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Ethnicity and State-Society: Conflict in Modern Afghanistan

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ETHNICITY AND STATE-SOCIETY
CONFLICT IN MODERN AFGHANISTAN

BY
SAHAR M. GHAZANFAR

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ABSTRACT

The challenges facing the current regime in Afghanistan derive in good part from the fact that it is a Western-based model of the democratic nation-state that was suddenly imposed on a nation ravaged by war, ethnopolitical conflict, and lack of infrastructure. My objective in this paper is to explore the relevance of ethnic identity to state politics and national identity in the history of Afghanistan. In the process, I will discuss differing notions of the link between ethnic and national identity in Western literature, and will suggest a scholastic consideration and re-examination of existing models for so-called modern nation-states. By describing the ethnopolitical challenges of implementing these models so abruptly in Afghanistan, I hope to encourage a closer examination of the power dynamics of various societies that are similarly characterized by decentralization and disunity.
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INTRODUCTION

"In an anthropological spirit, then, I propose the following definition of the nation: it is an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign."

-Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities (1983: 6)

It is intriguing to consider Benedict Anderson’s proposition with regards to the primary unit of political sovereignty in the modern world. The demise of colonial empires, which was most precipitous following the World Wars, gave way to the creation of numerous new nation-states: Turkey, India, Pakistan, Israel, and nearly all the countries in sub-Saharan Africa. The fall of the Soviet Union produced more new additions to the maps of Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Furthermore, the formation of the United Nations in 1945 and its high-profile involvement in world affairs ever since has continued to reinforce the nation-state as the dominant form of aligning government with territory. This component of globalization has resulted in the formation of a large global political community, characterized by a confederation of smaller political communities contained within national boundaries.

What then distinguishes this global political community from the “inherently limited and sovereign” political communities discussed by Benedict Anderson is the criterion by which many nation-states in the world have been established. This is the recognition of ethnic communities referred to as ethnies. Anthony D. Smith asserts that while there is considerable overlap between ethnies and nations, it is the territorial significance of nations and the communal significance of ethnies that distinguish the two (Smith 1991: 40). In areas such as Central Asia, for example, national borders were first
created for geographic, strategic, and administrative purposes by imperial Russia in the 18th and 19th centuries (McCauley 2002: xvii). The Soviet Union later encouraged the development of distinct nationalist identities within those republics based on ethnic categories and their respective territorial 'stans,' or lands - Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and so on; significant ethnic diaspora across the borders, however, remains today (McCaulet 2002: xviii). In sub-saharan Africa, on the other hand, nation-formation has involved drawing together several *ethnies* within territories established by colonial administration and without reference to ethnicity; this has resulted in many multi-ethnic African nations struggling to reconstruct their national identities through political patriotism to territory (Smith 1991: 41). The extension of *ethnies* across national boundaries in the world, therefore, and the presence of several *ethnies* within certain nations have accounted for numerous instances of ethnopolitical conflict - or, at the very least, conflicted senses of identity for many nation-states today.

A profound example of this process exists in the nation of Afghanistan, where multi-ethnic tensions, tribal warfare, and political instability have long challenged the establishment of strong central governments. This problem became apparent more than ever after the events of September 11 and the subsequent collapse of the Taliban regime, when the international diplomatic community struggled after a U.N.-led military excursion in Afghanistan to designate a new Afghan government that would curb domestic conflict and work toward rebuilding its war-torn infrastructure. The challenge, it seemed, was in striving to represent all ethnic groups and to thus appease the ethnic-based military groups that had been fighting for power throughout the civil war and the
Taliban’s rule (Schetter 2001). Since opposition has nonetheless continued against the present government despite its broad-based ethnic representation, it is apparent that the state of politics in Afghanistan is far more complex than an ethno-political conflict. That is, while ethnicity has played a major role in power dynamics in Afghanistan, its determination for any group of people is often problematic due to the wide range and permutations of geographical distribution, genetic diversity, language, tribal relations, sectarian following, and socioeconomic class attributed to individuals. While the multitude of these factors has resulted in an array of Anderson’s ‘imagined communities,’ it has also impeded the development of a common ethnie that is often characteristic of modern industrialized nation-states – such as China and the United States - that possess a stronger sense of unity and national identity.

In this paper, I will explore the relationship between ethnicity and the nation as described by Western writers on nationalism and will relate this to the case of Afghanistan. In doing so, I will demonstrate how the often enumerated components of the so-called ‘modern’ nation – the strong presence of a group identity, a strong central polity, historic territoriality, and a common civic culture and ideology – are part of the Western civic model of the nation and have been either absent or only problematically present in Afghanistan. I will also dispute, however, the relevance of an ethnicist model, which has been suggested as the competing form of nation-statehood in ‘Eastern’ countries. Afghanistan’s complex ethno-political nature has challenged the formation of any single ethnie-based nationalist identity within its borders, and has highlighted the political significance of multiple ethnic identities in domestic power relations. This may
explain why the current U.N.-sanctioned Afghan government, which is largely based on a Western model of the nation-state, has encountered much opposition and conflict despite efforts to establish an ethnically diverse administration to appease the various ethnic groups. This situation calls into question the feasibility of implementing modernist models for sovereignty in Afghan society, and illustrates the necessity for an assessment of group identity and dynamics in determining contemporary models for nation-statehood in parts of the world that are similarly characterized by ethno-political disunity.
ETHNICITY & THE NATION

"...lumps of sameness, marked out by limits of consensus..."

The relationship between ethnicity and nation formation has been the subject of examination by many scholars and schools of thought in the social sciences. While the primordialist perspective regards group identities such as ethnicity to be historically immemorial and a given characteristic of human populations, modernist perspectives such as constructivism and instrumentalism maintain that it is a cultural construct, and a product of social interaction, manipulation, or imagination. Anthony Smith provides a useful response to this dichotomy; he makes a crucial distinction between ethnic categories and ethnies, as they refer respectively to pre-modern notions of ethnicity and the modern ethnic basis for nation-states that arises from them. While I find Smith’s views too ethnicist in assessing nations (and in particular, Afghanistan), I support his incorporation and recognition of both cultural and political elements in approaching the concept of the nation. In this chapter, I will outline the major definitions of ethnicity and nationhood that have been offered throughout the discourse on national identity, and I will discuss how the two have been linked in the conception of the modern nation-state. I will then also problematize this modernist model and its applicability to parts of the world that demonstrate forms of ethnic identity and sociopolitical structure that differ from those described in existing literature on nationalism.
PRIMORDIALIST VIEW

Primordialism approaches the concepts of culture and group identity as products of pre-modern human ties and experiences. These ‘primordial attachments’ are regarded as natural and are rooted in what Clifford Geertz calls, “‘givens’ of social existence...immediate contiguity and kin connection...congruities of blood, speech, custom, and so on” (Geertz 1973: 259). The primordialist definition of group identity, therefore, is governed by markers associated with circumstance of birth – the genetics, language, religion, and social practices of the group into which one is born. Such group identities include kinship, which is based around biological relationships and lineages, and race, which in the primordialist and ethnobiological view, is based upon phenotypical physical features (Geertz 1973: 262). Ethnicity, which is often determined based on the above mentioned factors, is also among the group identities identified by primordialism.

With regards to the nation, Geertz views the existence of primordial group identity to be in conflict with processes of modern state formation. He presents ‘civil sentiment’ as being distinct from primordial ties due to allegiance to a civil state governed by political supremacy. This makes some reference to Max Weber’s definition of the state as “a human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory; note that ‘territory’ is one of the given characteristics of the state” (Weber 1918: 121). The relative independence of primordial identity from this territorialized political entity is what makes it, in Geertz’s view, competitive with a civil society that is based on allegiance to it. Furthermore, the primordial nature of ethnic and tribal identity makes it more challenging to modern states
than other competing loyalties; unlike "class, party, business, union, profession, or whatever...groups formed of such ties are virtually never considered as possible, self-standing, maxima social units, as candidates for nationhood" (Geertz 1973: 261). There is thus an implication that group identities based on primordial ties – such as ethnicity - serve as major defining qualities of nations.

Anthony Smith makes a similar argument as to the ineligibility of other forms of identity – such as gender, regionalism, and class – as bases for nation-formation. Gender categories, while largely of unquestionable universality, lack the geographical proximity and cultural unity to effect large-scale political mobilization; regional identities can be easily broken down into almost infinite local identities and are difficult to indisputably define; and socioeconomic classes are often territorially dispersed, are subject to fluctuating economies and lack the emotional appeal to invoke group loyalty (Smith 1991: 4-5). Religious communities are described as possessing more cohesive qualities – such as a transcendence of gender, class, and regionalist categories – but this is largely due to its close integration with ethnic identity, which possesses the same qualities (Smith 1991: 6-8).

While Smith acknowledges the historical significance of ethnic ties, he disputes the radical primordialist view that they are natural and inherent in human populations. He instead incorporates aspects of the modernist perspective that they are ‘situational’ and socially constructed (Smith 1991: 20). This view has been described as ethnicist modernist, or reflexive modernist, and will be further elaborated later in this chapter.
MODERNIST VIEW

Much of the modernist discussion of identity has involved an exploration of the link between social categories and the process of state modernization. The transition of a pre-modern society to a modern state is generally associated with industrialization and the development of a centralized government. Group identities such as ethnicity, therefore, are assessed with regards to these phenomena. As opposed to primordialists, who maintain that ethnicity is rooted in natural human ties, modernists regard it to be largely determined by the socioeconomic and political conditions of a society.

Instrumentalist theory asserts that ethnic affiliation is in fact a highly flexible category that is socially constructed and adaptable for various sociopolitical purposes. Marx-inspired instrumentalism claims that it is a political tool used by dominating classes to promote economic self-interest, and is thus subject to change according to situational advantageousness (Vermeulen and Govers 1997: 22). Fredrik Barth introduced an important approach within this view, describing ethnicity as, “a symbolic system which can be manipulated situationally by members...an organizational strategy, whereby members seek to satisfy their expressive and symbolic needs for group continuity and belongingness in those social environmental contexts where such emotive needs come to the fore, and/or to satisfy their instrumental needs for economic, political, and social power” (Barth 1969). An individual’s ethnic affiliation, therefore, is a product of both ‘self-ascription and ascription by others,’ in accordance with sociopolitical circumstance (Barth 1969: 13).
Barth does acknowledge the cultural significance of ethnic identity over its biological derivations, as he writes, “a categorical ascription is an ethnic ascription when it classifies a person in terms of his basic, most general identity, presumptively determined by his origin and background...to the extent that actors use ethnic identities to categorize themselves and others for the purposes of interaction, they form ethnic groups in this organizational sense” (Barth 1969: 10, 13-14). While Barth makes the important observation that ethnic identity is greatly contingent on circumstantial designation, he has been labeled a primordialist by some contemporary social scientists due to the importance he gives it as a defining concept. Barth describes ethnic groups as populations that: 1) are largely biologically self-perpetuating so that they share certain physical characteristics, 2) share cultural values and customs, 3) comprise a community of communication and interaction, and 4) are identified as being distinct, both by themselves and by others (Barth 1969). An important criticism of this that can be made, however, is the relevance of this concept to a world undergoing state formation and modernization. The facilitation of travel and increase in intermarriage between populations has rendered the primordial concept of biological race useless today. Furthermore, the last three aspects of ethnic groups that Barth lists have become increasingly characteristic of modern nation states. The process of state formation, therefore, has come to involve a redefinition of the importance of certain group identities, with a shift from ethnicity to the nation.

Constructivist writers deal with this idea in their approach to nationalist identity as a dynamic, socially defined entity. Ernest Gellner emphasizes the importance of
industrialization in empowering the state with defining cultural identity. As agrarian societies acquire literacy and industrialized modes of communication, a new ‘high culture’ emerges that replaces traditional stratified forms of social structure (i.e., kinship, tribal, and ethnic ties) in agrarian society. This is achieved through an educational system established and controlled by the state, which can therefore standardize rhetoric that reinforces a national identity (Gellner 1964). Benedict Anderson expresses a similar sentiment in his emphasis upon the importance of ‘print-capitalism’ – the spread of print media – in unifying a population under one identity within a territorial sovereign state. He lends some strength to Gellner’s view in his discussion of “the spread of particular vernaculars as instruments of administrative centralization” amongst monarchical states before the emergence of print (Anderson 1983: 40). What distinguishes print-capitalism, however, is its origins in the interaction between capitalism, technology, and human linguistic diversity to produce the basis for a national consciousness (Anderson 1983: 44-45). This occurs through the unification of dialectical groups through the standardization of their languages in print; through endowing language with a fixity and permanence in written form; and through empowering linguistic groups that are most forthcoming in appropriating print media (Anderson 1983: 45). The importance of print-capitalism and language was so compelling in determining power politics, many disadvantaged ‘sub-nationalities’ in Europe tried to elevate their status by struggling to enter print and radio media in the late twentieth century (Anderson 1983: 45).

The power of print-capitalism, in Anderson’s view, is that it "made it possible for rapidly growing numbers of people to think about themselves, and to relate themselves to
others, in profoundly new ways" (Anderson 1983: 36). This, along with industrialization and other processes associated with modernity, has created the basis for the “imagined community” that Anderson sees as comprising a nation. This perspective, indeed, has enormous implications for assessing group identities in a world that is becoming increasingly globalized, and where ethnic, racial, and communal boundaries are being crossed with more frequency than ever. Though Anderson is often associated with the modernist school of thought, I would characterize his view in this regard as being quite post-modern.

While this perspective has great foresight in envisioning a possible trend in the future world order, it may tend to undermine the importance of ethnic communities in global politics today. Ethnopolitical conflict is still a flagrant phenomenon in many parts of the world, and it would not serve a discussion of the nation well to ignore its relevance to state formation. In between the primordialist and modernist/post-modernist perspectives is the reflexive-modernist view held by Anthony Smith. In The Ethnic Origins of Nations and National Identity, Smith discusses the formation of ethnic and national communities that are determined both by historical, ‘pre-modern’ ties and by sociopolitical events.

‘ETHNIES’ AND NATIONAL IDENTITY

In his discussion of ethnicity, Smith is careful to distinguish between the concepts of ‘ethnic category’ and ‘ethnic community.’ The former represents a grouping used to refer to a population by outsiders, even if the population has very little self-awareness
and “only a dim consciousness that they form a separate collectivity” (Smith 1991: 20). One example of this that Smith gives is of the Turks in Anatolia before 1900, who were unaware of a ‘Turkish’ identity that was distinct from their local village ties or their inclusion in the Ottoman empire at large (Smith 1991: 21). The ethnic category is an objective, externally imposed classification, and often lacks an evaluative basis in common origins, shared historical memories, or a sense of solidarity within a homeland (Smith 1991: 21). It is more likely to be a category based on physical features, or exclusion by another group (Smith 1991: 23).

An ‘ethnic community,’ on the other hand, is referred to by Smith with the French term *ethnie*. In contrast with an ethnic category, the *ethnie* is a conscious, self-perceived entity that is based in several shared attributes within a population. Smith lists these six attributes as: “1) a collective proper name, 2) a myth of common ancestry, 3) shared historical memories, 4) one or more differentiating elements of common culture, 5) an association with a specific ‘homeland,’ and 6) a sense of solidarity for significant sectors of the population” (Smith 1991: 21). Due to the historical and cultural qualities of these properties, as well as the flux in their subjective significance, Smith purports the *ethnie* to be “anything but primordial, despite the claims and rhetoric of nationalist ideologies and discourses” (Smith 1991: 23). In addition, the reinforcement of an *ethnie* through the above attributes allows it to endure despite territorial dispersion and separation from a sentimental homeland – such as the Jewish and Armenian diasporic communities (Smith 1991: 23).
It was discussed earlier in this chapter that Smith described ethnic identity to be the most prominent candidate for a basis of nationhood, compared with other forms of group identity. He writes in National Identity:

\[\ldots\;\text{as with other social phenomena of collective identity like class, gender, and territory, ethnicity exhibits both constancy and flux side by side, depending on the purposes and distance of the observer from the collective phenomenon in question. The durability of some ethnies, despite changes in their demographic composition and some of their cultural distinctiveness and social boundaries, must be set against the more instrumentalist or phenomenological accounts that fail to consider the importance of antecedent cultural affinities that set periodic limits to the redefinitions of ethnic identities. (1991: 25)}\]

Smith therefore proposes a more cultural approach to the instrumentalist consideration of identity and modern nations, without reverting to the extremes of primordialism. Though ethnies are always undergoing change and dissolution due to sociopolitical events (i.e., the wane of the Assyrians), their endurance is dependent upon ties rooted in a sentiment of common nostalgia and cultural values (Smith 1991: 30).

What then causes the ethnie to form the core of a nation is the overlap in their foundational aspects. Smith abstractly defines ‘national identity’ to be “a named human population sharing an historic territory, common myths and historical memories, a mass public culture, a common economy and common legal rights and duties for all members” (Smith 1991: 43). The ethnie forms the cultural basis for the nation’s existence and possession of territory. Smith also points out that while not every modern nation can point back to a particular ethnic derivation, the fact that the first nations grew out of ethnies and were culturally influential in the world allowed this model to be popularized in subsequent instances of nation formation (Smith 1991: 41). He writes of the earliest ethnic nation states of Western Europe:
The formation of nations in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has been profoundly influenced by the examples of England, France, and Spain...this is usually attributed to their possession of military and economic power during the period of the formation of nations in Western Europe. As the burgeoning great powers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, these states were seen as models for imitation by those less fortunate, and their national format was increasingly regarded as a key to their success. (Smith 1991: 59).

Finally, Smith discusses the role of the *ethnie* in modern state formation and identity by describing two types of *ethnies*. A ‘lateral *ethnie*’ is associated with the aristocratic class of a society, which gradually incorporates the rest of the society into a dominant culture through military, administrative, fiscal and judicial apparatuses. The cultural heritage of such a nation, therefore, is determined by the values, symbols, myths, traditions and memories of the aristocratic *ethnie*; this has primarily been the case with such Western European ethnic states as England, France, and Spain. Smith writes, “In this way, the aristocratic ethnic state was able to define a new and broader cultural identity for the population, even though in practice this often entailed some degree of accommodation between the dominant and peripheral ethnic cultures within the parameters set by the power of the dominant core” (Smith 1991: 55). A ‘vertical *ethnie*’ on the other hand, is a subjective community based on demotic ties throughout a society; lacking in an operative bureaucratic state, its unity relies more heavily upon a common tradition, such as religion, myth of chosenness, or historical exclusion (Smith 1991: 61). While Smith lists the Byzantine Greeks, Catholic Irish, and the Jews as examples of this, he devotes particular discussion to Arab nationalism in showing the difficulties of transforming vertical *ethnies* into modern state identities. Modern Arab nations are finding themselves simultaneously subject to “the impact of a rationalizing ‘scientific state,’ often of an imperial or colonial variety,” and the traditionalism and Islamic civic culture that are part
of their demotic *ethnies* (Smith 1991: 63). This has resulted in efforts on the part of ‘ethnic intelligentsia’ to redefine national identity in a way that reconciles Western modernity with the society’s traditions and past, often through the rediscovery and propagation of a vernacular historical culture (Smith 1991: 64). An example of a nation where I think this has been successful is Israel, where standardization and modernization of the Hebrew language and the unification of immigrants under a single Jewish identity contributed to forming a nation that is both Jewish and ‘modern’ in the Western sense of state formation. A similar process is under way in Central Asian states such as Uzbekistan, where intelligentsia are looking to the traditions, art, and history preceding the Soviet era as a source of nationalist identity and revival.

Smith’s arguments are, without a doubt, extremely pertinent to patterns of nation formation in many parts of the world. I do find, however, that his discussion of lateral and vertical *ethnies* are somewhat limiting in conceiving the ethnic bases of national identity, in that he generally presumes the existence of one single *ethnie* in the formation of a successful, modern nation. This model has been prominent in Western Europe where the earliest nation-states arose; it is based on the premise of a strong, centralized government that promotes a single national identity rooted in an *ethnie* constructed both by pre-modern ties and sociopolitical processes over time. What I have suggested, however, is that there are societies where such a model is not readily applicable, and where the apparatus to foster this modern notion of a national *ethnie* is not present. As will be discussed, Afghanistan is a country comprised of several tribal ethnic communities and a decentralized political structure that has reinforced the fragmented
nature of the society. While there have been various efforts to encourage a single modern ethnie, this has largely been initiated by one ethnic sector and therefore resisted by the rest of the society. Furthermore, the current government, while ethnically diverse, is largely based on the U.N. model of the modern nation state. Its sudden imposition upon a fragmented and diverse nation that lacks the infrastructure of a Western nation-state is problematic, and implies an enforcement of a single ethnie that does not exist. In the next chapter, I will examine the impact of ethnic identity upon the politics of nation formation in Afghanistan, and will show how the decentralized authority and ethnopolitical diversity of the nation has played a strong role in determining its fractious political structure. The preservation of this fragmentation has challenged the formation of a single ethnie that forms the core of Western-style modern national identity, and thus must be accounted for in forthcoming models for modern state formation.
ETHNICITY IN AFGHAN POLITICAL HISTORY

"Afghanistan is not a self-contained ethnic unit, and its national culture is not uniform..."

The study of ethnicity in Afghanistan has been a complex issue, subject to multiple discourses on approach and methodology. As discussed in the previous chapter, primordialists that have identified ethnic groups along biological lines have been criticized by modernist anthropologists such as Fredrik Barth, who has approached them more as organizational identities based upon self-ascription and ascription by others. Still other anthropologists, such as Richard Tapper, have suggested revisions to this perspective by disputing their organizational continuity and highlighting the tremendous influence of Western ethnographers and the state in shaping notions of ethnic identity. He asserts that the ethnic group is a Western sociological concept that is generally irrelevant to indigenous forms of Afghan identity, and that “ethnic aspects of identity must be studied in relation to non-ethnic aspects” such as political hierarchy (Tapper 1988: 31). In addition, Tapper notes a shift away from “linguistic descent, tribal and generally ascribed identities, towards more achieved identities based on territorial, economic, and political categories” in Afghanistan (Tapper 1988: 30).

Indeed, what this paper seeks to explore is the relevance of ethnicity to state politics and national identity in Afghanistan. While there have been instances of social modernization processes reminiscent of modern Western states such as noted by Tapper, the formation of a single national *ethnie* has been complicated by the resurgence of
multiple ethnic identities in domestic conflicts, particularly in recent years. Power relations and struggles, as will be evidenced, play a significant role in determining the importance of ethnicity in political contexts of Afghan society.

THE ETHNIC COMMUNITIES OF AFGHANISTAN

Tapper's observation that "ethnic identities have different bases and different connotations" in Afghanistan refers to the multiple factors of language, settlement patterns, religious sectarianism and historical affiliation with tribes that exist in the nation's social fabric (Tapper 1988: 31). In addition, phenotypical traits that are clearly recognizable in certain populations (particularly the groups of Mongol descent) have contributed to designations of ethnic categories to them by other populations. This categorization, itself, can be seen as a manifestation of social power hierarchies and an example of the political meaning of ethnicity. In this paper, I will rely upon published ethnographic and state definitions of the ethnic groups, with a caveat on the ambiguity of these determinations.

The ethnic group that has been regarded by ethnographers to be the largest in Afghanistan is the Pashtun. While most published population figures are outdated and unsubstantiated due to the effects of war, the Pashtuns are estimated to have numbered around 7 million in 1983 and to comprise between 40 to 50 percent of the total population (Hyman 1983: 11; Magnus, Naby 2002: 12). It is important to note, however, that although the Pashtuns are regarded as the largest single ethnic group, they are not believed to constitute the majority of the population of Afghanistan (Rubin 2002: 28).
The majority of what is considered to be the Pashtun ethnic group is comprised of the Abdali (or Durrani) tribes, and the Ghilzai tribes, both of which have competed heavily throughout Afghan history for political domination of the nation and have therefore reinforced the prominence of the Pashtuns in the nation (Magnus, Naby 2002: 12). They are concentrated most heavily throughout the southern and southeastern parts of Afghanistan, although Pashtuns inhabit several areas throughout the region, including neighboring Pakistan. The Pashtuns have also synonymously been known as “Afghans” in medieval and popular terminology; the name of the country, therefore, stems from the influence of Pashtun tribes in the establishment of a sovereign state in the eighteenth century (Magnus, Naby 2002: 11). Many speak an Indo-European language, Pashto, yet there are many who also speak Persian either exclusively or bilingually.

As far as the concept of an ethnie is concerned, Pashtuns strongly demonstrate an identity rooted ir: a myth of origin and lineage. The Makhzan-i-Afghani, a manuscript written around 1650 by a court noble in Delhi, records the alleged oral tradition of the origin of the Pashtuns. The story claims that the ‘Afghans’ are descendants of the grandson of King Saul of Babylon that migrated to Afghanistan as one of the lost tribes of Israel; the various Pashtun tribes are therefore derived from his different grandsons (Magnus, Naby 2002: 14). Fredrik Barth, however, speculates that this story might have been fabricated amidst political motives of the author, who sought to flatter the Afghans and “claim as an Afghan any ancient hero, real or imaginary, whose name and fame might make his connection worth having” (Barth 1959: 53). The existence of such a
legend, nonetheless, has had a role in shaping Pashtun pride and emphasizing the importance of descent and lineage amongst Pashtun tribes (Magnus, Naby 2002: 14).

The Pashtuns have generally played the dominant role in Afghan politics, from confederate tribal resistance of foreign invaders to centuries of monarchical control. Pashtunwali, the Pashtun tribal regulatory code, has had a strong influence upon political dynamics and the development of the Afghan polity and assembly body, the Loya Jirgah (Poullada 1970: 10; Magnus, Naby: 14-15). Their extensive tribal organization has characterized the decentralized political order of the country that has resulted in such conflict and disunity throughout the society (Poullada 1970: 1). They have been the ruling elite of Afghanistan, and as will be evident in subsequent discussion of the nation’s history, their interaction with the other ethnic groups has involved a conflict in developing a dominant national identity.

The second most prominent ethnic group in Afghanistan are the Tajiks, who are most heavily settled in the northern and western parts of the country. Unlike the Pashtuns, who have maintained their powerful tribal structure, the Tajiks shed their tribal links long ago in exchange for loyalty patterns centered around family and the village (Magnus, Naby 2002: 16). They are generally physically indistinguishable from the Pashtuns, who are also of Mediterranean substock, although some Tajiks in the far north do possess Mongoloid characteristics (Dupree 1980: 59). Their most definitive property, therefore, is as an ethnolinguistic group; they speak an Afghan dialect of Persian known as Dari. The popularity of Dari as a lingua-franca throughout Afghanistan and much of Central
Asia has earned its status as an administrative language alongside Pashto, despite the exclusion of Tajiks from high office in the traditionally Pashtun-dominated state (Magnus, Naby 2002: 15-16). This fact has served to rival Pashtun cultural hegemony in Afghanistan, and has been the source of inherent ambiguity in the polity; Kabul, the capital and traditional site of the Afghan monarchy, is a predominantly Dari-speaking city, and even the Mohammadzai Pashtuns, who comprise the top of Afghan social hierarchy and the former monarchy, speak almost exclusively in Dari (Rubin 2002: 26).

The third major ethnic group in Afghanistan, the Hazaras, are also Persian-speaking, but are distinguished from the Tajiks by two main features. First, they are easily identified by their facial characteristics, which signify their descent from the Mongol and Turkic tribes who have passed through Afghanistan extensively (Rubin 2002: 30). Second, they are the largest and one of the most distinct Shi’i Muslim groups in the nation, which is predominantly Sunni Muslim. They are similar to the Pashtun in that they are traditionally tribally organized and have myths of origin – among them, an alleged descent from the army of Genghis Khan that came to Afghanistan in the thirteenth century (Dupree 1980: 161). They have suffered much discrimination for all of these reasons, particularly from the Pashtun state. They are also seen as one of the most rebelliously militaristic groups in the country, which led to several clashes with the monarchy. King Abdur Rahman Khan imposed several harsh measures to dismember the Hazara tribal structure in order to fortify Pashtun influence and national identity in the 19th century; this will be discussed in further detail later in the chapter.
The remaining ethnic groups of Afghanistan are a mix of ethnolinguistic populations – the Turkeic-speaking Uzbek, Turkmen, Kyrgyz and Kazakh; the Baluch; and the Nuristani. The Turkic-speaking groups of the north, while nearly physically indistinguishable from one another or the Hazara, each speak a unique language and follow different forms of social structure; for example, while the Uzbeks are largely detribalized, the Turkmen have retained tribal organization (Magnus, Naby 2002: 17). The Baluch also speak their own unique language and are distinguished by their form of subsistence as nomads throughout southern and western Afghanistan; they are largely tribally organized (Rubin 2002: 31). The Nuristani reside in the valleys north of Kabul, and identify largely with their territory and their language; however, this is done primarily in a national context rather than a local one (Rubin 2002: 31).

This may illustrate how ethnicity becomes most apparent and socially meaningful when identified on a national level; its definition can be otherwise quite nebulous. An example of such categorical ethnic designations by the state is the prevalence of identity cards under the monarchy in the 20th century. The line marked ‘Qawm,’ or ‘tribe,’ was often filled with an ethnolinguistic identification for the individual. Examples of entries include “Pashtun, Tajik, Uzbek...any level of tribal organization; an area of residence such as a village, valley, or town; or an occupational group similar to a caste...qawm identity might be based on kinship, residence or occupation” (Rubin 2002: 25). In addition, ethnic categorization seems to be most fluid amongst the Persian and Turkic-speaking groups, “among whom descent is not ideologically important...locality and territorial ties appear to be critical; there is some evidence that a change of residence by a
member of one of these groups into the territory of another leads quickly to a change of identity” (Tapper 1984: 240). Also, Hazaras who convert from Shi’ism to Sunnism are often regarded as having ceased to be Hazara (Tapper 1984: 240). These phenomena are all very distinct from traditional Pashtun identity, which constitutes a long list of criteria that are rather rigorously applied – “one must speak Pashto, practice Sunni Islam, trace descent to the apical ancestor Qays ‘Abdur Rashid, and not allow one’s sisters or daughters to marry non-Pashtuns” (Tapper 1984: 241). The consequent disparity between the unity of the Pashtun ethnie and the diversity of the other ethnic groups has manifested itself in numerous conflicts throughout the formation of the Afghan nation, as will be seen here.

PASHTUN TRIBES & THE FOUNDING OF THE AFGHAN NATION STATE

As mentioned earlier, the Pashtun tribes of Afghanistan have traditionally had the most influence in establishing the state of Afghanistan. The earliest recognition of Afghanistan as a nation-state - that is, a nation governed by Pashtuns as opposed to various imperial rulers – occurred following the downfall of the Safavid rulers at the beginning of the eighteenth century (Rubin 2002: 45). The two largest and influential Pashtun tribes at the time, the Ghilzais and the Abdalis, were highly active in wresting control of Afghanistan from the Persian empire. The Ghilzais, who were initially the strongest force in this endeavor, managed to consolidate much of Afghanistan into a short-lived empire that unified several of its tribes. R. Gopalakrishnan writes, "[The Ghilzai empire] gave evidence to the potential of the Afghan tribes to establish an empire and to remain as a constant threat in the frontier" (Gopalakrishnan 1982: 41). Once the
Afghan tribes had acquired their independence after the assassination of Persian ruler Nadir Shah in 1747, they established their own centralized monarchy and selected an Abdali - Ahmad Shah Durrani - as Afghanistan's first king through a Loya Jirgah, or council of tribal chiefs (Rashid 2002: 10). Shortly thereafter, however, the solidarity of the Pashtun tribal groups decreased and they began to conflict. The threat of civil warfare was quelled only when the new king sought to strengthen his sovereignty via the ultimate basis of tribal infrastructure in Afghanistan - kinship. In an effort to establish an effective central government, he set up a "Federative Republic," or "confederation of tribes." This action, in effect, also established Pashtun hegemony in Afghanistan by supporting kinship relations amongst the Pashtuns as a method of achieving solidarity (Gopalakrishnan 1982: 41-49).

Durrani was thus successful in bringing authority to his central leadership by allocating power to regional and tribal institutions while reserving certain powers for himself. While the central government was almost entirely in control of the civil and military affairs of Afghanistan, social governance was largely left to tribal leaders who gave strong backing to Durrani. For example, any social, legal, or religious reforms that occurred did not impinge upon traditional values held in esteem by local tribes because they were within the jurisdiction of tribal leaders (Gopalakrishnan 1982: 52). Judicial matters were also left to the Pashtun tribes, as "[they] settled their disputes among themselves; they considered themselves the ruling group, not subjects or citizens of the state" (Rubin 2002: 46). This policy of non-interference in tribal affairs caused a period of strong Afghan Pashtun unity under Durrani, and was strongly influential in
Afghanistan's emerging identity as a nation-state. It also definitively secured the Pashtun *ethnie* as the dominant national identity supported by the state, both in the aristocratic and popular senses.

**THE ANGLO-AFGHAN WARS**

The conflagration of the Anglo-Afghan wars (1839-42; 1878-80) was a major factor in enhancing Afghanistan’s emerging national identity, as it was the new nation’s first significant assertion in the international state system (Rubin 2002: 47). The ruler during the first Anglo-Afghan war, Dost Muhammad Khan, had spent time in Britain and was therefore familiar with the Western conceptualization of state modernity and identity. This made him especially determined to defend Afghanistan’s independence against the British, and he sought military assistance from the European-influenced nation of Iran under the Qajars (Rubin 2002: 47). His son and successor, Sherali, executed many of the Westernizing social reforms in education, government, and the military that he had envisioned as part of the ‘modernization’ of the Afghan nation-state (Magnus, Naby 2002: 34). These processes, along with the strong role of the Pashtun tribes in defeating the British in both Anglo-Afghan wars, strengthened national identity with Afghanistan and gave greater legitimacy to the monarchy. This legitimacy, however, was contingent mainly upon tribal support – particularly amongst the Pashtuns - and thus proportional to the state’s advocacy of tribal interests. The success of subsequent rulers would be largely determined by this fact.
THE ‘IRON RULE’ OF ABDUR RAHMAN KHAN

The policy of appeasing the Pashtun tribal infrastructure as a means of legitimizing central authority was further effected by King Abdur Rahman Khan. In the 1880s, King Amir Abdur Rahman Khan began a campaign to consolidate the state of Afghanistan and drew upon the help of tribes to fight the ‘unruly’ of the country. He largely summoned ethnic Pashtuns like himself, and thus they made up a significant percentage of the tribes that helped him wage war. The ethnic Hazaras, who had succeeded for years in resisting interference from central power, were a primary target of the King and the band of tribal warriors ultimately defeated their stronghold of Hazarajat in 1892. This victory not only boosted the position of Pashtun nomads and tribes in determining the state of Afghanistan, but it also opened up the fertile regions of Hazarajat for Pashtun nomadic settlement (Pedersen 1994: 129). This was badly needed at the time, as strong domination by the British in India limited the movement of Pashtun nomads who resented their controlling presence (Pedersen 1994: 135).

Manifestations of tribal resistance against the monarchy, however, grew during Abdur Rahman Khan’s rule as he tried to subjugate the tribes. Barnett Rubin writes of the king, “Like all Afghan rulers, he simultaneously opposed and manipulated social segmentation...despite all his efforts, however, [he] failed to destroy tribal power” (Rubin 2002: 50). The fight against the British during the two Anglo-Afghan wars had strengthened tribal unity and made it the dominant force in Afghanistan. It was not until Abdur Rahman Khan made official accommodations for the tribal Loya Jirgah in his
administration that his relations with the tribes improved – thus “co-opting a tribal tradition into a state institution” (Rubin 2002: 51).

Abdur Rahman’s policies ultimately strengthened the authority of both the state and the Pashtuns in Afghanistan, sanctioning his legitimacy with a divine Islamic claim to sovereignty not unlike the European absolutist notion of divine right (Rubin 2002: 50). Many of his actions, however, worsened interethnic relations in the country. His brutal assault upon the Shi’i Hazaras in 1892 was compounded by another strategic pittance of the Pashtuns against the group, in which he condemned them as heretics and summoned the Ghilzai tribe to wage a holy war against them; the Hazaras were “plundered, displaced, and sold into slavery,” and their subordinate status lasted well into contemporary times as they provided much of the cheap labor pool in Kabul (Rubin 2002: 51). This embitterment between Hazaras and Pashtuns would manifest itself in many conflicts to come.

THE DEPOSITION OF AMANULLAH

The friction between tribal Afghanistan and the state that had begun under Abdur Rahman would increase during the rule of a later king who tried to implement aggressive social reforms. Between 1919 and 1929, King Amanullah Khan put into effect a long list of legislation intended to modernize the Afghan nation-state, covering areas such as education, political organization, the military, and social customs. Among the most revolutionary proposals was an official discouragement of traditional veiling and seclusion of women, and a consolidation of the tribal military factions into a single
national army (Poullada 70, 148). The reforms were not received well by the tribal constituency, who decried the social proposals as violations of Islamic law and who condemned the increase of Amanullah’s centralized authority in the tribal regions (Poullada 94). This led to a tribal rebellion in Khost in 1924 that caused Amanullah to relax his draft policy in these areas (Poullada 1973: 95). It is apparent that Amanullah was relatively inexperienced in his political rule, as he consistently overlooked crucial factors in administering his policies. Leon Poullada writes, “Amanullah’s political naïveté is best demonstrated by (1) his failure to build a political apparatus that would have provided adequate communication with his people and replaced the tribal linkages he was dismantling, and by (2) his underestimation of the power of the tribes” (Poullada 1973: 154). This underestimation proved to be his downfall, as continuous propaganda from the mullahs and resistance movements amongst the tribes led to an uprising in 1929 that ousted Amanullah from power. The new king Nadir Khan, on the other hand, had immense backing from the large Pashtun Ghilzai tribe that helped reinforce his entitlement to the throne (Poullada 1973: 198). The powerful influence of the tribes in checking the legitimacy of the Afghan monarchy was thus made extremely clear – this time, with overturning results. The coup also served as a reminder of the strength of tribal ties in the face of ‘state modernization’ and the challenge they pose to the formation of modern, Western-style national identity.

ZAHIR SHAH’S REFORMS

Under the last king of Afghanistan, Zahir Shah, a more aggressive approach was taken toward state modernization and the pacification of tribal insurgency. His Prime
Minister during the 60s, Daoud Khan, launched a series of sociopolitical reforms aimed at expanding education (particularly for women), restructuring the government through a new constitution in 1964, and infrastructure development with foreign aid (Magnus, Naby 2002: 48). These measures were aimed, in part, at strengthening state power over the traditional power structures of the tribes. Barnett Rubin writes, “the government countered tribal power with gradual encapsulation and fragmentation rather than confrontation...its command over foreign aid, state enterprises, education, and state employment enabled it to compete with the khans for the allegiance of their tribes and even sons” (Rubin 2002: 72).

The new constitution and reforms, however, while designed to disband tribal power, were also aimed at boosting Pashtun dominance of Afghan politics and society. The delineation of administrative districts were arranged to ensure a Pashtun majority in each, and the two parliaments were over 60 percent Pashtun (Rubin 2002: 73). In addition, the unequal social development of Kabul over the rural areas resulted in increased access of urbane Pashtuns to power and privilege in the government; Ralph Magnus and Eden Naby write, “in this respect, the ethnic pecking order that placed Pushtun Durrani at the top operated to the disadvantage of others” (Magnus, Naby 2002: 50). Furthermore, the establishment of the Pashto Tulana Institute for research on the Pashto language, as well as the implementation of a rule requiring all government workers to know the language, were geared toward a state goal of standardizing Pashto culture in Afghan society (Emadi 1990: 9). This came to the chagrin of many non-Pashtuns who had found Dari to be an adequate interethnic language (Magnus, Naby
2002: 50). The exacerbation of this interethnic tension, as well as of socioeconomic classes due to the unequal nature of the social reforms, may have fueled the conflict dynamics of the communist revolution in 1978.

THE COMMUNIST ERA AND THE MUIJAHEDIN

The communist revolution of 1978 in Afghanistan was symbolically significant, in that it was the theoretical overthrowal of an elitist monarchy in exchange for rule by the ‘masses’ and ‘working class.’ The lack of industrialization in the country, however, or the cohesion of even a single popular ethnne impeded such an endeavor and actually amplified multi-ethnic loyalties in national politics. The People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), which was largely responsible for the coup in collaboration with the Soviets, was divided into two branches along ethnolinguistic lines – the Pashtun Khelq, and the Dari-speaking Parcham. Motivations for party membership were greatly influenced by ethnic identity and mutual disregard; the Khelq was primarily composed of Pashtuns of tribal provincial backgrounds who resented the Dari-speaking Kabuli elite for their social monopoly of the capital and their supposed betrayal of Pashtun cultural heritage (Magnus, Naby 2002: 112). In return, the Dari-speaking members of the Parcham felt opposed to the Pashtuns for their historical domination of national politics and government and exclusion of non-Pashtun groups. There has been speculation that these ethnic lines might have been reinforced early in the party’s history by the Soviets to encourage division, only to be done away with when Soviet interest promoted unity and mobilization for the coup in 1978 (Magnus, Naby 2002: 120). The persistence and manipulation of these ethnic conflicts by the Soviets, however, was evident throughout
the rise and fall of several different communist leaders – Nur Mohammad Taraki, Hafizullah Amin, Babrak Karmal - in the early years of communist rule in Afghanistan. Ralph Magnus and Eden Naby write, “there is no central theme or policy underlying the blood feuds of the Marxists except the struggle for power” (Magnus, Naby 131); and as has been evidenced in past power struggles in the nation, ethnic identity has been a factor of division in conflict.

While the state was experiencing these ethnic tensions, the tribal and ethnic militia of Afghanistan were uniting in an opposition movement against the government and the Soviet invasion. Known as the mujaheddin, they were drawn together across tribal lines under the common banner of Islam to fight off the Soviets in a jihad, or holy war. This movement was fueled ideologically and militarily in Islamist training schools based in Pakistan, and was supported with widespread monetary assistance from the international community – particularly the United States, Saudi Arabia, and China. The communist regime in Kabul and its ideological reforms were viewed as an affront to traditional Islamic values and for this reason was resisted with Islamist fervor by the mujaheddin (Magnus, Naby 2002: 139).

Najibullah, the communist president of Afghanistan during the later years of the regime, tried unsuccessfully to incorporate the mujaheddin into the existing government. The symbolic implications of such a move were profound; Rubin writes, “this model of state-society relations, with its formal recognition of decentralization, was radically different from the strategy of centralized encapsulation that had been pursued by previous
Afghan regimes... but most of the country’s territory and population remained beyond the reach of the state” (Rubin 2002: 148). Indeed, as discussed before, the absence of industrialization and other aspects of state modernity impeded state control of Afghan society and therefore complicated the formation of a national community that could be unified under one state; thus, it could not be used an apparatus by the communist regime as anticipated.

**CIVIL WAR AND THE ADVENT OF THE TALIBAN**

While the *mujaheddin* were ultimately successful in toppling the communist regime and evicting the Soviets from Afghanistan in 1989, their ethnic divisions throughout the conflict had deepened factionalist tendencies along ethnic lines. This was often propelled by alignment with different international allies; while Pakistan and Saudi Arabia sided with eastern and Ghilzai Pashtun *mujaheddin*, Iran supported the Persian and Turkic-speaking *mujaheddin* – most particularly, the Shi’i Hazara groups (Magnus, Naby 2002: 258). The withdrawal of the Soviets and American support from the Afghan scene created a vacuum of power in the country, and sparked years of conflict amongst these ethnic militia groups as they battled each other for political control of the country. The two largest rivals were the Ghilzai Pashtun militia headed by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, and the Tajik Dari-speaking militia led by Ahmad Shah Massoud. Both camps held office as part of the same Afghan Interim Government during the early 1990’s, but bitterly disputed exclusive possession of power and jurisdiction over territory. It was amidst this warfare that much of Kabul was destroyed, and widespread cases of looting, destruction, and rape by *mujaheddin* groups in civilian sectors were also reported.

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The civil war did much to unravel any consolidation of Afghan ethnic communities under a single modern Afghan identity that may have slowly developed with past regimes, through initiatives in integrative public education, military and the media (Magnus, Naby 2002: 12). The amplification of ethnic cleavages thus became a stronger phenomenon in subsequent power struggles in the country. Furthermore, the rampant chaos and lack of leadership during the civil war became a major factor in facilitating the rise of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan in 1995. Having roots in the Islamist madresa schools of Pakistan, the Taliban movement was a product of both Islamist militarism and primarily Pashtun tribal mobilization. The disorder of Afghan society and the threat of disintegration of tribal integrity during the war were important in winning Pashtun tribal support and participation for the Taliban, who vowed to “restore peace, disarm the population, enforce Shar’ia law and defend the integrity and Islamic character of Afghanistan” (Rashid 2001: 21).

The Taliban enforced numerous codes of law that they alleged to be based upon Islamic Shari’a, such as the complete veiling of women, full beards on men, the prohibition of women in the workplace, and death and amputation sentences for offenses such as adultery and murder. While the Islamic legitimacy of these laws was widely rejected by much of the mainstream Muslim community worldwide, the Taliban’s code of law may be seen more as a product of Islamist inspiration and Pashtun tribal values, such as Pashtunwali.
This premise of Pashtun cultural alignment aggravated interethnic politics, however. Reports of human rights violations reveal a higher incidence of acts committed against minority ethnic groups in Mazar-e-Sharif and Hazarajat (RAWA 2002). Though the Taliban’s rule has been credited with stabilizing the “fragmented warlord condition” of Afghan society at the time, such Pashtun offenses have been met with hostility from Persian and Turkic-speaking ethnic groups (Magnus, Naby 2002: 195). This was evident in the consistent collaboration of non-Pashtun ethnic militia in the opposition battles against the Taliban; Tajik commander Ahmad Shah Massoud, who was allegedly assassinated in September of 2001 by supporters of the Taliban and al-Qaeda, was the leading figure of the opposition movement (Rashid 2002: 87). The confederation of these groups, known as the ‘Northern Alliance’ - an implied reference to their non-Pashtun makeup – posed a consistently strong challenge to the Taliban until their collapse after September 11 in 2001. The deployment of American and U.N. troops in Afghanistan was performed in heavy cooperation with the Northern Alliance, as their domestic battle expertise was sought in overthrowing the Taliban regime. This fact would have heavy bearing on the establishment of the replacement government of Afghanistan by the international diplomatic community.

THE PRESENT

The current government of Afghanistan was virtually an overnight construction in the hurried aftermath of September 11th. It is an intended incorporation of both international and indigenous Afghan consensus; interim appointments were made by the United Nations in December 2001, and endorsements were made by an Afghan Loya
Jirgah in June 2002. The head of state chosen was Hamid Karzai, the head of the Pashtun Popalzai clan in Kandahar and a distant kinship relative of former king Zahir Shah. Karzai was likely chosen for office due to his fluency in English and Western-style education, which were anticipated to serve him well in interactions with the international diplomatic community. A particularly significant consideration in his selection, however, was his relationship with the various tribes and ethnic groups of Afghanistan. As the son of a former parliamentary deputy and royalist clan leader, Karzai possessed high leadership status with the politically dominant Pashtun. His role in the struggle against the Soviets, however, also won him support with many of the mujaheddin factions comprising the Northern Alliance (BBC 2002). He has demonstrated a welcoming attitude toward many of the non-Pashtun ethnic groups, symbolizing his support by constantly appearing in public in the traditional Uzbek chapan robe and universally popular karakul hat. He also maintained close friendly relations with ethnically diverse members of his administration, such as deputy premier Sima Samar, a Hazara woman, and foreign minister Abdullah Abdullah, a Tajik and former assistant to Ahmad Shah Massoud of the Northern Alliance.

The purpose in the division of power in Karzai’s administration appears to be the appeasement of the various ethnic groups, and specifically their militias. While Karzai’s background and support from the former king won initial approval from the Pashtuns, the delegation of the interior, defense and foreign ministries to Northern Alliance control were intended to win support from the non-Pashtun ethnic groups. The results, however, have been far from successful in this regard. Northern Alliance leaders, such as Tajik
warlord Ismail Khan, have been resistant of the central regime in their governance of provinces and demonstrate a desire for the decentralized authority that has traditionally existed in Afghanistan. Many Pashtun tribes have been even more ideologically fervent about their opposition of Karzai, launching violent opposition and several assassination attempts upon him. While there are many Pashtuns who support Karzai, there are many others who consider his cooperation with the United States an offense to Afghan tribal tradition (Yusufzai 2002). As Leon Poullada states, the two most outstanding political features of Pashtun tribes are, “their resistance to conquest or to integration within a larger community, empire, or nation and their internal conflict and disunity” (Poullada 1970: 4). Surely, the bitter division of Pashtuns between those loyal to Karzai and those despising his western sympathies is a clear illustration of this, and may erupt into more flagrant conflict in the future. In addition, the increased involvement of local countries who are ethnically allied with groups in Afghanistan – Iran, Pakistan, the republics of Central Asia – are escalating the potential for Afghanistan to become a battleground for foreign interests yet again (Magnus, Naby 211). The presumed consequences of more war and lack of monetary funds are the continued instability of infrastructure in the country and the hindrance of industrial development. These matters have the obvious social effect of impeding the development of a unified national sentiment, which has continued to deteriorate precipitously over the past two decades of war. Afghan social unity, in the sense of the modern Western nation-state, is a phenomenon wholly absent today.
CONCLUSION

The challenges facing the current Afghan regime derive in good part from the fact that it is a Western-based model of the democratic nation-state that was suddenly imposed on a war-ravaged nation lacking infrastructure. The conflicts that do erupt between different parties highlight a theme of conflict present throughout much of Afghan history described in this paper – centralized authority of the state versus decentralized authority of tribes. The role of ethnicity in this conflict is as a complicating political and cultural factor; it further prevents the consolidation of either camp from maintaining any lasting dominance over the other. This divisiveness also inhibits the national solidarity that is characteristic of the Western model of the successful modern nation-state.

The sociopolitical situation in Afghanistan is therefore distinguished from this model. The various ethnic identities asserted in Afghanistan by various groups comprise a variety of *ethnicities*, as communities that each claim different forms of organization and social interests. Were Afghanistan to undergo the industrialization and modernization processes of Western ethnic states discussed in Chapter 2, such boundaries would likely become less relevant as ‘common civic interest and identity’ would become the unifying qualities of the national *ethnie*. Instead, it remains a highly decentralized society, subject to a central state primarily for diplomatic purposes and territorial distinction.

My objective in this paper has been to explore the relevance of ethnic identity to state politics and national identity in the history of Afghanistan. In the process, I have
discussed differing notions of the ethnicity-nation link in anthropological and sociological literature, and have suggested a scholastic consideration and re-examination of existing models for so-called modern nation-states. By describing the ethnopolitical challenges of implementing these models so abruptly in Afghanistan, I hope to encourage a closer examination of the power dynamics of various societies that are similarly characterized by decentralization and disunity. Perhaps the establishment of a single ethnie around a central state will be reconsidered when imagining future alternatives to the currently globalized model of the nation.
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