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### War in the Hazarajat: Imposed Identities and Flawed Schemes of State Building

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## **War in the Hazarajat: Imposed Identities and Flawed Schemes of State Building**

The existence of a “Hazarajat,” that is, a meaningfully bounded cultural region in the heart of Afghanistan populated by a group distinct from the broadly Pashtun-Persianate ethnic milieu of surrounding areas, generated and continues to generate maladaptive tensions within Afghanistan. The formation of a modern Afghan state necessitated the forceful integration of the Hazara within Kabul’s political sphere in order to maintain political coherence in the context of both internal and external imperial pressure, in terms of both regional Afghan-British tensions and local moves to reinforce state power emanating from the capital. Forceful integration efforts, and specifically the 1888-1894 war conducted by Abd al-Rahman, furthered the coalescence of a discrete Afghan entity yet concomitantly introduced somewhat of a poisoned chalice into Afghan nationhood: a land and people significant in size and distinct from the majority, yet possessing territorial centrality. At the intersection of counterproductive Afghan state building, tenuous tribal politics, and traditional notions of regional self-governance stands the war in the Hazarajat and the lingering tensions it produced.

### A People Apart

The Hazara, on the face of things, stand apart from other major ethnic groups in Afghanistan. They sit outside the Indo-Aryan racial continuum in south-central Asia, being characterized as Asiatic in appearance, with the majority being practitioners of Shia Islam, a minority belief system in a country mostly populated by Sunnis of various backgrounds. Their origin can be approximated but is not definitively known. Modern scholarly consensus traces

their ancestry back to an intermixing between Mongol/Turkic and autochthonic populations, emerging as a distinct group during and after the Mongol invasions of the 1200s and 1300s CE.<sup>1</sup> There are dissenting scholarly opinions on this question, some speculate pre-Mongol Turkic origins, while other academics claim that the Hazara descend from entirely indigenous or entirely Mongol historical populations.<sup>2</sup>

In whichever case, what is clear is that the Hazara have become a distinct and meaningful grouping in the context of Afghan ethnography and ethnopolitical history. This group can be described as Shia Muslim, Dari-speaking (specifically, a Turkic-informed dialect of Dari called Hazaragi), sedentary, and inhabiting the modern Afghan provinces of Ghor, Daykundi, Bamiyan, Ghazni, Uruzgan, Samian, Wardak, and Baghlan to greater and lesser extents.<sup>3</sup> Within these central Hazara territories of Afghanistan, the local majorities often cohabitated with minorities of other ethnicities: Pashtuns in the south, Tajiks and Uzbeks in the north, and Aimaqs to the west. What this paper and others refer to as “the definitive Hazarajat” is a meaningfully Hazara region, but it is not exclusively inhabited by its namesake people. Further, in a more contemporary context, there are significant populations of Hazaras in major Afghan cities, functioning in both discrete Hazara urban communities and as a class of subaltern workers in non-Hazara households.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth Bacon, “The Inquiry into the History of the Hazara Mongols of Afghanistan,” *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology* 7, no. 3 (September 1, 1951), p. 241.

<sup>2</sup> Sayed Askar Mousavi, *The Hazaras of Afghanistan: an Historical, Cultural, Economic and Political Study*. Curzon (1998), pp. 19-43.

<sup>3</sup> Alessandro Monsutti, “Hazara History”, *Encyclopedia Iranica* XII, no. 1 (2003), p. 83.

<sup>4</sup> Melissa Kerr Chioyenda, “The Illumination of Marginality”, *Central Asian Survey* 33, no. 4 (February 2014), pp. 453-54.

It is vital to disentangle Hazara identity from this paper's use of Hazara as an academic exonym. With regards to most of this paper's descriptive and analytic content, "Hazara" is used as above: it refers to a Dari-speaking people of significant Mongol/Central Asian descent living in agriculturalist villages in the central highlands of Afghanistan, practicing Shia Islam. However, such an identity does not fully encapsulate the people who identify as Hazara, who carry on a variety of urban and rural existences across the country of focus and beyond. There exist significant communities of Hazara in the cities of Ghazni, Herat, and Kabul, as well as in the city of Quetta in southern Pakistan.<sup>5</sup> Those communities were extant during the time period examined by this paper, but their growth and coming-of-age occurred because of, and thus after the 1888-1894 war this paper investigates.

Conversely, there are communities historically and geographically grouped with the Hazara who practice Sunni Islam, and a similar ethnic grouping called the Aimaq, who live in western Afghanistan, are traditionally nomadic pastoralists, practice Sunni Islam, but have emerged out of the same historical phenomena (Mongol migration and local acculturation) which produced the Hazara.<sup>6</sup> This paper focuses its attention on definitive members of the Hazara ethnicity dwelling in central Afghanistan, but will also touch on these complexifying relations.

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<sup>5</sup> Mousavi, pp. 139-153.

<sup>6</sup> Niamatullah Ibrahimi, "Shift and Drift in Hazara Ethnic Consciousness: The Impact of Conflict and Migration." *Crossroads Asia Working Paper Series* (September 27, 2012), pp. 4-5.

Finally, it is essential to pick apart not only what the definitively material and physical aspects of the Hazara identity are and how they came to be, but how also those aspects became entrenched in exonomic versus endonomic paradigms of identity. It must be recognized that “entanglements of identity”<sup>7</sup> in the modern context, the strong conceptual ethno-social linkages between Hazara servitude, racial alien-ness, and Shia modes of religious devotion, are states of affairs with discrete and identifiable *exonomic* origins; that is, identification of the Hazara as a Mongoloid-presenting Shia underclass was first done, and done most forcefully, by outsiders.<sup>8</sup>

Internalization of these features by the Hazara themselves as either intrinsic or inescapable aspects of their endonomy, that is, their self-identity and modes of self-reference, came in large part due to (and thus, after) the events that this paper focuses on. In short, a potent mix of internal imperialism; Islamization in a Sunni, state-directed context; and Abd al-Rahman’s interfacing with Pashtun tribal interests; would serve to “activate” these exonomies of identity for the Hazara<sup>9</sup> for the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Premodern and localized modes of Hazara endonomic identity would be displaced parallel to their own geographic displacement after 1894.<sup>10</sup>

The first recorded mention of a “Hazara” people comes from the writings of the Central Asian conqueror Babur in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, who ascribed the term to a variety of groups and places in central Afghanistan. His “Hazara,” which is not fully disentangled from the nomadic “Aimaq,” appear at least partially Mongol in descent, and some spoke a Turco-Mongol language.<sup>11</sup> When

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<sup>7</sup> Farzana Marie, “Confronting Misconstrued Histories: Creative Strategies in the Hazara Struggle toward Identity and Healing,” *Arizona Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* 2, no. 1 (Spring 2013), p. 87.

<sup>8</sup> Ibrahimi, pp. 1-2.

<sup>9</sup> Chioendra, p. 4.

<sup>10</sup> Monsutti, *War and Migration*, pp. 62-63.

<sup>11</sup> Monsutti, *History*, p. 82.

the Hazara acculturated to a totally Persianate linguistic existence is not known, but that was the case at least as early as the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century CE. Such a growth in affinity for Dari-Persian culture may have come about under the Hazara's conversion to Shia Islam in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, during Safavid Persian rule.<sup>12</sup>

Hazara lifeways in the period this paper addresses were different, though not significantly so, from the Afghan median. The Hazara were in broad terms agriculturalists, with a secondary mode of economic production tied to sedentary, village-based cattle grazing and herding.<sup>13</sup> In this sense, they lacked the nomadic, specifically pastoral orientation of the southern Durrani Pashtun, and also were without the more “developed” modes of sedentary, urbanized living prominent among the Ghilzai Pashtun of Afghanistan's east.<sup>14</sup> What nomadism did exist in the Hazarajat was predominantly local and trade caravan-based, fulfilling the need for commercial linkages between thinly settled valleys lacking safe and high volume road networks.<sup>15</sup>

The broader context of Hazara economic and social patterns derives from the relation between mutually reinforcing structures of cultural differentiation and topographic isolation. As a heterodox religious sect residing predominantly in an isolated mountain system in a region broadly lacking consistent functions of state authority, relations to outside groups and locales were greatly lessened relative to Pashtun and Tajik communities in the “outer bounds” of

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<sup>12</sup> Mousavi, p. 204.

<sup>13</sup> Klaus Ferdinand, “Nomad Expansion & Commerce in Central Afghanistan: A Sketch of Some Modern Trends,” *Folk* 4 (1961), p. 126.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 124.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 125.

Afghanistan.<sup>16</sup> Those other major ethnic communities of Afghanistan possessed strong links to their co-ethnics in surrounding polities,<sup>17</sup> engendering a degree of regional connectivity that the Hazara, due to their cultural peculiarities, simply lacked. Afghan Pashtuns maintained strong tribal and economic links across the Hindu Kush into the northwest frontier of British India, while the Tajiks were generally conceived as forming the northeastern boundary of a Persianate cultural continuum extending from Mesopotamia and the Persian Gulf into Central Asia.<sup>18</sup> What would otherwise have been a meaningful linguistic and religious link to Iran was negated by the significant difficulty of merely accessing Hazara territory.

Through-trade in Hazarajat was minimal. The east-west and north-south caravan routes were routed along Herat-Qandahar or Herat-Mazar-e Sharif-Kabul paths (in the case of the former), or Mazar-e Sharif-Kabul-Qandahar (in the latter case).<sup>19</sup> Highly variable topography and heavy snowfall reduced the utility of routes through the center of Afghanistan, which is to say, through Hazara territory.<sup>20</sup> Both the Hazara and the nature of their “native” terrain posed extensive threats to caravan traders, with the former characterized by Abd al-Rahman as raiders and plunderers of caravans in his justification for war upon the ethnic group.<sup>21</sup> Whether Abd al-Rahman’s notions of Hazara banditry were true is unclear and not within the focus of the paper, but it is clear that the Hazarajat lacked the relative connectivity and ease of movement that

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<sup>16</sup> Mousavi, pp. 57-60; Dupree, pp. 5-21.

<sup>17</sup> Louis Dupree, *Afghanistan*. Princeton University Press (1980), pp. 57-61.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 319-321.

<sup>19</sup> Shah Mahmud Hanifi, *Connecting Histories in Afghanistan: Market Relations and State Formation on a Colonial Frontier*. Stanford University Press (2011), pp. 6-8, 51-58.

<sup>20</sup> Monsutti, *War and Migration*, p. 59.

<sup>21</sup> Ferdinand, p. 126.

outlying regions of Afghanistan possessed. As such, Hazara territory was characteristically insular in cultural terms, as well as a lacuna of commercial activity.

The Hazara's relation to state power in this period is not well-known. Regional secular governance flowed from tribal leaders, the *mir*, to subtribal local leaders called *beg*. Also important in local affairs were the *sayyed* or *sayyid*, descendants of the Islamic Prophet Mohammed who held some measure of authority as local notables.<sup>22</sup> The *sayyeds*, who commanded respect and authority due to non-tribal bloodlines, lived and operated beside but not directly within tribal hierarchies led by *mir*s. Thirdly, networks of educated religious leaders, trained in Iranian and Iraqi *madrassas* or religious schools, exercised their own temporal authority parallel to the tribal hierarchies of the *mir* and *beg*.<sup>23</sup> This last category of authority, though perennially present, gained prominence only in the later 20<sup>th</sup> century with the penetration of foreign influence into the region and the activation of conscious Shiism as a primary mode of Hazara identity. As such, explicitly religious Hazara leadership will not be addressed in a significant way by this paper.

For the most part, during the early- and mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, outside influence in the Hazarajat was characterized by intertribal conflicts brought to the region via Hazara disputes with other regional/local Tajik and Uzbek tribal authorities. These networks of tribal leaders and *sayyeds* exercised broad authority within the Hazarajat, and only during the reign of Dost Mohammed in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century did the modern Afghan state first penetrate “intrusively” into traditional

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<sup>22</sup> Ibrahimi, p. 3.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.



Hazara lands.<sup>24</sup> Hazara *mirs* paid taxes to central authority in Kabul as early as the rule of Sher Ali Khan in the 1860s.<sup>25</sup> Some Hazara tribes supported Sher Ali in his unsuccessful fight to defend the throne from Abd al-Rahman after his return from Bukhara in 1880, but most quickly realigned behind the victor. When Abd al-Rahman cemented his control of Kabul and began a reciprocal relationship with the British that focused on funding to centralize and solidify control of his realm, the past disloyal and insurrectionary nature of the Hazara, along with their heterodox religious practices, were portrayed as grave issues.<sup>26</sup> This is to say that the Hazara were generally not in direct and open opposition to Kabul at the conflict's beginning. Indeed, many Hazara *mirs*, particularly in the north of Hazarajat, accepted the sovereignty of Abd al-Rahman and paid taxes to his regime. Rather, early hostilities emerged from state overreach, not latent Hazara insurrectionary tendencies.<sup>27</sup>

### The Conflict's Stage

There is little scholarly consensus on the exact origins of the 1888-1894 conflict in the Hazarajat, but the scholarship of Hazara academic Sayed Askar Mousavi tends to attribute causality to Hazara leadership's reactions to the structural instability and capriciousness of the Afghan state. Incessant conflict between tribal leaders, and more broadly between ethnic groups during this time, as well as increased state tax collection and newly harshened disciplinary measures utilized by Abd al-Rahman to assert control of the country, all incentivized Hazara tribes to dissociate first in terms of non-compliance, and then violence, from the structures that

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<sup>24</sup> Mousavi, pp. 92-94.

<sup>25</sup> Ferdinand, p. 128.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 128-129.

<sup>27</sup> Mousavi, pp. 119-121.

bound the Hazarajat to the Kabul regime.<sup>28</sup> Hazara *mirs* who had enjoyed amenable arrangements with Abd al-Rahman early in his reign, as well as under his predecessor, increasingly found themselves subject to harsh taxes and territorial dispossession. Early resistance to such measures led to mass incarcerations of *mirs* and *begs* identified by state authorities as instigators of insurrection, though nothing as such had occurred at that time. It was one such action, the arrest and exile of the Hazara tribal leader Sayed Jafar to Mazar-e Sharif in northern Afghanistan, that would provoke the ethnic group into widespread open rebellion.<sup>29</sup>

Time must be taken here to make sense of the Afghan state's motivations in utilizing heavy-handed measures against a people who were not especially restive or rebellious in the first place. Contemporary and historical scholarship provides two mutually reinforcing points central to the argument of this paper: the Kabul state's concern for state building, border erection, and internal imperialism; and the Durrani monarchy's equally vital interest in manipulating domestic tribal dynamics to preserve the dynastic security of the regime. On the first point, Abd al-Rahman's reign began the most intense period of internally led domestic state building on the Western model to date in Afghanistan.<sup>30</sup> Prompted and supported by British imperial interests, the monarchy undertook a program of administrative reform and expenditure restructuring that elevated the establishment and enforcement of borders, forts, and a standing military into positions of vital state interest.<sup>31</sup> Such a project required a concomitant expansion of state authority to and across internal and external borders.<sup>32</sup> The Hazarajat was one such area,

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., pp. 118-119.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 121.

<sup>30</sup> Dupree, pp. 415-420.

<sup>31</sup> Hanifi, *Connecting Histories*, pp. 100-103, 119-120.

<sup>32</sup> Ibrahimi, p. 5.

possibly the most prominent within Afghanistan, where traditional means of exercising state power necessitated a negotiated process of devolution-of-authority to indigenous tribal leaders.<sup>33</sup>

The Kabul state could not lean on its blood ties to the Pashtun ethnic plurality of its territory to exercise control here, and nor could it write off the Hazarajat as just another frontier zone to be eventually brought under state control. As an *internal* frontier, continued toleration of the Hazarajat's foreignness served only to dislocate the settled core of the monarchy's realm in Kabul, Ghazni, and Qandahar from the vital commercial centers of Herat and Mazar-e Sharif.

Hazara *Mirs* and *begs* were traditionally expected to pay their accumulated tax revenue forward to the central government, and in return, they would be left with major authority on regional and local issues. Such an arrangement was inimical to Abd al-Rahman's state-building project, and when combined with the decided "otherness" of the Hazara (Shia, non-Pashtun in language and appearance, and their relative isolation in the central highlands) allowed for state perspectives which problematized the Hazarajat as an obstruction to Afghan administrative and territorial integrity, irrespective of their general lack of insurrectionary interest.

The second, related motive in the Durrani monarchy's plan to subjugate the Hazarajat was the extensive potential such a subjugation would have for rebalancing domestic, and specifically Pashtun, tribal relations. The Kabul state's ability to exercise authority in the "heartlands" of eastern and southern Afghanistan relied on the strategic manipulation of Pashtun tribal interests to ensure the security of regime interests.<sup>34</sup> According to academics who disagree with Dupree

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<sup>33</sup> Mousavi, p. 121.

<sup>34</sup> Dupree, pp. 418-419.

on this question, the Afghan state was not a Pashtun state.<sup>35</sup> Indeed, its core administrative apparatus was definitively Persianate. However, the relation of the state to Pashtun tribal movements and interests remained absolutely central to its function as an instrument of authority for its rulers. Further, Pashtun and other Afghan tribal interests emerged out of a premodern, preindustrial context which valued land rights over capital processes, making local and regional negotiations of authority inexorably linked to the question of territory.<sup>36</sup>

The phenomenon of resettling Pashtun communities by force and/or by incentive had precedents in Abd al-Rahman's government. He had done so with thousands of Ghilzai Pashtun in the northeastern Hindu Kush, the Ghilzai being characterized in most academic literature as generally in opposition to the Durrani Pashtun base of support for his regime.<sup>37</sup> By removing them from the strategically valuable, majority Pashtun territories in southeastern Afghanistan and placing them in locales with indigenous non-Pashtun populations, Abd al-Rahman sought to remove them from the immediacy of intra-Pashtun conflict and resettle them among people less tied to the Pashtun-Kabul axis of power. Further, such a transfer of Pashtuns from the center to the fringes allowed a concomitant spread of that Pashtun-Kabul axis' utility in national and tribal politics. What occurred in Hazarajat would, initially, run along similar lines.

### The Kabuli State and Minorities

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<sup>35</sup> Shah Mahmud Hanifi, "Quandaries of the Afghan Nation," in Shahazad Bashir and Robert D. Crews (eds.), in *Under the Drones: Modern Lives in the Afghanistan-Pakistan Borderlands* (Harvard University Press, 2012), pp. 99-100.

<sup>36</sup> Mousavi, pp. 123-125.

<sup>37</sup> Dupree, p. 419.

The Hazara are not the only, or possibly even the most historically significant, Shia-identified minority within the Afghanistan of Abd al-Rahman. Standing in stark contrast to the Hazara in nearly every aspect but their declared religious affiliation were the Qizilbash, a Persianized Turkic minority prominent in the urban communities of Kabul and Qandahar.<sup>38</sup> This group became progressively more closely affiliated with the Afghan state through their dual utilization as a “loyalist fifth column” and as literate (in Persian) administrators by the Durrani monarchy from the mid-1700s to the period of focus for this paper and beyond.<sup>39</sup> Though broad anti-Shia strictures were issued by Abd al-Rahman as part of his Islamization campaigns, the Qizilbash were by that point so integrated into, and such an integral part of, the Afghan state structure that nominal displays of *taqiyya* or public displays of majoritarian religious adherence were enough to guarantee their safety. At the time of this paper, the Qizilbash were decidedly “on the side of” Abd al-Rahman, and not their co-religionists.<sup>40</sup> Their nature as willing and critical participants in Afghan state formation made forceful normalization of Sunni practices both unnecessary and unadvisable. Further, their specific geographic distribution within urban centers untied them from centrifugal arrangements of power in the tribal hinterlands so commonly discussed within conventional Afghan histories. Lacking either urbanization or institutional power within the state, the Hazara could not help but become a target for forceful incorporation.

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<sup>38</sup> Dupree, p. 334.

<sup>39</sup> Solaiman Fazel, “Ethnohistory of the Qizilbash in Kabul: Migration, State, and a Shia Minority,” (Ph.D Thesis, Indiana University, 2017), pp. 5-6

<sup>40</sup> Mohammed Hasan Kakar, *Government and Society in Afghanistan: The Reign of Amir 'Abd Al-Rahman Khan*. University of Texas Press (1979), p. 99.

As another brief point of comparison, the position of the inhabitants of Nuristan or Kafiristan must be explicated to obtain a fuller sense of the situation that the Hazara found themselves in at the close of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Similar to the Hazara, the Kafiristanis (a derogatory appellation given to this people before their Islamization under Abd al-Rahman) maintained a relatively isolated existence in a series of narrow valleys on the periphery of more settled lands.<sup>41</sup> Further, that geographic or topographic solitude allowed for the maintenance of heterodox or even foreign (to the macro-regional Muslim majority) religious and cultural practices. As indicated by the appellation of *kafir*, inhabitants of what would become Nuristan traditionally practiced a polytheistic model of religion<sup>42</sup> related to Indo-European pantheons familiar to students of Western and South Asian history.<sup>43</sup> As such, the Kafiristanis lived under a form of tribalism little informed by either Islamic cultural practices or regional dynamics. Though the specific nature of their “otherness” differed from the Hazara in terms of degree, that they were “other” is not in doubt.

The Islamization of Kafiristan occurred in much the same context as the subjugation of the Hazarajat, though in the latter case there was less requisite emphasis on conversion as such.<sup>44</sup> Abd al-Rahman in the Hazara case utilized Islamization as *one of* the political tools available to motivate Sunni opposition to a heterodox but still functionally Islamic Hazarajat, while in Kafiristan Islamization was *the* necessary mode by which the region could and would be brought

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<sup>41</sup> A.C. Jewett, *An American Engineer in Afghanistan*. Edited by Marjorie Jewett Bell. University of Minnesota Press (1948), p. 75.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 84.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 288-290.

<sup>44</sup> Amin Tarzi, “Islam, Shari‘a, and State Building under ‘Abd Al-Rahman Khan,” in Nile Green (ed.), *Afghanistan's Islam: From Conversion to the Taliban*. University of California Press, (2017), pp. 131-132, 137-138.

under Kabul's thumb. Here, again, substantial numbers of Pashtun tribesmen were settled within the freshly designated Nuristani people to further link the region to structures of state power and modify the relations of those Pashtuns themselves to the state.<sup>45</sup> The notion of solidifying a common Islamic jurisprudence and Sunni mode of worship across sovereign Afghan territory was part and parcel of Abd al-Rahman's two campaigns of internal imperialism seen here, but its utilization differed drastically.

### The Frontier at War

The region of Hazara territory that was specifically the focus of resistance to state authority in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, southwest Hazarajat, became characterized during this time as *Yaghistan* or "rebels' land."<sup>46</sup> It was composed of the modern province of Uruzgan, as well as districts in Ghazni, Zabol, Qandahar, and Helmand, i.e., regions bordering major Pashtun-dominated population centers.<sup>47</sup> This belt of mixed dryland farms and highland pasture was dominated by the Hazara. However, it was also proximate to Pashtun majorities and included Pashtun minorities.<sup>48</sup>

Incensed by a public castigation of rebellious Hazara activities given by Abd al-Rahman, local conflicts in ethnically mixed Hazara/Pashtun regions boiled over into low-scale violence.

Promising new lands and property for the Pashtun, particularly the Mohmand and Ahmadzai

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<sup>45</sup> Dupree, p. 419.

<sup>46</sup> Ibrahimi, p. 6.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., pp. 6-7.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 6; Mousavi, pp. 129-131.

tribes, the Afghan king assembled an army with a claimed strength of over 100,000 fighting men to prosecute the war in Yaghistan. The majority of those troops were tribal Pashtun volunteers.<sup>49</sup>

Naturally, clashes between Hazara insurrectionaries and local state-backed groups emerged here first.<sup>50</sup> Such clashes took the form of limited but directed violence towards local Hazara notables and their families. Sayed Jafar's arrest and subsequent exile took place in this context.

Importantly, these first actions against Hazara leadership were not carried out just by Pashtun and non-Hazara state-allied groups, but by elements within the Sunni Hazara community as well.<sup>51</sup> Abd al-Rahman's "calls to violence" against the Hazara were initially religious in character; part and parcel of the government's wider campaigns of Islamization that sought to bring out a more unitary Sunni Islamic mode of national unity among the diverse and disunited groups that dwelled in Afghan state territory.<sup>52</sup> Identifying enemies of the state first by their religious heterodoxy encouraged infighting in communities, specifically, the Hazara who possessed religious divisions, but had not before acted upon them in a major way. This intra-Hazara conflict came to a head when a regional Pashtun government appointee fined both sides in the struggle, Shia and Sunni alike, a substantial sum of 100,000 rupees each as a result of the fighting. Neither side was able to provide the necessary funds, and when tax collectors from Kabul arrived in 1890 to secure the fines, the two Hazara factions were attacked together and defeated by state forces.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Ferdinand, pp. 127-128.

<sup>50</sup> Ibrahimi, p. 6.

<sup>51</sup> Mousavi, p. 121.

<sup>52</sup> Kakar, p. 311.

<sup>53</sup> Mousavi, p. 122.



This incident, the first real direct conflagration between the Hazara as a whole and the forces of Abd al-Rahman, demonstrates the limited analytical validity of the “Shia identity” so focused upon by contemporary ethnographers and historians of the Hazara. In real terms, the Shia-ness of the Hazara majority is not what the Afghan state chose to penalize with insurmountable financial burdens and state-endorsed militant action. Rather, it was the autonomy of the Hazarajat itself. The supposedly essential application of “Shia identity” upon the Hazara is not a natural extrusion of their lived experiences and traditional lifeways, but rather an economic imposition leveraged by the Afghan state to further developments at best orthogonal to questions of religious affiliation.

The defeat of Hazara fighters in 1890 was not the end but rather the prelude to real violence in the region. Mousavi identifies that initial conflagration as “Phase One” in the Hazarajat’s subjugation, followed by a Phase Two running from 1890-1893.<sup>54</sup> The Afghan state progressively and consistently tightened its authority over the region by striking directly at traditional structures of power among the Hazara elite. To do so, waves of *mirs*, *begs*, and *sayyeds* from the Hazarajat were summoned to Kabul by authorities, stripped of any residual legal power that the Afghan state structure accorded them, and consequently imprisoned or exiled. In their place were positioned Pashtun administrators and accompanying detachments of Kabuli soldiers to collect newly increased taxes and defend against the ensuing modes of Hazara resistance.<sup>55</sup> Once it was understood by local leadership that this was not a piecemeal response

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., pp. 122-123.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 123.

to past insurrection but a totalizing shift in regional governance, it became a singular and vital imperative to act with force against the Afghan state, and resistance was immediate and widespread.

Armed resistance in Phase Two of the war in the Hazarajat began in 1892 with an assault on a state garrison by Hazara forces of the Pahlawan tribe in response to a sexual assault on the wife of a prominent local.<sup>56</sup> The success of that operation encouraged widespread uprisings throughout the region, which were soon accompanied by militant action on the part of the Kabuli Hazara community and even some support from Afghan state officials in the Hazarajat who were dissatisfied with government policy. Critical differences between insurrection in Mousavi's first and second phase was that the latter phase of rebellion had an identified leadership and specific national political aims, while the former had neither.<sup>57</sup> Importantly, that leader, Mohammad Azim Beg, was not a self-declared Hazara nationalist or revolutionary. Rather, he had been one of the first *mirs* to pledge the allegiance of he and his tribe to Abd al-Rahman in the 1880s, and subsequently helped to coordinate the Afghan state's early moves to reinforce its authority in the Hazarajat. That an individual so close to Abd al-Rahman's structures of power would choose to side with a local rebellion over state authority is evidence both of the "activation" of Hazara identity due to outside pressure, and the severity of that pressure in itself.

Mir Azim Beg organized a meeting of Hazara *mirs* in early 1892, which came to be known as the *Jirga-e Au Qoal*. That conference established the explicit aim of the rebellion not as the re-

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 123.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 125.

imposition of traditional authority, autonomy, and functional independence in the Hazarajat, but rather the overthrow of Abd al-Rahman and his regime.<sup>58</sup> Perhaps this is because Hazara leadership understood the coming war as one centered on the nature of state authority, rather than a defense of any sort of ethno-religious proto-identity.

Aided by the relative topographic isolation of the region, rebel forces were able to secure major points of entry to “upper” Hazarajat and defeat initial state detachments sent to quell the uprising. Yaghistan, around the southern fringes of Hazara territory, remained under state control.<sup>59</sup> Here took place the major action of the war and its ensuing ethnographic consequences.

The failings of the rebellion are numerous and not entirely within this paper’s scope, but they will be briefly listed for context. Firstly, the Hazara rebels’ explicit identification of regime change in Kabul as their overarching motivation for prosecuting the war reaffirmed state propaganda that the Hazara were heretics and traitors who sought to disrupt the essential ordering of the nation, thus lending more support through armed volunteerism among the Pashtun tribes. Secondly, there was intermittent infighting among Hazara *mirs* and their men over local revenue impositions and struggles for intra-Hazara power, hurting the capability of Hazara forces to cooperate in a united front. Conversely, Afghan state forces operated under a unified and relatively stable structure of command that lent them the ability to more effectively coordinate and bring force to bear on pockets of resistance. Lastly, just as the topography of the

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 123.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p. 124.

Hazarajat isolated the region from the easy exercise of state power, it also isolated individual Hazara communities from each other. Each settled locality of the Hazarajat operated independently as an insurrectionary enclave within relatively impassable mountains, preventing the Hazara from leveraging significant cooperation between rebel groups.<sup>60</sup> All these factors enabled the numerically superior and better equipped state forces to triumph by late 1893, and secure a negotiated peace with Hazara leadership by 1894.

### A Broken Land

The results of the peace in Yaghistan were dually immense and traumatic. All positions of leadership and governance, once held by local Hazara authority figures, were given either to transplanted Pashtun appointees or local Hazara deemed loyal to Kabul and paid via central government salaries. These government representatives were known as *arbabs*.<sup>61</sup> Grazelands in the south, as well as proximate farmland, were transferred to the ownership and usage of Pashtun nomads who had been promised such compensation for supporting the war effort in the beginning stages of rebellion.<sup>62</sup> This had the dual effect of dislocating as many as 400,000 Hazara from their traditional lands<sup>63</sup> while also transferring vast territories to a population who, in the state's later assessment, were incapable of effectively utilizing that land.

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., pp. 128-131.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 132.

<sup>62</sup> Ferdinand, p. 128.

<sup>63</sup> Ibrahimi, pp. 4-5.

Hopes that “settling” the Pashtun in southern Hazarajat quickly gave way to the realization that their new land grant was barely utilized, and came at the costs of a loss in regional economic productivity and thus state revenue.<sup>64</sup> Recognizing the nature but possibly not the extent of their miscalculation, Afghan state officials gradually re-transitioned land rights for definitively arable territory in former Yaghistan back to their original Hazara inhabitants from 1895 into the early reign of Amanullah Khan, Abd al-Rahman’s grandson.<sup>65</sup> At the same time, land identified as productive pasture remained in the hands of newly settled Pashtun, creating a dynamic in which the Pashtun nomads regularly crossed, camped within, and extracted local concessions from the extant Hazara farming communities. In the end, which was not an end, but only a stage for later ethnic conflagrations, the Hazara emerged defeated, broken, and made subservient to the Kabuli state, while the state itself gained nominal control of the Hazarajat at the expense of a heightened potential for later violence.

### Conclusions

Characterizing the war in the Hazarajat as an essentially sectarian conflict passes over the very tangible aspects of state development and core-periphery power relations which fed into the war’s inception, and which fell out of its end. The Hazara, once an isolated and definitively premodern people on the “inner edge” of the Afghan state, were brought fully within it through antagonistic modes of internal imperialism that both begat an essentially negative and foreign “Hazara identity”, as well as engendered deep animosity and distrust between the Hazara and the Afghan state. These modes of state building in Afghanistan’s interior, though nominally

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<sup>64</sup> Mousavi, pp. 94-97, 133-137.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., pp. 96-97.

modernizing and integrationist, still operated upon paradigms of tribal politics inimical to constructing a viable Afghan nation-state.

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