



Edited by Robert D. Crews and Amin Tarzi

THE TALIBAN AND THE CRISIS OF AFGHANISTAN

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AFGHANISTAN

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Remembering the Taliban

Lutz Rzehak

The reign of the Taliban is over, but what remains? How Afghans recall the past and preserve memories of the Taliban era are questions of crucial importance. The civil war and the Taliban are still part of individual experience today. Political alignment, ethnic affiliation, and, not least, personal histories shape the varying ways in which Afghans assess the Taliban and their way of governance. Recent events in Afghan history are often recalled in ways that transform stories about the past into meaningful history for the present.

In Afghan society, the written word is an important, but not all-embracing or constitutive, element of social communication. One must look instead to the oral transmission of knowledge. This mode of transmitting knowledge about contemporary Afghan history conforms to distinct forms of traditional folk literature, reworking individual experiences into a collective one adapted to the construction of cultural memory. Popular poetry, songs, prayers, storytelling, and other, more casual, forms of communication reveal how Afghans

adapt particular rhetorical patterns to construct oral accounts of recent history, including that of the civil war and the reign of the Taliban, to shape popular opinion in the present. Drawing on historical narrations and songs from early periods of Afghan history, the first part of this essay reconstructs the established tradition of folklore. The second then compares these traditional genres with new kinds of folklore in order to show both continuity and change.

I take my material from interviews and participatory observation conducted during trips in 2002 and 2005 to the southwestern province of Nimroz. Ethnically, the southwestern part of Afghanistan is inhabited by Baluch, Persian-speaking groups (Farsiwan, Tajik, Parahi, Anardarahi, and others), and Pashtuns (mostly of the Ghilzai tribe, who also use Persian as their primary language in this region). Persian is the main language of administration and education in Nimroz Province, whereas Baluchi may be used, along with Persian, as the *lingua franca* in everyday communication, even by non-Baluch people. During both trips I lived in the household of a Baluch family, which provided me the opportunity to follow casual communication in everyday life.¹ The members of this household belong to the Baluch Shayrzi tribe. They have close marriage ties with the Nurzi tribe, whose members may identify themselves either as Baluch or Pashtuns.² My hosts had largely been stock farmers until the catastrophic drought that began in 1997—an occurrence that many interpreted as divine punishment for the crimes of the Taliban (an interpretation reinforced by the ending of the drought in the winter of 2002–2003, one year after the collapse of the Taliban). Locals then shifted to earning a living through trade and occasional jobs, including cross-border drug trafficking. None of my hosts was associated with the Taliban movement, and no other informants admitted to having been. However, drug trafficking necessitates involvement

with the producers and suppliers of drugs, who in this case are usually Pashtuns from Helmand Province and who may have been associated with the Taliban.

The greater part of Nimroz is desert and remains uninhabited. The majority of the population lives in the southwestern part of the province where the Helmand River forms a delta on both sides of the border of Iran and Afghanistan and flows into a large lake without an outlet (the *Hamun-e Helmand*). Thus, expansive deserts separate all of the important settlement areas of Nimroz from the central parts of Afghanistan. Both in Afghan Nimroz and on the Iranian side of the border the population consists mainly of Baluch, who maintain close cross-border family ties with each other. Like many Pashtun tribes who live near the border with Pakistan, the Baluch belong to the “free tribes” (*qabayil-e azad*) of Afghanistan and enjoy some privileges, especially in frontier affairs. Officials tolerate the fact that many of them have two identity cards, a *tazkira* from Afghanistan and a *shinasname* from Iran. Some Baluch have Pakistani documents as well. They can cross the border easily and almost without restriction. In 2004 a new bridge was built over the Helmand River near Zaranj, and an international checkpoint was opened there; however, Baluch use neither the bridge nor the checkpoint. Only a hundred meters away, and still in plain view of the border officials, they cross the river that forms the frontier by boat—without any control. Even some members of the local administration of the province are said to keep two households, one in Afghanistan and another in Iran. Situated seven kilometers from the border with Iran, the administrative center of the province is Zaranj—a young town that was founded in 1970 and that, for this reason, may also be called Shar-e Naw, or “New City,” by local people.

According to local informants, the Taliban conquered the province of Nimroz twice. In January 1995, Taliban military units took the

city of Dilaram in the southwestern part of Farah Province.³ This point is strategically important for Nimroz, because here one has to leave the main circle road that connects Kabul, Kandahar, and Herat in order to enter the province.⁴ When the Taliban appeared in Dilaram, the local mujahedin government of Nimroz started negotiations with them. Both sides agreed that Taliban troops would not enter the province of Nimroz as long as it remained unclear which group would hold power in Kabul. If the Taliban succeeded in taking Kabul, the mujahedin would hand Nimroz over to them without resistance. People say that the Taliban ignored this agreement and entered Nimroz Province only a few days later. Local mujahedin forces under the leadership of Karim Brahui did not resist and withdrew to neighboring regions in Iran.

Soon after seizing Nimroz, the Taliban appointed a governor (*wali*) with a certain standing in local society. His name was Hamidullah Niyazmand, and he is said to belong to the Baluch Brahui tribe, the same tribe as the leader of the local mujahedin, Karim Brahui. The ancestors of Hamidullah Niyazmand had formerly lived in Nimroz, and some people still remember that his father worked as a mullah in some villages of the province. Hamidullah Niyazmand himself grew up and was educated in Pakistan and spoke neither Baluchi nor Persian. Under his rule Urdu became the official language of provincial administration, and only Pashto was accepted along with it. Baluch and Persian-speaking persons who applied to local officials and did not know Urdu or Pashto were turned away. However, people remember that Hamidullah Niyazmand was quite acquainted with local traditions, and that their customs were widely respected at this time.

Later on, Hamidullah Niyazmand was replaced by a new governor named Mullah Ghani. People remember that in the main he followed the same principles of governance as his predecessor. He did

not rule for a long time, because in the meantime local mujahedin forces managed to summon up their strength and attack the Taliban on three sides. They reconquered Zaranj quickly and ruled again for some weeks. But when the Taliban captured Herat on September 5, 1995, and the strong mujahedin leader of Herat, Ismail Khan, fled to Iran, Taliban forces started a new attack on Zaranj. Once again the local mujahedin of Nimroz did not offer any resistance and, like Ismail Khan, withdrew to Iran, as they had done before.

Locals remember all subsequent Taliban governors as very hostile and barbarous persons who came from Pakistan and did not have the faintest idea about local customs. Sher Malang spoke Pashto, but persons who met him say that they heard only rude things from him. During his reign the local library, with more than fifteen thousand books, was burned down. Locals in Nimroz believe that Sher Malang, who wielded a stick and struck people with it, considered them to be Shiites due to their close relations with persons on the Iranian side of the border. They also recall that Sher Malang and his men had an order from the Central Council (*shura*) of the Taliban in Kandahar to kill all males in Nimroz and to marry all females in order to put an end to this kind of “unbelief.” Undoubtedly there were cases of violence, but no mass executions or forced marriages are reported.

The successor to Sher Malang was Mullah Muhammad Rasul. Locals say that he was a close associate of Mullah Omar. Mullah Muhammad Rasul tried to bring cross-border trafficking under his control and to amass a personal fortune in the process. Under his rule, massive economic pressure was added to ethnic and religious discrimination. The Taliban confiscated land, private houses, and shops. Drug smuggling was the main source of income for the local Taliban at the time.

Mullah Muhammad Rasul founded a new city called Ghurghuri

seventy kilometers to the northeast of Zaranj in the middle of the desert in order to draw the local population away from the frontier regions with Iran. He declared Ghurghuri the new administrative center of Nimroz and moved all local offices to this city. There had been some Pashtun settlements in the region of Ghurghuri before, and people believe that the Taliban clearly felt safer in a Pashtun environment. The Taliban did not succeed, however, in moving the population of Zaranj to the new city.

When U.S. troops carried out an air raid on Zaranj on November 13, 2001, Mullah Muhammad Rasul fled, together with other Taliban. People say that they all went back to Pakistan. Local mujahedin forces soon returned from Iran. They let the Taliban flee and came into power without fighting. The former governor of the local mujahedin, Karim Brahui, has once again become the governor of the province.⁵

Oral transmission of history is a general phenomenon, but in a country like Afghanistan it is of special importance. The Persian language, officially called Dari since the 1960s in Afghanistan, has more than a thousand-year tradition of writing and literacy. Historiography has been an elaborate genre of Persian literature from the very beginning, and it has served as a model for historical writing in many other Islamic languages. This applies especially to Pashto, which has, at a minimum, a five-hundred-year-old tradition of writing.

For social communication, however, Afghans do not necessarily confine themselves to these very sophisticated and highly elaborate forms, styles, and genres of writing. This is not only related to a comparatively high rate of illiteracy. In many spheres of Afghan everyday life, writing is often less important than in most other societies. Consequently, Afghans tend to attach more importance to the spoken word. Eloquence, poetic talent, narrative art, and other rhetorical

gifts are held in high esteem. Beauty of language is not seen as a superfluous ornamentation of oration. Rather, language is a thing of beauty. The aesthetic of oration holds much power of persuasion.⁶

This also applies to the transmission of knowledge in everyday communication. There is a lively tradition of storytelling in Afghanistan.⁷ Narratives, legends, tales, and stories are told for entertainment and for education as well. Popular knowledge of Islam is transmitted in narratives of the lives, extraordinary adventures, pious deeds, and attributes of the prophets and saints.⁸ Similar narratives of historical events transmit common knowledge of history.

How does this transmission of historical knowledge work? The following story is very popular in Afghanistan. It is about Amir Abdul Rahman Khan, who ruled from 1880 to 1901 and who is widely known as the “Iron Amir.”

One day a woman came to the court of Amir Abdul Rahman Khan and said: “A man kidnapped me, brought me to his home and assaulted me.” In order to show that a man would never assault a woman without any reason, Abdul Rahman Khan ordered his men: “Bring needle and thread!” His servants brought needle and thread. Abdul Rahman Khan took the needle into his hand and gave the thread to the woman. Then he said to her: “I will turn the needle and you will thread it.” As much as the woman tried to thread the needle, she couldn’t get the thread into the eye of the needle. Finally she said to Abdul Rahman Khan: “Keep the needle still so that I can thread it!” The Amir became really angry now, and he said: “I see, you also stayed still so that this man could assault you. If you would have turned and moved like I turned the needle now, this man could not have assaulted you.” He surrendered the woman to his men and said: “Bring her into

prison because she made fun of the men.” Thus his men imprisoned the woman.⁹

It is unclear whether the incident reported in this story really happened or not.¹⁰ This story is nonetheless well known among Afghans, and it can be classified as belonging to the traditional folklore of Afghanistan. The story not only keeps alive the memory of Amir Abdul Rahman Khan as a hard-hearted and intransigent ruler. It has another and more important message as well: in a country where women are not even allowed to testify in court, they have no opportunity to appear as plaintiffs unless they want to be accused themselves.

In many languages of Afghanistan this kind of short prose story recounting more or less concrete historical events is called *riwayat*, which means both “metaphorical short story” or “narration,” on the one hand, and “tradition” or “transmission,” on the other.¹¹ In Persian (Dari) and Pashto, the words *hikayat* and *qissa* may also be used to describe short stories of this kind, which, however, are not necessarily about specified historical incidents. The same can be said for short stories called *naki* in Baluchi. Persian formulas like “once,” “one day” (*roz-e, yak roz, yak waqt*), or “the matter is that” (*hal in ast ki*), and their equivalents in other languages of Afghanistan are typical introductions to this kind of short prose story on more or less specified historical events in contrast to real fiction, as in fairy tales, which usually start with the formula “Once upon a time” (*yak-e bud, yak-e nabud*, literally: “there was, there was not”).¹²

Reports on historical events transmitted successfully in the form of *riwayat* belong to a type of text in which each part has a clearly defined function for the structure and meaning of the entire text. Stories are generated when singular events are correlated to each other, not only temporally and causally, but by a final idea, which shows common features of finality and imparts a metaphorical idea.

Power of persuasion is thus emotional and aesthetic, rather than merely logical. Moreover, not only do these stories help keep in memory a particular historical event and the meaning attributed to it; they also present a narrative pattern for successful transmission of this historical knowledge. In short prose stories like *riwayat*, historical knowledge is always handed down together with the narrative form for transmission.

Historical events preserved and transmitted in cultural memory by means of well-established genres of folk literature like *riwayat* usually date back to older periods of history. These events do not belong to the individual experience of the persons who tell these stories or who listen to them today. No one can prove that an incident reported in such stories actually happened or not, and there is no need for such proof, because the main message of a *riwayat* is its metaphorical meaning and not the story behind it.

Stories in the genre of *riwayat* are always *meaningful stories* about the past that were successfully kept in cultural memory in order to become meaningful history for the present. Cultural memory, as it is transmitted in these genres of folk literature, is based upon specific codes of narration, on the one hand, and becomes supra-individual experience and objective culture, on the other, because it no longer depends upon the experience lived within individual biographies.¹³ In a society where an aesthetic model of language is held in high esteem, stories in the genre of *riwayat*, together with other genres of literature, define the basics of cultural identity.

The civil war and the reign of the Taliban also belong to the past, but they are still part of the individual experience of most people who live in Afghanistan today. Remembrance of these events belongs to communicative memory: all participants who have a stake in this common discourse have more or less equal rights to form opinions based

on the experiences of individuals, kin-groups, tribes, or other social groups. Yet transmission of this experience cannot be subject to those strong codes that are characteristic of traditional genres of folk literature, nor can this individual experience be transformed into supra-individual or collective experience as easily as was the case with traditional folk literature on historical themes.

It is almost a commonplace in contemporary rhetorical theory that the background and intention of a speaker as well as the audience and the context of communication are crucial determinants of rhetorical choices. When a foreign scholar conducts an interview and asks a person for memories about the Taliban, this person will choose other rhetorical and argumentative patterns than would be used in habitual communication with friends and relatives. In interviews, more literate persons tend to give a chronological account of the events, including temporal and causal links and putting personal experience aside.

Once I asked a person to tell me how the Taliban came to Nimroz. The interviewee had studied at Kabul University. People said that he was an officer in the intelligence services in Nimroz and neighboring provinces, which represented a sign of education in their eyes.¹⁴ He started his narrative with a report of the well-known political events of 1978. Then he gave a detailed chronological account of the civil war and its international ramifications. I am sure he would have finished with the American attacks against Afghanistan after September 11, 2001, if we were not interrupted. In his lengthy response he never said a word about himself.

Less literate and illiterate persons tended to confine their narration to particular events without chronological specification. Every narrative could be given an imaginary headline that clearly captures what the story is about, such as “How I was forbidden to speak my language at the governor’s office,” “How the Taliban burned down the

library,” “How the Taliban tried to frighten us away from Zaranj,” “How the Taliban raped Iranian boys,” “How my brother was arrested for possession of firearms,” and so on. Substituting the part for the whole, such events were reported to represent a certain aspect of this period of history.

Phrases like “one day” or “once” (*yak maughe* in Baluchi; *yak roz* in Persian) were typical openings for such narratives. Informants frequently used phrases such as “for example” (*masalan*) or “this is how the Taliban were” (*ame raz atant taliban* in Baluchi; *intur budand talibha* in Persian) to show that a particular event stands for a general idea. In Persian (Dari), people can express their attitude toward the Taliban by choosing a corresponding plural suffix. In Pashto the plural of *talib* is always *taliban*, whereas in Persian one can say either “taliban” (with the suffix *-an*) or “talibha” (with the suffix *-ha*). The suffix *-ha* is universal and applicable to any class of noun. More limited in application, the suffix *-an* may denote humans, is more literary, and can be used especially if one wishes to express respect. Thus the plural of “compatriot” (*hamwatan*) or “my dear” (*aziz*) is always expressed as “hamwatanan” or “azizan.” No one would say “hamwatanha” or “azizha.” Conversely, in Persian, people tend to prefer the form *talibha*, because *taliban* (with the suffix *-an*) would pay too much tribute to the Taliban.¹⁵

Usually interviews were conducted at gatherings in the guestroom of a private house. Other persons listened to the interviews, and communication could easily turn into common discussion. Once I asked a person whose name was Dastagir to tell me how he was arrested for possession of firearms. He had once mentioned the fact before. Instead of telling this story himself, Dastagir asked his brother to tell me how he was arrested under the Taliban.

The time of the Taliban was a time when, for example, the Taliban came to Nimroz. Then they found out that Dastagir

had a firearm. One Talib took Dastagir and brought him to the intelligence agency. He hit Dastagir so much that his body became completely green. He said: "I swear to kill you. You must give up the firearm." [*Addressing Dastagir:*] You gave up the firearm. Then you sat at home for some months until you healed. When you healed the Talib [came again and] said: "Do you have other arms?" He [Dastagir] said: "No. God forbid! It was only one. I gave this one to you." And so his life continued on then. People, for example, were much afraid of the government at this time. Especially Persian-speaking people and Baluch. If you knew Pashto you could do everything. You could go to every office, if your language was Pashto. You could do everything. Nobody asked where you were coming from and where you were going. If you spoke Persian or Baluchi they thought you were cursing at them. This is how they were.¹⁶

The narrative was not limited to the incident when Dastagir was arrested. Recounting this event, the narrator tried to represent a more general aspect of the Taliban era, defined by the fact that Baluch in general faced discrimination, whereas Pashtuns enjoyed many privileges only because they were Pashtuns and because they knew Pashto. This informant presented this idea here in a very direct way without sophisticated rhetorical approaches, but Dastagir asked his brother Gholam Nabi to tell this story because his brother was a talented narrator. He knew that Gholam Nabi would tell this story better than he could have done himself.

Gholam Nabi has worked as a shepherd most of his life and is well acquainted with the tradition of storytelling. He is completely illiterate, but almost every evening one can hear the men and women of his house laughing at his jokes and droll stories. The oratory of such persons is held in high esteem. People not only listen to them when they

tell traditional folk stories, but, as we have seen, narration about events from the recent past can also be delegated to such experienced storytellers, who are appointed as *guardians of narrative memory*.

Such experienced narrators know exactly what people expect from them. Sometimes they even try to generate stories that follow the structure of the well-established genre of *riwayat* when they are talking about events from the recent past.¹⁷ Usually such narratives still show certain rhetorical deficits. However, the following example demonstrates that the same experienced narrator, Gholam Nabi, not only recounted an event from the recent past, but intended to give the reported incident a more common idea and to entertain his audience at the same time. The narrative was also recorded during casual conversation in a private guesthouse.

Once a Baluch married his daughter to a Pashtun. This happened some years ago, twenty years ago. Well, the Pashtun came here, he was working and then he married, started a family. Then he took his wife and went to his homeland. I don't remember where this was, in [the province of] Helmand, in [the province of] Kandahar, or in [the provincial center of Helmand] Lashkar Gah. Well, he took her and went away . . . He brought her away one or two years after the wedding. Later on the father also set off. [He said to himself:] "I'll see how my daughter is—if she has not died, if she is still alive, if she was not imprisoned, how she is doing." Well, the man set off. At that time there were not so many cars and such facilities, just a camel or a horse. One night he stopped here, one night he stopped there, he traveled for several days and nights. Well, he went to the place where the house of his son-in-law was. He came to the village and asked: "Where is the house of that person?" One [person] said: "It is here." Another

[person] said: "It is there." And the poor man was so exhausted. Finally he found the house. Well, he found the house and went there. He saw his son-in-law and his father. They all welcomed each other. Then they went into the house. They gave much bread and tea to him. Well, so he was sitting there. One night went by and a new day began. Then he said: "I came to my daughter. I want to meet my daughter and to know if she is okay, how her life is, if she is doing well or not." [The Pashtun] said: "We still have time. You will see her." More days went by. A long time later the Baluch said: "I didn't come to you. I don't want to see you. I can well do without seeing you. I came to see my daughter." [The Pashtun] became embarrassed. First he said: "That's not our custom. We are not allowed to show our wives to anybody, no matter if he is her father or somebody else." Then the man said: "But she is my daughter. I cared for her, she slept at one place with me, she got up with me, and after all she is my child! And now you are hiding here from me." The Pashtun said: "I do not hide her. You may meet her behind a curtain." Then they hung a curtain in the room. The girl was sitting on one side and her father on the other side. Well, they welcomed each other and enquired after their health. The father asked his daughter how she was doing, how her life was. The girl said: "You see how I am doing, don't you? Why are you asking?" Then the old man went away from his daughter. He got on his old jackass and came back. This is the way the Pashtun did. Over. The program is over. [*Laughs*]¹⁸

This incident was reported like an ethnic joke to stereotype Pashtun men as strong and uncompromising guardians of their daughters and wives. Often this stereotype serves as an explanation for the harsh

policy of the Taliban toward women in all parts of Afghanistan where they had power. In Nimroz, where a considerable number of Baluch give their daughters to Pashtuns in order to strengthen economic ties for drug trafficking, this was indeed a true-life story that had another very topical message as well: never give your daughter to a Pashtun unless you don't want to see her anymore.

When Gholam Nabi told this story, he obviously tried to follow the pattern of traditional folk stories. The main protagonist remained anonymous. In this case the name of the protagonist was not important for the final idea of the story. The fact that he was Baluch is sufficient information. All singular events of the plot were combined in precise chronological order. The narrator included details that were not necessary for the plot, but that aimed to affect the listeners emotionally and to keep them in suspense—for example, when he mentioned how the Baluch became exhausted when he was searching for the house of his son-in-law, his characterization as a “poor man,” or the pitiful statement that the Baluch came back on an “old jackass,” although at the beginning it was said that he traveled by horseback or camel.

Gholam Nabi told the whole story nearly to the end in Baluchi. When he said the last sentence (still in Baluchi), “This is the way the Pashtuns did,” he looked into the faces of the listeners and felt that they were expecting something more. Then he suddenly switched to Persian and added a phrase (“Over. The program is over”) that all persons in the audience knew from Iranian television. He even said this phrase with the typical pronunciation of Iran, one that sounds quite funny from the lips of an Afghan. This code-switching created the punch line that the story itself was missing, but that people nonetheless anticipated. The story had a rhetorical deficit, and the experienced narrator knew how to compensate for it. Here the payoff of the joke was in the narrator's performance. This story can thus be re-

garded as a *riwayat* in nascent state. For successful transmission in the tradition of *riwayat*, the story still needs a punch line that would express the metaphorical idea and that would be an irredeemable part of the narrative structure of the story.

The following narrative about an incident that happened during the reign of the Taliban was given by a Persian-speaking officer of the local intelligence agency at a gathering of elders and tribal chiefs in a private house. It also contains a *riwayat* in nascent state, but this *riwayat* remained imperfect for other reasons.

The matter was that in sixty . . . eighty one [A.D. 2002] I went to Kabul. I joined a tribal meeting like we are sitting now. [There was] a doctor whose name was Doctor Abdullah and who was from Kabul, of course, and I was acquainted with him before. . . . In the course of our meeting he said: "At the time of the Taliban," he said, "one Friday I left my home to go to a mosque and say the Friday prayer and to go to the house of my daughter after the Friday prayer." He had married off his daughter, and "every week," he said, "on Friday I went to see my daughter always." "When I was walking on the way," he said, "there was a congregation, a prayer; I went to join the prayer, the Friday prayer. I said my prayer, the Friday prayer. The prayer was finished and I left the prayer. I was walking on the way [again] in the direction of my daughter's home." It happens that in Kabul at some mosques the prayer lasts ten to fifteen or twenty minutes up to half an hour, it may differ from other mosques. He said, "When I was walking on the way there was another mosque with a congregation, people were standing and praying." "The Taliban were standing with whips and bludgeons and said to me: 'You didn't say your prayer.' I swore: 'Leave me! I have said my prayer at

that mosque already, but at that mosque the prayer was ten minutes earlier.” Well, he said: “They whacked me so much and they said: ‘You must say your prayer. You didn’t say your prayer. You are lying.’” He said: “I went again to this mosque. I had performed twelve bows of the afternoon prayer at that mosque, and I performed twelve bows at this mosque.” “The prayer was over. When I was walking on the way I came to a third mosque, where people were praying, and a Talib was standing there with whip and bludgeon. He said: ‘Look at this guy, who is not praying now, who does not go to mosque, does not join the prayer. He has forsaken God.’ I said: ‘Leave me, because I have said my afternoon prayer at one mosque already, a second time a Talib criticized me, and I said my prayer at a second mosque. Now you are asking me for the third time to say my prayer.’” He said: “They whacked me so much and said that I had to say my prayer.” He said: “I was offended, and I said that I wouldn’t say my prayer.” “Three or four persons,” he said, “took me and brought me to the local commander, to that commander of the Taliban whom they had at checkpoints. He asked me: ‘How many bows is a prayer?’ I said: ‘For Muslims an afternoon prayer is ten bows, for Taliban thirty.’ He [the commander] said: ‘Why is a prayer for Taliban thirty bows?’ [I answered:] ‘It is thirty bows because I have said my prayer two times and performed twenty bows, and now you are forcing me to say my prayer for the third time.’” Well, he said: “He whacked me so much there. He hit the whip upon my foot, on my back and on my shoulder. Finally white bearded men came and rescued me from their hands, freed me.” He said: “When I was freed from the Taliban I swore to God that I wouldn’t pray at all as long as the Taliban were ruling in Afghanistan, that I would never turn

my face in the direction of the Qiblah.” “Finally,” he said, “I came home and told my wife, my children and my family what had happened. We decided that we had to leave Afghanistan.” “We felt impelled to do so. We went to Pakistan. I lived in Pakistan, in Peshawar for three, four, five years up to the time when the Taliban disappeared in Afghanistan. Then I came, I came back to Afghanistan.” “Now I am in Kabul,” he said. He is an official servant. “I am a clerical worker,” he said, “at the ministry of education. I am working there. My father was religious [Muslim], I am religious [Muslim], I say my prayer five times, and I go to mosque, because the fury which I had with the Taliban, is over now when the Taliban have disappeared.”¹⁹

The main intention of the narrator was to describe the fate of one of his friends under the Taliban. He wanted to show how this friend, who had always been a good Muslim, lost his faith in God under the Taliban because they treated him as an unbeliever and forced him to pray again and again although he had done his prayer already voluntarily. In order to prove the authenticity and validity of the incident, the narrator mentioned the name of his friend and explained in detail where he had heard what had happened to his friend, what his friend had done, and what he had thought before and after this incident.

This narrative contains a part that could be told separately without mentioning the name of the protagonist. It recounts how ignorant Taliban forced a good Muslim to perform his afternoon prayer three times. The metaphorical idea of this story is given in the phrase “For Muslims an afternoon prayer is ten bows, for Taliban thirty.” The number of bows is prescribed for each prayer in a canonical way, and for Muslims it is not subject to discussion or interpretation. Saying that for Taliban an afternoon prayer is thirty bows instead of ten, the

narrator expresses the common idea that the Taliban had a very strange understanding of Islam and that they forced people to practice a faith that was not their own.

This part can be seen as a successfully generated story that follows the narrative pattern of traditional *riwayat*. It contains a metaphorical idea that can reflect collective experience, because it resonates with elements found in many individual biographies of the last decade in Afghanistan. Of course, the narrator would not have related the story of his friend if it did not contain an idea that all of his listeners could share and that was expressed, moreover, in a rhetorical way that could meet the aesthetic expectations of the audience.

The tradition of storytelling and especially the genre of *riwayat* seem to be suitable to combine individual experience about the reign of the Taliban and other events from the recent past into common experience that in the future can become collective experience and memory. Experienced narrators who are well acquainted with the traditional genre of folk stories are appointed as guardians of historical knowledge. They are able to present their narrations in a pattern where every part of the text has a clearly defined function for the structure and meaning of the entire text. Thus stories can be generated that show common features of finality and that are aimed to impart a metaphorical idea about the recent past. The narrative structure of these stories still seems imperfect, but in general a narrator knows that he should tell a story where an idea that is acceptable for the collective memory can be handed down together with the narrative form of transmission.

A similar narrative strategy appears in a manuscript written in Persian by a local intellectual named Abdul Rahman Pahwal about the reign of the Taliban in Nimroz.²⁰ The manuscript gives a largely chronological summary of the events that took place from the emer-

gence of the Taliban until the end of their rule in November 2001, though sometimes the author refers to earlier events dating back to the 1950s. From a regional point of view, the main focus is Nimroz Province. The author often does not mention when a particular event took place, because the date was not important for his way of recounting history. He does not intend to give a complete chronological account with all temporal and causal links. For Abdul Rahman Pahwal, many events were worth being preserved and kept in memory because they could represent a more general feature of the reign of the Taliban. Thus, following the example of *riwayat*, he also generated more or less metaphorical short stories where the main message is more important than the concrete story behind it.²¹

Together with prose stories, poetry is another important genre of folk literature intended to keep events and experiences from the past in memory. Epic poems like the Persian *Shahnama* or the classical poems (*shayr*) of the Baluch present legends about the origins and acts of great national heroes from the dim and distant past. However, in Afghanistan there has always been a lively tradition of composing poetry and songs about events from the recent past as well. The French scholar James Darmesteter was the first European to notice the importance of these historical songs in Afghanistan. When he published a collection of historical songs from the Pashtuns in 1888–1890, he was confident that no serious history of Afghanistan could be written without taking notice of these historical songs. In the foreword to this edition he pointed out, “The British historian Kaye wrote a book about the first British-Afghan war, but he did not mention the songs of the Pashtuns at all. He probably didn’t even know that these songs existed. Imagine that a historian would write a book about the French revolution without knowing the Marseillaise.”²²

Indeed, in some historical songs, events from the past are recounted with so much detail that one can outline the essentials of what happened, when, and where. In contrast to written literature on historical subjects, historical folk songs of this kind are mostly dedicated to local events that belong to the historical knowledge of a tribe or of a single region alone. A Pashto song about the outbreak of the third Anglo-Afghan war in 1919 illustrates this point. In the genre of *charbayta* (Persian: *chaharbayti*; literally, “four verses”), this song was recorded by the Afghan scholar Abdullah Bakhtani in the early 1960s in Laghman Province, east of Kabul.²³ Of course this war was far from being a local event, but this song presents a quite comprehensible picture of how fighting took place in the region of Laghman. Moreover, the song conveys an interpretation of the causes of the war.

Refrain:

Ghazi Pacha [“the king, religious warrior” (King Amanullah)] is the ruler of all of Afghanistan.
Even in London the *parangi* [the British] are afraid of
him.

Verses:

The *parang* was unfair in Peshawar;
Indians, Sikhs, and Muslims lost their houses [there].
Then *Ghazi pach* [King Amanullah] announced his decision.
And he sent his troops [from Kabul] against them.

Our weapons droned and were accompanied by thunder
when the *parang* sent bombs from the sky.

Our fallen heroes were beautiful like roses,
 [but] uncountable was the number of *parang* whom they
 had killed.

Sardar Muhammad put on the uniform of the commander
 in chief.

Coming from Dakka he rushed to Jalalabad.

Brigadier Anwar was with him.

Both made a deal and appropriated the treasury.

From the bridge near Dargunt the way [of the troops]
 goes upward, oh my Lord!

First comes Charbagh, then [comes] Mandrawar, and
 then the town of Torgaray,

And in Qala-ye Seraj the sardar holds power.

A brave man lives there—Muhammad Zaman.

Let God give power to our ruler!

Let his throne become even more powerful!

Muhammad Yaqub will praise him everywhere.

Praise to the Almighty, who gave us the true faith.²⁴

Like most *charbayta*, this song starts with a refrain (*sar* or *kasr*), which is followed by usually five or six verses (*band*). In the first verse we hear that the war broke out when King Amanullah sent his troops to punish the British for quelling a riot in Peshawar in 1919. As we know, the real reason for this war was a letter in which King Amanullah demanded that the British viceroy in India recognize the independence of Afghanistan. Nevertheless, the explanation given in this song must be regarded as a true historical fact as well because the complex diplomatic background to the war was obviously unknown

in the remote mountainous province of Laghman. On the other hand, the striking news of a bloody uprising in Peshawar, which really did take place at the same time, could spread like wildfire even without any modern mass media.²⁵ It is not surprising, therefore, that people thought this incident had caused the war against the British aggressors.

In the second verse the author remains close to historical detail, hinting at the fact that the British for the first time used bombers in the war and that they were superior to the Afghans in technical equipment. The third verse recounts how Sardar Salih Muhammad Khan from Dakka became the commander in chief of the Afghan army and how he stole the treasury together with Brigadier General Muhammad Anwar Khan from the Asaki tribe, thereby misusing their official positions. This is a verifiable detail as well. Sardar Salih Muhammad Khan was, in fact, later imprisoned.²⁶ In the fourth verse the local color becomes salient in a very special way. It describes the route along the river Alingar to Qala-ye Seraj (the former center of the province) that local troops took during the war. The last verse contains praise of God and King Amanullah. The author's name, Muhammad Yaqb, is mentioned here as well.

The information about historical events presented in these songs remains close to verifiable details, without further metaphorical meaning or other symbolic features. Sometimes the date may be included as well. The protagonists are not idealized, but described as honorable or contemptible persons. The language is rather prosaic, the form inflexible.²⁷ It is a special feature of these songs that they deal with local events or present a local interpretation of an event. This can be explained by the practice of performance. These songs were performed by their authors. They sing these songs for a limited local audience, and none of these songs is composed for written transmis-

sion or for recording, of course. The local viewpoint of the author and his audience define the local perspective of the songs.

Most songs of this kind deal with fighting and war, be it tribal feud or war against foreign invaders. The meaningful messages handed down and kept in the cultural memory with these songs can be seen in the maintenance and strengthening of the fighting spirit. Thus the British wars against Afghanistan inspired Persian authors as well. Many of them composed battle poems (*jangnama*) in the tradition of the epic poem *Shahnama*. The most famous of these battle poems from the nineteenth century are the “Poem about Akbar” (*Akbarnama*) by Hamid Kashmiri and the “Poem about the Battle of Kabul,” written by an unknown author from Kabul. Hamid Kashmiri even used the unique meter of the *Shahnama* in his poem.²⁸ The fact that the British also hired Persian poets to compose similar poems advancing British military interests reflects the popularity of these battle poems and their importance for wartime propaganda.²⁹ Other historical songs are about local feuds, heroic victories in the traditional game of buzkashi, or other domestic happenings. Songs about disasters such as earthquakes and floods are meant to express pain and sorrow and can be interpreted as prayers of supplication or invocation.

Originally these historical songs were as ephemeral as the lives of their authors and the events they describe.³⁰ When a song contained a verse of high poetic quality, this part could be handed down by oral transmission and become common folk heritage. Other authors may incorporate such verses into their own poems later on. Today we know selected songs about historical events from the nineteenth or early twentieth century only because they were collected and written down by linguists, ethnologists, or folklorists. Although European scholars made the first of such publications, by the 1960s Afghan in-

tellecuals also became interested in folklore and did their own linguistic and ethnological fieldwork. They gave these songs a second life as the folkloric heritage of Afghanistan that is no longer transmitted orally but kept in memory in written form.

The tradition of writing songs about current events is still alive in Afghanistan today. Local authors and singers can be found in every part of the country. Most songs about the recent past are songs about the wars that dominate the recent history of Afghanistan. They have a lot in common with older historical songs in terms of form and substance. As in the past, they are performed by their authors at concerts for a limited audience, but today performance and transmission are not limited to live concerts.

The first song about the civil war that I heard during my visit to Afghanistan in 2002 was an invocation performed by a young man. When I asked him if he wrote this song himself, he answered that he knew this song from a tape recording and that it had been written by a local singer, Zaher Baluch. Although he had never been at one of Zaher Baluch's concerts, he had heard him singing on television and in radio broadcasts. Like many other Baluch, he owned more than one cassette with recordings of this singer.

In this song (*liko*) the singer appeals to local saints, begging them to stop the war. Khajgir, Ghaltan, Amiran ("the Amirs"), Shai San, Bala Nosh, and Mir Iqbal are the names of saints whose graves are famous places of pilgrimage in southwestern Afghanistan. Invocations are a very popular genre of folk literature in Afghanistan, and it was no coincidence that, of all songs, this young man sang this one.

O holy Khajgir! Help us, holiest of all saints!

O holy Ghaltan. O holy Sultan!

Hoist your flags! Afghanistan was destroyed.
 There is much war and bloodshed in the land of the Af-
 ghans.
 All this war and dispute comes from America.
 O holy Khajgir! Eliminate our hatred!
 Destroy the enemies with your spear!
 Bring peace to the land of the Afghans!
 Muslims are fighting for money and dollars.
 One says seven, the other says eight.³¹
 Land of Afghanistan, you are unprotected.
 We remember the saints, Khajgir and the Amirs,
 Shai San and Bala Nosh, bring the war to an end!
 Sayyed Mir Iqbal, don't forget about us!³²

Electronic media have radically changed the way modern historical songs are transmitted. In the bazaars of Afghanistan one can find hundreds of cassettes and compact discs (both audio and video) with recordings by local singers. Sometimes songs about the civil war are transmitted via radio and television as well. Especially in the first year after the fall of the Taliban, one could hear such songs on radio and television as an expression of joy about the newly resumed liberty. Modern electronic mass media have created a secondary mode of oral transmission.

Afghans nonetheless treasure the merits of live concerts. The following song was recorded in 2002 during a concert by Zaher Baluch in a private home in Zaranj. From Zahedan in the Iranian part of Baluchistan, Zaher Baluch is the most famous Baluch singer in Afghanistan. Since the Baluch do not recognize the frontier between Iran and Afghanistan, events from Afghanistan are as topical as what happens in the Iranian part of Baluchistan for Zaher Baluch. Some

Pashtuns from Helmand and Kandahar provinces were also present at the concert and were obviously trading partners of the host. Guests ordered songs from Zaher Baluch, writing their wishes on small sheets of paper, which were passed on to the singer. Although the following song (*liko*) had been ordered from the very beginning of the concert, Zaher Baluch sang it only when the Pashtun guests had left the concert. He apparently did not want to offend them. The song is about the famous mujahed, Ahmad Shah Masud, who managed to resist the Taliban until his death at the hands of Arab terrorists on the eve of September 11, 2001. Popular mass media may disseminate such songs widely throughout the country, but not all Afghans endorse the messages they convey. Only those persons who have struggled on the same side of the front line or who share the same political experience can embrace the themes of a battle song. This applies to the following composition about Ahmad Shah Masud in a special way.

Refrain:

Masud, the hero, commander of Panjsher

Verses:

Masud, the hero, declared [war] on the Russians.
Afghanistan must not be ashamed of him—Masud, the
hero.

He warned the Russians with his struggle and with his
physical appearance.

He hit the Russians and he killed them, [he] made them
look foolish before the whole world—Masud, the
hero.

Masud was a lion (*Sber*) in the valley of the five lions (*panj Sber*).

He hit the Russians and made their eyes cry—Masud, the hero.

Brave Masud frightened the Russians away.

He had a hundred commanders [in his power] against the Russians—Masud, the hero.

When the brave Masud, commander in chief of the jihad, hit the Russians, the whole world was looking at Afghanistan—Masud, the hero.

But then two brothers, Afghans [Pashtuns] and Tajiks made the day turn dark.

The enemy misused his friends and brothers—Masud, the hero.

Being masked as journalists these two terrorists came, and [they] killed Masud, those wild animals—Masud, the hero.

God called Masud to himself. He said Goodbye to this world.

May God let him meet his fate! May God reward him with virgins (*horis*) and slaves—Masud, the hero.

Ahmad Shah Masud inflamed our hearts.

May our pure Lord forgive you all your sins—Masud, the hero.

May Allah be close to you. Paradise will be your destiny.
 May your head be higher than the throne of the Lord on
 the Day of Judgment—Masud, the hero.³³

This song about Ahmad Shah Masud was written in the same pattern as traditional historical songs. It consists of a refrain repeated after every one of the ten verses. Like older historical songs, it gives a more or less detailed historical account of the struggle carried out by the main protagonist. Verses 1 to 5 treat the war of the mujahedin against the Soviet invaders. Masud is introduced here as the outstanding leader and army commander of all mujahedin. This can be seen as a legitimate interpretation because in 1992 Masud was appointed as minister of defense in the mujahedin government. Verse 6 hints at the civil war that broke out sometime later, concluding that foreign enemies brought the ethnic war to Afghanistan. In accord with the actual chronology of events, the terrorist attack against Masud is described in verse 7, even noting that the terrorists came in the guise of journalists. Verses 8 through 10 celebrate the main protagonist in traditional forms of praise.

In contrast to traditional historical songs, however, the events described in this song are not limited to one region only. Today news of all kinds is spread by modern mass media, and people are integrated into the political life of the country in quite novel ways. Their view is no longer confined to a single region. Zaher Baluch performed this song on Kabul television with great success. Far from Kabul, many Baluch knew the refrain and some verses. For them this song about Masud was a hymn about the end of a lengthy war. It figured as a kind of Afghan “Marseillaise.” Common fate and historical experience forged shared heroes such as the protagonist idealized in this song. In 2002, Masud was regarded as a national martyr (*shahid-e milli*), at least for all non-Pashtuns.

When I visited Nimroz again in 2005, however, I didn’t hear this

song. I brought my hosts a compact disc with songs of Zaher Baluch that I had recorded two and a half years before. This present was very welcome, and my hosts listened to the CD more than once. But usually they skipped the song about Ahmad Shah Masud and preferred the lyrical and epic songs. Today modern electronic media may preserve historical songs forever, but in the communicative memory of the people they are still as transient and ephemeral as the events these songs recount.

There is another important dimension of the role played by mass media in shaping communicative memory in Afghanistan. Concerts by local singers are organized in private houses. On such occasions, many guests are invited and feasted. People regard such concerts as meritorious deeds. As mentioned above, guests can order songs and write their wishes on small sheets of paper. Before a singer performs a song ordered by some guests, he gives a short introduction noting the identity of the guest who ordered this song and also offers a prayer of supplication for the host.³⁴ When recordings of a concert are sold later in the bazaar, the name of the host is spread together with the songs. Such acknowledgments increase the patron's reputation as a generous and noble person. Thus the songs are preserved and kept in memory together with the name of the singer's benefactor.

As in the past, songs about the past and present remain very popular in Afghanistan. Like their predecessors, these songs capture detailed chronological accounts of historical events. And some of these songs are still intended to inspire a fighting spirit. In contrast to the past, however, historical songs are now spread by electronic media as well and may be preserved for ever. Yet the popularity of historical songs is still as fleeting as the events they depict. In a context marked by widespread war-weariness, songs that convey invocations and prayers of supplication enjoy special popularity. The same applies to satirical songs that ridicule, in equal measure, all political parties and military groups.

units in Pashtun-inhabited areas for relatively small numbers of people while creating fewer such electoral units in non-Pashtun areas with larger populations. Hamid Karzai's attempt to appease his Panjsheri partners in the Transitional Government by proclaiming that the Panjsher district will be elevated into a province was another example of this policy.

36. Lahouari Addi, "Religion and Modernity in Algeria," *Journal of Democracy* 3, no. 4 (October 1992): 4.
37. For a discussion of this general tendency in Islamist political movements and the history of Islamic states, see Fatima Mernissi, "Arab Women's Rights and the Muslim State in the Twenty-First Century: Reflections on Islam as Religion and State," in *Faith and Freedom: Women's Human Rights in the Muslim World*, ed. Mahnaz Afkhami (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1995), 36.
38. For earlier manifestations of similar movements in the country, especially during the 1920s in opposition to King Amanullah's reforms, see Nawid, *Religious Response to Social Change*.
39. The Taliban also demonized their opponents' foreign patrons, Muslim and non-Muslim, such as Shiite Iran, Russia, and the Central Asian republics (with the exception of Turkmenistan).
40. When the so-called "Iron Amir," Abdul Rahman, assumed power in 1880 at the end of a long war of succession, and when Nader Shah came to power during the civil war of 1929, both drew on patronage from British India and the discourse of jihad against their real and presumed enemies. For details on the involvement of Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and others in the region, see Rashid, *Taliban*; and Maley, *Fundamentalism Reborn*.

5. Remembering the Taliban

1. Both travels were sponsored by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft.
2. Nurzi are Pashtuns by origin. Members of this tribe still regard themselves as Pashtuns in regions with a predominantly Pashtun population. In regions like Nimroz, where the majority is Baluch, however, most Nurzi switched over to the Baluchi language and even adopted a Baluch identity. Here only elderly Nurzi still use Pashto as their primary language and will specify their ethnicity as Pashtun if they are asked.
3. Historical publications about the Taliban offer no information about the events that took place in the remote province of Nimroz. The chronological overview presented here was compiled according to information given by local informants and in a Persian-language memoir about the reign of the Taliban. See Lutz Rzehak, ed. and trans., *Die Taliban*

- im Land der Mittagssonne: Erinnerungen und Notizen von Abdurrahman Pabwal* (Wiesbaden: Ludwig Reichert Verlag 2004). For information about the historical and socioeconomic development of the province before 1978, see Erwin Orywal, *Die Balūc in Afghaniſch-Siſtān: Wirtschaft und ſozio-politiſche Organisation in Nimrūz, SW-Afghanistan* (Berlin: Reimer, 1982); and Gholam Rahman Amiri, *Taswir-e az zendegani-ye mardom-e Baluch dar Nimroz wa Hilmand-e sufla qabl az inqelab-e saur* (Kabul: Akadimi-ye ulum-e j. d. Afghanistan: 1365 [1986]).
4. The border between these provinces has since been redrawn: Dilaram now belongs to the province of Nimroz. There is no passable road between Dilaram and Zaranj; one has to know the way across the desert.
 5. In 2004, Karim Brahui became the minister of tribal and frontier affairs in the government of Hamid Karzai and moved to Kabul.
 6. Barbara Johnstone describes such an *aesthetic model of language and persuasion* for Iran, contrasting it with an *instrumental model* in Western societies, where language is seen mainly as a tool. The contrast is not that in countries like Afghanistan or Iran beauty of language works instead of logic, but that aesthetic of oration is an important additional factor of persuasion. See “Arguments with Khomeini: Rhetorical Situation and Persuasive Style in Cross-Cultural Perspective,” *Text* 6, no. 1 (1986): 171–187, esp. 181–182.
 7. Performance as well as political and rhetorical aspects of traditional storytelling in Afghanistan are described by Margaret Mills, *Oral Narrative in Afghanistan: The Individual in Transition* (New York: Garland, 1990); and Mills, *Rhetorics and Politics in Afghan Traditional Storytelling* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991).
 8. See M. Nazif Shahrani, “Local Knowledge of Islam and Social Discourse in Afghanistan and Turkistan in the Modern Period,” in *Turko-Persia in Historical Perspective*, ed. Robert L. Canfield (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 167.
 9. I heard this story several times when talking to Afghans inside and outside of Afghanistan. It is given here as published in Raushan Rahmani, *Afsanaha-ye dari* (Tehran: Soroush, 1374 [1995]), 394.
 10. Such tales seem to be pure fiction. Indeed, similar stories were recorded in Rhineland, Germany, in the 1930s. In these versions, the German king Frederic the Great takes the place of Amir Abdul Rahman Khan, and the woman was ordered to put a sword into a revolving sheath instead of threading a needle. See Heinrich Dittmaier, *Sagen und Schwänke von der unteren Sieg* (Bonn: Ludwig Röhrscheid Verlag, 1950), 150.
 11. The word *riwayat* is used here in its popular meaning, denoting a genre

- of folklore. See George Morgenstierne, “Volksdichtung in Afghanistan,” *Afghanistan Journal* 1, no. 4 (1974): 2–17; Simadad, *Farhang-e estelahat-e adabi: Wazbanama-ye mafhim-wa estilahat-e adabi-ye farsi wa orupayi* (Tehran: Morwarid, 1378 [1999/2000]), 253–254. For Muslim jurists, this word (mostly in the original Arabic form, *riwaya*) is a technical term in the study of the traditions (*hadith*); see G. Schoeler, “Die Frage der schriftlichen und mündlichen Überlieferung der Wissenschaften im Islam,” *Der Islam* 62, no. 2 (1985): 201–230. Zoroastrians use the word *riwayat* to denote certain kinds of juristic texts (Jan Rypka, *Iranische Literaturgeschichte* [Leipzig: VEB Otto Harrassowitz, 1959], 43).
12. In Pashto, typical opening formulas of such prose stories are *yawa wradz*, *yaw wakbt*, *yaw dzal* (once) or *hal da da che* (the matter is that). Baluchi equivalents are *yak maughe*, *roch-e* (once) or *hal esh int ke* (the matter is that). Fairy tales start with *wu ka na-wu* (literally: “there was or there was not”) in Pashto and with *yak-e bud*, *yakk-e nabud*, *chap sha kbuda chiz-e nabud* (literally: “there was one and there was no one, with the exception of God there was nothing”) in Baluchi.
 13. The term *cultural memory* is used here according to Jan Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis: Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen* (Munich: Beck, 1992). See also Lutz Niethammer, *Lebenserfahrung und kollektives Gedächtnis: Die Praxis der “Oral History”* (Frankfurt am Main: Syndikat, 1980); and J. Straub, “Geschichten erzählen, Geschichte bilden: Grundzüge einer narrativen Psychologie historischer Sinnbildung,” in *Erzählung, Identität und historisches Bewusstsein: Die psychologische Konstruktion von Zeit und Geschichte*, ed. J. Straub (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1998), 81–169.
 14. In Afghanistan the informers of the intelligence services are usually disdained. In common speech the word *shaytan* (devil) is used to denote these persons. In a given context, *shaytan* means “informer.” This is not extended to the officers of the services, who command proper respect, however, at least as long as they are working for only one institution. All the same people believe that the job of an intelligence officer requires some education.
 15. In colloquial Persian the consonant *h* of the plural suffix *-ha* may be omitted, and the plural of *talib* may be formed simply as *taliba*.
 16. Informant: Gholam Nabi Sherzi, 27 years old, herdsman from Kang, illiterate, Baluch; date and place of the recording: August 23, 2002, Zaranj, province of Nimroz, Afghanistan (recorded during a gathering in the house of Gholam Sakhi Sherzi); language: Baluchi.
 17. How people in Afghanistan generate stories in a quite similar way when they are talking about saints and holy places is shown in Lutz Rzehak,

- “Narrative Strukturen des Erzählens über Heilige und ihre Gräber in Afghanistan,” *Asiatische Studien* 58, no. 1 (2004): 195–229.
18. Informant: Gholam Nabi Sherzi, 27 years old, herdsman from Kang, illiterate, Baluch; date and place of the recording: August 23, 2002, Zaranj, province of Nimroz, Afghanistan (recorded during a gathering in the house of Gholam Sakhi Sherzi); language: Baluchi, Persian.
 19. Informant: Ahmad Shah Khan, about 40 years old, head of the intelligence agency of the province of Nimroz, Farsiwan; date and place of the recording: April 16, 2005, Zaranj, province of Nimroz, Afghanistan (recorded during a meeting of male elders of the Nurzi tribe in the house of Gholam Nabi Sherzi); language: Persian (*farsi-ye kaboli*—colloquial standard of Afghanistan).
 20. See Rzehak, *Die Taliban im Land der Mittagssonne*.
 21. A more detailed analysis of the narrative structure of this 191-page manuscript is given in *ibid.*, xvii–xxv.
 22. James Darmesteter, *Chants populaires des Afghans* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale E. Leroux, 1888–1890), cxix. The history of Afghanistan to which he refers is John William Kaye’s *History of the War in Afghanistan*, 3 vols. (London, 1857).
 23. See ‘Abdullah Bakhtani, *Turbresh ya melli sanderi* (Kabul, 1347 [1968]), 78–79. A literary analysis of the genre of *charbayta* in Pashto folk literature is given by G. F. Girs, ed. and trans., *Istoricheskie pesni pushtunov* (Moscow: Nauka, 1984), 30.
 24. The song is published here as given by Girs, *Istoricheskie pesni pushtunov*, 107.
 25. See L. R. Gordon-Polonskaia, “Voina Afganistana za nezavisimost’ i uchastie v nei pograničnykh pushtunskikh plemen (1919–1921 gg.),” in *Nezavisimyi Afganistan: 40 let nezavisimosti* (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo vostočnoi literatury, 1958), 253.
 26. See L. W. Adamec, *Historical and Political Who’s Who of Afghanistan* (Graz: Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt, 1975), 122–123.
 27. For further details, see Girs, *Istoricheskie pesni pushtunov*.
 28. See L. A. Stroptsova, ed., *Kratkaia istoriia literatur Irana, Turtsii i Afganistana* (Leningrad: Izdatel’stvo Leningradskogo universiteta, 1971), 75.
 29. See [Duktur] Asadullah Habib, *Adabiyat-e dari dar nima-ye nakbustin-e sada-ye bistum*, 2nd ed. (Kabul: Nasir Ahmad Multahib, 1381 [2002]).
 30. Very few scholars can prove the transience of such folklore within their own scholarly careers. George Morgenstierne started his linguistic fieldwork in Afghanistan in the early 1920s. When he went to Afghanistan in 1970, he read some historical songs in the Parachi language that he

had recorded in 1924 to the direct descendants of his informants from the 1920s. They knew not one single song and regarded Morgensterne as the greatest bard of their people. “Volksdichtung in Afghanistan,” 7.

31. “One says one thing, the other another.”
32. Informant: Gholam Sakhi Sherzi, about 30 years old, trader (author of the song: Zaher Baluch); date and place of recording: August 28, 2002, Zaranj, province of Nimroz, Afghanistan; language: Baluchi.
33. Informant: Zaher Baluch (author), 40 years old, poet and singer, Baluch; date and place of recording: September 12, 2002, Zaranj, province of Nimroz, Afghanistan (concert at a private gathering); language: Baluchi.
34. Zaher Baluch accompanied his songs and these introductions with a stringed instrument, called a *suroz*, played with a bow. Both of his hands were occupied, so he held with his toes the sheet of paper with the names he had to mention.

6. Fraternity, Power, and Time in Central Asia

I am indebted to Sami Siddiq for comments on an earlier draft of this paper. Nothing in the paper, however, is his responsibility.

1. John Kifner, “Through the Serbian Mind’s Eye,” *New York Times*, April 10, 1994.
2. *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Caucasus Report* 7, no. 29 (July 23, 2004).
3. Vicken Cheterian, “Where Is Juma Namangani?” *Eurasia Insight*, July 17, 2000.
4. Admittedly, in many cases the leaders of these movements were urbanites and essentially secular in their orientation; Franjo Trudman in Croatia and Slobodan Milosevic in Serbia were notable examples. Also, the leaders of the radical Islamist movements in Central Asia were something other than they appeared. Social movements are in fact complex in their moral inspiration.
5. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1991), 36.
6. Kathryn Verdery, *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies: Reburial and Post-socialist Change* (New York: Columbia University, 1999), 104ff. Each “people” should have a place, a land of their own. It was, for instance, Richard Wagner’s vision for the German people of Europe: In his diary he wrote: “the incomparable magic of my works . . . it is German. But what is this German? It must be something wonderful, mustn’t it, for it is humanly finer than all else?—Oh heavens! It should have a soil, this German! I should be able to find my people! What glorious people it