review Article)', *Iranian Studies*, 38/4 (2005): 665.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 673.
- ¹⁷ Edwards, *Heroes of the Age*.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, ch. 4.
- ¹⁹ A. Ghani, 'Islam and State-Building in a Tribal Society: Afghanistan, 1880–1901', *Modern Asian Studies*, 12/2 (1978): 269–84.
- ²⁰ A. Ghani, 'Disputes in a Court of Sharia, Kunar Valley, Afghanistan, 1885–1890', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 15/3 (1983): 353–67.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, 353.
- ²² R. Nichols, 'Afghan Historiography: Classical Study, Conventional Narrative, National Polemic', *History Compass*, 3/1 (January, 2005): 3.
- ²³ Olesen, *Islam and Politics*.
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*, 123.
- ²⁵ S. M. Hanifi, 'Review of Nawid, Religious Response to Social Change in Afghanistan', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 35 (2003): 348–52.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*, 350–1.
- ²⁷ K. Lizzio, 'Embodying History: A Naqshbandi Shaikh of Afghanistan', *Central Asian Survey*, 22/2–3 (2003): 163–85.
- ²⁸ S. B. Majrouh, *Da Dzāndzānī Xāmār* (Pashto and Persian: *Ego Monster*) (Kabul: Faculty of Literature and Human Sciences, Kabul University, 1979), Cycle 1.
- ²⁹ S. B. Majrouh, 'Some Vestiges of Buddhist World-Outlook in our Collective Unconscious', *Afghanistan*, 30/1 (1977): 89–96.
- ³⁰ O. Roy, *Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Roy, *Groups de solidarité au Moyen-Orient et en Asie centrale: États, territoires et réseaux*, Les Cahiers du CERI N° 16 (Paris: Centre d'Études et de Recherches Internationales, 1996).
- ³¹ D. B. Edwards, 'Summoning Muslims: Print, Politics, and Religious Ideology in Afghanistan', *Journal of Asian Studies*, 52/3 (1993): 609–28.
- ³² 'A.-u.-D. Siddiqī, *Da Paktiyā Wolōsī Shā'irān* (Pashto: *Popular/Mass Poets of Paktiya*) (Peshawar: self-published, 1992); D. B. Edwards, 'Words in the Balance: The Poetics of Political Dissent in Afghanistan', in D. Eickelman (ed.), *Russia's Muslim Frontiers: New Directions in Cross-Cultural Analysis* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1993).
- ³³ 'Abd-us-Sattar, *Majmū'at-ul-Khutab* (Pashto: *Collection of Friday Sermons*) (Lahore: 1932).
- ³⁴ Z. Mlātar, *Tālibān aw da Paxto Shi'r* (Pashto: *Religious Students and Pashto Poetry*) (Peshawar: self-published, 1986).
- ³⁵ W. F. Miller, 'Metaphors of Commerce: Trans-Valuing Tribalism in Yemeni Audiocassette Poetry', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 34 (2002): 29–57; Miller, 'Of Songs and Signs: Audiocassette Poetry, Moral Character, and the Culture of Circulation in Yemen', *American*

Ethnologist, 32/1 (2005): 82–99; S. Freitag, 'Visions of the Nation: Theorizing the Nexus between Creation, Consumption, and Participation in the Public Sphere', in R. Dwyer and C. Pinney (eds.), *Pleasure and the Nation: the History, Politics, and Consumption of Public Culture in India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001), 35–75.

³⁶ S. W. A. Shah, *Ethnicity, Islam, and Nationalism: Muslim Politics in the North-West Frontier Province, 1937–47* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1999).

³⁷ W. Khān, with foreword by Sayed Wiqar Ali Shah, *Pashto. Da Āzādāy Tahrīk (Pashto: The Freedom Movement)* (Peshawar: self-published, 1988).

³⁸ S. Amin, 'Gandhi as Mahatma: Gorakhpur District, Eastern UP, 1921–22', in R. Guha and G. Chakravorty Spivak (eds.), *Selected Subaltern Studies* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1988 [1984]), 35–75.

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