The Impact of Political Islam on Cultural Practices in Badakhshan, Afghanistan, during the Taliban Era

by

Bruce E. Koepke

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1965a:26). One has to bear in mind that the harsh and extreme weather conditions of this region made these particular sections of the Silk Road passable for only limited times of the year. Badakhshan’s primary role in this trade route was as a distributor rather than a supplier of goods (see Grevemeyer 1982:101; Raunig 1978:554). Many old caravanserais (rest houses) continue to be used and thus testify to the continued popularity of this ancient trade route. Yet the Silk Road has not only been important for the trade of consumer goods; it has also been a vital means of transmitting cultural practices including those of aesthetic entertainment. Musicians, dancers and actors would have been especially popular at the major caravanserais and chaikhanas (teahouses), since their performances were not reliant upon local languages, but utilised the extra-linguistic media of music, dance and mime (see also Haussig 1988:108-109).

Towards the end of the seventeenth century the discovery of maritime routes between Europe and the East had a significant impact on the monopolistic position of Central Asia and Afghanistan as transit trade centres. These new routes proved to be safer, cheaper, and in many respects faster (see Gregorian 1969:21; Grevemeyer, 1982:102), their inevitable popularity thus contributing to the subsequent economic and cultural isolation of northern Afghanistan. The Bolshevik reconquest of Western Turkestan which followed the Russian Revolution in 1917 and the Chinese Communist takeover of Muslim Eastern Turkestan in 1949, culminated in the closed border policies of the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (henceforth USSR) and China in the 1920s and 1950s respectively. These trade and travel restrictions further impacted upon the peoples of Badakhshan, particularly merchant families who had been involved in long distance and cross-border trade (see Shahrani 1984:143). In 1924, the area of Badakhshan under the control of the Bokhara Amir was integrated into the former USSR, and later became the autonomous province of Gorno-Badakhshan in the Tajik Soviet Socialist Republic (see Grevemeyer 1982:72). Yet even with Tajikistan’s independence in December 1991, its borders with Afghan Badakhshan have remained closed and any trans-border trade remains illegal.

Since the early twentieth century, the illegal trade of high quality opium from Badakhshan’s abundant poppy fields has markedly increased. In 1870-1880, opium was already being grown in the Pamir region of Sheghnan, but was
mainly used by local communities, including the court of Mir Yousef Ali Shah (see Holzwarth 1990:209, 220n5). However, just prior to World War I, China’s enormous population of opium addicts created the lucrative opportunity of an opium export market. Bypassing Britain’s strictly controlled opium trade, Badakhshan quickly adapted its agricultural traditions and began to cultivate the labour-intensive poppy plant. By 1922 the opium poppy had become the province’s main crop with Xinjiang, for example, importing exclusively from Badakhshan (Holzwarth 1990:209-210). In recent years, particularly during the Rabbani Presidency (1992-2001), the cultivation of opium has dramatically escalated to become the main source of income for many farmers. Although officially prohibited by the Islamic State of Afghanistan under President Rabbani and also by the Governor of Badakhshan, there has been no effective means of enforcing bans in the poverty-stricken province, despite support from the UN. Importantly, the poppy plant is not only a vital source of income for many local communities, but has numerous useful by-products including animal fodder, vegetable oil and soap that are greatly valued by the impoverished population.

In fact, in 1998 and 1999, Badakhshan needed to import most essential goods such as additional grains, oil, salt, sugar, fuel, and medicines, as well as the luxury items of soap, batteries, soft drinks, and clothing. While oil and salt were available from neighbouring provinces, most other items originated in Iran and Pakistan and were smuggled via donkey or truck through Taliban territories to Taloqan (Takhar Province), Sar-e Pul (Baghlan Province) and then onwards to Faizabad. In addition, a small number of household and luxury items reached Badakhshan via the Topkhana/Shah Salim Pass during the summer months. However, these goods tended to be available only in the larger district centres of Keshem and Faizabad in the western mountain regions, and in Jurm and Baharak in the central basin. In comparison, the bazaars in the villages of the high mountain areas in south- and north-eastern Badakhshan were characterised by a marked scarcity of tea, sweets, fruit, and clothing.

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63 Mir is a Tajik word for a local chief.
64 In 1907, China had an approximate population of 13.5 million opium addicts (see Holzwarth 1990:208).
65 During this period, Jurm established itself as a centre for Badakhshan’s opium production and trade.
66 The stem of the poppy plant, for example, is used as fuel; its ashes are utilised in soap production. The seed is extracted for oil production and used for cooking and the remaining seed pulps are fed to domestic animals (see Afghanaid 1995:Appendix lii).
This economic and geographic isolation, together with its lack of natural resources, meant that Badakhshan occupied a peripheral political position during Afghanistan’s modern era (1950-1978). Even before the Marxist coup in 1978, Badakhshan was categorised by the UN as one of the poorest and most backward provinces of Afghanistan (see UNIDATA 1992:5). UN recommendations published in 1976 were never implemented (UNIDATA 1992:5) with the consequence that the levels of poverty in the province continued to escalate. These cycles of impoverishment are further perpetuated by the fact that approximately one third of the local population is landless (see Goodhand 2000:272). Moreover, throughout its history, Badakhshan has been prone to food shortages (see Goodhand 2000:268) and regular floods continue to erode precious arable land. During my field research, bartering continued to be a common practice as a consequence of scarce employment and irregular payment of salaries. In the bazaars, locally hand-made items such as traditional Badakhshi shoes, coats, caps, pottery, lapis lazuli jewellery, saddle goods, and urns were sold next to basic household goods imported from Pakistan and Iran.

With this virtual lack of cash flow, opium resin became a quasi-monetary unit, providing many impoverished farmers with immediate finances and often in hard currency. The limited employment options available for Badakhshi men in Badakhshan were to work with one of the few international NGOs, to serve as a soldier for one of the numerous military commanders belonging to various factions of the United Front, or alternatively to engage in the opium trade as a courier or farmer. Since the Islamic State of Afghanistan did not have a remotely viable economy, people became dependent upon whatever offered a means of cash revenue. Thus, a shift from the production of wheat to that of opium, from the trade of animals to the trade of drugs became characteristic of all levels of Badakhshi society in the last stages of Rabbani’s Presidency (see Goodhand 2000:277).

The harsh and often inhospitable living conditions of Badakhshan are further compounded by its poorly developed internal infrastructure. Major thoroughfares that were built during previous regimes dating back to President Daoud (1973-1978), deteriorated with the beginning of motorised trade over twenty years ago (see Raunig 1978:559, 572n14). Since neither the Islamic

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67 After a second major earthquake hit Badakhshan in May 1998, many international NGOs started to set up offices and programs throughout the province.
68 As a result of the widespread insecurity in Badakhshan, peasants were not able to sell livestock in Kabul or other large bazaars.
State of Afghanistan nor the local government had the means to allocate funds for roadworks, the main motorable transport artery (Keshem-Argu-Faizabad-Baharak-Warduj-Zebak-Ishkashim) was fragile and suitable only for all-wheel-powered vehicles and trucks. Whilst there was no telecommunication system during the time of my research in 1998 and 1999, several satellite phones existed in Faizabad and an old telephone line serviced a few government buildings as well as some NGO offices.69 Electricity was virtually non-existent.70 A diesel-powered generator in Faizabad’s Shahr-e Kohna district operated very infrequently, while in Dasht-e Islam a somewhat more efficient diesel-generator more regularly supplied electricity to residences near the inner city.71 Whereas all NGOs used diesel-powered generators, no other settlements had access to public electricity. However, in Buz Dara in the Pamir region as well as in Bagh-e Zard in western Badakhshan, I saw some ingeniously designed generators comprised of parts stripped from Soviet military vehicles and driven by local irrigation canals.

In spite of its extreme isolation and poverty, Badakhshan has historically had one of the best provincial education systems available in Afghanistan. The province was well known for its Sunni religious institutions (see Shahrani 1984:152). Secular education for both girls and boys was also relatively well supported by national and provincial governments from the 1950s to 1990s.72 During my research, Sheghnan district in the north-east of the province was singled out by virtually all Badakhshi informants as a centre of learning and for producing some of the best male and female teachers of the province. Although...
physically remote, this town has a long history of education that may be attributable to the forcible relocation of the family members of Mir Yusuf Ali Shah to Kabul at the end of the nineteenth century (see Emadi 1998:109). It seems that some of these family members became gholam bachagan (slave boys) who upon returning to their home district, promoted ideas of modern education (see Shahrani 1984:147). In addition, from 1960 until the late 1980s, members of elite or wealthy landowning families in Badakhshan were sent to Kabul for further education after completing schooling in the province. Many of these early graduates returned as teachers or remained in Kabul as academics, intellectuals or bureaucrats (see Shahrani 1984:153-154). Chapter Four will discuss three educated urban Badakhshis: Mansur Hashimi, Tahir Badakhshi and Burhanuddin Rabbani, who emerged in the 1960s and 1970s as critical players in Afghanistan’s nascent political movements.

During the Rabbani Presidency, many schools were assisted by international NGOs with the consequence that in 1994 the province was believed to have the highest rural literacy rate in Afghanistan (see Mokhtarzada 1994:8). Faizabad had four high schools for boys and two for girls, as well as a co-educational teachers' college. However, schools were unable to provide resources such as books, paper, pencils, desks, or chairs. Whilst teachers were supposedly paid by the government, by 1994 the payment of their salaries was infrequent. In 1998, many teachers in district centres commented that they were rarely paid, and in rural areas, most teachers had not been paid for years. Nevertheless, in that same year, Badakhshan’s Ministry of Education claimed that the province had 156 primary schools, 62 intermediate, and 55 high schools. Significantly, in comparison with areas under the control of the Taliban, girls were not barred from attending school.

73 After Abdur Rahman Khan took Sheghnan in 1893, the Sheghni elite was thereafter required to send gholam bachagan to Kabul (see Emadi 1998:109). Abdur Rahman Khan saw this as a regional pacification program, intending that the slave boys would lose their Badakhshi identity and thus not pose a threat to central governance (see Shahrani 1998:234n38). Children from many aristocratic families throughout Afghanistan were sent to Kabul and eventually become an educated, forward-looking elite removed from their local traditions. Often the gholam bachagan would eventually return to their provinces as administrative officers (Holzwarth 1990:57-58).

74 The NGOs NAC and UNICEF have been especially supportive.

75 Member of local elite, 1998, Badakhshan.

76 According to Badakhshan’s Ministry of Education, the subjects taught consisted of arithmetic, trigonometry, geometry, physics, science, chemistry, biology, geography, history, carpentry, calligraphy, drawing, writing, religion, English, Pushto, Arabic, Dari, and sports. The sports that I observed were volleyball, buzkashi and wrestling. Some of the students competed at the annual equestrian and wrestling tournaments around nowruz, the Persian New Year (Personal communication with local informants in Faizabad in May 1998).
from receiving a basic school education. Prior to the emergence of the Taliban, students who wished to pursue higher level studies and whose parents had the resources to send them, would travel to Kabul, Mazar-e-Sharif or Taloqan. After the Taliban’s take-over of Mazar-e Sharif in north-western Afghanistan in May 1997, male and female students were only able to pursue basic tertiary education in Takhar, which from 1997 was increasingly subjected to air strikes. Fearful of reprisals, students from territories held by the United Front were generally unwilling to pursue higher education. By 1998, the Taliban controlled all universities in Afghanistan.

During the late 1980s and early 1990s – at the end of the mujahideen resistance to the Soviet-backed Communist government and in the early stages of the Islamic State of Afghanistan – many areas controlled by conservative Islamist leaders experienced an upsurge in Islamic orthodoxy that became manifest in all aspects of society. The provincial library in Faizabad, for example, was closed since the reading of non-Islamic books was discouraged. In 1998, I observed the remnants of this once well-stocked library, its vast collection of books having been dumped on the floor of a locked, damp and dusty room in a building near the bazaar. Many of these books were historical or medical in nature and dated back to the times of Zahir Shah and Mohammad Daoud. All books containing visual images were riddled with bullet holes. However, in spite of restrictions on printed material, a local Dari newspaper called ‘Badakhshan’ continued to be published sporadically whilst it had sufficient supplies of paper and fuel to run the print machinery.

The retreat of Soviet forces in 1989 and the emergence of a conservative Islamic mujahideen leadership in Badakhshan also led to a considerable demise in the rights of women. In contrast to other provinces in Afghanistan, however, at the time of my research women were able to continue working as teachers, 

77 Women were only permitted to do so if they were accommodated with relatives in these cities.
78 The Taliban entered Mazar-e Sharif first briefly on 23 May 1997 after the defection of Abdul Malik, a major commander of Dostum’s Jumbesh-e Melli party (National Islamic Movement), to the Taliban. Several days later, on 27 May, Malik returned to Dostum and the Taliban were pushed back (Maley 1998:11-12). On 8 August 1998, however, the Taliban succeeded in securing Mazar-e Sharif until they were ousted during the US-led military campaign against terrorists on 9 November 2001 (see Gannon 2001; Rashid 2000:72-73).
79 The control of Taloqan by the Taliban in 1997 and 1998 was only short-lived and it was quickly re-taken by the United Front (see Davis 1998; IRNA 2000). Taloqan was under Taliban rule from 5/6 September 2000-11 November 2001, when it was liberated by the United Front with the assistance of the US-led alliance against Terrorism (see BBC 2000).
doctors and nurses. Nevertheless, even though both President Rabbani of the Islamic State of Afghanistan and the provincial administration officially sanctioned such practices, orthodox mullahs in Faizabad often used the obligatory namaz-e jorne (Friday prayer) to call for changes in these policies. In 1998, groups of women were able to walk to the bazaar, albeit fully concealed by green, blue or white burqas (garments that conceal the entire body of a woman from head-to-toe). According to a local informant, the wearing of the burqa in Badakhshan had been enforced with the inauguration of the Islamic State of Afghanistan in 1992 and had remained common etiquette even though most of the local population was in strict opposition to the Taliban. It seemed also that women were ‘willing’ to wear the burqa since it afforded them a degree of protection from commanders who upon sighting a woman, may have demanded to marry her. During my second visit to the province in 1999, an intensification of orthodox practices in Faizabad meant that women – even clothed in burqas – were seen infrequently outside of the compounds of their homes.

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This ethnography has highlighted Badakhshan’s tremendous diversity in terms of its ethnicities, languages, Islamic sects, and geographical regions. I have argued that the use of markers of identity in Afghanistan may often be problematic and thus should not be thought of as being fixed entities. Dari, which is spoken with a Badakhshi dialect, serves as the lingua franca for the province’s mostly multi-lingual inhabitants. The combination of its rugged topography, with an abundance of towering mountains that situates half of the province at an altitude of over 3000 metres, and the extremes in climate, has fostered a settlement pattern of small, isolated communities that share

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80 The province’s only hospital is located in Faizabad with several male and female doctors in attendance. In 1998 there were approximately twelve government health centres in Badakhshan. Like teachers, doctors were generally unpaid, relying upon their private practices and the sale of prescription medicines for income. Several NGOs (Swedish Afghanistan Committee, MERLIN) and UNICEF support the health system by funding basic salaries, but more commonly, medicines.

81 This was such a sensitive issue that on several occasions in 1998 Rabbani had to intervene so that local women as well as foreign women employed by NGOs could continue their work (Personal information with member of local elite).

82 At the level of the eyes a small net is inserted so as to allow for some orientation whilst walking.

83 Personal communication with male member of Badakhshi elite, Faizabad, 1998.
distinctive socio-cultural identities. The harsh climate and inhospitable terrain clearly connect each community closely to the unpredictable forces of nature. Not surprisingly therefore, throughout Badakhshan’s history the region has been isolated and inaccessible, although its high mountain passes, seasonally raging rivers and deep valley encarvements often served as political boundaries for many semi-autonomous princedoms and modern military commanders. Badakhshan’s remoteness from urban centres has meant that it did not share the benefits of the trends of modernisation that swept across Afghanistan in the 1960s and 1970s and consequently there has been a lack of any significant development. Indeed, the province has remained severely impoverished, based on a traditional subsistence agrarian society, and whose economic stagnation as well as limited employment opportunities have made it especially vulnerable to the labour intensive, yet highly profitable growing of opium poppies.

It is against this backdrop that the cultural practices I recorded in 1998 and 1999, and which were performed by Sunni Tajiks, Uzbeks and Pushtuns as well as Ismaili Tajiks, may be comprehended. Since cultural performances were restricted at that time for religious and/or political reasons, this ethnographic background is necessarily complemented by the ensuing discussion of Badakhshan’s political history.
The Political History of Badakhshan

Afghanistan stands at the threshold of a new – a democratic epoch...It is in the process of a profound shift into the ‘modern period’ and will therefore increasingly be exposed to internal crises and tensions (Klimburg 1966:7).1

This statement by the Austrian ethnographer Max Klimburg, author of one of the first general monographs on Afghanistan, may easily have been made after the inauguration of Afghanistan’s interim administration in Kabul on 22 December 2001. Klimburg’s announcement of Afghanistan’s new era of modernity and democracy, however, was written nearly thirty-seven years ago, one year after Afghanistan was identified as a constitutional monarchy in 1964. Moreover, few would have anticipated that the internal tensions and crises which Klimburg saw as accompanying the path to modernity, would lead to a Marxist coup in 1978, decades of civil war, the rise of extremist Islam, and the eventual failure of Afghanistan as a political state. The Communist period had made the country vulnerable to outside forces, most importantly, that of Pakistan’s intelligence organisation, the Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate (ISI), and Saudi Arabia, but also the United States and Iran. Almost half of Afghanistan’s financial aid originated from Saudi and other Arab sources. It seems now that these groups were primarily interested in promoting Wahhabism, a puritan Arabian Islamic reformist movement that is particularly anti-Shiite (see Chapter Five), and intentionally aimed to reduce the influence

1 I have translated this quote from the original German into English.
of traditional Afghan religious and cultural practices by financing those *mujahideen* groups who were prepared to adopt their extremist ideologies. The recipients of these financial and military benefits were Gulbuddin Hekmatyar from the Hezb-e Islami, Abdul-Rab al-Rasul Sayyaf from Ittehad-e Islami as well as the leader of the Taliban, Mullah Omar. The culmination of this foreign influence in Afghanistan was manifest in the Taliban militia’s close alliance with the Saudi Wahhabi-influenced extremist Islamist Osama bin Laden and his al Qaeda (Military Base) terrorist network.

From 1998 to 2001, Badakhshan held the unique position as the only province in Afghanistan whose territories remained outside of the control of the Taliban. Nevertheless, in Badakhshan in 1998 and 1999, the influence of ultra-conservative Arabian and Indian extremist Islamic reformist dogmas was evident in the prohibition of traditionally popular aesthetic and non-Sunni religious cultural performances. In order to explicate the complex relationship between the emergence of an Islamist society in Afghanistan and the patronage/prohibition of cultural practices in Badakhshan, I shall begin this chapter with an historical overview that situates the province in the larger social and political context of the nation of Afghanistan. I shall then specifically examine the circumstances that led firstly to the emergence of political Islam in Afghanistan, then later to the rise of extremist Islam that reached its zenith during the Taliban era (1996-2001). As will be argued in this and the following chapters, extremist Islam – albeit on a much smaller scale – was also manifest in some regions of Badakhshan. This had a significant impact on the expression of non-religious performances in the province.

**The Pre-, Early and Medieval Islamic Periods**

Badakhshan’s traditional epoch was dominated by the relative autonomy of Badakhshan’s rulers. Elected either externally or by Badakhshan’s elite, the rulers represented the interests of Badakhshan’s sphere of political influence who, despite the formal recognition of the suzerainty of external rulers, were able to govern relatively autonomously...As a result of conditions that generally affected all areas of governance in Central Asia, the boundaries of the territorial sovereignty, however, remained fluid...When viewed from the perspective of major sovereignties, Badakhshan was a dependency of their empires, whereas from the perspective of provincial historians (and their patrons, the [local Badakhshi] rulers), it was an independent empire whose tradition of rulers could be traced to their ancestor,
While the history of the territory now known as Badakhshan has been marked by an abundance of take-overs and wars, it has nevertheless tended to remain a fiercely autonomous territory that was often only nominally controlled by invading dynasties and rulers. A number of dynastic leaders or vassals of empires ruled over Badakhshan during the pre-Islamic and early Islamic eras. While Badakhshan was first mentioned in seventh and eighth century Chinese documents, there is no clear record of the region’s early period of Islamisation (Barthold et al. 1960:852). The powerful Mongol Genghis Khan whose influence extended throughout large parts of Central Asia and the Middle East, dominated the thirteenth century and his descendants, the Chagatai rulers, governed territories including Badakhshan but extending as far as parts of India and Turkey. From the fifteenth to eighteenth century, Badakhshan was largely seen as a dependency of larger empires such as that of the Moghuls as well as those which originated in East Turkestan, including Samarkand, Balkh, Kunduz, and the Chagatai-Mongols (see Barthold et al. 1960:852; Grevemeyer 1982:24). Yet local rulers and provincial historians of that era continued to regard the region as an independent territory (see Grevemeyer 1982:23).

The beginning of the sixteenth century marked the ascendancy of the Uzbeks in Afghanistan and subsequent Uzbek/Moghul rivalries for the subjugation of Badakhshan. Huge Uzbek empires which were created in what is now contemporary northern Afghanistan, vied for control over the territory of
Afghanistan not only with the Moghul empire in present southern Afghanistan (see Grevemeyer 1982:21), but also with a third major contestant, the Safawids (1502-1722), who dominated contemporary western Afghanistan (see Dupree 1973:321; Floor 1980:133). All three empires continually waged war against each other. From 1504-1647, however, Badakhshan was ruled predominantly by the Moghuls, although at the same time the region remained effectively governed by its local rulers, the Mir-e Shahs, who mostly resided in Faizabad. Despite an attempt by the fifth Moghul ruler, Mir Jahan (1628-

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4 Individual Uzbek tribes had not been effective as a political force until the end of the fifteenth century when Mohammad Shaybani united a number of Uzbek tribes against the Timurids and the Moghuls. The Uzbek dynasty had been ruled by three dynasties: the Shabanids (1500-1598/99), the Astrakhanids, also known as the Janids (1598/99-1741/1785), and the Mangits (1740/1785-1920) (see Grevemeyer 1982:44). The Uzbek Mohammad Shaybani briefly ruled over Badakhshan in 1505, but was unable to hold onto the province due to the opposition by the local elite. In 1507/1508, he was again defeated in Badakhshan (Grevemeyer 1982:46). With the take-over of Herat by Mohammad Shaybani in 1507, he officially became the successor of the Timurids and the founder of a new dynasty (Grevemeyer 1982:42).

5 Babur, the founder of the Moghul Dynasty, was a Chagatai descendent from Tamerlane on his father's side and Genghis Khan on his mother's side (see Ghaussy 1997:24). In the sixteenth century, Badakhshan was ruled by Nasir Mirza (Babur's brother), Mirza Khan (Babur's patrilineal and matrilineal cousin and also a relative of the Badakhshi royal family), Humuyan (Babur's favourite son and future heir), Hindal (Humuyan's son), and Mirza Suleiman (the son of Mirza Khan). When Humuyan succeeded Babur as ruler of the Moghul empire in 1530, Kamran Mirza (Humuyan's rival-brother) and Mirza Suleiman constantly conquered and reconquered Badakhshan. The province was thus governed by a number of rulers for many interrupted brief periods. The assistance of foreign rulers (such as the Khan of Kashgar in 1529) was often sought by these two rivals in their quest to achieve rule, or to support the Badakhshi elite in securing their preferred Moghul ruler (for example Mirza Suleiman in 1545). In order to gain or re-gain control of Badakhshan, the rival Moghul rulers Kamran Khan (1546) and Mirza Suleiman (1549), as well as Badakhshan's elite, periodically sided or threatened to side with neighbouring enemies such as the Uzbeks or the Mongols of Kashgar. Mirza Suleiman's grandson Mirza Shahrukh was the last Moghul ruler during this period (see Grevemeyer 1982:32-41).

8 Historically, the Mir-e Shah was linked to the mirs (who were often related to the Mir-e Shah) via a relationship that may be characterised as "primus inter pares" ("first among equals") (Holzwarth 1980:192). The mirs ruled in princely mini-states, mostly as dependencies of the Mir-e Shah and in the peripheries of his spheres of influence (largely limited to central Badakhshan). They served as mediators between the interests of the local population in the villages and valleys, and the provincial government under the authority of the Mir-e Shah. The provincial government, in turn, was the intermediary between regional interests and the Afghan state (or previously with other empires). The settlements of Faizabad, Keshem, Jurm, and Baharak, and as well as Munjan in southern Badakhshan have at various times functioned as the bases for the rulers of Badakhshan (see Map 3). Following the destruction of Faizabad in 1827 by the ruler of Kunduz, the Uzbek Morad Beg (died 1838) (see Grevemeyer 1982:124; Wood 1841:162-163, 199), Jurm temporarily became Badakhshan's capital. Since the time of its reconstruction in the 1840s however, Faizabad has remained the provincial capital of Badakhshan (see Grevemeyer 1982:105; Grötzbach 1979:93).
1658) to wrestle Badakhshan from the increasing Uzbek domination, the territory remained effectively under the Uzbek khanate until possibly 1654.9

For 230 years (1657-1887), the entire province of the geographical region of Badakhshan, which at that time included the contemporary political territories of Gorno-Badakhshan in Tajikistan and Badakhshan in Afghanistan, was locally ruled by Amir (King) Yari Beg (1657-1707/1708) from Yaftal and his descendants who proudly claimed Alexander the Great as their ancestor (see Grevemeyer 1976:64; 1982:48). Even though this may be considered to be a time of independent Badakhshi rule, Amir Yari Beg had also nominally acknowledged the authority of the Uzbek government in Bokhara (Grevemeyer 1982:48). The Yarid rulers were mostly based in Faizabad and whilst their authority was generally recognised, it was most powerful in the central regions near their residence, while all other areas were governed by mirs or local aristocratic rulers. While the actual threat posed by the Uzbek empire was somewhat diminished during the rule of the Yarid dynasty, from the end of the seventeenth century to the early nineteenth century, rulers from the Uzbek khanate of Kunduz continued to initiate offensives against Badakhshan and ruled the territory for varying intervals.12

**The Cloak of the Prophet Mohammad**

It was during the time of the Yarid rulers, possibly in the period from the mid-seventeenth to mid-eighteenth centuries, that the khirqa-e mubarak (the cloak of the Prophet Mohammad) was situated in Faizabad and became an important political and religious symbol for the local populace. Indeed, the profound significance of the khirqa subsequently led to a confrontation between

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9 A khanate is a district under the governance of a khan or ruler.
10 Yari Beg, the Mir-e Shah of Badakhshan and founder of the Badakhshi Yarid dynasty, came from a religious family in Bokhara (see Grevemeyer 1976:64). He was a Naqshbandi Sufi pir (religious leader) and his territorial powers were limited mainly to Badakhshan’s central regions (Holzwarth 1980:104, 188).
11 They bore the titles of Amir, Mir, Shah, Mir-e Shah, or Mir-e Badakhshan.
12 The Uzbek khanate of Kunduz is sometimes also referred to as the Uzbek-Kataghan khanate (located in present Kunduz). Uzbek rulers of Badakhshan were Mahmud Bi (1698-1708), Qobad Khan (1767/1769-1792), and Morad Beg who achieved several brief periods of subjugation from 1821 onwards, but continuous rule from 1829-1838 (Grevemeyer 1982:52-54, 124). In 1829, after having finally conquered Badakhshan, Morad Beg totally destroyed the provincial capital Faizabad and resettled over 20,000 Badakhshi in the swamps of Kunduz (see Grevemeyer 1982:54). Jurm became the temporary capital until Faizabad was rebuilt.
Badakhshan’s ruling elite and the newly established Afghan central government of Ahmad Shah Durrani (1747-1773) who sought custodianship of the cloak as a means of legitimising his rule. Since the story surrounding the acquisition of the khirqa is relevant to the religious and political history of Badakhshan and is a continuing element of local cultural heritage, it deserves to be discussed here in some detail. In fact, according to local legend, one of Faizabad’s public spaces, the maidan-e sang-e mahr (the grounds of the Stone Mahr), is the site from where the khirqa-e mubarak was once fraudulently removed from Badakhshan. This site is now the venue for the annual nowruz (Persian New Year) celebration during which several cultural performances (sport and entertainment) took place in 1998 (see Chapter Six).

There are a number of versions of the travels of the khirqa, several of which are cited by R. D. McChesney (1991:222-231). In one story, Wais Qarani was entrusted with the religious relic by Ali, the fourth Caliph, acting at the Prophet’s behest. After Wais Qarani’s death, the cloak was eventually moved to Baghdad by Shaikh Dust Mohammad,13 whose descendants later brought it to Bokhara. After eighty years, the shaikhs Agha Mohammad and Nazir Mohammad relocated the cloak to Balkh (present Mazar-e Sharif) where it remained for thirty-five years. On 12 August 1697, the khirqa was transported to a khanaqa (the place of worship of a Sufi brotherhood) in Jauz Gun (contemporary Faizabad, Badakhshan). It seems that the khirqa remained there until Shah Wali, the wazir (minister) and a relative of the Afghan king Ahmad Shah, took it to Kandahar in 1768 (see McChesney 1991:223-224).

Commenting on conflicting dates in the chronologies of the khirqa, McChesney (1991:224) also cites Mullah Sang Mohammad’s Tarikh-e Badakhshan (Boldirev 1959), which describes the travels of the cloak as beginning in 1658. Sang Mohammad’s account seems to indicate that the cloak had been transferred to Samarkand from where it was to be relocated to India by three shaikhs of the Naqshbandi Sufi order. While travelling through Badakhshan on their way towards the Dorah Pass to Chitral in present Pakistan, they were intercepted by Amir Yari Beg, Badakhshan’s ruler and, like the shaikhs, also a descendent of an eminent Naqshbandi family from Samarkand. Yari Beg not only refused to allow the transit of the Prophet’s cloak but confiscated the khirqa and built a mosque to house it (see Barthold et al. 1960:853; McChesney 1991:224-225). In this version of the story, the three

13 A shaikh is a religious leader, and in this context may be understood as the leader of a Sufi order.
shaikhs were given honorary Islamic titles and awqaf (pious endowments in the form of property). Interestingly, one of the titles bestowed was an Ismaili term (sahib al-dawat) (see McChesney 1991:224-225), which possibly indicates a positive connection at that time between the dominant Sunni Hanafites and the Sevener Nizari Shiite Ismailis who are now marginalised in Badakhshan. Subsequently, the town of Jauz Gun was renamed Faizabad which translates as “the abode of divine bounty, blessing and charity” (Adamec 1972:67).

In the apparently clearer account by Faiz Mohammad Kateb, the author of Saraj al-tawarikh ("Torch of Histories") (McChesney 1991:222-225), Shah Murad, the Amir of Bokhara, is believed to have offered the khirqa – which had been in Central Asia for the previous five hundred years – as a gift to Ahmad Shah Durrani when consolidating a treaty with him in 1768 (see also Adamec 1972:67; Grevemeyer 1982:66). This religious relic was then supposedly ‘relocated’ from Faizabad to Kandahar (see Adamec 1972:67; Lee 1996:91; McChesney 1991:225), although given the cloak’s exceptional religious and political significance, it seems unlikely that the local Badakhshi elite would have surrendered the khirqa readily. Questions therefore remain as to the circumstances of the removal of the khirqa from Faizabad.

A local version of the story, which I recorded in 1998, suggests that the khirqa was taken from Faizabad through an act of deception, and then only after stiff local resistance:

During a previous time, the cloak of the Prophet was bought to Faizabad. Ahmad Shah Durrani, Afghanistan’s first king, came to Badakhshan to collect the robe, but the local khan [ruler] refused. The Afghan king then sent a relative to fetch the robe. The relative, a prince, camped near the buzkashi ground [maidan-e sang-e mahr]. He promised the local Badakhshi ruler that he would never take the robe past an important stone, which was locally known as sang-e-mahr. The prince [presumably Shah Wali] did not tell the local ruler that the stone would be first placed on one donkey that would then be followed by another donkey which was to carry the robe. This act of deception cleverly misled the locals. The mosque in Faizabad where the robe was once held still exists in Shahr-e Kohna, Faizabad’s Old City (Personal communication with member of local Badakhshi elite, Faizabad, April 1998).

The historical stone or sang-e mahr is located in the present Shahr-e Naw district of Faizabad, near the Kokcha River. The khirqa itself still remains in Kandahar where it served as a significant religious as well as political icon for the Taliban regime whose headquarters were located in that same city. In fact,

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14 Awqaf is the plural of the singular Arabic noun waqf.
15 The distinction between Sunni and Ismaili Muslims will be elaborated in Chapter Five.
in a manner reminiscent of Ahmad Shah Durrani, the Taliban leader Mullah Omar used the shroud as symbolic evidence of his legitimate authority (see Maley 1998:19) when on 4 April 1996, he appeared in public in Kandahar, holding aloft the *khirqa-e mubarak* – the first time in sixty years that an Afghan ruler had done so (see Rashid 2000:42). This clearly demonstrates the centrality of religious heritage to the legitimisation of political authority in Afghanistan.

**Integration into the Afghan Nation**

Ahmad Shah Durrani, the first ruler of the nation of Afghanistan from its inauguration in 1747 until 1773, twice gained control of Badakhshan, but without any enduring impact upon the region (Grevemeyer 1982:64-65). By the mid-nineteenth century, however, as the emerging Durrani Pushhtun leaders curtailed the offensives of the Uzbek khanate of Kunduz, the Badakhshi *mirs* nominally accepted Durrani suzerainty. However, political alliances tended to be contingent upon the kinship of territorial rulers (see Holzwarth 1990:40), with the consequence that allegiances between Badakhshan and Kabul were often short-lived and alliances were frequently sought in other neighbouring territories by rival dynasties of *mirs*. By 1872/73, Afghanistan had become a buffer state, an active, strategic pawn in the Great Game between Tsarist Russian-Central Asia and British-India. The territory of Badakhshan was geographically wedged between these two empires. With an increase in taxes during the early reign of the Afghan *Amir* Sher Ali (1869-1879) when the majority of Badakhshan’s population was suffering severe economic hardship, a general mood of dissatisfaction arose and following his death in Mazar-e Sharif in 1879, a number of Badakhshan’s aristocratic elite successfully revolted against Afghan rule and proclaimed *Mir* Baba Khan as the ruler of the province (1879-1880) (see Holzwarth 1990:45). The return of *Amir* Abdur Rahman Khan from exile in Samarkand in early 1880, his assumption of the throne (1880-1901) and his subsequent subjugation of Badakhshan, however,

16 Abdur Rahman was the grandson of *Amir* Dost Mohammad Khan (1819-1839, 1842-1863), the founder of the Durrani Mohammadzai rulers, and nephew of *Amir* Sher Ali Khan (1863-1866). The last major revolt against the Afghan rulers occurred when the Badakhshi *Mir* Alam Khan returned from exile in Bokhara and found support among various factionalised dynastic groups in Badakhshan, enabling him to become the *Mir* of Badakhshan from October 1880-March 1881. As previous local rulers had done before him, *Mir* Alam Khan paid only lip service to the Afghan Amir and ensured that Badakhshan’s population did not have to pay further taxes to the central government in Kabul (see Holzwarth 1990:48).
brought an end to the political feuds that had continued to prevail in this territory.

Abdur Rahman's instigation of critical changes in Afghanistan's domestic politics impacted upon the virtual autonomous rule of Badakhshan's local mirs.\(^\text{17}\) His appointment of mostly non-Badakhshi Pushtuns, rather than members of the Yarid dynasty, as provincial governors and government officials (hakim, alaqadar), was an effective means of disempowering the Mir-e Shah as well as the mirs, and of thus undermining the traditional relationship between the local elite and the Afghan state.\(^\text{18}\) As a direct consequence of this reduction in the authority of the mirs, the relationship between the state and members of the land-owning rural elite (aqsagal, arbab, malik) was strengthened, and these individuals came to act directly for the Afghan government, while remaining subordinate to local government officials.\(^\text{19}\)

Abdur Rahman Khan's provincial administrators were given virtually free reign, including the determination of tax collection. In addition, military personnel who were also mostly Pushtuns from other provinces, were stationed throughout Badakhshan and their upkeep was deemed to be the responsibility of the local population (see Holzwarth 1980:221-222). The brutal rule of this centrally appointed administration meant that many Badakhshi families escaped into exile to Kulyab (present southern Tajikistan), Yarkand

\(^{17}\) Abdur Rahman had hoped to recover former Afghan territories that were lost to the Uzbeks in Turkestan, and eventually to establish an independent emirate (empire) (see Kakar 1979:5). Soon after his accession to the throne on 31 July 1880, the British retreated following the end of the Second Anglo-Afghan war, while continuing to handle Afghanistan's foreign affairs. The local Badakhshi elite, however, were disempowered and left with a marginal role in this new political system (see Grevemeyer 1982:173). The former local ruler of Badakhshan, Mir Baba Khan, together with Mir Mohammad Omar Khan, aligned himself with Abdur Rahman, and was thus briefly reinstated as Badakhshan’s main authority. As Abdur Rahman’s domestic policies and Pushtun chauvinism progressively disadvantaged Badakhshan’s population, Mir Baba Khan subsequently refused to succumb to Abdur Rahman’s taxing demands for contributions to the upkeep of his local military personnel. Soon after, in May 1880, Abdur Rahman found an opportunity to imprison Mir Baba for his betrayal and immediately installed Mir Mohammad Omar Khan as Hakem (Governor) of Badakhshan (see Holzwarth 1990:47).

\(^{18}\) The loss of the entitlements of the Badakhshan mirs is exemplified by a policy which led to the disarmament of the local population, while only Pushtun government employees were allowed to carry weapons (see Shahran 1984a:148).

\(^{19}\) Prior to 1921-1923, the position of government-appointed officials in Badakhshan was filled by the traditional aqsagal (village/community leader, often an elder). After this period, from the reign of Amanullah (1919-1929) onwards, the task of government official was given to the non-Badakhshi alaqadar (Holzwarth 1990:99). For further details see Kakar (1979:64), Grevemeyer (1980:162), Holzwarth (1980:209-221; 1990:83-84, 97-102), Kussmaul (1965:81-84) and Shahran (1984a:148). See glossary (Appendix One) for translations of the local terms.
(contemporary Xinjiang Province, China) and Hunza (present northern Pakistan) (Holzwarth 1990:49, 76). Those influential families who were unable to flee, were taken to Kabul. Leaders of qawm and village leaders were also imprisoned or even executed. By June 1886, 2000 members of Badakhshan’s elite had been imprisoned and 1000 political prisoners had been executed (Holzwarth 1990:50).

With military and financial aid from Britain who was seeking a strategic ally in its quest for supremacy in the Great Game, Abdur Rahman successfully united Afghanistan into a centrally organised, although absolutist state. The securing of Afghanistan’s international borders in 1873, 1879 and 1893/1895 represented the endpoint of Badakhshan’s quasi-autonomous status and the territory was subsequently divided between Afghanistan and the principality of Bokhara, which at that time was a Russian protectorate (Barthold et al. 1960:853; Emadi 1998:109). As a result of the process of territorial demarcation effected by British, Russian-British and British-Afghan commissions (see Kakar 1979:64), ethnic and sectarian groups were artificially separated and communities with strong kinship ties were divided by designated borders. The Ismaili-inhabited Pamir region of Badakhshan, for example, was arbitrarily divided along the natural boundary of the Amu Darya between the Emirate of Bokhara (under Russian influence) and the Afghan state.

Abdur Rahman Khan was succeeded by his son Habibullah (1901-1919) who was born to a Badakhshi Wakhi slave girl from his harem (Kakar 1979:16). Habibullah was notable for his desire to distance himself somewhat from the

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20 The Granville-Gorchakov treaty of 1873 was signed at a time of chaotic revolts by various aristocratic factions in Badakhshan as a result of new taxes imposed in 1869 by the Badakhshi ruler Mahmud Shah, an ally of the Afghan Amir Sher Ali (1869-1879) (see Holzwarth 1990:41-42). As an outcome of the treaty of Gandamak in 1879, a large part of historical Badakhshan was assigned to Afghanistan (see Grevemeyer 1982:71). An earlier integration of Badakhshan into Afghanistan had been delayed by the second Anglo-Afghan war (1878-1880), during which time the British had occupied Kabul with the aim of installing their preferred leader Yaqub Khan (1879), whom they had ordered to sign the treaty of Gandamak to allow Afghanistan to become a British dependency (see Holzwarth 1990:44). In 1883, Amir Abdur Rahman Khan finalised Badakhshan’s integration into the Afghanistan state (Grevemeyer 1982:23). In 1891/1892, Russia claimed the eastern Pamir regions, which was administered through a Russian officer by the oblast (administrative territory) of Ferghana. Although the Soviets abolished the Emirate of Bokhara, Soviet rule did not become established in the Pamir regions north and east of the Amu Darya until 1925. In 1895, the Russian and Afghan border was permanently demarcated (see Barthold et al. 1960:853). Darwaz, at the northernmost tip of Badakhshan, became part of Afghanistan, whereas the regions of the upper Amu Darya (Darya-e Panj) became the border with the principality of Bokhara and thereby Russia.
harsh rule of his father by, for example, introducing a fairer system of taxation, and consequently, many Badakhshi families returned from exile. His successor Amanullah (1919-1929), however, while largely continuing and even expanding Habibullah’s reforms, was inspired by ideas of democracy and secularism and planned to initiate Afghanistan’s entry into the modern world. His new constitution of 1923 promised equal rights to all ethnic and sectarian groups, yet outside the capital Kabul, little if anything changed (see Emadi 1998:110). In fact, with his increases in taxation following the cessation of British subsidies in 1919, Amanullah had alienated both peasants and Islamic clergy (see Holzwarth 1990:65).

The Badakhshi elite did not mount active resistance to Amanullah’s reformist rule since, to a large degree, they had re-established themselves as local political leaders and had improved their economic position through trade and agriculture. It is possible, however, that the re-emergence and strengthening of the traditional patron-client system of loyalties may have been a means by which the urban and rural elites throughout Afghanistan effectively opposed the program of modernisation (see Grevemeyer 1982:173-174). At the same time, Badakhshan had remained a conservative Islamic territory as was made clear during the brief reign in Kabul of the Tajik rebel Habibullah Kalakani in 1929, when Azimollah Khan, the Governor General of the Afghan province of Kataghan and Badakhshan, was one of the first provincial leaders to support Kalakani’s extremist Islamic policies (see Holzwarth 1990:65). Aiming to mobilise the disadvantaged and rural populace by offering them a better life that was based on adherence to ultra-orthodox Islamic values, Kalakani also advocated the abolition of unpopular taxes and promised the cancellation of outstanding arrears of revenue.

In October 1929, Mohammad Nadir Khan (a former Defence Minister of King Amanullah) overthrew Habibullah Kalakani and proclaimed himself King of Afghanistan (Dupree 1973:458-460). His political position was dominated by the desire to maintain international neutrality and to effectively withdraw from the modern world. After he was assassinated, his nineteen-year-old son, Zahir Shah, held the throne from November 1933 until July 1973 when he was

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21 Amanullah (1919-1929) was the first ruler to assume the title of Padshah (King) instead of Amir. Consequently, all leaders thereafter were referred to as Padshahs.

22 Nadir Khan had returned from exile in India and was supported by the British.
overthrown by his cousin, Sardar Mohammad Daoud (Maley 1997a:168). While the ruling Badakhshi Yarid dynasty had already collapsed by the end of the nineteenth century, its rural gentry remained politically powerful until approximately the second half of the twentieth century (Holzwarth 1990:192). Indeed, the comparatively peaceful period in Afghanistan from 1930 to the 1950s was largely the result of a relatively harmonious relationship between the state and the traditional elite (Olesen 1995:172). Centrally-funded projects in the former province of Kataghan (Baghlan, Takhar and Kunduz) led to the emergence of industry and concomitant improvements in infrastructure, agriculture and employment prospects. However, Badakhshan was excluded from these new developments. In fact, with the completion of a motorable road from Kabul to Kunduz and Pul-e Khumri (Baghlan Province), Badakhshan was further peripheralised and its bazaars, important centres during the caravan trade along the Silk Road until 1914, diminished (see Holzwarth 1990:226-227). During this period of selective modernisation in Afghanistan (late 1950s-late 1970s), little urbanisation or real improvements in agricultural methods and living conditions were evident in Badakhshan.

The Rise of the Urban Educated Elite

A paucity of literature exists about the province of Badakhshan from the time of the reign of Afghanistan's last Musahiban rulers (1933-1978), throughout the Communist era (1978-1992) and under the Rabbani government (1992-2001). Certainly, in comparison with neighbouring Third World countries in the 1960s and 1970s, Afghanistan had a comparatively stable currency, a relatively well-functioning judicial system, ministries, a professional army, developing infrastructure, and tourism (see Glatzer 1997:12; Saikal and Maley 1991:19). Yet these signs of a developing modern society pertained mostly to the capital Kabul and to some larger provincial capitals such as Herat and Mazar-e Sharif, but definitely not to Badakhshan which remained a neglected, underdeveloped and impoverished province.

During the rule of King Zahir Shah and President Mohammad Daoud, the rural gentry continued to work effectively with the Afghan governors. Towards the end of this period (1950-1978), however, noticeable changes were evident in

23 A sardar was a male member of one of the ruling Afghan clans in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (see McChesney 1991:323). See footnote 7, Chapter One, for further comments on the Musahiban rulers.
Afghanistan's once powerful Islamic establishments. Historically, the traditional *ulema* (religious scholars) who had studied in private *madrassas* (higher religious schools) within Afghanistan or abroad, and their rural support networks, had exclusively fulfilled the legal duties of administrators and ensured compliance with Hanafi jurisprudence. But from the 1950s, the authority of the *ulema* was challenged by a nascent circle of Islamic intellectuals, later known as Islamists, who had been educated in state-controlled religious institutions. From 1965 to 1971, the demands of these religious intellectuals became increasingly vocal, although they continued to remain a marginal group in Afghan society. The overthrow of the monarchy by Mohammad Daoud in 1973 temporarily ended the aspirations of this emerging Islamist movement (see Roy 1998:199-200; Saikal and Maley 1991:21-27) which was perceived to be the main opposition to the formation of a republic. Daoud had found support for the *coup* against the monarchy in the Parchamis (Banner), one of the rising pro-Soviet Communist parties (see Shahrani 1984b:41), and together with the Communist members in his cabinet, he proceeded to suppress his Islamic opponents, many of whom were from the Islamic clergy, and to impose bans on Islamist parties. As a consequence, most religious intellectuals were forced underground and many sought exile in Pakistan (see Shahrani 1984a:159). There, the Islamists politically organised themselves into the Jamiat-e-Islami and following a factional split, also into the Hezb-e Islami (see Roy 1995:43-44; 1998:200; Shahrani 1984a:158-159). While the ideologies of these Islamist parties were not overtly extremist or radical in nature, due to a combination of factors which will be later elucidated, they were to impact seriously on the practice of cultural heritage in Badakhshan in the late 1990s.

A brief detour is necessary here to clarify the terms 'Islamic' and 'Islamist', both of which are relevant to an understanding of the emergence of political Islam and the rise of the *mujahideen* who themselves were "by no means ideologically homogenous" (Saikal and Maley 1991:62). In fact, the

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24 Mohammad Daoud, a cousin of King Zahir Shah and nephew of Nadir Shah, served as Prime Minister from 1953-1963 and had thus been absent from power for ten years prior to the coup (see Adamec 1991:163).
25 See Roy (1986) for an extensive summary of the history of Afghan Islamist movements.
26 Commonly, ultra-conservative Islamic movements are often termed 'fundamentalist' although a debate currently exists about the definition and meaning of this term (for an excellent summary see Maley 1998:17-20; Roy 1986:54; Saikal and Maley 1991:62-65). As a result of the term's wide and often inappropriate use, especially in the media, in most cases I shall use the terms 'extremist' or 'ultra-conservative' to describe radical Islamic ideals.
mujahideen were comprised of orthodox Sunni ‘Islamic’ clerics, Sunni and Shiite moderate and Sunni radical ‘Islamists’ as well as Wahhabis (see Roy 1995:43). Amin Saikal and William Maley (1991:63) categorise Sunni Muslims in Afghanistan into adherents of intellectual Islam (Islamism), Sufi Islam or village Islam, although it must be emphasised that these categories are neither static nor exclusive and that an individual may be influenced by elements of any or all of the three groups.

Intellectual Sunni Muslims were largely educated in state-controlled madrassas within Afghanistan but were also influenced by Egyptian and British Indian organisations that advocated the development of Islamism.\(^{27}\) This political movement may be understood as “a reaction by Muslims to the challenge of the Western models of state and development” (Rubin 1995:86), with the aim of establishing an Islamic state based on Islamic jurisprudence. Afghanistan’s Islamists were opposed to the monarchy, Pushtun nationalism, foreign influence, communism, orthodox Sunni sectarian organisations (such as Deobandi), and traditionalist Islamic establishments like the ulama (see Adamec 1991:120; 1986:71; Roy 1995:20, 44). The Muslim Youth in Afghanistan which from 1978 assumed the name of Jamiat-e Islami (Islamic Society), was founded by Gholam Mohammad Niyazi, a Sunni Pushtun from Paktia Province (see Shahradi 1984a:158), and the Sunni Tajik Badakhshi, Burhanuddin Rabbani, both of whom had studied at the Al Azhar University in Cairo in the 1960s and were employees at the Faculty of Theology, Kabul University (see Roy 1995:20).\(^{28}\) In addition to Burhanuddin Rabbani, several men associated with Niyazi’s circle later became influential leaders during the jihad (Islamic resistance) and post-Communist rule: the Sunni Tajik Ahmad Shah Massoud from the Panjshir Valley, the Kharruti Ghilzai Pushtun Abdul-Rab al-Rasul Sayyaf from Paghman near Kabul, and Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, a

\(^{27}\) For example, these religious intellectuals were influenced by the works of the Egyptian Hasan al-Banna (1906-1949) and disseminated translations of the Egyptian Sayyid Qutb (died 1966) and the British Indian Abul Ala Maududi (died 1979), the founder of the Jamaat-e Islami in India (see Olesen 1995:228; Roy 1998:199).

\(^{28}\) The Muslim Youth in Afghanistan or Sazman-e Jawanan-e Musulman-e Afghanistan was also known by the Arabic name Ikhwan al-Muslimin (Muslim Brothers) and many of its members had pursued religious postgraduate studies (see Olesen 1995:231; Roy 1986:70). Burhanuddin Rabbani attended the Abu Hanafi madrassa, a government-controlled madrassa in Paghman near Kabul and later received his higher education at the Al Azhar university in Cairo (1966-1968), where he was influenced by the Muslim Brothers. Upon his return to Afghanistan in 1968 (Adamec 1991:201), Rabbani taught as a lecturer at Kabul University in the Faculty of Theology.
Sunni Kharruti Ghilzai Pushtun from Imam Saheb in Kunduz. The views of these key political figures were represented in Badakhshan in 1998 and 1999 through the popular and generally more moderate Jamiat-e Islami (Rabbani, Massoud) as well as the less common, but nonetheless influential, more radical Islamist groups of Hezb-e Islami (Hekmatyar) and Ittehad-e Islami (Sayyaf).

While historically very active in Badakhshan through the association of the Yarid rulers with the Naqshbandi tariqa (Sufi order), Saikal and Maley's second category of Muslims, the Sufis, were not as overtly political in the province as were Sufis such as Sebghatullah Mojadidi's Jabha-e Nejat-e Melli or Pir Sayyid Ahmad Gailani's Mahaz-e Melli Islami, in other parts of Afghanistan. The third and largest group of Sunni Muslims in Afghanistan may be thought to have been influenced by traditional 'Islamic' values through either the ulema (religious elite) or 'village Islam'. While the ulema have been educated in private or state-controlled madrassas, the majority of Afghans in rural areas have acquired their religious training at a maktab (primary religious school) from often poorly educated village mullahs (for further discussions on traditional Islam see Roy 1986:31-32, 44-50).

During the rule of Zahir Shah and Mohammad Daoud, religious intellectuals as well as urban, secularly-educated intellectuals who were attracted to the growing socialist movements, emerged in Badakhshan. Two members from Badakhshan's socialist intelligentsia were particularly instrumental in the events leading to the Marxist coup in 1978 and the subsequent brief Marxist/Leninist rule (1978-1979): Mansur Hashimi from Junn, a Marxist-influenced member of the Khalq (Masses) faction of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan, and the Sunni Tajik Tahir Badakhshi from Faizabad.
the founder of the Setam-e Melli (Party Against National Oppression) (see also Dorronsoro 1992:6). 31

The ruling Khalq faction of Mansur Hashimi brutally enforced their highly unpopular reforms, suppressing critics and the Islamic clergy. Tahir Badakhshi’s Setam-e Melli was a novel anti-Pushtun movement that virtually pre-empted the ethnic divisions that eventually were to curtail Rabbani’s Presidency. Several non-Pushtun Badakhshis who were initially drawn to Marxist leaders later aligned themselves with Setam-e Melli purely on the grounds of its ethnic sentiments (see Roy 1986:106). However, the Badakhshi intellectual who played the most pivotal role in Afghanistan’s most recent history is the moderate Sunni Tajik Islamist and founder of the Jamaat-e Islami Afghanistan, Professor Burhanuddin Rabbani from Yaftal near Faizabad (1984a:154-159). 32 As early as 1969, Rabbani had led a revolt against the provincial government in Badakhshan; by 1972 he became the founder of the Muslim Brothers in Afghanistan (Shahrani 1984a:158-159), 33 and by the late 1970s, he emerged as a leader who seemed able to unite the often-fractured

156). Shortly after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979 that installed Babrak Karmal as President, Mansur Hashimi was imprisoned and then killed.
31 Tahir Badakhshi was also sent to Kabul for further education and enrolled in Habibiah, one of Kabul’s prestigious secular high schools. Upon graduation, he studied Law and Political Science at Kabul University and became known as a social activist advocating the ideals of ethnic and regional identity (see Shahrani 1984a:156). In 1965, Tahir Badakhshi joined the PDPA and was one of the original members together with Babrak Karmal and Nur Mohammad Taraki (see Adamec 1991:42). After the split of the PDPA into Khalq and Parcham factions, he became a member of Babrak Karmal’s Parcham faction. Frustrated with the level of Pushtun dominance in both the Parcham and Khalq factions, he established his own party, the Maoist-influenced Setam-e Melli which sought to improve the living conditions of the rural peasants and to liberate minority groups from Pushtun “internal colonialism” (Shahrani 1984a:157). The Setam-e Melli was thus predominantly anti-central government and espoused a structure in which the provinces were to rule autonomously in a manner reflecting the social and political conditions that existed prior to Badakhshan’s integration into the Afghan state in 1883 (see earlier comments this chapter as well as Holzwarth 1980:177). Tahir Badakhshi later dissociated himself from both factions of the PDPA since he perceived the Soviets to be supporting Pushtun dominance in Afghanistan (Shahrani 1984a:156). During the latter part of Daoud’s Presidency (1973-1978), Setam-e Melli had gained considerable momentum in northern Afghanistan as well as in Kabul. In 1979, Tahir Badakhshi was killed under orders of President Hafizullah Amin.

32 Unlike Tahir Badakhshi and Mansur Hashimi, Rabbani was not sent to a secular high school in Kabul, but to a government-controlled madrassa (see footnote 28 and Shahrani 1984a:157).
33 It is interesting to note that the Wahhabi-influenced Sayyaf became the deputy during Rabbani’s leadership of the Muslim Brothers in the early 1970s, while the extremist Hekmatyar served as the secretary (see Roy 1986:73). These two mujahideen leaders will be discussed in more detail below. Another Badakhshi involved with the Muslim Brothers at Kabul University was Mohammad Omar, a Tajik from Faizabad who instigated a failed uprising in 1975 (see Dorronsoro 1992:6; Rubin 1995:292).
alliance of mujahideen groups, and later the factions within the anti-Taliban opposition of the United Front.


In April 1978, President Daoud's instigation of the arrests of several leaders of the pro-Soviet People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan served as a trigger for the *coup d'état* on 27 April and the establishment of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan headed by Nur Mohammad Taraki (see Rubin 1995:104-105). The overthrow of the Presidency of Daoud ended over 200 years of virtually uninterrupted rule by the Durrani Pashtuns (1747-1978). Yet while the policies of the Marxist/Leninist regimes of the Ghilzai Pashtuns Nur Mohammad Taraki and later Hafizullah Amin may have benefited some members of the secularly-educated urban middle classes, they were extremely unpopular among the traditional land owners and conservative clergy (see Emadi 1998:114; Greve Meyer 1982:182; Shahrani 1984b:41). With Islam perceived to be a threat to the new government, in October 1978, Afghanistan's Republican tri-coloured flag of black, red and green was radically replaced with a red flag that not only resembled those of the Soviet republics (Kamali 1985:31-32), but which significantly omitted the colour green, the symbol of Islam (Micheline Centlivres-Demont in Bourdieu 1990:40).

Land reforms that were intended to win over the rural peasantry strongly alienated Badakhshan's land-owning and politically influential elite (see Holzwarth 1980:178). In Faizabad for example, land was not necessarily redistributed to the landless, but was often allocated to families who were close

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34 The *coup d'état* fell on the second month of the Afghan calendar *saur* (which overlaps with the Gregorian month of April) and for this reason is historically referred to as the Saur Revolution (although lacking popular support, it was not a genuine revolution). In 1967, the PDPA had split over issues relating to the abolition of the monarchy, resulting in the establishment of the more radical and anti-monarchic Khalq (Masses) faction under Nur Mohammad Taraki and the more moderate pro-Soviet Parcham (Flag) faction under Babrak Karmal. These groups reunited in 1976 (see Beattie 1984:184).

35 In September 1979, after serious internal power struggles, Nur Mohammad Taraki was replaced by Hafizullah Amin who adopted an even more uncompromising and radical style of leadership. Nur Mohammad Taraki was secretly murdered in October 1979.

36 In addition, the traditional symbols of an arch and culprit were also omitted from this new flag (Kamali 1985:32). The provisional constitution of Babrak Karmal, however, reinstated the three colours and emblems of the traditional flag, but not without the introduction of the new symbols of "a wheel and a five-tipped red star" (Kamali 1985:33).
to Communist leaders and who thereby furthered their actual power base within the province (see Roy 1986:91). Furthermore, Taraki’s regime completely ignored the traditional system of loyalties and reciprocities so common in rural Afghanistan and in which local representatives (often the rural elite) acted as intermediaries between the peasants and the state. In fact, the ‘Revolution from Above’ (see Halliday and Tanin 1998:1357-1359; Rubin 1995:115-121) instigated by the Taraki and Amin regimes was destined for failure due to the Communist leaders’ complete ignorance of existing societal conditions within Afghanistan and their lack of strategic implementation of reforms, which compounded the distinct absence of popular support for their rule. These political failings together with the Afghan Communist leadership’s limited assertions of Soviet notions of communism (Halliday and Tanin 1998:1360) led to the invasion of Afghanistan by the Soviet Union in December 1979, and the installation of Babrak Karmal (1979-1986), the leader of the Parcham faction of the People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan, as President. It now seems likely that this intervention, in combination with the subsequent establishment of Soviet-style institutions, was envisaged as a means of enabling the Soviets to implement their models of social, political and economic reform albeit through the framework of the People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan (see Rubin 1995:122-145).

With improved infrastructure through the construction of an airport, hospitals and the expansion of schools, the Badakhshis experienced some tangible benefits during the Communist period. To a degree, non-Pushtun members of the middle classes as well as peasants also had greater opportunities for social advancement (see Giustozzi 2000:39-40) and urban, educated women in particular availed themselves of the forms of emancipation introduced primarily during the rule of Babrak Karmal (see Giustozzi 2000:20-24). Nevertheless, as the province was often able to meet only half its own food requirements, it was constantly dependent on Soviet cereal subsidies (see Goodhand 2000:268).

37 Given that this era was marked by the Cold War, the Soviet Union would have undoubtedly liked to secure a base in Afghanistan, an important geo-strategic territory whose two neighbours, Iran and Pakistan, were at that time aligned with the United States. In spite of Afghanistan’s status as a non-aligned country, it had secured generous Soviet economic investments during the reign of King Zahir Shah from the mid-1950s to 1973 as well as during the Presidency of Mohammad Daoud (1973-1978). These included humanitarian aid, the training of Afghan military personnel as well as the construction of ambitious forms of transport infrastructure (Rubinstein 1982:133-158). During the same period and in competition with Soviet development aid, Afghanistan also received substantial economic assistance although no military aid from the United States (Rubin 1995:65).
In spite of Babrak Karmal’s revocation of the unpopular land reforms that had been introduced by Nur Mohammad Taraki and Hafizullah Amin, he was unable to diminish the groundswell of discontent that continued to rise from within the Islamic and Islamist domains. In Badakhshan, the earliest signs of dissatisfaction with the Khalq-led government, however, did not arise from the nascent Islamist groups, but from local members of Tahir Badakhshi’s Setam-e Melli who briefly took the military base in Baharak in April 1979 (see Shahrani 1984a:160). The lack of local support for this rebellion meant that it was quickly squashed by the army and after this incident, the government intensified its already brutal rule in the province, with widespread persecution of any potential critics of the government.38

In spite of this crackdown on opposition figures, anti-government rebellions continued and an Islamic resistance consisting of an alliance between the traditional ulema and numerous Islamist groups, many of which had established headquarters in Pakistan, began to emerge. In early 1979, members of the Jamiat-e Islami Afghanistan re-established contact with Burhanuddin Rabbani in Peshawar with the intention of mobilising a jihad against the Communist government (see Emadi 1998:114; Shahrani 1984a:161). By June 1979, Badakhshi members of the Jamiat-e Islami with the assistance of some ulema and peasants organised some of the first major uprisings against the government, first in Koran in southern Badakhshan and then later in Jurm, central Badakhshan (see Map 3 and Shahrani 1984a:162). By the 1980s, ideological differences between the various Islamic (consisting largely of traditionalist ulema) and Islamist groups were put aside and an often tenuous but ultimately united resistance against the Soviet-backed Communist government was formed. The Communist government responded with increasing violence, but was only able to keep the mujahideen resistance under relative control with the military assistance of the Soviets (see Maley 1997a:168) towards whom the jihad had also been extended. In 1980, in order to maintain the government’s supply lines across the Amu Darya, Soviet troops were engaged in trying to crush pockets of mujahideen resistance in Badakhshan (see Roy 1986:119). By 1982, Soviet troops occupied Koran-e Munjan in southern Badakhshan to block the Munjan Pass to Pakistan that served as a supply route for the mujahideen (Roy 1986:187).

38 Shahrani cites the execution of approximately 3000 political prisoners by August 1980 (1984a:161).
With the failure of Babrak Karmal’s attempts to reconcile opposition parties, he was replaced in May 1986 by Najibullah (see Maley 1997b:267). While Najibullah appeared to more genuinely adhere to Islamic values, his attempts at national reconciliation in which he proposed a cease-fire with the mujahideen, were rejected by leaders of the resistance groups (see Rubin 1995:146-147, 165-166). When the Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev ordered the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan from May 1988 to February 1989, Najibullah struggled to maintain power. By December 1991, with the discontinuation of all Soviet aid, his regime suffered a crisis of legitimacy and internal fragmentation and on 16 April 1992, finally disintegrated (see Maley 2002:190). On 18 March 1992, while the forces of Ahmad Shah Massoud, the Tajik commander from Panjshir, Kapisa Province, who was in charge of the Jamiat-e Islami’s military operations, advanced towards Kabul and amidst pressure from the United Nations, Pakistan and the United States, Najibullah agreed to resign and to allow a transitional government to be formed (see Rubin 1995:268). In the meantime, the Hezb-e Islami had gathered support among the Khalq and Parcham factions of the former Communist government. As a result, two mujahideen groups – Massoud’s faction of the Jamiat-e Islami and Hekmatyar’s Hezb-Islami – aimed to seize control of Kabul while the representatives of the interim administration vacillated over their leadership. In the chaos of March and April 1992, Badakhshan fell to the control of Jamiat-e Islami mujahideen (see Rubin 1995:274).

39 Najibullah was an early member of the Parcham faction of the PDPA and was instrumental in establishing and heading KhAD (Afghanistan’s Intelligence Service).

40 Following a Loya Jirga that was convened by Najibullah, Afghanistan’s name was even changed from the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan to the old title of the Republic of Afghanistan in order to draw attention away from the government’s Communist ideology (see Rubin 1995:109).

41 Najibullah’s attempts failed despite changing the name of the PDPA to Hezb-e Watan (Fatherland Party) in June 1990 and further stressing Islamic values (see Rubin 1995:165-166).

42 The interim administration was to be elected during a shura (council) attended by all major Sunni and Shiite parties as well as Najibullah’s government. Yet, this UN plan failed at the last minute when Rabbani and Mojadiddi demanded that only mujahideen parties be represented (see Rubin 1995:269). In Afghanistan, a rebellion of mostly non-Pushtun members of the Parcham faction who were loyal to former President Karmal and who resented Najibullah’s Pushtun chauvinism, led to negotiations and alliances with northern non-Pushtun militia groups, such as the Uzbek Rashid Dostum and the Ismaili Sayyid Mansur Nadiri (a pir of the Ismailis of northern and central Afghanistan, but not of the Ismailis in Badakhshan) (see Rubin 1995:291). In this context, ‘militia’ pertains to “irregular or semi-regular formations, generally local or regional in character, semi-trained or not trained at all, subject to a less formal discipline than the regular armed forces” that were engaged during various times of the Communist period in a loose alliance between the government and the mujahideen (Giustozzi 2000:198, 213-224).
Whilst a large number of Sunni Islamic and Islamist-oriented resistance organisations as well as some Shiite Islamist groups were formed with the common goal of liberating Afghanistan, only seven American, Saudi and Pakistani-backed Sunni *mujahideen* parties that were based in Peshawar attended a number of *shura* (council of elders) meetings held in the late 1980s to propose the post-Communist administration.\(^{43}\) These parties belonged to Sunni Islamist groups that were led by religious intellectuals who were educated in state-controlled *madrassas* or secular schools (Jamiat-e Islami, Hezb-e Islami and Ittehad-e Islami), Sufi groups that were traditionally close to the Afghan rulers (Jabha-ye Melli Najat and Mahaz-e Melli Islami), as well as Islamic groups that were influential among Afghans exposed to village Islam and whose leaders were often *ulema* educated in state-controlled or public *madrassas* (Harakat-e Inqilab-e Islami and Khalis' Hezb-e Islami) (see Saikal and Maley 1991:65).\(^{44}\)

\(^{43}\) Both Pakistan and Saudi Arabia had hoped to install either Hekmatyar or Sayyaf who were their preferred leaders of a future Afghan government (see Saikal and Maley 1991:122-125). In May 1987, the seven major Sunni *mujahideen* parties in Peshawar met as a *shura* to discuss an interim government. This *shura*, however, was unsuccessful due to differences between the participants over the election of leadership (see Olesen 1995:284, 290-291). In June 1988, a second, and slightly more successful, meeting took place that became known as the ‘Peshawar Alliance’. Ahmad Shah, a Wahhabi and deputy of Sayyaf’s Ittehad-e Islam, was elected as the leader of this proposed Afghan interim government (see Olesen 1995:291; Saikal and Maley 1991:124), whereas the other posts were divided among the other *mujahideen groups*. In the Rawalpindi *shura* in 1989, Mojadidi (Jabha-ye Nejat-e Melli) emerged as the compromise-choice to lead the *mujahideen* interim administration, *shura-e qiyadi* (Leadership Council), with Sayyaf (Ittehad-e Islami) as the Prime Minister, Mohammad (Harakat-e Inqilab-e Islami) as Defence Minister and Hekmatyar (Hezb-e Islami) as foreign minister. Surprisingly, Rabbani who had mustered significant support within Afghanistan was given only a minor portfolio – the Ministry for Reconstruction.

\(^{44}\) The Jamiat-e Islami (Islamic Society) was led by Professor Burhanuddin Rabbani; Hezb-e Islami (Islamic Party) by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar; Ittehad-e Islami (Islamic Alliance) by Abdul-Rab al-Rasul Sayyaf from Paghman; Jahba-ye Melli Najat (National Liberation Front) was under the leadership of the Sunni Sebghatullah Mojadidi, a member of a family of *pirs* who led most of the Sufi Naqshbandiya in Afghanistan. Mahaz-e Melli Islami (Islamic National Front) was directed by the Sunni *Pir* Sayyid Ahmad Gailani, the head of the Qadiriya Sufi order in Afghanistan; Harakat-e Inqilab-e Islami (Islamic Revolutionary Movement) was led by the Sunni Mawlawi Mohammad Nabi Mohammad, from Logar, an ultra-conservative member of the *ulema*; Khalis’ Hezb-e Islami, an ultra-conservative splinter group of the even more radical Hezb-e Islami of Hekmatyar, was led by the Sunni Ghilzai Pushmawali Younus Khalis, an *alim* from Nangarhar. Another major and more recent political party, the Hezb-e Wahdat (Party of Unity), a mostly Twelver Shiite party of ethnic Hazaras was formed in 1990 (see footnote 47 below). Only in June 1992 when Rabbani resumed the Presidency, were the Hezb-e Wahdat included as the eighth *mujahideen* party to be involved in determining the government (see Olesen 1995:292).
These categorisations of the mujahideen are somewhat problematic however, in that they imply a rather static and ideologically homogeneous alliance. Indeed, while Rabbani is a conservative religious intellectual, the Jamiat-e Islami functioned as a more moderate Islamist organisation which had its power base among the Tajik population of northern Afghanistan, but which also incorporated some Uzbeks and Pashtuns, especially in areas that had a coherent and effective ulema. In contrast, both Sayyaf and Hekmatyar were leaders of ultra-conservative and extremist Islamist groups. While Sayyaf, who like Rabbani had studied at a state madrassa and then at Cairo’s Al Azhar university, was patronised by Saudi Wahhabis, his beliefs had become firmly anchored in orthodox, almost puritanical Islam. Hekmatyar’s Islamism was even more radical, reflecting his adherence to the teachings of the ultra-orthodox Syrian Hanbalite jurist Ibn Taymiyya (1263-1328). While both Sayyaf and Hekmatyar vehemently opposed Sufism, Hekmatyar also espoused the pronouncement of a jihad against unbelievers (Roy 1986:78). In fact, Hekmatyar’s party was probably the most extreme of all mujahideen groups, with many of its members joining the Taliban after the party’s collapse. Similarly, the Harakat-e Inqilab-e Islami and Khalis’ Hezb-e Islami who drew their support from the Pashtun tribal areas in eastern Afghanistan were later to join the Taliban. A further ideological difference among the mujahideen was evident in the support for the monarchy by the Sufi leaders Sebghatullah Mojadiddi, who was also a conservative religious intellectual, and the more moderate Pir Sayyid Ahmad Gailani (Maley 2002:63). Moreover, in addition to the Sunni Islamist and Islamic groups, a number of Shiite parties which were largely led by clerics and were based in Quetta, Pakistan, were active in the Twelver Shiite-inhabited regions of Afghanistan, such as the Hazarajat in central Afghanistan. However, in spite of this representation, Afghanistan’s

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45 Sayyaf is also a co-founder of the Jamiat-e Islami (see Goodson 2001:255; Saikal and Maley 1991:60-61). With the assistance of Saudi Wahhabis, Sayyaf established the Ittehad-e Islami in 1981, which served as the main point of entry into Afghanistan for foreign Arab mujahideen (see Rubin 1995:191, 221). He is a fervent supporter of Salafi Islam which disapproves of any deviation from the ‘pure’ interpretation of Islam and which in Badakhshan is known as a type of Wahhabism. Zardew, in south-eastern Badakhshan, for example, was a pocket of Wahhabi followers, many of whom were at times close to Sayyaf (Personal communication with member of local Badakhshi elite, June 1998). Chapter Five discusses Wahhabism in more detail.

46 For Ibn Taymiyya, a good Muslim was not defined by religious attitude but by a person’s political actions. As a result, it was possible to denounce a Muslim as a heretic for purely political reasons (see Roy 1986:78). The Taliban, as will be discussed later, seem to have also incorporated some of Ibn Taymiyya’s radical views.

47 The Shiite parties consisted of the Shura-e Ettefaq (led by Ayatullah Beheshti), Sazman-e Nasr (led by Abdul Ali Mazari), Sepah-e Pasdaran (led by Mohammad Akbari), and the
sizeable Shiite sectarian communities felt mostly marginalised and excluded from the *shuras* and thus from the process of formation of the interim government.\(^{48}\) This was certainly the case at the *shura* held in Rawalpindi from 10-24 February 1989 (Maley 2002:150), when the Shiites, unable to secure satisfactory representation, refused to participate (Maley 2002:178; Saikal and Maley 1991:123, 133n8).\(^{49}\)

By the late 1980s, it was already apparent that foreign actors had overtly and covertly entered the political arena by supporting their preferred *mujahideen* groups financially, ideologically and logistically.\(^{50}\) Amidst the rising ethnic and sectarian tensions, the *shuras* were marked by the promotion of ultra-conservative elements, particularly as a consequence of the domination by the Hezb-e Islami and Ittehad-e Islami and despite the fact that these groups did not necessarily experience a high degree of support from within Afghanistan. Independent Saudi Wahhabi organisations, for example, financed those Sunni *mujahideen* groups that were inclined to follow their brand of puritan Islamic ideals and which were vehemently anti-Shiite. Although initially supporting the Jamiat-e Islami, due to its close relationship with Sayyaf’s Ittehad-e Islami, the Saudis later directed their support primarily to Sayyaf and Hekmatyar’s Hezb-e Islami who also enjoyed the favour of Pakistan, as well as the support of

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\(^{48}\) It is impossible to give an exact figure of Twelver and Sevener Shiites in Afghanistan. In response to their inadequate representation, five pro-Iranian Shiite *mujahideen* groups staged their own meetings in Iran (see Olesen 1995:291-292).

\(^{49}\) The representation of the participants at this meeting was therefore by no means an indication of the balance of the Sunni *mujahideen* groups.

\(^{50}\) With international funds, predominantly from the United States and Saudi Arabia, America’s Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) coordinated the purchase of arms from China, Egypt and Israel and transported the weapons into Pakistan, where they were then distributed by Pakistan’s ISI to the major *mujahideen* groups and Arab volunteers. From 1986, the US also directly supplied US-made Stinger missiles to the ISI for distribution (see Rubin 1995:196-201). Other countries were also involved in aiding the *mujahideen*. Members of the British Special Air Service trained some *mujahideen* groups, while a number of European and Asian countries supported the Islamic resistance by primarily offering medical assistance (see Maley 2002:81). Iran exclusively supported Afghan Shiite Islamist groups. The bulk of the international military aid and finances were distributed to Hekmatyar’s Hezb-e Islami, the preferred *mujahideen* party of Pakistan, as well as Pakistani and Arab Islamist extremists. In fact, Hekmatyar even attracted assistance from Iraq and Libya (Rubin 1995:182). Various Saudi and Arab Wahhabi groups provided Sayyaf’s Ittehad-e Islami, the smallest *mujahideen* group in Afghanistan, with significant funds and weapons in disproportion to the other groups (Maley 2002).
various Arab Islamist groups (see Rubin 1995:214-215). In addition to the financial and logistical support provided by these external players, both the Hezb-e Islami and Ittehad-Islami attracted many Arab mujahideen. Similarly, the Iranian government, in an effort to counterbalance the foreign support reaching Sunni groups, assisted several Shiite mujahideen parties and from 1990, supported the newly-formed Shiite Hezb-e Wahdat as well as the Jamiat-e Islami and the Sunni Uzbek Abdul Rashid Dostum’s Junbesh-e Melli (National Islamic Movement) (see Giustozzi 2000:245; Rubin 1995:221-223). From 1995, the Taliban became the main recipients of Saudi financial aid (see Giustozzi 2000:245).

In Badakhshan, the moderately conservative Jamiat-e Islami was by far the most dominant party, especially in southern, central and north-eastern parts of the province. The radical Islamist parties led by Abdul-Rab al-Rasul Sayyaf and Gulbuddin Hekmatyar were also particularly influential with a number of local Badakhshi sub-commanders. In the otherwise predominantly Ismaili-inhabited region of Zardew in eastern Badakhshan, for example, a minority Sunni Pushtun community had embraced Wahhabism and was thought to be close to Sayyaf’s Ittehad-e Islami. Sayyaf was to become one of the main Pushtun allies of the Rabbani Presidency (1992-2001) and the United Front, but his faction was not the only group in Badakhshan to promote Wahhabi ideologies. Mawlawi Kheyradmand from Argu, a conservative Sunni Uzbek commander who toward the end of 1998 briefly served as Governor of Badakhshan and who was aligned with Hekmatyar’s Hezb-e Islami and later also with the United Front, was well-known for his leanings towards...
Wahhabism. In addition, a number of Uzbek and Baluch commanders in western Badakhshan were loyal to Hekmatyar’s Hezb-e Islami, especially in and around Keshem and Argu as well as in Faizabad. The Sunni Baluch Badakhshi Bohadar, a conservative senior commander from Keshem, for example, was aligned with Hezb-e Islami and was loyal to President Rabbani’s United Front during the time of my field research. As Chapter Five will further elaborate, the endorsement of ideologies of extremist Islam, most notably by the Taliban (1996-2001) but also by a number of mujahideen commanders in Badakhshan during the period of the Rabbani Presidency and the United Front, was to have serious consequences for the expression of Afghanistan’s cultural heritage.


On 25 April 1992, Massoud entered Kabul with the assistance of Dostum’s Junbesh-e Melli, the Shiite Hezb-e Wahdat as well as members of non-Pushtun Parchami factions within Najibullah’s government. The signing of the Peshawar Accord the following day saw Sebghatullah Mojadiddi appointed as Acting President of the interim administration (shura-e intiqali), which was to be followed after two months by a four month Presidency by Rabbani, which became known as the shura-e qiyadi (Leadership Council) (see Maley 2002:197-199; Rubin 1995:271-274; Saikal 1998b:32-34). Massoud’s control of Kabul together with the signing of the Peshawar Accord represented the

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55 Mawlawi Kheyradmand was governor of Badakhshan for the brief period of three months from the end of 1998 until his assassination in January 1999 (see Dorronsoro 1992).

56 After this transitional period, the shura was to select an interim government over a period of eighteen months after which general elections were planned (see Rubin 1995:271). Rabbani was initially to hold that position for four months but after some controversy arising from the fact that the assembly was dominated by his supporters, his Presidency was extended for a further eighteen months (see Goodson 2001:74; Saikal 1998b:33). After Rabbani’s leadership was renewed for a further six months with the approval of the shura (shura-e ahl-e hal wa aqad), he assumed his Presidency on January 1993 (see Maley 1993:388). On 7 March 1993, during the Islamabad Accord – and under considerable pressure from Pakistan and Saudi Arabia – an agreement was reluctantly reached that Rabbani could continue his eighteen month term, provided that Hekmatyar was given the portfolio of Prime Minister (see Goodson 2001:74; Maley 1993:388-389; Maley 2002:199). Hekmatyar, however, refused this post on the grounds that Massoud – his major enemy – would firstly have to relinquish his post as Defence Minister (see Saikal 1998a:118). In mid-1994, amidst further controversy, Rabbani again extended his presidency (see Saikal 1998b:38-39). On 12 August 1997, while the Taliban were seriously advancing into northern Afghanistan, Rabbani was again re-elected following a shura by the anti-Taliban alliance in Mazar-e Sharif (see Rashid 2000:229).
climactic end of Afghanistan’s Communist era (see Rubin 1995:269-271). On 28 April 1992, the Islamic State of Afghanistan was inaugurated, and Ahmad Shah Massoud was sworn in as Defence Minister (see Olesen 1995:292-293; Rubin 1995:271-272; Saikal 1998b:32). Yet the mujahideen parties were fragmented and tensions arising from ethnic, linguistic, sectarian, kinship, and personality differences had by then impacted on Afghanistan’s civil and political society. While Rabbani served as President in Kabul, every major group that had been claiming a stake in the Afghan leadership “both allied with and fought against every other major group at one time or another” (Khalilzad and Byman 2000:67). During this period, the adherence to ultra-conservative Islamic dogmas, including ultra-conservative Hanafi Islam, Indian reformist movements such as Deobandism, and puritan reformist sects that advocated Wahhabism, by a number of groups greatly impacted on the expression of popular non-religious cultural practices. These influences and their consequences will be dealt with more extensively in the following chapter.

The increasing rivalry between powerful non-Tajik commanders such as the Ghilzai Pushtun Hekmatyar and the Uzbek Rashid Dostum, seriously harmed the stability of Rabbani’s presidency (see Maley 1998:10). While Rabbani managed to extend his Presidency at the shura-e ahl-e hal wa aqd (Council of Supreme Popular Settlement) in December 1993 until 28 June 1994 (Maley 2002:198), the political landscape had further changed with the appearance of “embryonic regional states” in Herat, north-western Afghanistan and north-eastern Afghanistan (see Dorronsoro 1995:37), which only nominally supported Rabbani’s leadership in Kabul. Furthermore, on 1 January 1994,

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57 This is exemplified by the extraordinary situation in Kabul in June 1992, when the Jamiat-e Islami under Massoud controlled the north of Kabul, Hezb-e Wahdat mujahideen the west, Dostam’s Junbesh-e Melli soldiers “the area around the Bala Hisar fortress and Teppe Meranjan”, and Sayyaf’s Ittehad-e Islami fighters the Paghman area west of Kabul (Maley 2002:202).

58 From August 1992, Hekmatyar and his supporters were already officially countering the government in an attempt to fracture President Rabbani’s fragile alliance with Dostum and Sayyaf (see Saikal 1998b:33). Hekmatyar’s rocketing of Kabul on August 1992 alone, killed over 1000 civilians (Maley 2002:198).

59 It is also important to note that at that time, many of the mujahideen groups operated as militias that relied on territorial and/or sectarian support networks (Saikal 1998b:30). In the north-west of Afghanistan, the Uzbek Rashid Dostum had virtually created his own autonomous fiefdom. Likewise, the Tajik Ismail Khan ruled independently in Herat. The Hazaras had for the first time in the history of Afghanistan asserted themselves as political players and controlled the territories of central Afghanistan that surrounded Bamiyan. Hekmatyar’s domain lay just south and east of Kabul. Rabbani and Massoud therefore effectively only controlled Kabul and north-eastern Afghanistan (especially the provinces Badakhshan, Takhar, Kapisa, and Parwan).
the major non-Tajik commanders formed an alliance – the *shura-e hamahangi* (Council of Coordination) – consisting of Hekmatyar’s Hezb-e Islami, Dostum’s Junbesh-e Melli, Mazari’s Hezb-e Wahdat, and even Mojadiddi’s Jabha-e Nejat-e Melli – which effectively destabilised the Rabbani government until February-March 1995 (see Maley 2002:203). By that time, the nascent Taliban militia had already taken control of Kandahar and were advancing towards Kabul via Hekmatyar’s headquarters that were located south of the capital. In mid-February 1995, Hekmatyar’s soldiers were thus forced to retreat from their base in order to avoid a confrontation with the Taliban. Indeed, Hekmatyar’s escape triggered a string of events that led the Islamic State of Afghanistan, through its Defence Minister Massoud, to take complete control of Kabul. As a consequence, March to October 1995 represent the first and only peaceful period of the Islamic State of Afghanistan in Kabul (Maley 2002:206). With the exception of this short-lived interval, the post-Communist aftermath of internecine fighting among Islamist groups meant that the Islamic State of Afghanistan became a failed state and remained so until November 2001.

When Burhanuddin Rabbani first assumed the post of President of the Islamic State of Afghanistan in June 1992, he became the second non-Pushtun ruler after Habibullah Kalakani, but the first Badakhshi leader to govern Afghanistan. In Badakhshan, the provincial government’s administrative positions were almost exclusively filled by Sunni Islamist Tajiks or Uzbeks who were educated in urban state-*madrassas* or secular schools and who had gained prominence as *mujahideen* during the *jihad* with either Rabbani’s Faizabad *shura* or Massoud’s *shura-e nazar-e shomali* (Supervisory Council of the North). This social and political advancement of *mujahideen* through the system of *jabha* (the military structure of the *mujahideen*) thereby effectively altered the traditional hierarchical power structure of Afghan society and the influence of the elite or wealthy land-owning families (see Roy 1995:14).

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60 After Hekmatyar’s retreat from his headquarters near Kabul, Massoud was in a position to effectively bomb Hezb-e Wahdat forces in western Kabul. Hezb-e Wahdat, in turn, saw it necessary to enter an alliance with the Taliban so as to retaliate against Massoud’s forces. Yet the Hezb-e Wahdat’s alliance with the Taliban backfired, allowing Massoud to expel the Taliban from Kabul. With the assistance of Sayyaf’s Ittehad-e Islami, Massoud exercised military control over the capital, with the result that Dostum’s forces also left Kabul. For a more detailed account of these events see Maley (2002:203-204).

61 The system of *jabha* functioned through the creation of core units where military training was offered. It was possible to become a member without having to rely on the traditional *qawwn* network (see Roy 1995:73-74). This was best exemplified by the establishment of Massoud’s *shura-e nazar-e shomali* (Supervisory Council of the North) and special military
At the same time, other commanders who did not belong or did not adhere to this Islamist network, largely adopted what became known by the neologism *qanun-e kalashnikov* (Law of the Kalashnikov) or *qanun-e jang* (Rule of War), which further perpetuated the transformation of Afghanistan’s culture into a *farhang-e jang* (Culture of War). The abundance of weapons that had been supplied by outside actors to the *mujahideen* during the *jihad* and which had often remained in the possession of a *qamandan* (field commander), meant that many local commanders were able to advance militarily to positions of authority, even more so if they had loyal men at their disposal. In fact, regional commanders who were loyal to either Massoud or Rabbani generally had little, if any, control over these renegade local commanders in Badakhshan.

The combination of unsettled feuds and the ready availability of arms in Badakhshan resulted in retribution killings against former members of the Communist regimes. This meant that musicians were also targeted. Indeed, the political fragmentation among *mujahideen* groups at a national level was evident also in Badakhshan. While his supporters controlled most of Faizabad, Rabbani had an uneasy relationship with Hezb-e Islami commanders in the western and northern parts of the province as well as with commanders who were pro-Sayyaf in eastern Badakhshan. To complicate matters further, political loyalties tended to be unstable, with personal rivalries and/or financial incentives potentially inducing a commander to switch allegiance to his former opposition.

The emphasis on adherence to conservative Islam which represented the only real common ground among the various *mujahideen* groups, inevitably impacted upon prevailing attitudes towards non-religious cultural practices. With the inauguration of the Islamic State of Afghanistan, Sharia (Islamic) law was promoted as the only acceptable code of conduct. Indeed, one of the first edicts was to order women to wear the *shalwar qamiz* (traditional clothing of a long shirt and baggy trousers) and the *chadri* (veil) (see Olesen 1995:294-295). Such policies reflected the significant influence of extremist Islamists, namely Hekmatyar and Sayyaf, both of whom had many Arab *mujahideen* in their political organisations, and whose views Rabbani was compelled to

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units such as the *zarbati*, a force that had special striking capabilities and which trained elite soldiers who were later to be instrumental in the overthrow of the Taliban militia (see Rohde 2001; Rubin 1995:235). However, Massoud’s military structure never challenged the traditional structures at the village level (see Roy 1995:74).

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62 During the Communist period, women in Kabul were not required to be veiled in public and were in fact free to dress in typical Western fashion.
accommodate in order to maintain political power. The introduction of extremist Arab Islamic practices into Afghanistan, in particular, aimed to “oppose both cultural traditions (tribalism) and religious ones (Hanafism, Sufism)” (Roy 1995:86), and thus had profound consequences for grassroots Afghan heritage. To further complicate matters, for most of Rabbani’s Presidency from 1992-1996, Kabul itself was in virtual chaos, having been divided between rival mujahideen factions of the ruling coalition. It was under these circumstances that in 1994 an even more extremist Islamic movement – the Taliban – emerged in Pushtun dominated areas in south-eastern Afghanistan and with the blessing of Pakistan’s Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate, to fill the political vacuum that had arisen from the state of quasi-anarchy and internecine fighting.

The Political Engagement of the Ismailis

The Ismailis of Badakhshan constitute Afghanistan’s largest community of Sevener Shiite Muslims of the Nizari branch. While their religious ideology will be presented in detail in Chapter Five, their political affiliations are particularly relevant to this thesis given that the majority of the aesthetic practices I witnessed in Badakhshan were performed by Ismailis. Historically, this minority group of Badakhshis has been marginalised and subjected to political and social discrimination by Sunni Tajiks, Uzbeks and Pushtuns. From the late nineteenth century until 1978, Afghanistan’s national governments used local influential middle classes as administrative ‘go-betweens’ in order to implement successfully domestic policies such as the collection of state taxes. While this worked relatively well for Badakhshan’s Sunni population, it meant major changes for the Ismaili pirs (religious leaders), who had traditionally enjoyed large influence over the province’s Ismaili communities. These local rulers were excluded from central politics and their role was curtailed to that of mediating between their communities and the often Pushtun government administrators (see Emadi 1998:110).

As many of Badakhshan’s Ismaili communities are located near the Amu Darya, they were able to witness at first-hand the visible advantages of socialism – the development of infrastructure, hospitals, sealed roads, motorised vehicles, and electricity – in neighbouring Gorno-Badakhshan in the former Soviet Socialist Republic of Tajikistan, while at the same time being apprehensive about their proximity to the Soviet power. In the 1980s, Afghanistan’s Communist government signed a contract with the Soviet Tajik
government which allowed one Ismaili community, Sheghnan, to receive free electricity from neighbouring Khorog, the provincial capital of Gorno-Badakhshan. Given the long-standing impoverishment of the province of Badakhshan, it was not surprising that during my field research in the latter period of the Rabbani government, many Ismailis commented on the superior living conditions of their co-religionists across the border.

The Communist parties’ promise of empowerment for marginal groups in Afghanistan represented a window of opportunity for disillusioned Ismailis who sought to improve their social status and conditions (Emadi 1998:111). Consequently, many Ismailis joined the reformist People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan, and then later either the Parcham and Khalq factions, as well as Setam-e Melli and the Maoist Shula-ye Jawid (Eternal Flame). Due to their loyal support for the Communist regime, numerous Ismailis were rewarded with influential positions, while others were given the opportunity to study abroad at universities in the Soviet block. Certainly, orthodox Sunni Tajiks and Uzbeks, as well as Sunni mujahideen, were even further alienated and their rebellion against the government fuelled by the appointment of an Ismaili from Sheghnan, Amirbeg Jawan, as Governor of Badakhshan during the Taraki-Amin period (see Emadi 1998:114). At the same time, however, other groups of Ismailis refrained from politics and continued to follow their local pirs and shahs. Perhaps not surprisingly, few Ismailis joined the mujahideen.

After the fall of the Najibullah Communist government in 1992, most Ismailis became aligned with the Jamiat-e Islami and in fact, this allowed some Ismailis to bypass the traditional hierarchical mechanisms of power and to improve their status through either the jabha or zarbati systems. Following Tajikistan’s independence in 1991, the spiritual leader of the Sevener Shiite Ismailis, the Aga Khan, visited and supported a number of humanitarian projects in Gorno-Badakhshan and on 27 September 1998, he travelled to the Afghanistan/Tajikistan border near Ishkashim. This was the first time that the Ismailis of Badakhshan had the chance to see and hear their spiritual leader, even though they were physically separated from him by the Amu Darya.

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64 Other Ismailis also received influential political positions such as Khushnazar Pamirzad who became Governor of Jawzjan Province (see Emadi 1998:114).
65 Personal communication with member of Badakhshi elite, Badakhshan, July 1999.
Political History

The Taliban Period (1996-2001)

The Taliban, a predominantly Pashtun, anti-modernist and extremist Sunni Islamic militia, was formed in the summer of 1994 in the context of pervasive despondency and discontent amongst civilians after more than two years of civil war and intra-mujahideen fighting. The movement was founded by Mullah Mohammad Omar, a Hotaki Ghilzai Pashtun from Kandahar who is believed to have been associated either with Harakat-e Inqilab or Khalis’ Hezb-e Islami during the jihad (see Goodson 2001:116; Marsden 1998:44). However, there is mounting evidence that the Taliban were at least partly a creation of Pakistan (see Maley 2002:219-220). Its members included religious students from eastern Afghanistan’s rural madrassas and from conservative and often Deobandi-influenced madrassas in Pakistan. Further, many of the mujahideen who joined the Taliban were former members of mujahideen parties that were close to the traditional ulema and/or village Islam. These groups included Mawlawi Mohammad Nabi Mohammadi’s Harakat-e Inqilab-e Islami and Mawlavi Mohammad Younus Khalis’ Hezb-e Islami, but later also Hekmatyar’s Hezb-e Islami (see earlier discussion this chapter as well as Goodson 2001:81; Griffin 2001:35).

The Taliban seized the cities of Kandahar in 1994, Herat in 1995 and ultimately, the capital, Kabul in September 1996 (see Maley 1997a:175), wresting more than fifty percent of Afghanistan from the control of President Rabbani. Anthony Davis (1998b:43-44) suggests that this rapid military success could only have been possible with the active logistical support of Pakistan’s Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate. Whilst initially perceived to be a genuine and devoutly Sunni Islamic reformist force, the Taliban soon became notable for their imposition of an extremist hardline regime and their implementation of highly controversial policies that were allegedly based on Sharia law. As will become clear in later chapters of this thesis, these extremist principles seriously impacted on performance practices in Afghanistan, even in

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66 Taliban is the Persian plural of the Arabic singular noun for religious student, talib. Many of these religious students were Afghan orphans who had received free board and Islamic education in Pakistan and were organised as a “militarised force with a proper name, in Pushto Da Afghanistano da Talibano Islami Tahrik” (The Islamic Movement of Taliban) (Maley 2002:218).

67 Many of these madrassas continue to be affiliated with the Pakistani extremist Islamist political party, Jamiat-e Ulema-e Islam (Society of Muslim Ulema), a conservative Deobandi-influenced Islamist organisation (see Maley 1998:14). Chapter Five will further comment on Deobandi madrassas.
the province of Badakhshan which was controlled by the anti-Taliban United Front.

In 1996, at a gathering of Sunni ulema, Mullah Omar was officially proclaimed ‘His Eminence Amir al-Momineen’ (Commander of the Faithful) and on 4 April that year, he appeared publicly in Kandahar (Maley 1997a:177; Marsden 1998:65; Rashid 2000:42, 102), holding aloft the khirqa-e mubarak. If the change in Afghanistan’s flag during the Communist period was extreme, then the Taliban’s introduction of a white flag inscribed with black calligraphy – and without any images – was particularly radical. This new flag clearly signalled the ideology of the new regime: a departure from the earlier Islamist period of Rabbani and the mujahideen and the introduction of puritan, orthodox Islam that was ostensibly based on the teachings of the Prophet Mohammad in the seventh century.

Although the primary concern of the Taliban in 1996 was to eliminate Massoud, their advance into northern Afghanistan was also hindered by Dostum’s Junbesh-e Melli. On 13 June 1997, an anti-Taliban opposition was formed that became known as Jabha-e Muttahid-e Islami-e Melli bara-ye Nijat-e Afghanistan (United Islamic and National Front for the Salvation of Afghanistan), and which was most commonly referred to as the United Front (see Fielden and Goodhand 2001:13; Rashid 2000:61). Mazar-e Sharif was initially planned as the ‘capital-in-exile’ for the Islamic State of Afghanistan as well as the headquarters for the United Front but this was not to eventuate as the city was soon captured by the Taliban. Consequently, the government of

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68 See earlier section of this chapter for the history of the Mohammad’s cloak and its importance to the people of Badakhshan.
69 Initially, Dostum had remained relatively neutral during the Taliban’s battle against Rabbani, and controlled seven north-western provinces (CNN 1996). On 1 January 1994, Dostum joined the shura-e hamahangi (Council of Coordination) that attempted to stage a coup against the Rabbani government by bringing Hekmatyar, Dostum and the Hezb-e Wahdat into an alliance (see Maley 2002:203). This brief coalition was narrowly defeated by Massoud with the result that Dostum’s forces were ejected from Kabul by June 1994.
70 This new alliance was comprised of the Rabbani and Massoud factions of the Jamiat-e Islami together with their Pashtun ally Sayyaf and various local Hezb-e Islami commanders who were nominally aligned with the Rabbani government, as well as forces from Dostum’s Junbesh-e Melli and the Shiite Hezb-e Wahdat. The Western media often referred to the United Front as the Northern Alliance.
71 A conflict between Rashid Dostum and Abdul Malik Pahlawan, one of his main commanders, that had arisen following the suspected murder at Dostum’s instigation of one of Malik’s brothers, led to Malik’s four day defection to the Taliban in May 1997 (see Goodson 2001:78; HRW 2001:16). As the Taliban tried to disarm troops loyal to Malik in Mazar-e-Sharif, he once again switched sides, resulting in the Taliban’s second major military setback
the Islamic State of Afghanistan was relocated to Taloqan, Takhar’s provincial capital, until its first fall to the Taliban in August 1998, after which Faizabad in Badakhshan permanently became the defacto capital until 13 November 2001 when the United Front with the assistance of United States’ troops re-captured Kabul (see BBC 2001). The province of Badakhshan thus became the political, logistical and psychological backbone for both the Islamic State of Afghanistan and the United Front. Significantly, throughout this period, the Rabbani government successfully retained Afghanistan’s seat at the United Nations (see Maley 1997a:175).

In October 1997, the Taliban announced that it had changed Afghanistan’s official name from the Islamic State of Afghanistan to the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (see HRW 2001:11). Their first incursion into Badakhshan occurred in November 1997. In a small Wahhabi enclave in south-eastern Badakhshan that is located on the summer trade route to the Dorah and Shah Salim Passes to Pakistan (see Map 3), Sunni Badakhshis (who had been influenced by conservative Indian reformist Islam and who had been living in exile in Pakistan where they had become members of the Taliban), returned from Chitral to Badakhshan disguised as traders. They briefly infiltrated the towns of Zardew and Zebak (see Jennings 1999), a move that was facilitated by the assistance of an extremist local commander influenced by Wahhabism. The Sunni Tajik Badakhshi Najmuddin Khan, one of the main commanders of Massoud’s shura-e nazar, immediately sent reinforcements and after a fierce but brief battle, defeated the Taliban. In August 1998, the Taliban’s offensive in north-western Afghanistan led to their occupation of the provinces of Faryab, Jawzjan and Balkh, with Takhar Province and its provincial capital Taloqan also briefly falling to Taliban control on 10/11 August (see BBC 1998;
Davis 1998a). The nearby regions of western Badakhshan near Keshem that were largely under the control of Hezb-e Islami commanders at that time, briefly switched their allegiance to the advancing Taliban until Massoud sent reinforcements. From then onwards, the people of Badakhshan anticipated an imminent assault by the Taliban.

With the Taliban’s entry into Kabul in September 1996 and the northern retreat of the coalition members of the Islamic State of Afghanistan, the Jamiat-e Islami became increasingly factionalised, with members positioning themselves in accordance with leadership and locality: Massoud-Panjshir versus Rabbani-Faizabad (see also Saikal 1998b:36-37). Likewise, during my field research, Badakhshan was periodically beset by frictions within the Jamiat-e Islami, the Rabbani government as well as within the United Front. The province was roughly divided into two spheres of political influence. The first was led by President Rabbani who controlled most of western Badakhshan and some districts north of Faizabad; the second belonged to Massoud who exerted his influence in most areas south of Faizabad as well as in the north-eastern regions, including the border regions with Tajikistan, Pakistan and China. Yet while Rabbani directly controlled the capital Faizabad through an alliance of local commanders, a number of whom were his relatives, his political hold was contingent upon his accommodation of conservative and extremist allies. The western parts of Faizabad, for example, were controlled by the Sunni Uzbek Basir Khalid and his brothers who represented a traditional and conservative faction of the Jamiat-e Islami, but who were also close to the ulama and to some commanders aligned with Hekmatyar’s party (see Dorronsoro 1992:7; Rubin 1995:219, 285). The areas west and north of Faizabad (Argu and Shahr-e Bozurg) were entirely under the control of powerful Hezb-e Islami commanders, some of whom, such as Mawlawi

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76 Personal communication with member of Badakhshi elite, Faizabad, 1998.
77 Personal communication with member of Badakhshi elite, Faizabad, August 1999.
78 In order to satisfy some Hezb-e Islami commanders who were nominally loyal to the United Front, it seems that Rabbani installed the Sunni Uzbek Kheyradmand from Hekmatyar’s Hezb-e Islami as the Governor of Badakhshan in early January 1999. Kheyradmand was an old foe of Massoud’s shura-e nazar and was assassinated in suspicious circumstances only three months after taking up his position (see AFP 1999). His death led to an armed struggle in April 1999 in which reportedly two hundred of his supporters briefly held strategic buildings including the airport in Faizabad and during which soldiers of Massoud’s shura-e nazar were killed (Reuters 1999a).
79 Personal communication with member of Badakhshi elite, Faizabad, August 1999.
Kheyradmand from Argu, were known for their Wahhabi-influenced puritan interpretations of Islam. Long-standing tensions continued to resurface between the Jamiat-e Islami and Hekmatyar's Hezb-e Islami in Badakhshan not only as a consequence of ideological differences, but due to their respective ethnic and kinship alliances. In addition to this tenuous alliance, small pockets of Wahhabi commanders who were located in central and southeastern Badakhshan, intermittently switched their allegiance between Hezb-e Islami and Sayyaf's Ittehad-e Islami, generally in accordance with the degree of financial inducement on offer (see also Dorronsoro 1992:8).

Communities in many areas of Badakhshan that were controlled by the United Front were required to pay taxes to commanders who then relayed this income to the military structure of either Rabbani's Faizabad shura or Massoud's shura-e nazar. Rabbani's relatively weak and ineffective administration, however, meant that the qanun-e kalashnikov prevailed in much of the province (see also Goodhand 2000:272). Moreover, the province was partly reliant upon a "quasi-feudal" system of opium economy (Goodhand 2000:270). As Shahrani (1998) notes, in addition to the titular national administration, "community-based parallel power structures" based on "Sharia-governed civil society" were under the control of local commanders who were at times only nominally aligned with Massoud, Rabbani, Hekmatyar, or Sayyaf. Any substantial monetary incentive could easily facilitate a switch in political allegiance (Shahrani 1998:230).

Following the jihad against the Soviet-backed government, a Wahhabi emirate was established in Argu by an aлим who had been linked to the ultra-conservative Wahhabi-influenced Panjpir madrassa, a private religious institution in Pakistan's North West Frontier Province that was related to the Indian Deoband madrassa (see Chapter Five for a discussion on religious institutions in Afghanistan as well as Wahhabism and Deobandism). This Badakhshi 'emirate' spanned a territory that covered the regions of Jurm and Shahr-e Bozurg. Its extremist and anti-Shiite members were Sunni Tajiks and Uzbeks who were mostly aligned with Hezb-e Islami. Mawlawi Kheyradmand was associated with this group (see Roy 1995:82-83). Ideologically, this group was close to the Taliban, but, perhaps paradoxically, it was at times aligned with the United Front, albeit tenuously.

Dorronsoro argues that the influence of the Hezb-e Islami in the Keshem region may date back to Mohammad Omar in the 1970s (see 1992:7). More recent tensions relate to the times when the local Jamiat-e Islami representative of Argu, Jamaluddin, a graduate from the Faculty of Agriculture at Kabul University, was replaced by the Uzbek and Hezb-e Islami commander, Mawlawi Kheyradmand (see 1992:8; Dorronsoro 2000:165).

Personal communication with member of local elite, Badakhshan, August 1999.

Personal communication, members of local elite, Faizabad, 1998, 1999.
Prior to the emergence of the Taliban, Rabbani’s government was unmistakably conservative, partly in reaction to the liberal and purportedly un-Islamic cultural expression that had been permitted during the Communist period. However, several factors led to the integration of ultra-conservative Islamic edicts into the framework of the titular national government. These included the lack of any effective support from moderate Pushtuns in Rabbani’s government, the assumption of Hekmatyar’s position as Prime Minister in Kabul from late June until September 1996, and Rabbani’s continued reliance upon the allegiance of extremist leaders and their followers such as Sayyaf’s Ittehad-e Islami as well as Hezb-e Islami commanders who were committed to the United Front. In addition to the intra-party disputes of the Jamiat-e Islami, the meddling of outside actors such as Pakistan’s Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate, and the presence of foreign fighters including Arabs, Chechens and Pakistanis, accentuated the introduction of non-Afghan, Arabian Islamic cultural norms.

Once the Taliban took control of Kabul and the Saudi dissident Osama bin Laden officially assumed residence in southern Afghanistan as their guest, other Arabs filtered into the country. Significantly, bin Laden not only financially supported the Taliban, but acted as a form of ‘religious mentor’ to the militia. In fact, this alliance proved to be the final determining factor that prevented Rabbani from governing successfully (see Saikal 1998b). By 2001, the Taliban seemed to have become completely subservient to the political control of bin Laden and his mostly Arab extremist militant associates, as evinced by their destruction of the Buddha statues in Bamiyan and their arrest and incarceration of Western and Afghan humanitarian workers from the German NGO Shelter Now, whom they accused of Christian proselytisation. On 9 September, 2001, Ahmad Shah Massoud, the charismatic Islamic resistance leader and military strategist of the shura-e nazar for both the United Front and the Islamic State of Afghanistan, was assassinated by Arab suicide bombers in Takhar Province near the border of Badakhshan.84 This seemed to be not only a sign that the Taliban and their al Qaeda allies were destined to govern the entire country, but that they also had a much broader intention. The atrocities committed two days later in New York and Washington on September 11, horrifically testified to their agenda of global terrorism.

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84 The Arab journalists were carrying Belgian passports and posed as journalists. A bomb that had been concealed in one of their cameras killed the assassin as well as Massoud.
Due to the prevalence of extremist Islamic values within the larger context of Afghanistan, particularly in the light of the Taliban’s espousal of ‘pure Islam’, a degree of cultural confusion arose as to what Afghan cultural practices were and were not permissible ‘Islamic’ conduct. This upsurge of conservatism challenged the legitimacy of moderate Hanafi Islam as formally espoused by the ruling Islamic State of Afghanistan and as a consequence, the Rabbani government had to ensure that they were not perceived to be tolerant of ‘unlawful’ practices. Indeed, Rabbani’s ‘rapprochement’ with Hekmatyar in 1996 (see Maley 2002:215-216), combined with the orthodox attitudes of extremist Muslims who had been influenced by ultra-conservative Indian or Arabian reformist ideologies, meant that the code of conduct for cultural expression propounded by the Rabbani government, and thereby also by Badakhshan’s provincial government, was not dissimilar from the policies that the Taliban were soon to impose. Significantly, Hekmatyar had often asserted that members of the Jamiat-e Islami were not Islamic (Olesen 1995:294) and when serving briefly as Prime Minister in Kabul in 1996, he had been quick to implement strict bans on aesthetic performances such as music and dance and to make the burqa compulsory.  

As later chapters will elucidate, Sunni Islamic practices were never in dispute, but were at all times endorsed by all religio-political leaders.

The result within the province of Badakhshan was that non-religious practices, which prior to 1992 had been tolerated under Hanafi Islamic jurisprudence, were no longer patronised in the province. Yet at the same time, they were generally not explicitly forbidden. However, an intensification of restrictions on non-religious cultural practices was noticeable when I returned to Badakhshan in 1999 after an absence of twelve months. This was particularly true in regions that were contested by various opposing factions, such as in Faizabad where many mujahideen parties and independent commanders kept offices. A slow, yet gradual ‘Talibanisation’ was thus emerging in Badakhshan among the local population and commanders alike. It seemed that the diversity of armed groups in Badakhshan either positioned themselves clearly with the United Front forces, or they became more conservative with respect to their ideas of Islamic conduct. In a number of cases, particularly

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85 See Chapter Five for an excerpt of an (undated) manifesto that Hekmatyar’s Hezb-e Islami released prior to Hekmatyar resuming the position of Prime Ministership, and which states his extremist and radical views with respect to the censorship of non-Sunni religious practices.

86 For example, Hezb-e Islami, Jamiat-e Islami and Ittehad-e Islami kept offices in Faizabad.

87 Personal observation and communication with locals in Faizabad, 1998 and 1999.
among some Sunni Uzbek or Pushtun Badakhshis who were followers of Wahhabism, Islamic views were more extreme than those of the Taliban. This extremism, however, was largely the result of ethnic tensions, whereby a non-Tajik ethnic group may have sought to differentiate and distance themselves from the ideologies of the ruling Jamiat-e Islami in Badakhshan who were predominantly Tajik. It is also possible that members of such extremist groups may even have been preparing for their future role as allies of the Taliban, given that it seemed almost inevitable that the militia would ultimately take control of Badakhshan.

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The historical and political overview provided in this chapter has explicated the multi-ethnic and multi-sectarian nature of Badakhshan and highlighted its struggle to remain an independent unit within the larger context of Central Asia. Functioning largely as a quasi-feudal society, the territory of Badakhshan was initially controlled by local rulers through a traditional patron-client system of loyalties, with regular feuds occurring among major stakeholders. With the emergence of the Afghan Amir Abdur Rahman, Badakhshan was subsumed into the nation of Afghanistan whilst serving as a strategic buffer zone during the Great Game between Tsarist Russia and British India. The various accounts of the removal of the Prophet’s cloak from Faizabad attest to the centrality of Islam in the region; the cloak not only provided the modern name for the Badakhshi capital, but the oral history of the *khirqa* represents an important form of intangible heritage for the inhabitants of Badakhshan. Relatedly, two specific types of Islam have historically served as important cultural markers for the people of Badakhshan: Sevener Shiite Ismaili Islam that was introduced in the eleventh century through Nasir Khusraw, and Naqshbandi Sufism with which not only the Yarid rulers were associated but also, more recently, the former President Burhanuddin Rabbani.

The rule of King Zahir Shah from the 1950s to the late 1970s led to the establishment of institutions of modern education from which a number of members of the Badakhshi elite benefited. Yet during the latter period of his

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88 I refrain from using the term 'feudal' since the peasants and labourers did to a degree also benefit from their patrons, or landlords, through a system of reciprocity. For example, a land owner may assist financially in times of hardship, or may improve the structure of a road which would then benefit the entire community.
rule, through the ensuing Presidency of Mohammad Daoud, and particularly with the rise of the mujahideen during the jihad against the Communist governments, ethnic, sectarian and regional tensions became manifest in the political arena. These divisions are exemplified by the political figures of Nur Mohammad Taraki and Tahir Badakhshi, both of whom were secularly-educated Sunni Tajiks and who initially held very similar political views, but whose ethnic differences made their Communist aspirations irreconcilable (see Anwar 1989:126). Likewise, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and Burhanuddin Rabbani were educated in government madrassas and became conservative Sunni Islamists, both having belonged to the Muslim Brothers. However, their political organisations (Jamiat-e Islami and Hezb-e Islami) – while initially similar – were marked by ethnic differences that inhibited their united approach to nation formation. These ethnic tensions initially arose in the context of continued domination by the Durrani Pushtuns (1747 to 1978) and were the catalyst for the politicisation of ethnic or sectarian groups such as the Hazaras and the Ismailis that were historically marginalised in Afghan society.

Both the inauguration of Afghanistan’s interim administration on 22 December 2001 and the establishment of the Transitional Authority on 19 June 2002 were marked by an attempt to include all ethnic and sectarian factions. The appointment of Hamid Karzai initially as Chairman and later as President has meant that a moderate Pushtun, as well as a member of the Durrani confederation, has returned to govern Afghanistan. Not surprisingly, the three most senior portfolios in the interim administration were awarded to Panjshiri Sunni Tajiks from the inner circle of Ahmad Shah Massoud. In contrast, former President Burhanuddin Rabbani was not assigned a ministerial post, although three members of his Faizabad shura in Badakhshan received minor portfolios in the interim administration. The dominance of Panjshiri members and the marginalisation of Rabbani’s Faizabad shura in the Transitional Authority, in this case reflect regional rather than ethnic differences. However, in order to ensure a harmonious ethnic representation in the new cabinet of the Transitional Authority under the Presidency of Hamid Karzai, which was determined during the Emergency Loya Jirga from 11-19 June 2002, the Panjshiri faction had to rescind the important post of interior minister to the Sunni Pushtun Taj Mohammad Wardak. In 2002, Klimburg’s observations about the crises and tensions that would inevitably accompany Afghanistan’s path into modernity seem again to be rather appropriate.

89 The Ministry of Defence went to Mohammad Qassem Fahim, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Dr Abdullah and the Ministry of the Interior to Mohammad Younus Qanooni.
It is perhaps paradoxical that both Marxist/Leninist and Islamist ideologies – albeit in very differing ways – were to have such serious consequences for cultural performances in Afghanistan during the Rabbani Presidency and the Taliban period. The Communist governments’ radical modernisation of cultural practices was the catalyst for an intensification of traditional and mostly orthodox Islamic cultural values and a general backlash against all non-religious heritage. Yet intra-Islamist and ethnic rivalries continued to plague the Rabbani regime and its control over the failing Afghan state. As will be seen in subsequent chapters, the emergence of political Islam from the 1950s onwards effected a gradual shift from more moderate to more conservative interpretations of Hanafi Sunni Islam. In turn, this trend contributed to the pervasive yet mostly tacit condemnation of non-religious cultural heritage and subsequent restrictions of aesthetic cultural performances in Badakhshan. Yet conversely, since Badakhshan remained the only province beyond the Taliban’s control and was instrumental in the defeat of the militia in November 2001, the Rabbani period may be understood to have played a significant role in the safeguarding of some of Afghanistan’s non-Islamic cultural traditions, primarily the practices of sport that were clearly acceptable under Hanafi Islamic jurisprudence.
Islam and Performance

Dance where you can break your own self and
pluck out the cotton from the wound of sensuality!

People dance and frolic in the square –
men dance in their own blood.

When they have been delivered from their own hands, they clap their hands;
when they have jumped outside of their imperfection, they dance.

Within themselves their minstrels play the tambourine;
their uproar makes the oceans clap their waves

You do not see,
but they can hear the leaves on the trees also clapping.

You cannot perceive the clapping of the leaves –
you need the ear of the heart, not the body’s ear.

(Rumi translated by and cited in Chittick 1983:327-328).

Since the formation of Afghanistan as an identifiable political unit in 1747, all
facets of its society have been deeply embedded in Islam. In view of the fact
that Islam has consistently pervaded national as well as “parochial identities of
tribe, ethnic group and local community” (Olesen 1995:298), it has thus been
of primary influence in shaping Afghanistan’s cultural heritage. Even so, since
the 1970s, the radical shifts in political systems, from monarchy to republic
(1973-1978), communist (1978-1992), and finally to moderate and extremist
Islamist (1992-2001), have been accompanied by rather divergent views of
society, tradition and culture. During Afghanistan’s modern period, for
example, that is, the latter period of the reign of King Zahir Shah and subsequently during the Presidency of Daoud, attempts were made to foster a national cultural identity by appropriating cultural practices, including aesthetic performances such as the atan-e meli (national dance), as a means of uniting the interests and identities of the diverse peoples who inhabit the territory of Afghanistan. However, even by the mid-1970s under Daoud, it was apparent that rural and tribal identities as well as religious affiliations were clearly being neglected, if not suppressed. This state of affairs set the foundation for a conservative, Islamic backlash which intensified following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, resulting in the proclamation of a jihad against the Communist regime. By 1992, the parties comprising the mujahideen had succeeded in establishing an Islamist government under President Rabbani, and Islam was reaffirmed as the principal regulator of Afghan cultural practices.

Yet, with the exception of a six month period of relative calm from March-October 1995 (Maley 2002:206), the realisation of Islamist ideals in the inauguration of the Islamic State of Afghanistan did not represent an enduring peaceful resolution of the competing interests of the diverse Islamist and Islamic groups comprising the mujahideen. Instead, a rise of ultra-conservatism led to the unforeseeable emergence of internecine war and with Hekmatyar’s forces frequently and destructively rocketing Kabul and renegade troops of Jamiat-e Islami, Ittehad-e Islami or Hezb-e Wahdat, at times involved in civilian atrocities (Maley 2002:203-206), the Presidency of Rabbani was seriously destabilised and ultimately undermined. As discussed in Chapter Four, these rivalries were to a large degree orchestrated from abroad with the financial and military support particularly of Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Iran.

In turn, this had led to a general escalation in Islamic orthodoxy throughout Afghanistan, and climaxed in the emergence of the Taliban who took control of Kabul in 1996. Once in charge of the capital, they had quickly instituted their puritanical version of Islam as exemplified by their strict censorship of many non-Islamic cultural practices, from recreational activities such as gudi paran jangi (kite-flying), the equestrian sport of buzkashi, to aesthetic entertainment like music and dance.\(^1\) Nevertheless, while the Taliban’s orthodox interpretation of non-religious performances captured the world’s attention, it was not entirely a new development as debates about the legality of such

\(^1\) This Central Asian equestrian game will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Six. Kite-flying literally translates as ‘fighting flying puppets’ (see Dupree 1973:212).
practices have been a recurring theme not only in Afghanistan, but throughout the history of Islam.

This chapter will begin with a close examination of the main schisms in Islam, since the social actors of this study, the majority Sunnis and the minority Ismailis in Badakhshan, are followers of sectarian groups which have long-standing conflicting attitudes towards aesthetic performances. Many of the performances observed during my fieldwork occurred among the Ismailis, so a brief description of their history is necessary to facilitate an understanding of their social environment and their political and religious marginalisation. Key Islamic concepts and movements that shaped prevailing understandings of cultural performances in Badakhshan's conservative society in 1998 and 1999, will also be discussed. This will necessarily include a summary of normative Islamic sources, as well as interpretations and comments on these sources from theological, legal and philosophical perspectives. Finally, I will provide an overview of the shifts in the performance of non-religious practices in Afghanistan and Badakhshan that arose during the mujahideen period, Rabbani Presidency and Taliban era until the time of my fieldwork.

Normative Islam

Since the death of the Prophet Mohammad in 632, Muslims have lived in far-reaching territories as diverse sectarian groups, each drawing on the undisputed authority of Islam's normative texts. In order to acknowledge the numerous and diverse influences of such factors as geography, language and ethnicity on Islam, a debate currently exists about whether Islam should be referred to as singular or plural. The Egyptian anthropologist Abdul Hamid M. el-Zein argues that the use of the term "islams" instead of the singular "Islam" allows

2 The term normative is used here to describe Islam as a religion that is based on authoritative texts, for example early scriptural sources such as the Quran and hadith (the Prophet's words and deeds). Building on Max Weber's theories, Shiloah (1995:34) identifies Islam's normative texts as a "sacred written tradition", which as a result of "continual editing and complex processes of interpretation...tend to become the focus of specialized intellectual competence and prestige in the religious field and...rationalized systems of religious doctrine." Debates on performance and Islam have been primarily conducted in the languages of Persian and Arabic. Hence, the literature reviewed in this chapter is derived from secondary sources as well as from translations of source materials.

3 Normative Islam stands in opposition to mystical Islam, which is not necessarily textually based but emphasises an inward union with God, often through the performance of aesthetic practices.
for a deeper understanding of the “multiplicity of cultural meanings” in which Islam is practised globally (1977:254). Hence, although I will refer to Islam in the singular, the reader should bear in mind that the nature of Islam is multifaceted and dynamic and is subject to the influence of its context. While all Muslims concord with the authoritative knowledge arising from Islam’s normative texts, that is, the sacred text of the Quran, together with the hadith, the Prophet’s words and doctrines, and the sunna, a practical model that includes the practices, customs, deeds and utterances of the Prophet Mohammad (see Bouhdiba 1985:2; Wensinck 1987:555), 4 issues concerning the nature of ‘authentic’ Islam have arisen, primarily as a consequence of ambiguities of interpretation (see Eickelman 1998:251). Such concerns have become particularly manifest in the field of performance, with both religious and non-religious cultural performances having repeatedly been the objects of dispute in a variety of times and places. Discussion of the relationship between performance and Islam thus needs to be grounded in Sharia jurisprudence and the normative sources of Islam.

As in most Sunni-dominated societies, the Hanafi school of jurisprudence has always been the major form of Islamic law in Afghanistan, and was recognised as the state religion during the first three constitutions (1923, 1931 and 1964). 5 While the Communist regime (1978-1992) claimed to be tolerant towards Islamic principles and to fully respect Sharia (see Kamali 1985:32), in reality this represented little more than lip service. Unlike the previous constitutions, however, the provisional constitution under the Presidency of Babrak Karmal in 1980 legitimised “the practice of Islam for the Muslims of Afghanistan” (Kamali 1985:34). Moreover, it made no change to the application of Sharia law, with the result that in cases of legal ambiguity, preference was still given to Sharia (see Kamali 1985:34). Nevertheless, most references to Islam that appeared in The Fundamental Principles of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan, 1980, were generally “non-committal, oblique and shrouded within texts covering various other topics, thereby diluting the reference to

4 The Quran is the unquestioned sacred text and authority containing the word of God as revealed to the Prophet Mohammad. Covering most aspects of social and cultural life, it provides a conceptual framework for all Muslims (see Davies 1988:105). Many hadith contain explicit sayings of the Prophet which were collected by people close to Mohammad (see Akhtar 1990:222-223n2; Fischer and Abedi 1990:123).

5 Four main schools of law came to predominate in Sunni: the Hanbali, Shafite, Maliki, and Hanafi, each school taking its name from its founder. The main differences between them lie in the principles of legal reasoning, especially with reference to the hadith and the legitimacy, limits and methods of ijithad (see Hourani 1991:69).
Islam (Kamali 1985:33-34). Nevertheless, by 1987, Islam was reinstated as the state religion (Giustozzi 2000:58). Further, while neither the Islamic State of Afghanistan (1992-2001) under the presidency of Rabbani nor the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (1996-2001) under Mullah Omar formalised constitutions, since no secular law existed at that time, Hanafi-based Sharia effectively became the only form of jurisprudence.

Hanafi jurisprudence recognises four sources of law: the Quran and the sunna, together with the application of qiyas (reasoning by analogy) and ijma (consensus). The ulema (Doctors of the Law), however, have exclusive privilege in the interpretation of legal matters arising out of qiyas and are mostly also the interpreters of ijma (see Olesen 1995:59n20; Roy 1986:80). Sharia is based on Islam's normative texts which were “developed largely by means of interpretive elaborations” (Messick 1993:30) and are regarded by most Muslims as reflecting “divinely ordained norms and ideals of just conduct” (Eickelman 1998:258). Indeed, Islamic law regulates all public and private behaviour, providing specific guidelines for personal hygiene, diet and sexual conduct, in addition to specific rules for religious matters such as prayers, fasting and alms-giving. Hence, Sharia encompasses much more than the equivalent concept of law in the English language and in Western societies (see Eickelman 1998:257). In many Muslim countries, including Afghanistan, however, Islamic law may actually be understood as the product of the interplay between local law and Sharia through the discipline of fiqh (jurisprudence), that is the “critical use of the sunna, hadith and Qur’an” (Fischer and Abedi 1990:125). This chapter will primarily concentrate on aspects of the Quran and hadith that are relevant to an exploration of the legality of cultural performances, and especially aesthetic practices, in an Islamic society.

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6 In cases not encompassed by Islamic jurisprudence, qiyas is used to make a judgement through ijtihad (personal interpretation). The ulema are religious leaders who have usually successfully completed a higher degree in a madrassa (see Roy 1986:80). In the early Islamic period, they were “the main agents in the interpretation of God’s will and thus developed legal rules” (Buskens 2000:8).

7 Pushtunwali (the tribal code of behaviour for Pushtun communities in Afghanistan and Pakistan) is an example in which local law is deeply embedded in Sharia law.
Sectarian Islam in Badakhshan

Afghanistan’s population is comprised of approximately eighty percent Sunni Muslims, nineteen percent Twelver Shiite Muslims, and about one percent Sevener Shiite Ismaili Muslims (see Mostyn and Hourani 1988:293). Two Islamic sects are prevalent in Badakhshan: the predominant Hanafi Sunni Muslims and the minority Sevener Shiite Ismaili Muslims of the Nizari branch. The Sunnis are named after the early Muslims who identified with the dogma and practice of the *sunna*. In contrast with the other major Islamic sects that have arisen under the umbrella of Shiism,\(^8\) Sunnis follow the orthodox or Medina school of leadership succession (see Wensinck 1987:555-556) and constitute about ninety percent of the world’s Muslim population. The historical rift between Sunnis and Shiites is well documented and the history of events will not be addressed here in detail.\(^9\) In fact, as emphasised by the historian Farhad Daftary, it is perhaps more important to recognise that both the Sunni and Shiite Islamic factions are “integral part[s] of Islam” and should be viewed “as different interpretations of the same Islamic message” (1990:36).

The Shiites, literally meaning ‘partisans’, are members of the largest non-orthodox Muslim sect and are also known as Twelver Shiites or *Ithna Ashariyya*, which refers to the number of accepted imams in their lineage. The main Twelver Shiite population in Afghanistan, locally called *Dovazdah* (Twelver) Imami Shiites, is centred around the Hazarajat in central Afghanistan, predominantly in Bamiyan Province and surrounding districts, but communities are also located in Herat and Kabul (see Map 2). Although sharing many common traditions with the Sunnis and adhering to almost identical practices, the Shiite doctrine is based on the spiritual pre-eminence of Ali and has its own legal school and body of *hadith* (see Davies 1988:63; Strothmann 1987:350).\(^10\) The practice of *taqqiya* (concealment) is also an

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\(^8\) Shiism evolved as a political movement in seventh century Arabia. Originally, this group was made up of some friends and supporters of Ali, the son-in-law of the Prophet Mohammad. Ali was the fourth Caliph from 656-661 and eventually his group of supporters became known as the party of Ali who view the only legitimate successors to Mohammad as the descendants of his son-in-law Ali and his daughter Fatima (Daftary 1990:35).

\(^9\) The Sunni count the first four caliphs, the friends of the Prophet, as legitimate successors, whereas Shiites acknowledge only Ali as the first successor. The Shiites refer to the Prophet’s successors as ‘Imams’ in contrast to the Sunni’s term, ‘Caliph’. For a further discussion see Brill (1987), van Donzel (1994), Daftary (1990), and Hourani (1991).

\(^10\) Similar practices include “the recitation of the faith, prayer, fasting, alms, and pilgrimage” (see Lindholm 1996:167), and the application of a body of traditions which is used in
important aspect of Shiism, allowing followers in times of persecution, "to dissimulate their real beliefs if their expression would result in grave physical danger or a threat to their community" (Ahmad 1969:17; Eickelman 1998:265). Like their Sunni co-religionists, the Shiites have also had to deal with internal factionalisation. Following the death of the Shiite's sixth Imam, Jafar al-Sadiq in 765 (see Lindholm 1996:174), disputes over succession led to splits within the erstwhile homogeneous sect, and an active struggle among the various factions to determine the post of Imam. One of the larger claimants, the Ismailis, recognised Ismail as Imam, and he became the eponymous figure from whom the sect derives its name.

The early formative period of the Ismaili belief system is thought to have been from the mid-eighth century to the beginning of the Fatimid period in the early tenth century (Daftary 1990:91), when the Ismaili Imams ruled over a large territory and were respected for their "highly and well-organised administration" (Aavani 1977:2). In contrast to the formal and definitive approach of normative Sunnism, Ismaili dogma incorporated Neoplatonic ideas, as well as "Christian and Zoroastrian messianism...to provide a complete framework of belief which was a powerful intellectual alternative to Sunnism" (Turner 1974:87-88). Moreover, the Quran was seen to hold both authoritative and mystical meaning. This esoteric approach later developed into a widespread practice of mystical Islam, when mysticism was introduced into more orthodox forms of Islam, primarily Sunnism.

conjunction with the Quran. The major differences between the two Muslim groups lie in the inheritance laws and specific ritual observances.  

11 As a result of discrimination against Shiites by previous regimes and especially by the Taliban militia, it is possible that many may have chosen to conceal their faith. The exact number of Shiites in urban areas therefore remains unclear. To a lesser degree, taqqiya is occasionally also practised by Sunnis.

12 Some Shiites believed that Jafar al-Sadiq had designated his eldest son Ismail as his succeeding Imam. Since Ismail died before his father, however, the majority of Shiites concluded that Jafar al-Sadiq (died 765) had appointed yet another son, Ismail’s younger half-brother, Musa al-Kazim, as his successor as seventh Imam (see Daftary 1990:94).

13 To date, the doctrine of the imamate has retained a central position in the teachings of the Ismailis (Daftary 1998:1; Madelung 1987).

14 The Fatimid imamate was established in 909 and lasted until the reign of the eighth Fatimid Caliph and Imam al-Mustansir in 1094, when the major Ismaili division occurred (Daftary 1990:144). This period is usually regarded as the 'golden age' of Ismailism and the summit of Ismaili thought and literature (Daftary 1998:2).

15 Parallels between Ismailism and Sufism may be seen to exist in that as a religious guide, the imam, in a manner not unlike the Sufi leader, "led to the divine hidden within him...[b]ut in contrast to the varied personal devotion of the Sufis, this Shi’ite devotion of the Nizari [Ismaili]...is centred upon a single cosmic individual" (Hodgson 1955:165).
mystical Islam will be discussed later with respect to its influence on the traditions of aesthetic performance. Moreover, the Ismaili doctrines of spiritual enlightenment and “the companionship of the imams” not only offered an alternative to Sunni praxis, but fostered a desire to “overthrow the established order and to inaugurate a new society based on justice” (Turner 1974:88). Hence, a diversity of social groups, including disillusioned intellectuals, as well as the dispossessed and illiterate were attracted to its teachings.

The Ismailis were also well-known for their missionary work to remote and peripheral regions of the Islamic world.16 At its peak, their Fatimid dynasty (909-1171) ruled as far eastward as the trans-Amu Darya region in Central Asia and India (see Daftary 1990:144).17 But eventually, the dynasty began to falter and when problems of succession arose, it split into several groups.18 Following the death of the eighth Fatimid Caliph (and Imam), al-Mustansir (1036-1094), at the end of the eleventh century, the Fatimid Ismailis divided into the Nizari and the Mustali Ismaili sects (see Daftary 1998:3; Holzwarth 1994:12).19 In contrast to the Mustali Ismailis, the Nizari Ismailis acquired political prominence within the territories controlled by the hostile Sunni Saljuqs, and established an independent state of their own based at the mountain fortress of Alamut in northern Persia.20 This state persisted for almost 166 years and its communities were scattered across vast territories, from

16 The centre of the Ismailis was initially in Ifriqiya, in contemporary Tunisia, and from there they expanded their territory after the conquest of Egypt (see Daftary 1990:144).
17 For a short period, the Ismailis ruled over “North Africa, Sicily, Egypt, the Red Sea coast of Africa, Yaman and the Hijaz with the holy cities of Mecca and Medina, Syria, and Palestine” (Daftary 1990:144). Later, from 973, they ruled in Egypt and made Cairo their capital.
18 One imam, for example, denied his own divinity and a later imam was without sons (see Lindholm 1996:174).
19 Al-Mustansir ruled as the eighth Fatimid Caliph. A Caliph, literally “deputy of God”, is a title that was given to the ruler in Muslim countries who, as the successor of Mohammad, guided the Muslim community in civil and religious affairs. The dispute about succession al-Mustansir arose from a challenge between the designated successor, al-Mustansir’s eldest son Nizar, and his youngest son Ahmad. Nizar was unsuccessful in his bid as heir and was eventually executed in 1095 (Daftary 1998:2).
20 The Saljuqs (approximately 1038-1194) were a major Muslim dynasty of Turkic origin that ruled vast regions such as Persia, Iraq, Syria, and Palestine (see Dupree 1973:315; Gregorian 1969:15; Lindholm 1996:277). The Mustaliya sect later divided again into the Hafizi and Tayyibi factions. The Tayyibiya recognised al-Tayyib, the infant son of al-Amir, as their new Imam. Al-Amir was al-Mustansir’s grandson (see Daftary 1990:256). This Ismaili sect went through varying periods of concealment and manifestation, wherein their respective imams were either hidden from or visible to the public (Daftary 1990:257). Their doctrines remained close to that of the Fatimid Ismailis.
eastern Persia to Syria (see Daftary 1990:324). In the mid-thirteenth century, following their defeat by the Mongols, the Nizari state disintegrated and little information exists as to their subsequent fate. What is clear, however, is the serious religious persecution that the Ismailis suffered during this post-Alamut period (Holzwarth 1994:13). Indeed, it seems most likely that from the fifteenth century onwards, through their practice of taqqiya, many Nizari Ismailis including the imams of the post-Alamut period, evaded hostile Sunni authorities by disguising themselves as Sufis (see Daftary 1998:4; Madelung 1987:205). This argument seems quite feasible given that mystical Islam was gaining widespread influence at that time. Moreover, an Ismaili-Sufi connection is also noticeable in literature of this period (see Daftary 1998:166).

Daftary (1998:3–4) suggests that many of the Alamut Ismailis may have gone into exile and established new existences as fragmented agriculturalist communities in Central Asia, Afghanistan and India. Even with the loss of their home state, and their subsequent suppression and marginalisation on the fringes of other societies, the Nizari Ismailis successfully managed to maintain their lineage of Hazir (Living) Imams. This was facilitated by the fact that

21 The fortress of Alamut is located in contemporary northern Iran. The Nizari Alamut state, with its centre in Daylaman in eastern Persia, was defeated by the Mongols in 1256 (see 1990:324; Daftary 1998:3). The Islamicist Wilferd Madelung (1987:202) believes that these independent Nizari communities possibly developed independently of the Alamut centre under the leadership of local “pirs or shaykhs” (spiritual guides).

22 Daftary mentions that following the loss of their capital in Alamut, “the Nizari imams went into hiding, losing direct contacts with their followers” (1998:4).

23 Sufis are the followers of mystical Islam. The Arabic equivalent of mysticism in Islam is tasawwuf, a concept that can be traced “as an organized movement” to the mid-eighth century (see Shiloh 1995:40). Tasawwuf is possibly a reference to the woollen robes worn by ascetics “as a sign of penitence and worldly renunciation” (Crapanzano 1973:15; Hourani 1991:72).

24 These agricultural communities in Afghan Badakhshan would have been largely self-sufficient as they still are today. In the urban areas of Gorno-Badakhshan in Tajikistan, however, as a result of Soviet policies, traditional agricultural practices were abandoned and urban communities (e.g., the provincial capital Khorog) became dependent on Soviet food subsidies, since their agricultural land was used for urban expansion.

25 Those Shiite sectarian groups, including the Nizaris, which regard Ismail as the true successor of Jafar al-Sadiq, believe that a living imam always has to be present as the legitimate descendent of the Prophet and successor of Ali (see Holzwarth 1994:6). A number of sectarian Ismaili groups, however, selected their own candidate for the position of Hazir Imam (see Lindholm 1996:174). Other Shiite sects consider the seventh Imam to be the last and hidden Imam. From the mid-nineteenth century, during the modern period of the Nizari Ismailis, the Nizari Imami became “known to the outside world as the Agha Khan” (Daftary 1990:437). Prince Karim Aga Khan IV is the 49th Hazir Imam and is the current spiritual head of the Nizari Ismaili community.
during the Alamut period (1090-1256), dais (Ismaili missionaries) had already established local “dynasties of pîrs and mîrs” (spiritual guides) in more remote areas such as the Pamir and upper Oxus regions of Badakhshan (Daftary 1998:165). These Ismaili communities of north-eastern Badakhshan had accepted the Nizari imamate (see Madelung 1987:202). Prior to this advent of Alamut-influenced Nizari Ismaili Islam into Central Asia, it seems that many such communities in this region would have practised ancient Iranian religions (Daftary 1998:165). However, during the period from the fifteenth to the mid-seventeenth century, the Ismailis living in the Pamirs of contemporary Afghan Badakhshan and Gorno-Badakhshan in Tajikistan represented the largest Ismaili community in the world (see Holzwarth 1990:14-15).

The Persian-speaking Nizari Ismaili communities of contemporary Afghanistan are now mainly concentrated in the Pamir and Upper Amu Darya region of north-eastern Badakhshan, in south-eastern Badakhshan, in areas of the Hazarajat, in Baghlan and Kunduz provinces, as well in the capital Kabul (see Map 2).26 Local practices in Badakhshan were strongly influenced by the eleventh century poet, philosopher and missionary Nasir Khusraw (1004 to approximately 1077) (see Holzwarth 1994:12, 113n3; Hunsberger 2000:xxi).27 While selected works by other classical Persian poets and in particular Sufi poets such as Sanai, Farid al-Din Attar and Jalal al-Din Rumi, have been revered by the Nizari Ismailis and have influenced their doctrines (see Daftary 1998:166-167), Nasir Khusraw remains the single most important influence on all Ismailis in Badakhshan. During my field research, every Ismaili I interviewed affirmed the centrality of Nasir Khusraw to their local culture.28 His popularity in the Weltanschauung of the Badakhshi Ismailis is also reflected in the existence of many images of the poet in the form of paintings

26 In light of the discrimination suffered under the Taliban, as also experienced by Twelver Shiite communities, it is impossible to judge the exact percentage of Ismailis that resided in Kabul. Many Ismailis may have chosen to practice taqqiya during that period. It is quite possible therefore that since the defeat of the Taliban, their numbers may have increased.

27 Nasir Khusraw was born in 1004 in the village of Qubadiyan, near Marv which used to be part of Khurasan (contemporary Balkh Province, Afghanistan). He died between 1072 and 1078 (see Aavani 1977:1, 11; Hunsberger 2000:4, 261n11). According to the historian Alice Hunsberger, Nasir Khusraw worked up to approximately 1044 as a financial administrator for the local courts in Balkh, Khurasan (initially for the Ghaznavid sultans and later for their successors, the Saljuqs).

28 His continued popularity even extends outside of the wider Badakhshan region to West and South Asia. Both Boldirev’s Russian translation of Mullah Sang Mohammad’s Tarikh-e Badakhshan (1959) and K. Mohammad-Zadeh and M. Shah-Zadeh’s Tarikh-e Badakhshan (1973) comment on Khusraw’s influence in Badakhshan.
and posters in *jamaat khanas* (Ismaili religious community houses), especially those of the Nizari Ismailis in Gorno-Badakhshan (see also Holzwarth 1994:134).

Attracted by the fame of Fatimid Caliph (and Imam) al-Mustansir, Nasir Khusraw, then an orthodox Sunni Muslim, travelled from Khurasan to Egypt where he converted to Ismailism (Hunsberger 2000:4-5). After a six year residence in Cairo, the capital of the Fatimids, Nasir Khusraw was appointed *hujja* (Proof) of Khurasan by al-Mustansir (see Aavani 1977:10). As the head of an Ismaili *dawa* (Ismaili religious organisation), he started his missionary activity in Balkh, but due to assassination attempts by Sunni opponents, was forced to flee the region. Around 1061 (Daftary 1998:103), he escaped eastwards to Yumgan in central Badakhshan, where he was patronised by a Badakhshi ruler (see Holzwarth 1994:12) and “became the founder and patron-saint of the Isma’ili community” (Madelung 1987:199). Holzwarth (1994:17-18) contends that the religious leadership of the Ismailis in Badakhshan around the eighteenth century rested with those families who were descendents of two former students of Nasir Khusraw. These descendents adhered not only to the Ismaili system of missionary titles but were also associated with Sufism (Holzwarth 1994:17-18).

The apparent synthesis of Sufi and Nizari Ismaili ideologies is attested to by the fact that Nizari Ismailis in Central Asia “use verses of the mystical poets of the Iranian world in their religious ceremonies, which are often akin to Sufi-

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29 The *jamaat khanas* is used for religious, communal and cultural activities by the Ismailis in Badakhshan and in the neighbouring regions of Gorno-Badakhshan and northern Pakistan (see Daftary 1998:218). The Ismaili community in Afghanistan has had virtually no contact with its *Haizir* Imam other than his fleeting visit to the Tajik/Afghan border across the Amu Darya in 1998 (the first visit to Gorno-Badakhshan occurred in 1995). As Badakhshan is economically isolated and was especially so during Afghanistan’s civil war (1978-2001), Ismaili artefacts were not for sale in the district bazaars of the Ismaili-inhabited regions in Badakhshan in 1998 and 1999. In comparison, in nearby but — at that time — inaccessible Gorno-Badakhshan, paintings and pictures of Nasir Khusraw or of the Aga Khan were readily available and commonly adorned the walls of local *jamaat khanas*.

30 Aavani argues that Nasir Khusraw also acted as a court poet and would have written poems at that time with “eulogies of kings or other powerful peoples, or celebrations wine, women and other pleasures”. This poetry would have been destroyed upon his conversion (1977:2).

31 The Arabic noun *hujja* is from the Quran and means both “proof” as well as “presentation of proof” (IIS 2001). In Shiism, this term designates Prophets and Imams as “proof” of God’s presence on earth. In the Ismaili *dawa* of the pre-Fatimid and Fatimid periods, it was also applied to senior *dais* (missionaries) and in the Alamut period of Ismaili history it was used for those representing the Imam (see IIS 2001).
like *dhikr* incantations*" (Daftary 1998:167).\(^{32}\) Furthermore, this Ismaili-Sufi convergence is particularly well elucidated in a source book on the cosmology of the Ismailis of the Pamir region by the Russian Andrej Bertel’s (1970:7):\(^{33}\)

A “Book of Spheres” (*afaq-nama*) from the Pamir mountain region cites ten attributes of an illuminated, that is, “inspired” soul (*nafs-i mulhama*): knowledge, wisdom, faith, understanding, loyalty, dancing and listening to music (*raqs wa sama*), enchantment (*wajd*), ecstasy (*halat*), adoption of the (godly) word (*qabul-e sukhan*).

Although this passage is not dated, it clearly refers to the performance of music and dance during traditional religious meetings. During my research in Badakhshan’s Ismaili-inhabited Pamir regions, dancing and listening to music were popular and revered practices and many of the attributes listed in the ‘Book of Spheres’ – knowledge, wisdom, faith, loyalty – were evident in the lyrics of the Ismaili music that I recorded. I suggest that this frequent recitation of classical mystical poetry, such as the *ghazals* of Rumi and the *qasidas* (odes) by Nasir Khusraw, during local music performances, is evidence of its continuing role as a vital literary and spiritual influence for these Ismaili communities. This will be further addressed in Chapters Six and Seven.

An historical account by Mahmud bin Wali, a court librarian during the Khanate of Balkh under the rule of Nadir Mohammad Khan (1606-1642, 1647-1651) in the seventeenth century, establishes a clear link between Nasir Khusraw and the importance of aesthetic practices in Ismailism (see Akhmedov and DeWeese 1991:162).\(^{34}\) Mahmud bin Wali’s encyclopedic work *Bahr al-asrar fi manaqib al-akhyar* (‘The Ocean of Secrets in the Accounts of the Noble’) was written between 1634-40 and describes his observation of devotees visiting Nasir Khusraw’s shrine in Hazrat-e Sayyid, central Badakhshan (see Map 3). This pilgrimage was undertaken to gain spiritual guidance and also to seek musical inspiration (see Akhmedov and DeWeese 1991:163; McChesney 1991:97; Wali 1977:88). In the shrine housing Nasir Khusraw’s tomb, Mahmud bin Wali noticed several musical instruments which Nasir Khusraw had instructed be used by devotees to perform his *qasidas*.\(^{35}\) These instruments included a *doira* (tambourine), *sarghin* (a reed instrument), *rubab* (short-necked lute), *nay* (flute), and *tanbur* (a long-necked, unfretted lute

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\(^{32}\) An example of this Sufi-Ismaili synthesis will be discussed in Chapters Six and Seven with the song “Rawan”.

\(^{33}\) This passage is discussed in Holzwarth (1990:119-120n35) and has been translated by this author from German into English.

\(^{34}\) Badakhshan would have been a nominal appendage of the Khanate of Balkh.

\(^{35}\) According to Mahmud bin Wali (1977:89), by merely visiting the tomb, any novice musician would immediately have experienced an improvement in his technique.
with multiple melodic strings plus optional sympathetic strings). As will be described in subsequent chapters, two of these instruments that were observed in the seventeenth century are still played by the Badakhshi Ismailis: the doira (locally also known as the daf) and the rubab (locally known as the six string Pamiri rubab).

Time is a falcon, baz, very predatory—
How can you play, bazi, with the falcon, baz, of Time?

(Nasir Khusraw in Schimmel 1993:14).

Nasir Khusraw’s use of the polysemous word bazi (play) in this passage is ambiguous, since the Persian/Dari term may also refer to dance. The positioning of dance in Islam will now be discussed in relation to both normative and mystical Islam.

**Mystical Islam**

From the mid-eighth century, the heterodox tradition of Sufism has had a strong presence in the Muslim world, becoming especially common throughout the Middle East, Central and South Asia (see Shiloah 1995:40). During its formative period, Sufism had satisfied the desire of some disenchanted Sunnis for an alternative form of spiritual practice that enabled the experience of Islam in ways other than through the literal interpretation of the normative texts (see Trimingham 1998 (1971):133-139). While conservative Sunni jurists and clergy tended to regard the new mystical emphasis with suspicion, by “[w]orking from within Sunnism, Sufism appealed to a diversity of groups and provided the caliphate with a new form of social cohesion and control at the popular level” (Turner 1974:90). Hence, by the mid-ninth century onwards, Sufi doctrines gradually found their way into the teaching institutions of

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36 I would like to thank Wolfgang Holzwarth, Berlin, for mentioning this article to me. The sarghin is also referred to as karna and is mentioned in Ferdowsi’s Shahnahme (1990 (1967)). This instrument is similar to a surnai (a double reed instrument) that is commonly played in Central and South Asia. While the sarghin was largely used as a military instrument during battle, a surnai is performed during feasts and celebrations (Personal communication, Dr Mohammad Torabi, Canberra, 2002). Mahmud bin Wali may have referred to either the Afghan rubab, a lute with four melodic strings and approximately fifteen sympathetic strings, or to a Pamiri rubab, which has six strings and no sympathetic strings.

37 Whilst the tanbur does not seem to be performed at present by Ismaili Badakhshis in Afghanistan, during my 1999 field trip to Gorno-Badakhshan, Tajikistan, however, I met Ismaili tanbur players in Dushanbe and Khorog.
orthodox Islam (see Crapanzano 1973:17) and in fact, it seems that as a consequence, orthodox Islam was revived (Turner 1974:90). Likewise, in Badakhshan, the marginally positioned Ismailis were not the only people attracted to Sufism’s heterodox doctrines, but a large percentage of the majority Sunnis were also drawn to Islamic mysticism. Indeed, during my fieldwork, the continuing popularity of Sufism in Badakhshan was evident in the public veneration of saints by both men and women at numerous ziarats (Sufi shrines), which are found throughout the province in almost every village and along many transport routes.38

Mystical Islam facilitated direct, individual communication with God, through esoteric and often non-verbal practices, while still maintaining a “harmonious relationship of belief, as outlined in Islam’s exoteric [normative] doctrine of the Shari’a” (Trimingham 1998 (1971):147). Spiritual enlightenment was thus sought through the establishment of a link between the sacred texts and acceptable communal practices. Trimingham (1998 (1971):147) elaborates on the embodied experience of mysticism:

> The Truth which the seeker seeks is existential; it must be apprehended by the whole personality. The cognitive aspect, therefore, is mediated through its integral union with practice. Action, the song, exercise and dance, with the attendant symbolism, is the primary form of communication.

While Quranic recitations remained important elements of Sufi practice, the “often emotionally intense patterns of belief” (Eickelman 1998:282) could potentially lead a participant into religious ecstasy.39 Zikr, the repeated recitation of the name of God, became another central exercise.40 Later, aesthetic performances such as music and dance were introduced to accompany Sufi rituals (see Eickelman 1998:276), while some Sufis also advocated the practice of shahid, “the contemplation of a young man...[who is] believed somehow to represent or embody the Divine” (Crapanzano 1973:17).41 This latter practice will be elaborated upon in a later section of this chapter.

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38 During my research trips, I observed that Sufi shrines were frequently venerated by local women, both with and without small children, as well as men, soldiers, and drivers. The only people who refrained from these practices were mujahideen belonging to conservative political factions which had been influenced by orthodox Sunni Islamic ideologies.

39 The Arabic term for ecstasy is wajd.

40 Sometimes transliterated as dhikr, zikr can be understood as the communal recitation or the “incessant ‘listening’ to such recitals” with the goal of achieving union with God (Endress 1988:55).

The mystical path of Sufism is taught in various orders, or dervish brotherhoods, many of which originated in Central Asia, especially between the Amu and Syr Darya, and were already established at the time of the Mongol invasions in the mid-thirteenth century (see Crapanzano 1973:17; Paul 1998:1). Sufi teaching centres and hostels attracted many artisans but were also patronised by the educated elite and gradually became organised into guilds (see Eickelman 1998:276). These Sufi organisations were “associated with tariqas (spiritual paths) as naturally as with patron saints...[and] their tombs, [which served] as shrines, became centres for pilgrimage and marketing” (Hodgson 1960:894). Hodgson (1960:894) even suggests that Sufis became “effective missionaries in areas newly opened up to Muslim influence”, a role which previously, Ismaili dais had fulfilled (see Turner 1974:91).

The geographic region of historic Khurasan stands out as a centre of Sufism, having produced some of the most respected Sufi orders, writers, poets, and theologians, irrespective of their ethnic backgrounds. Sufi teachings and doctrines were originally transmitted as oral traditions from Sufi masters and later were also recorded in written texts (see Hourani 1991:74). In fact, much of the literature from the early Sufi era from approximately the early ninth century has been preserved (see Schimmel 1975:37-41; Trimingham 1998 (1971):166). This ‘tangible’ heritage is a rich source of philosophical and historical information, both about this era as well as Sufi thought and clearly demonstrates the ideological impact of Sufism “on the spiritual life of the Muslim world” (Canfield 1986:90).

The religious tradition of Sufism was also perceived to exercise considerable political influence. Its charismatic potential, “was regarded from the outset as politically suspect with political authorities sometimes using Sufi organizations for their own purposes or regarding them, often with cause, as being so used by others” (Eickelman 1998:276). A number of Sufi orders, for example, such as the Naqshbandiya and Qadiriya, have traditionally maintained close ties with ruling authorities in Afghanistan and more recently were actively engaged in

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42 The Syr Darya flows through contemporary Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.
44 A tariqa can be considered as a spiritual path, especially in the sense of following a particular saint. The term can also refer to a religious brotherhood (see Crapanzano 1973:239).
the *jihad* against the Soviet-backed Communist regime.\(^4^5\) From the fifteenth century, the Naqshbandiya order was one of the most powerful political and spiritual groups in Central Asia,\(^4^6\) establishing teaching centres in Herat and Samarkand, and also strongly represented in Balkh and Badakhshan (see Schimmel 1975:365; Wieland-Karimi 1998:2, 28).\(^4^7\) This order played a major role in Central Asian politics until the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. With the existence of four Naqshbandi *madrassas* that were supported through extensive *awqaf* (religious endowments such as land) in Badakhshan, Faizabad has served as a major Naqshbandi centre since at least the seventeenth century (see Holzwarth 1990:106n8). Grevenmeyer (1982:143-144) cites a passage of the *Tarikh-e Badakhshan* (Boldirev 1959) in which the court of Amir Sultan Shah, the ruler of Badakhshan from approximately from 1747 to 1765/1770, is described as a centre of Naqshbandi learning. During that period, a number of well-known religious and secular scholars were in residence at the court including over four hundred dervishes, who were renowned for their singing and whose voices were at the disposal of the *Amir* and his Lahore-trained religious scholar. Schimmel (1975:365-366) categorises the Naqshbandiya as a “sober” Sufi order, in part because they refrain from any aesthetic performances, such as music and dance, during their religious practice of *sama* (listening).\(^4^8\) In order to differentiate their praxis from the term ‘orthodox’, which is usually applied to Sunni Muslims who adhere strictly to Islam’s normative texts, Wieland-Karimi (1998:30) prefers to call the Naqshbandiya an *orthoprax* order whose focus is the practice of *zikr* (silent praise of God).\(^4^9\) The main Naqshbandiya group in contemporary Afghanistan is the Mojadididiya branch whose followers are descendents of the seventeenth century Indian

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\(^{4^5}\) As discussed in Chapter Four, the descendents of two important Sufi dynasties were leaders of moderate political parties during the *jihad*: Sebghatullah Mojadidi (Jabba-ye Melli Najat) from the Naqshbandiya order, and Sayyid Ahmad Gailani (Mahaz-e Melli Islami) from the Qadiriya Sufi order. The former President Burhanuddin Rabbani (1992-2001) is also thought to have links with the Naqshbandi Sufis (see Rubin 1995:218).

\(^{4^6}\) The Naqshbandiya order is named after the fourteenth century Baha al-Din Naqshband (1318-1389) from Bukhara in contemporary Uzbekistan (see Wieland-Karimi 1998:27).

\(^{4^7}\) Under the Moghul emperors, for example, Kabul became a centre of Naqshbandiya (Wieland-Karimi 1998:28).

\(^{4^8}\) *Sama* refers primarily to listening but may also include physical movements which are ritualistic in nature. This concept will be discussed in forthcoming sections of this chapter. The Arabic term for sober is *sahw* (Wieland-Karimi 1998:25).

\(^{4^9}\) Wieland-Karimi follows W. Cantwell Smith’s thesis that the term ‘orthodox’ does not appear in the languages of Muslims. Orthopraxy, therefore, describes “a commonality of practice and ritual” compared to orthodoxy, “the commonality of belief, on the grounds that Muslims share common rituals, even if they interpret them differently” (Eickelman 1998:254).
Naqshbandi Ahmad-e Sirhindi. Since the mid-eighteenth century, the Mojadiddi family has maintained a close relationship with the Afghan royal family through intermarriage and has been seriously involved in politics since the 1920s (see Olesen 1995:233).

Another Sufi order influential in Afghanistan is the Qadiriya which was popular during the Moghul period, especially in the mid-seventeenth century (Wieland-Karimi 1998:24) and whose pirs exerted considerable spiritual and political power. In comparison with the Qadiriya order which incorporated the ecstatic performance of music and dance into its Sufi praxis (see Trimingham 1998 (1971):43n4), the Suhrawardiya, like the Naqshbandiya, are a “sober” (Schimmel 1975:195) and orthoprax order (Wieland-Karimi 1998:25) which generally does not condone aesthetic performances in conjunction with their religious activities. While the Suhrawardiya has also been actively engaged in political and social life in Afghanistan and has maintained good relations with ruling families, it has not reached the political prominence of the Naqshbandiya and the Qadiriya. In further contrast, the Chishtiya has kept a relatively low political profile, but has claimed tremendous popularity in the Indian subcontinent, especially among artisan communities, due to its emphasis on the performance of music and dance in

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50 Ahmad Sirhindi lived from 1563-1624. He was a pupil of the sixteenth century Khwaja Baqi Billah, who was thought to have introduced Naqshbandiya to India. Sirhindi’s conservative beliefs seem to have influenced later Moghul rulers. He was opposed to the veneration of Sufi saints at shrines and discouraged the religious syncretism that was popular under the rule of the Moghul Akbar (see Roy 1986:55; Wieland-Karimi 1998:28). According to Wieland-Karimi, Sirhindi was also initiated into the Qadiriya, Chishtiya and the Suhrawardiya orders (1998:29).

51 It is important to emphasise that the Mojadiddi family is not the only Naqshbandiya branch in Afghanistan.

52 This group was founded in Baghdad by Abdul Qadir Gailani (also spelt Gilani), who lived from 1077/78-1166 and was born in Gilan, a Persian town near the Caspian Sea (see Olesen 1995:46; Wieland-Karimi 1998:23-24). The current pir, Sayyid Ahmad, was a religious adviser to Afghanistan’s last monarch, King Zahir Shah (see Wieland-Karimi 1998:123). At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Qadiriya gained further prominence, especially among the Pushtun tribes of eastern Afghanistan, when Naqib Sahib, a brother of the order’s spiritual leader was invited, possibly by Amir Habibullah, to live in Chaharbagh in Nangarhar province (see Olesen 1995:46; Wieland-Karimi 1998:123). This particular branch of the Gailani family also established close contacts with the Afghan royal family through intermarriage. However, there are other branches of the Gailani family which are active in northern Afghanistan and which are independent of the Chaharbagh faction.

53 The Suhrawardiya order was founded by Abu Najib as-Suhrawardi in the twelfth century (died 1167), but developed further under his nephew Shihab al-Din as-Suhrawardi in the thirteenth century in Baghdad.
association with its practice of *sama*.\(^{54}\) Since the times of the Afghan Mohammadzai ruler Sher Ali Khan (1869-1879), the Chishtiya has exercised an extensive influence on the performance traditions of Afghanistan, especially in Kabul, where many followers such as professional musicians, were pivotal in the creation of national musical genres.\(^{55}\) Most Chishti Sufis live near Herat (Wieland-Karimi 1998:27), but since they were particularly targeted by the Taliban and consequently unable to openly practise their faith, many became refugees in Pakistan, predominantly in Peshawar.

Sufis have also traditionally placed considerable emphasis on the literary arts. *Ziarats*, for example, have served as popular meeting places and as venues for picnics, particularly during the months of spring and often to commemorate religious or national festivals (Einzmann 1977:84-85). In this context, religious music but also love songs as well as dances were performed by the visitors to a shrine (Einzmann 1977:85). Indeed, for many centuries, the concept of mystical love has been a strong feature of Arab, Persian and Turkish poetry. Sufi poets are well known in Badakhshan and their poetry was often incorporated into the lyrics of local songs that were performed during my research. The thirteenth century poet and mystic Jalal al-Din Rumi (1207-1273) while having a noticeable impact on Ismailis and Sufis, is also an important figure for many Sunni and Shiite Muslims in Afghanistan.\(^{56}\) His poetry has been popular in the Indian subcontinent since the early fourteenth century (Arberry 1950: 119; Schimmel 1975:327) and English translations of Rumi’s works are now best-sellers in the Western world. Schimmel describes Rumi’s poetry as “a love experienced in human terms but completely grounded in God” (1975:324). Within the Islamic tradition, Rumi is probably the most

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\(^{54}\) This order is thought to have originated in Chisht, a village near Herat in western Afghanistan. Wieland-Karimi (1998:25) suggests that Muin al-Din Chishti (died 1236) introduced the order into India, while the Pakistani anthropologist Ahmad describes Abu Ishaq (died 941) as the founder of this order (1969:37). The centre of the Chishtiya order is in Ajmer, Rajasthan, India.

\(^{55}\) The Afghan classical music tradition was influenced by Hindustani classical music. Sher Ali Khan, who ruled Afghanistan from 1863-1866 and 1868-1979, is thought to have been introduced to Hindustani classical musicians during his exile in India. Subsequently, in the second half of the nineteenth century, he invited musicians from India to travel to Kabul where they eventually settled in Kharabat, one of its suburbs (see Baily 1988:25; Sakata 1983:83-84).

\(^{56}\) Rumi was born in Balkh, near contemporary Mazar-e Sharif. Rumi’s family travelled to Persia and Turkey in the thirteenth century, during which time he met another great Persian poet of the time, Farid al-Din Attar (circa 1145/6-1220/1) in Nishapur (see Wieland-Karimi 1998:38-39). Rumi reached his mystical pinnacle in Konya, central Anatolia (now Turkey), where in 1244, he met the dervish Shams al-Din Tabrizi, who subsequently became his spiritual guide and companion (see Schimmel 1975:313).
important and consistent advocate of aesthetic performances as vehicles to a mystical union with God. The aesthetic aspect of his teachings became known through the sacred dances of the ‘Whirling Dervishes’ of his Mevlevi (Schimmel 1975:309) order. The late seventeenth and early eighteenth century poet Mirza Abdul Bedil is also popular throughout Central Asia and the Indian Subcontinent. While Turkestan is suggested as his birthplace (Wieland-Karimi 1998:39), most Badakhshi whom I interviewed believed that he was actually born in Argu, Badakhshan. Although Bedil did not directly belong to any of the Sufi orders previously mentioned, he was in contact with many Indian Sufi groups and was strongly influenced by Rumi (see Schimmel 1980:378). Several other major Sufi poets who have been of primary cultural significance in Badakhshan/Afghanistan will also be mentioned in the following discussion of the legality of music and dance.

The Legality of Performance in Islam

From the examination thus far, it is apparent that while the social actions of Muslims tend to be guided and evaluated by means of Islam’s normative texts, a desire for more personal religious experience and expression led to the development of mystical practice in the eighth/ninth century. At the same time, throughout Islamic history, the performance of cultural practices, which in some contexts were seen to be non-religious in nature, has been mostly frowned upon by orthodox Islamic factions due to their problematic status in their interpretations of the authoritative texts. Foremost amongst these concerns are the perceived potential of cultural practices to distract from the worship of God, to evoke immoral behaviour such as promiscuity, gambling, the consumption of alcohol or other illicit drugs, as well as mystical love for boys, in addition to their ability to lead to ecstatic and thus uncontrollable states (see al Faruqi 1985:189; Nasr 1997:221, 227; Shehadi 1995:5). Sport and, in particular, music and dance have thus become mired in controversy. Given that a number of sport and aesthetic practices that I witnessed in Badakhshan, and which will be discussed in subsequent chapters, were performed during

57 Bedil lived from 1644 to 1721 and his tomb is located in Delhi. However, when I discussed the idea that Bedil was possibly born in Badakhshan with a pir of a Bedil-aligned khanaqa (Sufi brotherhood) in Peshawar in north-western Pakistan in 1998, he gave this belief some credibility and further remarked that for this reason, his brotherhood had a strong affinity with Badakhshan.

58 In medieval as well as in contemporary orthodox Christianity, some Christian groups have also opposed non-religious entertainment and aesthetic practices (see al Faruqi 1978:6).
non-religious events, discussion of the status of such performances in Muslim societies is clearly necessary.

Various views on aesthetics, particularly art, have prevailed at various times throughout Islamic history. Islamic art is undoubtedly a vast field and it is beyond the scope of this chapter to summarise its influences and perspectives. Although there are passages in the Quran that affirm aesthetic practices, more generally however, they are concerned with the emphatic rejection of "any form of religious image", thus prohibiting the use of figural and iconic representation in any art form (al Faruqi 1985:17-18). While there are no passages in the Quran that can be clearly interpreted as banning the depiction of living beings (Hattstein and Delius:39), all sanctioned forms of aesthetic expression evince an intentional absence of figural representation to avoid any suspicion of the depiction of the human form, which may be perceived as a possible object of worship. In al Faruqi's words, "the beautiful, the significant in art, therefore, has been for the Muslim not an aesthetical portrayal of humanity or human attributes, or of the truths of nature" (al Faruqi 1985:19).

This is largely a result of *tawhid* (the doctrine of the unity of God), a "peculiarly Islamic variety of monotheism...[that] precludes any confusion or absorption of the divine in the non-divine" (al Faruqi 1985:16-17). This in turn has led to a "transcendence-obsessed culture...through the creation of the beautiful, to stimulate in the viewer or listener an intuition of, or an insight into, the nature of Allah...and of man's relation to Him" (al Faruqi 1985:19).

From a semiotic point of view, Islam prohibits any iconic signs which may imply a similarity or analogy to the divine. As a consequence, there is a noticeable lack of anthropomorphical representation in Islamic aesthetic traditions. The dogma of Islam's aniconism\(^{59}\) has been to a large degree successfully implemented in most areas of the tangible arts, especially with the visual and decorative arts. Yet compliance with this doctrine has inevitably proven to be more difficult in the field of intangible arts including aesthetic performances. Dance is particularly problematic since the various images, forms and meanings inherent to this practice and its potential to evoke a range of mental and/or emotional associations may be construed as in some way signifying aspects of the divine or as representing objects of possible worship.

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\(^{59}\) According to the OED (1989-2002), aniconism may be understood as the application of "simple material symbols of a deity, as a pillar or block, not shaped into an image of human form; also to the worship connected with these...[as well as] the use of, or worship connected with, such symbols."
It has thus tended to be perceived extremely negatively by Islamic jurists and clergy.

The definition of dance provided by al Faruqi (1978) emphasises the commonalities of dance in some Islamic societies. She suggests that the impact of the Islamic notion of tawhid and its dogma of aniconism is clearly reflected in the stylistic forms of dance which commonly utilise abstract and repetitious movements that do not necessarily aim to communicate a story (see al Faruqi 1978:6-7). Certainly, dances in Islamic societies do not usually follow a particular program or choreography. Instead, improvisation, mostly in the form of solo performances in which the arms play a dominant role, is more usually a predominant characteristic (see also Shay 1999). Nevertheless, when one considers the global nature of Islam, and also the diverse range of local, social, kinship, geographical, ethnic, Islamic sectarian, and even non-Islamic influences, it is important to ensure that one does not overdraw the extent of perceived similarities in the nature of dances in Islamic communities.

With respect to Persian poetry and the Sufi concept of mystical love, Schimmel (1995:415) clarifies how dance may have been perceived from philosophical and poetic perspectives by medieval Islamic jurists and scholars. She describes dance in Islamic cultures as an “epi-phenomenon to music or melodious recitation” and hence relegates it to a secondary and even subordinate role. This is however a rather debatable argument. Indeed, it would be quite feasible to alternatively consider dance to be the primary action and music as the secondary accompaniment, or further, to view the whole as one aesthetic performance.

Since the beginning of the Islamic era, cultural performances have been a constant and often essential feature of ruling Muslim elites. The first caliphs, for example, are thought to have been “enthusiastic supporters of art music,

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60 It is interesting to note that al Faruqi (1978:6n1) intentionally refers to the term “dance of Islamic culture” instead of “Islamic dance” in order not to offend the sensitivities of Muslims whose interpretations of Islam’s normative texts may mean that they do not condone dance.

61 Ensemble dances are a European invention and only a recent phenomenon in Islamic nations. They have arisen from an Orientalist fascination with the art of Islamic cultures, as well as through the touring of Muslim performers to Western nations.

62 The legs tend to provide support. Leaps and other off-ground activities occur only rarely. Performances are not conducted within a restricted time frame, but usually end either when the dancer decides to finish, or following communication with the accompanying musicians.
[and to have regarded it as] an integral part of their regal life” (Shiloah 1995:20). It seems that the Fatimid caliphs (910-1094) were also fond of entertainment in the form of “musicians, singing-girls, [and] dancers” (Shiloah 1995:71). Moreover, during this period, performances at private and public celebrations were not only enjoyed by the elite court families, but by all groups in Islamic societies who engaged in such practices under the pretexts of agricultural festivals, rites of passage and preparation for war (see Hourani 1991:198). These performances would most likely have included autochthonous elements as well as influences from other ethnic groups and neighbouring regions. From approximately the eleventh century, dance was rarely directly discussed by medieval Muslim scholars, but tended to be subsumed by the category of “the partaking in games, as mere play and diversion” (Shehadi 1995:5). This classification implies that even in this early Islamic period, dance as a form of play was typically a form of amusement and entertainment. As has already been established, dancing was a central feature of some Sufi practices. Yet while a lively debate about the legality of Sufi practices did emerge in this era, this was mostly concerned with the performance of music with, at best, fleeting remarks about the role of dance.

The broad categorisation of the cultural performances of music, dance and sport reflects terminological difficulties for these practices in the languages of Arabic or Persian. The Arabic term lahwa was used in early Islamic texts to describe performances encompassing a range of activities such as dance, music, play, gambling, sports, entertainment, and amusement (see al Faruqi 1985:178; Roychoudhury 1957:61, 64; Shehadi 1995:100, 112). This polysemic term undoubtedly compounded the ambiguity of performance, creating difficulties for orthodox jurists and scholars in delineating between the nature and hence legalities of various genres of performance. Recent scholars have continued to use the term lahwa mainly with respect to music (al Faruqi 1985; Roychoudhury 1957; Shehadi 1995), but it is feasible to broaden its definition to include dance (Shehadi 1995:112). In fact, Al Faruqi argues that the correct translation of lahwa actually appears to be closer to the term ‘secular entertainment’ (1985:178) and frequently, though not inevitably “associated with drugs, alcohol, sexual promiscuity, and the dissolute life” (al Faruqi 1985:189). Hence, the term lahwa does not address performance in a religious

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63 Nasir Khusraw witnessed some of these performances and recorded them in his Safarnama (‘Travelogue’) during his extended stay in Cairo (see Hunsberger 2000:3). For example, he commented on the Caliph’s tolerance for “pictures of dancing-girls in his vizier’s [minister’s] dwelling” (Khusraw 1881:128, 137; cited in Shiloah 1995:71).
context which may or may not have aesthetic value. Furthermore, there do not appear to be any consistent or clear rules with regard to the legality of lahwar in the normative texts (see Roychoudhury 1957:64).

The difficulties encountered in academic discourse when attempting to define the genre and practice of dance are accentuated when discussing these genres in Islamic societies since there are no exact equivalent terms for ‘music’ or ‘dance’ in either Arabic or Persian. The closest approximations to the Western concept of music are ghina which refers more to singing, and sama which is a specific expression related to Sufi religious practice and which really refers to listening. Consequently, the word musiqi is often used as an equivalent term for Western music (Shehadi 1995:7), and is understood as excluding such religious music as the Quranic chant and the adhan, as well as the chanted formulae of the dhikr service, madih and handam.... In its more limited sense, musiqi pertains only to the theoretical, as distinguished from the practical art of music (ghina'). To add to the confusion, ghina' has also been used to denote vocal, as distinguished from instrumental music (al Faruqi 1979:58).

In Dari-speaking Afghanistan, two terms may be used to describe dance: the Persian bazi, a polysemic term which commonly means ‘to play’ and often has “a slightly mischievous connotation” (Baily 1988:140-1), and the Arabic raqs which always refers to dance. However, the ethnomusicologist Fadlou Shehadi (1995:142) posits that the Arabic word raqs is also connected with the concept of “play-dance”. Indeed, it is important to bear in mind that the labelling of aesthetic performances during the early Islamic period may have been driven by “extra-logical, extra-conceptual considerations” (Shehadi 1995:142) wherein religious authorities were interested in “creating a semantical chasm between...religious ‘dance’ and the raqs that is associated with shere amusement” (Shehadi 1995:142). This allowed orthodox jurists to condemn dance as non-religious entertainment, whilst tacitly condoning the religious — albeit controversial — practice of dance that had gained popularity among the Sufi orders.

Hence, although two terms exist for dance (raqs and bazi), the lack of clarity in terms of the interpretations of dance by orthodox jurists has meant that it is

64 One only has to think of the commemorative Shiite passion play taziyeh which is normally performed during the tenth day of the lunar month of Moharram to mark the martyrdom of Hussain, the grandson of the prophet Mohammad, who was murdered in Kerbela, contemporary Iraq, during this month in 680 (see Chelkowski 1979:1-2).
65 Rumi, for example, uses the terms raqs and pa kuftan (literally ‘tap dancing’) to describe dance (see Chittick 1983:325).
never entirely clear whether these two terms are being used to refer to dancing of a religious or non-religious nature. This lack of clarity is exemplified in the classification by some Islamic and many Western scholars of the whirling movements of the dervishes as ‘dance’. When reflecting upon the general classification of dance as outlined in Chapter Two, these activities are dances, but more specifically they may be understood as aesthetic performances that bear religious meaning. Yet what is critical for the dervishes themselves is that such performances are sacred practices, and for this reason, Sufis most commonly do not view them as raqs or dance (see Shay 1995:68-69).

Like all social actions, the meaning and legality of dance is derived from interpretations of Islam’s divine and authoritative texts, the Quran, together with Sharia law and the collections of hadith. However, in spite of claims to the contrary by ultra-conservative or extremist Islamic factions, the normative texts in Islam are not “prescriptive in simple ways” (Fischer and Abedi 1990:147) and not surprisingly, “conflicting attitudes on the doctrinal level” (Shiloah 1995:34) are widespread among Islamic theologians and scholars, especially in relation to the hadith. Conservative scholars such as the fourteenth century Syrian Hanbalite jurist Ibn Taymiyya (died 1328), usually refer to two sections in the Quran in their condemnation of dance: Sura 17 al-Isra:37, “Do not walk proudly on the earth”, and Sura 31 Luqman:19, “Rather let your gait be modest”. Sura 8 al-Anfal:35, which denounces handclapping and whistling, is also occasionally used as further evidence of the impermissibility of aesthetic practices (see Schimmel 1995:415).

Strictly adhering to these orthodox interpretations, the Taliban banned clapping and whistling during sporting events such as soccer games and condoned only the chanting of Allah-u Akbar (God is Great) (see Chapter Six and Reuters 2001). Nevertheless, the ambiguity of these Suras means that conclusive statements about the permissibility of aesthetic practices are difficult to readily draw. As Sharia law also fails to address directly the performance of dance and music, orthodox jurists generally consult the collections of hadith for advice on the legal ramifications of these practices. However, the interpretation of the hadith immediately introduces other difficulties, including

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66 The Hanbal school of jurisprudence is named after the traditionalist jurist Ibn Hanbal (died 855) and teaches one of the most conservative forms of Islam. Hanbali jurisprudence is the official school of law in Saudi Arabia (Netton 1992:95-96).
67 All quotations from the Quran that appear in this thesis are taken from The Koran, translated by N. J. Dawood (1976).
68 Sura 8 al-Anfal:35 “Their prayers at the Sacred House are nothing but whistling and clapping of hands. They shall be punished for their unbelief” (Dawood 1976).
challenges of the ideological, legal, or political outcomes, of gaining a consensus and thereby formulating history among those skilled enough to point out weaknesses in chains...of narration, contradictions or anachronisms in the texts of the alleged narrations (Fischer and Abedi 1990:125).

With numerous collections of hadith in existence and a lack of consensus on often-controversial interpretations, the legality of aesthetic performances has thus frequently been dependent upon the whims of those jurists or clergy with the authority to interpret hadith. To further complicate matters, however, hadith are themselves categorised by orthodox authorities in terms of their degrees of reliability:

if all links in the chains [of the hadith] are reliable, the hadith is graded sahīh ('correct'); several independent reliable chains make it mutawātir ('confirmed'), the highest grade. Below these two grades, hadith may be evaluated as maqābūl ('acceptable' only because a faqīh [jurist] has issued a fatwá based upon it), hasan ('good,' but not fully reliable), mursal (lacking connected chains), da'if ('weak'), or majūl ('fabricated') (Fischer and Abedi 1990:125).

Conflicting interpretations of the legality of dance have therefore been virtually unavoidable. During the medieval period, dance was the victim of a general mistrust of non-religious performances which derived from the negative contexts in which music was mentioned in the hadith. Inevitably, however, the physical nature of dance and its potential for sensuality made it particularly controversial. From medieval times, conservative jurists have associated it with the sinful activities of sexuality, sensuality, passion, and addictive behaviour, and as a consequence, dancing has often been regarded as a greater evil than music and has been tacitly if not explicitly banned in orthodox Islam. At the same time, medieval Arab and Persian writers took a philosophical interest in the legality of aesthetic performances, primarily as a result of the increasing popularity of Sufi orders, many of whose religious practices incorporated music and dance.

One of the earliest supporters of aesthetic performances was the ninth century Persian poet Yahya ibn Muaz who discusses the ritual of dancing in poetic form (see Schimmel 1975:183):

The truth we have not found;  
so dancing, we beat the ground!  
Is dancing reproved in me  
who wander reproved from Thee?

69 Yahya ibn Muaz was from Rayy near Tehran but resided temporarily in Balkh. He died in Nishapur (contemporary Iran) in approximately 871-72 (see Schimmel 1975:51).
The tenth/eleventh century Persian Sufi poet Abu Said was another early medieval advocate of dance for whom ecstatic dancing to music was the essence of religious practice; he was known to promote dancing among his disciples (see Nicholson 1921:61). Sufism's "ritualised worship of God" (Endress 1988:55) utilised practices such as zikr and sama as well as the performance of dance and music which often led to ecstasy. While the Arabic term sama does not appear in the Quran, this practice has particular significance in mystical Islam and in most Sufi texts, and is discussed with reference to the English terms 'music' and 'listening', in the sense of "hearing music" and "the music that is heard" (Shiloah 1995:31). However, sama may be best understood as the "creation of a specific liturgy, composed of prayer, litanies, singing, music and sometimes dance" (Lewisohn 1997:1). The role of the performance of physical movements or dance during this practice is highlighted in Rudolf Sellheim's (1995:1018) explanation of sama as the 'nourishment of the soul',...a devotional practice which...can induce intense emotional transports...states of grace...of trance or of ecstasy...and even revelations. These manifestations are often accompanied by movements, physical agitation or dance which are of set form or otherwise, individual or collective.

Debates as to the legitimacy of sama occurred from the eleventh to the fourteenth centuries and centred on whether it could be sanctioned by the normative texts (see Nicholson 1921:34). Supporters usually refer to the incident in which Abu Bakr overheard two female servants singing in the house of Aisha, the third wife of the Prophet, during a holiday. Abu Bakr immediately prohibited their actions, whereas the Prophet, who was also present, demonstrated a more tolerant attitude towards their performance, responding "to let them be, for each people has its own feasts" (Shehadi 1995:97). Opponents of sama, such as Ibn Taymiyya (1966:301-302), do not concur with this interpretation, but assert that while the Prophet may have heard the sound of the singing, he most certainly would not have intentionally listened to it. Chapter Four has already discussed how the works of Ibn Taymiyya were a source of primary inspiration not only for the Taliban militia,
but also for the extremist Islamist Gulbuddin Hekmatyar of the Hezb-e Islami, as well as for other commanders influenced by Wahhabism.

It is possible however that sama may have originally been performed after religious practices, and marked by feasting, drinking, music, dancing, and flirtation with the young adolescents who sang and served refreshments (see Ritter 1955:491-492; Wafer 1997:111). Nevertheless, Rumi describes sama as an entirely sacred experience which inspires dancing: “The dancing lover is higher than the spheres, for the call to sama comes from Heaven” (Schimmel 1975:183-184).72 His emphasis on the close association between divine intoxication and dance is evinced in the following examples of his verses:73

It is a day of joy. Come, let us all be friends!
Let us take each other by the hand and go to the Beloved.

When we become stupefied in Him and are all one color, let us keep going, dancing, toward the bazaar.

It is a day for all the beauties to dance – let us close down our shops and all be idle.

It is a day for the spirits to wear robes of honor – let us go as God’s guests to the mysteries.

It is a day when idols are setting up tents in the garden – let us go to the rose garden and gaze upon them!


Bring the cup from early morning like the sun, for it has taught every mote of me to dance.


The heavens are like a dancing dervish-cloak, but the Sufi is hidden. Oh Moslems, who has ever seen a cloak dance without a body within it?

The cloak dances because of the body, the body because of the spirit, and love for the Beloved has tied the spirit’s neck to the end of a string.


72 Schimmel cites here a passage from Rumi’s Mathnawi (1975:183-184).
73 These four sections are translated by and cited in Chittick (1983:327, 328, 186).
No one dances until he sees Thy Gentleness –
Thy Gentleness makes infants dance in the womb.

What is so special about dancing in the womb
or in nonexistence? Thy Light makes bones dance in the grave!

We have danced much over the veils of this
world – become nimble, oh friends,
for the sake of the dance of that other world!


The writings of the eleventh century Chishti Sufi al-Hujwīrī clearly
differentiate between the ecstatic movements of Sufi practices and the
performances of music and dance outside of the sacred realm:
[d]ancing has no foundation in the religious law or in the path...But since ecstatic
movements and the practices of those who endeavour to induce ecstasy resemble it,
some frivolous imitators have indulged in it immoderately and have made it a
religion. I have met with a number of common people who adopted Sufism in the
belief that it is this dancing and nothing more...It is more desirable that beginners
should not be allowed to attend musical concerts lest their natures become depraved

His views are shared by many Sufis who are concerned with the practice of
sama by novices.

Another eleventh century theologian, religious reformer and Sufi, Abū Hāmid
al-Ghazālī (1058-1111), attempted to reconcile Sufism with normative Islam in
his Iḥyā’ ʿulūm al-dīn (‘The Revival of the Religious Sciences’) (al-Ghazālī, 1933; Shiloah, 1995:43). Emphasising that all practices should aim to bring a
believer closer to God, he discusses not only those actions “which bind human
beings to each other: eating and drinking, marriage, the acquisition of material
goods, listening to music” (Hourani 1991:169), but the aesthetic practices of
music and singing wherein a believer’s “heart reveals itself and its contents”
(Shiloah 1995:43).75 In terms of the legality of aesthetic performances, al-
Ghazālī distinguishes between permissible and impermissible practices, basing
his support for the legality of aesthetic performances on the earlier-mentioned
example of the Prophet’s tolerance of singing at Aisha’s house (see

75 While Shiloah refers only to the practices of music and singing, it seems appropriate to
extend al-Ghazālī’s concept to include aesthetic performances in general.
Further, Al-Ghazālī (in Roychoudhury 1957:91) classifies music into the following categories,

as sports (Lahw...) [which] is unlawful because it creates disturbances, ...as delight (Ladhāḥat...) ...[as it has a] source of delight of sense, pure and simple [; and, lastly, as] good (Mubah...) because the Prophet has set an example by enjoying it himself and allowing others to enjoy it.  

While one may extend this categorisation to encompass dance, in another passage, al-Ghazālī directly refers to dance as lahī (sport):  

[If] ash-Shafi‘i [the Islamic jurist] says that it is a sport which is disliked and which resembles what is vain, then his saying ‘sport’ (lahī)...is right, but sport, in respect that it is sport, is not unlawful; the play of the Abyssinians [who performed for Aisha, the wife of the Prophet] and their dancing is sport, yet the Prophet was wont to look at it sometimes and did not dislike it....[and] when God does not blame for the mention of His name to a thing by way of oath without being pledged to it and without being determined to keep it, rather being variable as to it, along with there being no advantage in it, how shall He blame poetry and dancing (Macdonald 1901-1902:243)?  

Although dance is not seen to be an inappropriate activity, al-Ghazālī suggests that it is a lesser form of amusement, since it is associated with sport and engaged in as a form of entertainment. Dance, therefore, should not necessarily be performed by “notable people” (Macdonald 1901-1902:8-9):  

And in a tradition it is said the he [the Prophet] said to Ā’isha, “Wouldst thou like to look at the kicking out” and “kicking out” and “hopping” are dancing....If the pleasure which causes dancing is praiseworthy, and the dancing increases and strengthens it, then the dancing is praiseworthy. And if the one is permissible, then the other is permissible, and if blameworthy, blameworthy. Yet, it is true that the practice of dancing does not befit the station of notable people or people who set an example, because, for the most part, it springs from sport and play, and that which has the aspect of play and sport in the eyes of the people should be avoided by him whose actions are imitated in order that he may not become small in the eyes of the people and they should leave off imitating him (Macdonald 1901-1902:8-9).  

Al-Ghazālī (in Shiloah 1995:44) suggests that aesthetic actions are acceptable under the following conditions:  

to encourage pilgrimage, but only for those for whom pilgrimage is permissible; to incite to battle; to inspire courage on the day of the battle; to evoke lamentation and sorrow....; to arouse joy; to elicit love and longing, in circumstances that permit singing and playing instruments; or to evoke love of God.  

Moreover, al-Ghazālī regards the performance of Abyssinian acrobats and musicians as legitimate and firmly believes that this type of sport would have included music and dance in its program (see Macdonald 1901-1902:243). Music, however, is clearly not permissible “when produced by women under certain conditions; if the instruments used are prohibited; when the song’s contents are not compatible with the spirit and precepts of religion; when the listener is ruled by lust; or if one listens to music for its own sake” (Shiloah 1995:44).  

Roychoudhury (1957:51) does not cite the exact passage of al-Ghazālī’s remark; it is probably taken from an abridged version of the Ihyā‘ ‘ulūm al-dīn.
In Macdonald’s (1901-1902:28) summary of the translation of *Iḥyā’ ʿulūm ad-dīn*, he trenchantly remarks that the “suitableness of dancing generally depends on circumstances and the dancer. An allowable thing to one man may not be allowable to another. Legally, dancing is not forbidden”. Liberal Muslims in contemporary societies seem to adhere to al-Ghazālī’s recommendations re: legality, wherein a performance must be interpreted with respect to its context; it therefore cannot be absolutely prohibited or condoned. As Macdonald (1901-1902:28) remarks in the case of aesthetic practices, the “listening to Music and Singing is sometimes forbidden, sometimes disliked, sometimes loved. All depends on him who listens”.

Many Islamic scholars believe that Ahmad al-Ghazālī, the younger brother of Abū Ĥāmid al-Ghazālī, was even more specific about the legitimacy of Sufi dance. In his *Bawāriq al-ilmā‘* (‘Lightening Flashes’), he mentions that ecstasy could be achieved during a *sama* session involving prayer, *zikr*, and the singing of Sufi poems, and which is then followed by “three physical techniques: dance, whirl and jump” (Trimingham 1998 (1971):195-196). Each physical movement during this practice signifies spiritual meaning:

The dancing is a reference to the circling of the spirit round the cycle of existing things on account of receiving the effects of the unveilings and revelations; and this is the state of the gnostic. The whirling is a reference to the spirit’s standing with Allah in its inner nature (sirr) and being (wujūd), the circling of its look and thought, and its penetrating the ranks of existing things; and this is the state of the assured one. And his leaping up is a reference to his being drawn from the human station to the unitive station (al-Ghazālī, 1938:99-100).

The philosophy of Ahmad al-Ghazālī was strongly inspired by other mystics and Sufi groups. In turn, one of his disciples, Abu Najib as-Suhrawardi, later became the founder of the Suhrawardi order discussed earlier. Both the Chishtiya and Mevlevi Sufi orders also drew on the teachings of Ahmad al-Ghazālī as well as Rumi’s vision of mystical performances, and integrated aesthetic actions into their Sufi praxis (see Schimmel 1975:327; Schimmel 1995:416). The Mevlevi was founded after Rumi’s death in 1273 by his son Sultan Walad (see Wieland-Karimi 1998:38-39), who took the aspect of sacred

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78 Ahmad al-Ghazālī died between 1121-1126 (see Shehadi 1995:153). Leonard Lewisohn (1997:4n10) argues that Ahmad al-Ghazālī has been confused with the Sufi Ahmad bin Mohammad al-Tusi and has been incorrectly cited as the author of the *Bawāriq al-ilmā‘* by James Robson in his edition of “Tracts on Listening to Music”. While I will continue to cite Ahmad al-Ghazālī as the author as it appears in the literature, I would like to alert the reader to this potential inaccuracy.

performance even further by institutionalising dance which accompanied by music, became the order’s central means of achieving union with God.\(^8^0\)

The medieval jurist Ibn Taymiyya was a vehement opponent of Sufi orders and their practices. Indeed, his attack on aesthetic practices seems to have been mainly directed against Sufism, which he viewed as illegitimate (see Tringham 1998 (1971):242). In contrast with the contextual approach of Abū Hāmid al-Ghazālī and related writers, Ibn Taymiyya (1966:309) urged Muslims always to be directed by the normative texts, and failing that, to be guided through the interpretations of the companions of the Prophet and their immediate successors. He espoused the idea that God, the Prophet and his close successors did not condone dance and based this position on Suras 17 al-Isra:37 and 31 Luqman:19 (see above as well as Shehadi 1995:109-110). Moreover, he ardently opposed the practice of sama, judging “anyone who practised sama’…[to be] an infidel and polytheist” (Shiloah 1995:35). Related to this, he emphasised the need to differentiate between “the sama’ that profits one in religion, and the sama’ which is allowed for lack of prohibition; [and] between the sama’ of the close companions and that of the amusement seekers” (1966:295).\(^8^1\) Hence, while recognising the desire of all Muslims to draw closer to God, Ibn Taymiyya did not see that this goal was furthered by the practice of sama and the inclusion of aesthetic performances (Shehadi 1995:96).\(^8^2\) Yet, the strongest attack against Sufism and its incorporation of aesthetic practices was written in the twelfth century by the conservative Baghdadi Hanbali jurist Ibn al-Jawzi.\(^8^3\) In almost half of his book Talbis iblis (‘The Devil’s Delusion’), Ibn al-Jawzi vehemently condemns Sufis for their divergences from his conceptualisation of authentic Islamic law (see Tringham 1998 (1971):242). Stating that it is “unlawful to dance like beasts and applaud like women” (Shehadi 1995:112), Ibn al-Jawzi describes dancing as “a demon-inspired, ‘immoral’ activity” (Schimmel 1995:416).

As this overview has shown thus far, the legality of dance in Islamic societies remains inconclusive. The mere fact that medieval Islamic jurists debated the legality of aesthetic practices indicates that music and dance performances

\(^{8^0}\) Rumi’s literary masterpiece the Mathnawi (‘Spiritual Couplets’), for example, is of central importance to the Chishtiya Sufi ideology (see Schimmel 1980:375).

\(^{8^1}\) This quote is cited in Shehadi (1995:95).

\(^{8^2}\) Ibn Taymiyya even included the term dance in the title of his essay Kitāb al-samā’ wa’l-raqs (‘The Book of Audition and Dance’), yet he only debated the legality of dance very briefly (see Ibn Taymiyya 1966:309; Shehadi 1995:109).

\(^{8^3}\) Ibn al-Jawzi died 1200.
occurred during that era (see al Faruqi 1978; 1979; Shehadi 1995; Shiloah 1979). Sufi dances are also depicted in the art form of Persian miniatures from that period (see Schimmel 1995:416). It seems likely that in order to accommodate the controversial but increasingly popular Sufi practices which incorporated the performance of music and dance, a compromise was made by many orthodox Islamic jurists. Their subsequent categorisation of performances as ‘religious’ and ‘non-religious’, however, while aiming to differentiate between practices, fails to effectively demarcate between them. In fact, many aesthetic performances combine elements of both categories and are consequently positioned on a continuum between these seemingly opposite poles.

For the most part, if an aesthetic performance occurs within the context of religious practice, it tends to be sanctioned or at least tolerated, whereas aesthetic performances which are deemed to be ‘non-religious’, are generally prohibited. Hence, Sufi music and dancing have generally been tacitly condoned by orthodox scholars, since these practices occur within a religious framework that emphasises esoteric knowledge and a direct encounter with God. At the same time, it is important to recognise that many orthodox clergy do not approve of either ‘religious’ aesthetic performances or Sufism. Nevertheless, in spite of their controversial status, music and dance – in both religious and non-religious capacities – have been popular activities in Muslim societies. Wedding dances, for example, are commonly accepted by orthodox Muslims as permissible practices largely because they are not categorised as a form of entertainment. Instead, these aesthetic performances tend to be acknowledged as a ‘necessary family practice’ during the rite of passage of a wedding, which is sanctioned by Islam.

Through the creation of a model that categorises the legitimacy of various types of music, Lois al Faruqi (1985:179) attempts to explain the importance of aesthetic practices to sacred performances in Islam. Seeking to avoid the connotations of the English concept of ‘music’, she uses a neologism, handasah al sawt (The Artistic Engineering of Sound) to refer to a “hierarchy of sound-art expression” (al Faruqi 1985:178) (see Table 1).84

If one were to apply al Faruqi’s classification to dance, then any dance that occurs in the course of entertainment during a party or a private function would

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84 This term can also be translated as the “artistic engineering of sound” (al Faruqi 1985:186).
be categorised as illegitimate or *haram* (see al Faruqi 1985:179). For that matter, any dance that may be associated with pre-Islamic or non-Islamic traditions would also be branded *haram*. However, as a result of the often-ambiguous positioning of aesthetic performances on the continuum of religious/non-religious practices, they may be variously interpreted by ruling authorities or clergy with respect to the categories listed in Table 1. In most cases therefore, dancing is not “expressly forbidden” (Adamec 2001:78) but, instead, categorised as *makruh* (reprehensible), which again confirms its ‘in between’ status.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Examples of musical practices</th>
<th>In orthodox Islam perceived as</th>
<th>According to Sharia and the hadiths considered as</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quranic chant (<em>qiraah</em>)</td>
<td>non-<em>musiqi</em> (non-music)</td>
<td><em>halal</em> (legitimate)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Call to prayer (<em>azan</em>)</td>
<td>non-<em>musiqi</em></td>
<td><em>halal</em> (legitimate)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pilgrimage chants</td>
<td>non-<em>musiqi</em></td>
<td><em>halal</em> (legitimate)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eulogy chants (<em>madah, nat</em>, etc.)</td>
<td>non-<em>musiqi</em></td>
<td><em>halal</em> (legitimate)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chanted poetry (<em>sher</em>)</td>
<td>non-<em>musiqi</em></td>
<td><em>halal</em> (legitimate)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family and celebration music (lullabies, wedding songs, etc.)</td>
<td><em>musiqi</em> (music)</td>
<td><em>halal</em> (legitimate)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Occupational” music (caravan chants, shepherd’s tunes, work songs, etc.)</td>
<td><em>musiqi</em></td>
<td><em>halal</em> (legitimate)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military band music</td>
<td><em>musiqi</em></td>
<td><em>halal</em> (legitimate)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocal/instrumental improvisations (e.g., <em>qasida</em>)</td>
<td><em>musiqi</em></td>
<td><em>halal, mubah, makruh, haram</em> (controversial)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serious metered songs</td>
<td><em>musiqi</em></td>
<td><em>halal, mubah, makruh, haram</em> (controversial)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music related to pre-Islamic or non-Islamic origin</td>
<td><em>musiqi</em></td>
<td><em>halal, mubah, makruh, haram</em> (controversial)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensuous music</td>
<td><em>musiqi</em></td>
<td><em>haram</em> (illegitimate)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 1: Perceptions of music in an Islamic context (adapted from al Faruqi 1985:179).**
Performance, Mystical Love and Eroticism

The fact that this discussion of the legality of aesthetic practices has implicitly and virtually exclusively been concerned with the performances of men and boys is due to a number of factors. Firstly, Sufi praxis traditionally incorporates male dances only. Secondly, as a male researcher, I had access solely to the male domain in Badakhshan. And thirdly, with the exception of the Western preoccupation with raqs al-sharqi (belly dancing), both Islamic and academic literatures are virtually silent about the nature and role of women’s dance in Islamic societies. Undoubtedly, Muslim women and girls also dance, notably during wedding celebrations. However, these performances occur mostly within the confines of the female domains of their residences to which males usually have no access.

Like dance and music, gender and sexuality tend to be rather ambiguous categories in Islamic cultures and naturally, do not necessarily communicate the same meanings as the equivalent terms in Western discourses. A performer’s gendered body may thus be understood as bearing specific meaning in an Islamic context (see Butler 1988:521). Both Arab and Persian poetry are pregnant with images of youth, beauty, sensuality, and sexuality (see Roscoe and Murray 1997:7; Wafer 1997:113). These images may be understood as metaphors for divine love or may symbolise the profane love for a male or female. While in Arabic poetry the link between a male and God is “expressed in metaphors of man’s longing for a beautiful maiden” (Schimmel 1982:151), in Persian poetry the relationship is “symbolized in the love between a man and a beautiful youth” (Wafer 1997:113), with frequent allusions to images of the adoration of young, beardless males. Indeed, the symbolic references to mystical love as well as to the beauty and purity portrayed by a young male are recurring themes in Sufi poetry, and may be thought to describe “the soul’s longing for God” (Olesen 1995:18). Relatedly, the performances of dancing boys while controversial and often questioned as to their sexual morality, have rarely been entirely prohibited by orthodox Islamic jurists. In the absence of Islamic scholars’ direct discussion of such performances, Western scholars, influenced by Eurocentric constructs of sexuality and sensuality, have often misconstrued the ambiguous and often allegorical images of sexuality and gender inherent in these performances.

85 The concept of mystical love, is not unique to Islam; it has also appeared in Christian literature. In Christianity, however, the gender of the mythical love relationship seems to be more clearly defined as heterosexual (see Wafer 1997:107).
One of the challenges of exploring the concepts of gender and sexuality in Persian-speaking territories arises from Persian grammar which does not clearly distinguish between ‘genders’ in a grammatical sense and ‘gender’ in a socio-cultural context. While some translators such as Chittick (1983) have resolved this dilemma by opting to define many nouns as grammatically feminine, in theory, a noun may be translated as indicating either gender. As one may also predict, ‘sexuality’ in Islam does not hold the same meaning as in contemporary Western discourses where it has tended to be categorised into the binary fields of homosexuality and heterosexuality. It is of course also important to remember that there was not a “cultural conception of homosexual types before late-nineteenth century medical discourse created one in northern Europe” (Murray 1997:29). Colloquially in Afghanistan, the terms bache bazi (literally ‘the act of engaging boys to dance’ or ‘playing with boys’) and zanaka bazi (engaging in an extramarital affair) are used to distinguish between homosexual and heterosexual liaisons (see Baldauf 1988:5). However, these constructs are clearly not sufficient to enable an understanding of sexuality in Islam, especially in traditional Muslim societies where sexuality is inextricable from the role of the family. The Islamic ideal of marriage, particularly in traditional societies, is to marry early, primarily in order to procreate and then, secondarily, to achieve sexual harmony with one’s spouse. Lindholm (1996:247, 252) argues that rather than Islam itself, it is largely this social organisation which includes the extended family unit and consists of arranged marriages with an emphasis on reproduction, that is responsible for the ambiguity of heterosexual desire in Muslim societies. In fact, male friendships or mystical love for a young boy, as alternatives to heterosexual desire, are generally seen to be of secondary importance since they do not threaten the family structure. Moreover, such practices may even be understood to bear religious meaning and to facilitate spiritual advancement.

As “practitioners of a spiritual method”, Sufis consider themselves to be “lovers” who attain a spiritual experience of the divine through the practice of sama (see Wafer 1997:110). For many Sufis, sama includes the participation of “charming young boys” (Schimmel 1975:181). This form of homoeroticism has been a contentious issue for orthodox Islamic jurists and as it has often been thought to be associated with dancing, the latter has consequently been

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86 In Persian, the third personal pronoun (he/she/it) is neutral and is transliterated as ū and may thus refer to either sex (see Appendix Two).

87 In Afghanistan, it is extremely difficult for men to engage in extramarital heterosexual activities and female prostitution is relatively rare (see Baldauf 1988:21-22).
deemed impermissible (see Roychoudhury 1957:100; Wafer 1997:119). A tradition of mystical love seems to have been well-established during the Islamic medieval period. The twelfth century Persian poet Ruzbihan Baqli emphasises three features that are essential for spiritual enjoyment in the practice of sama: “fine scents, a beautiful face to look at, and a lovely voice – the beauty of the singer…[being] a prerequisite for spiritual happiness” (Schimmel 1975:182). Another Persian mystic and poet Abu Said, was once asked about his sama practice in which he encouraged “young men to dance and sing” (Nicholson 1921:57). Abu Said countered the accusation by remarking that religious dancing may actually safeguard a youth from engaging in otherwise ‘immoral’ activities:

[The souls of young men are not yet purged of lust: indeed it may be the prevailing element; and lust takes possession of all the limbs. Now, if a young dervish claps his hands, the lust of his hands will be dissipated, and if he tosses his feet, the lust of his feet will be lessened. When by this means the lust fails in their limbs, they can preserve themselves from great sins, but when all lusts are united (which God forfend!), they will sin mortally. It is better that the fire of their lust should be dissipated in the sama' than in something else (Nicholson 1921:57-58).

One of the most passionate statements about mystical love comes from the thirteenth century Sufi Awhad al-Din Kirmani. Infatuated with young dancing boys, he was quoted by the fifteenth century poet Mawlana Abdurrahman Jami as saying that he “rent the shirts of the ‘unbearded’ when he got excited, and danced breast to breast with them” (translated by and cited in Schimmel 1975:181). It is possible, however, that this discourse on mysticism and mystical love may have developed in part to legitimate homoerotic practices that would otherwise be deemed haram (forbidden).

Jim Wafer proposes the existence of two types of Islamic mystical literature: a “vision complex” which may be understood as “the relationship between lover and beloved…[and is] mediated symbolically by the faculty of sight,” and a “passion complex” which “entails a symbolic physical interaction in which the lover is wounded or killed by his beloved” (1997:107-108). For the purpose of this chapter, the vision complex will be discussed as it serves to clarify and

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88 Ruzbihan Baqli (died 1209) was one of the great Persian love mystics and was mainly influenced by the Sufi Hussain ibn Mansur al-Hallaj (857-922) (see Schimmel 1975:296-297).
89 In Abu Said’s Halat u sukhnan-i shaykh Abu Said ibn Abil-Khayr. See also footnote 71.
90 A famous example of the “passion complex” is the relationship of Mahmud Ghaznavi, the tenth century King who introduced Islam into large parts of Afghanistan and India, and his relationship with his Turkish slave Ayaz. Through his love for Ayaz, Mahmud Ghaznavi himself became enslaved. This image is used metaphorically by many Sufi writers (see Lindholm 1996:252).
complement the religious concept of the admiration of young males. The characteristic of the vision complex is the action of *nazar ila l-murd* which may be understood as "the contemplation of youth" (Trimingham 1998 (1971):193) or the "looking with admiration at a beloved person" (Wafer 1997:108). *Nazar* has religious significance for Islamic mystics, being seen as the equivalent to "the vision of God Himself" (Wafer 1997:108). In fact, it may have led to the formation of a cult of 'beautiful, beardless boys'. Although the aesthetic practices of the Sufis did not seem to be focused on the satisfaction of sensuality, Schimmel postulates that an essential feature of *sama* was "the presence of a *shahid*...[whose] very contemplation...might induce the Sufi involuntarily to dance" (Schimmel 1995:416). A *shahid* thus symbolised the beautiful beloved, for he is the true witness of divine beauty. To look at him, to adore him from a distance, may induce the Sufi to truly religious ecstasy, and to contemplate his face in worship. Wherever beauty is revealed, there out of necessity love must grow (Schimmel 1975:291).

The experience of male homoerotic and mystical love in Islamic societies through the practice of *shahid* has no equivalent in Western languages and especially not in the Eurocentric construct of homosexuality (see Rzehak 1997:55). Significantly, Islam's normative texts are relatively silent or ambiguous on this matter. The Quran clearly condemns homosexual practices, but not necessarily "homoerotic sentiment" (Schmidtke 1999:260). When discussing the legality of *sama*, medieval Islamic jurists were mainly concerned with whether "the content expresses physical love, sensual desire or vain frivolities" (Shiloah 1995:41). If the practice of *sama* was seen as "pure diversion", it demanded prohibition (Shiloah 1995:41). Orthodox jurists, therefore, were able to discredit non-religious dance by tactically categorising the aesthetic performance as non-religious, in contrast to the Sufi dances which as elements of the sacred practice of *sama*, could therefore be condoned. However, ultra-orthodox jurists, like Ibn Taymiyya, drew the line at effeminate and gender-crossing performers (Shehadi 1995:101).

The practice of mystical love as expressed through a *shahid* is in fact common to many cultures and is known throughout the Islamic world (see Baldauf 1988:5; Rzehak 1997:38). In Central Asia, the practice of *shahid* seems to have

92 The Sufi poets Ahmad al-Ghazâlî and Awhaduddin Kirmani were believed to have engaged in the practice of *shahid* contemplation (see Wafer 1997:113).
become institutionalised in the performances of \textit{bache bazi}. According to the Islamicist Ingeborg Baldauf, as early as the ninth and tenth centuries (1988:5), Afghanistan had a reputation not only as a territory of beautiful boys but also of \textit{bache bazi} performances. The origin of these dances is uncertain, but the specific characteristics of these performances provide insight into the male dances of Islamic cultures in general, and, more importantly, highlight their historical continuity and the influences underpinning contemporary dances in many Central Asian regions, including Afghanistan. During her research in the mid to late 1970s in north-western Afghanistan, Baldauf found that the performances of \textit{bache bazi} were socially accepted phenomena (1988:5). She further argues that \textit{bache bazi} may actually be an autochthonous term (Baldauf 1988:5). The etymology of the Persian term \textit{bache bazi}, as with the polysemous term \textit{bazi}, directs attention to dance as a game or playful activity, but also links it to sex and the sacred (see also Shalinsky 1994:77).\footnote{\textit{Bache bazi} is translated in the Dari-English Dictionary as pederasty, loving the boys, and child's play (Neghat and Burhan 1993:101). As individual words, \textit{bazi} is translated as play, playing; game, sport; dance; deceit; practising and engaging, and \textit{bache} as boy, son, catamite, "a boy kept by a pederast" (Neghat and Burhan 1993:96).}

It is possible, however, that the term \textit{bache bazi} may mean different things in different locations in Afghanistan, ranging from homosexuality to the performance of dance for a mentor or master. In its broadest sense, the word \textit{bache} implies the generic term 'boy' (Baily 1988:140-141). In a narrower sense, however, \textit{bache} refers to a good-looking adolescent male who has not yet grown a beard, "a \textit{bacheh maqbul}, or \textit{bacheh birish}" (Baily 1988:141).\footnote{The Arabic/Persian \textit{bache birish} term literally means a 'boy with no beard', but in a derogatory sense refers in Afghanistan to a catamite, that is "a boy kept by a pederast" (Neghat and Burhan 1993:137).} \textit{Bazi}, 'play', is derived from the word \textit{bazi kardan} (playing), but may be understood as an amateur interest, a "\textit{shauq}, a spectacle, something to follow, to discuss, to compare performers and performances" (Baily 1988:141), a hobby like the keeping of pigeons, or even the playing of musical instruments.

In the context of a \textit{bache}, \textit{bazi} refers to the "playing boy" (Baily 1988:141):

\begin{quote}
[t]he term \textit{bache bazi} referred to the total activity of dancing boy performance...where a group of men joined together for the purpose of staging and enjoying a performance of dancing, and to the dancing itself (Baily 1988:141).
\end{quote}

A \textit{bache baz}, therefore, is a term that usually refers to a male adult whose 'hobby' it is to keep the company of boys, or in other words a "dancing boy enthusiast, who enjoyed spectating the dance of the dancing boy" (Baily
1988:141). Chittick (1983:289) connects the meaning of ‘bache baz’ with ‘shahid-baz’, that is someone “who is ‘devoted to witnesses,’...who occupies himself with the contemplation of beauty in human form”. Indeed, a bache baz may be understood as a ‘mystical lover of boys’ in a Sufi sense, and thus is sometimes referred to as a dewana (dervish) (Baldauf 1988:75). The meanings of the term bache bazi, therefore, may range from sex to the sacred. 96

The Influence of Wahhabi and Deobandi Madrassas upon Cultural Performances: Early 1930s to Late 1980s

Whereas a relatively vibrant debate about the role of performance existed among medieval writers from the ninth to thirteenth centuries, a virtual dearth of written records appears thereafter. This paucity of materials is also evident in Afghanistan where the little available information about the history and role of religious and non-religious performances makes providing a comprehensive overview a difficult task. For the most part, however, attitudes towards performance in Afghanistan have largely reflected the ideologies of the various political regimes. But, at the same time, since the formation of Afghanistan as a nation in the mid-eighteenth century, religious establishments have exercised great influence both in the political sphere and in the regulation of social norms and values. Indeed, periodically, religious leaders have used their political authority to encourage “the population to resistance against temporal rulers”, as precipitated the fall of the reformist King Amanullah (1919-1929) (Olesen 1995:193). 97

Under the possible influence of concurrent, successful, secular reformist developments in Turkey under Kemal Atatürk and in Iran under Reza Shah Pahlavi, Amanullah similarly envisaged the formation of a modern nation-state

96 It is also interesting to note that the Jat, a small group of socially marginalised and “traditionally itinerant, endogamous, non-pastoral communities” living in Afghanistan are thought to have been engaged in the provision of services as dancing girls and prostitutes (see Doubleday 1988; Rao 1986:255, 260-264). If a woman or girl were to dance to music at a wedding or during a function in which only females were present, this aesthetic entertainment would be considered socially acceptable. Depending on the type of gathering, if women or girls performed in an exclusively male domain, their actions may be perceived as haram and therefore be linked to prostitution. In comparison, it is unthinkable to have a boy or man perform in the women’s domain. Since the rise of orthodox Islam in Afghanistan, especially since 1992, these itinerant groups of female entertainers had assumed a low profile and were not mentioned at the time of my research in Badakhshan (Rao 1986:255). 97 See Chapter Four as well as Olesen (1995:144-165).
(see Ewans 2001:93-95). He began to introduce secular educational institutions and government-controlled madrassas with the intention of producing modern-educated government employees who were also trained in Islamic jurisprudence. The proclamation of the first constitution in 1923 “signalled Afghanistan’s entry into the political thought of the twentieth century” (Olesen 1995:120). Nevertheless, in order to maintain the crucial support of the ulema who continued to be highly influential for the majority of the population and who perceived Amanullah’s vision of a modern state to be anti-Islamic, Amanullah was forced to make considerable concessions. As a consequence, Islam and the nation as sources of legitimacy were...not integrated within the Constitution and instead the model of the legitimate transmission of power became dualistic (i.e. there were two separate sources of legitimacy) (Olesen 1995:122).

Moreover, Hanafi jurisprudence was included in the amendments to the Constitution that were passed at a Loya Jirga in 1924. This not only antagonised the sizeable Shiite community, but limited Amanullah’s plans of modernisation through his proposed law reforms. His vision of introducing “statutory law of dominantly secular nature” (Kamali 1985:20) under the pretext of “liberal interpretations of Islam” (Olesen 1995:130) aimed to grant the state responsibility for the determination and execution of punishment.

As already outlined in Chapter Four, Amanullah’s modernist ideals eventually backfired, leading to his downfall in 1929. The 1931 Constitution under King Mohammad Nadir Khan abandoned many of Amanullah’s statutory enactments that may have been perceived to foster the liberalisation of Islam (Kamali 1985:20). Instead, Nadir Khan emphasised the “adherence to Islam in legislation and government affairs” (Kamali 1985:20). Thus, conservative Islam under the influence of the qazi (a Sharia-applying judge) continued until the 1964 Constitution (Kamali 1985:20-21). This meant that all legal processes in Afghanistan were governed by Sharia law of the Hanafi school, with the traditional ulema and their rural support exclusively fulfilling the legal duties of administrators (see Olesen 1995 289:140, 127; Rashid 2000 435:83). With respect to the sanctioning of cultural practices, “beyond the parochial, tribal and localized identities, religious leaders were the autonomous keyholders to the socialization” of all Afghan communities (italics are this author’s emphasis, Olesen 1995:36). The 1964 Constitution under King Zahir Shah was thus marked by its conciliatory aims “to preserve the basic tenets of Islam while also responding to the need for social change and democratic reform” (Kamali 1985:21). It is important to note that in addition to Hanafi-based Sharia law, supplementary statutory laws that were modelled on Western jurisprudence and which dealt with criminal and civil cases for example were also introduced.
These secular laws, however, were believed to be “compatible with Islamic Law” (Olesen 1995:189). In reality, rural areas would have been more likely to follow Sharia, while urban areas were more likely to have been influenced by a combination of Western penal code and Islamic law. In retrospect, the 1923 Constitution under Amanullah may be considered to have been Afghanistan’s most liberal and tolerant constitution (Kamali 1985:28), but was short-lived as it was amended by the Loya Jirga the following year. Consequently, the 1964 Constitution under King Zahir Shah is held to be the most progressive constitution and as such, has served as the basis for both the Interim Administration (December 2001-June 2002) and the current Transitional Authority under Hamid Karzai.

Prior to the educational reforms introduced during the Musahiban period, the ulema, who were trained within a system of traditional and often-orthodox madrassas mostly based on Hanafi Islam but also influenced by Deobandism, thus served a relatively powerful function within the Afghan government. However, until the establishment of government-controlled madrassas in the 1930s and 1940s, the limited number of private madrassas in Afghanistan meant that many students aspiring to become an alim (religious scholar) were forced to seek education abroad.\(^98\) From the nineteenth century, therefore, Afghanistan’s religious students were exposed to the ideological influences of the conservative madrassas north of the Amu Darya in Central Asia, while others, indeed the majority of the ulema, were educated in the madrassas of the reformist ideology of the Deobandi in British India (Olesen 1995:186-187).\(^99\) From 1869-1979, many of these Afghan ulema had graduated from one particular reformist madrassa in India: Dar ul-Ulum in Deoband (Olesen 1995:198n22; Rizvi 1980:340; Roy 1986:57).\(^100\) The main exception to this

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\(^{98}\) The Arabic term alim is the singular form of ulema and denotes a student who is aiming to become a Doctor of Law, that is a member of the religious elite.

\(^{99}\) Pre-1917, students from Afghanistan’s northern regions would usually enrol in madrassas in Bokhara (Roy 1986:45), but also those of Samarkand and Tashkent (all in present Uzbekistan). In India, the madrassas of Deoband, Bareilly, Gopal, Delhi, Hyderabad, and Swat were attended by many Afghans (see Olesen 1995:43).

\(^{100}\) Deoband is near Delhi and its madrassa, Dar ul-Ulum, was established in 1867 (Metcalf 1982:38), aiming to reorient “the Muslim community to its original cultural and religious identity in view of the decline of the Mughal empire and the onslaught of British colonization” (Olesen 1995:45). The followers of the Deobandi madrassas initiated a Sunni sectarian religio-political movement that was based on Islamic reformist ideology (see Zaman 1999a:61; Zaman 1999b:303). Post-partition, religious students from Afghanistan attended Deobandi-affiliated madrassas in Pakistan, of which many were located between Peshawar and Islamabad. The curriculum of Afghanistan’s most prominent state-controlled religious institution, the Dar al-Ulum-e Arabia madrassa which later became known as the Abu Hanifa madrassa in Kabul,
ideological domination arose when Amanullah, attempting to restrict the influence of this school, had banned Deobandi-trained *ulema* in favour of graduates from India's more modernist Anglo-Mohammadan Oriental College (Olesen 1995:44, 144, 188).  

To a lesser degree, some members of the *ulema* were also exposed to reformist *madrassas* that were close to and influenced by Arabian Wahhabism such as the *Ahl-e Hadith* (literally, 'The People of the Path') (Metcalf 1982:305; Roy 1995:81). A number of *Ahl-e Hadith madrassas* that were associated with the Panjpir movement have been especially influential in Badakhshan, Kunar and Nuristan since the 1950s (see Roy 1986:212; Roy 1995:82). During the *jihad* against the Soviet-backed government which attracted many Arab Wahhabis as volunteer *mujahideen* but also as recruits to Osama bin Laden's al Qaeda terrorist network, substantial funds from Saudi Wahhabis reached affiliated *madrassas* in Afghanistan, such as those connected with *Ahl-e Hadith*, and which led to the substantial dissemination of Wahhabism in both Pakistan and Afghanistan (see Roy 1995:81). It is the Deobandi and Wahhabi *madrassas* that I will now turn.

In spite of Amanullah’s unsuccessful introduction of secular law, his establishment of three secular secondary schools in Kabul (Klimburg 1966:191) encouraged his successors to continue his vision of modernisation. The Musahiban rulers not only further expanded the secular school system but also introduced government-controlled *madrassas*, especially during the 1930s.

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1. This religious institution is located in Aligarh and was founded in 1877. (Olesen 1995:44).
2. Reacting against perceived laxity in Islamic practices, the political reform movement of Wahhabism was founded in the eighteenth century by Mohammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab (1703-1787) in Saudi Arabia with the intention of creating a form of 'unpolluted Islam'. It is important to note that the eighteenth/nineteenth century Indian reformist movements consisted of two streams, both of which have been confusingly termed 'Wahhabi' by the British as well as traditional Hanafi religious leaders (see Roy 1986:55; Roy 1995:20, 32-33, 82). The first group of Indian sectarian reformist ideology approved of Sufism and adhered to the formulations of groups that were associated with the teachings of Shah Waliullah (died 1762) and Sayyid Ahmad Bareilly as well as Deobandi ideology (Olesen 1995:108; Zaman 1999b:303). Their leaders were often Sufis, something that strictly set them apart from Arabian Wahhabis. The second sectarian group, the *Ahl-e Hadith*, while originally being influenced by Shah Waliullah, adhered to scriptural Islam. This group rejected the four schools of Islamic jurisprudence and was adamantly anti-Sufi and anti-Shiite.
3. Panjpir is in contemporary NWFP of Pakistan.
Not surprisingly, these state-controlled religious institutions represented a challenge to the more traditional private madrassas, which until then had served as the only domestic religious institutions. In the early 1950s, the Faculty of Sharia at Kabul University was established as a central, state-controlled religious teaching institution (Olesen 1995:188), eventually producing a core of modern intellectuals such as Burhanuddin Rabbani and Abdul-Rab al-Rasul Sayyaf, who were well-versed in Islam.

The Islamic reformist ideologies taught at Deobandi- and Wahhabi-influenced madrassas in the Subcontinent promoted a theory of liberation “through a return by the whole society to its former faith” (Roy 1986:56). They called for a renewed emphasis on the implementation of Sharia and promulgated strict adherence to the normative texts, attributing central importance to the study of hadith. Deobandism is particularly influenced by the Dars-e nizami (‘Course on Religious Education’), and has emulated the ideas of medieval Islamic scholars that stressed adherence to “traditionally transmitted’ sciences – such as morphology and syntax, Quranic studies, Hadith,...law,...principles of jurisprudence...[and] theology” (Zaman 1999b:297). Yet it is important to note that members of Deobandi madrassas have not only been exponents of orthodox Islam but have also been strongly linked to Sufism, in particular Naqshbandiya and Qadiriya (Olesen 1995:50). The orthoprax Sufi orders observe the Hanafi school of jurisprudence but strictly denounce non-Islamic aesthetic practices (see Roy 1986:55, 212). With their vision of the establishment of a “truly Islamic state” (Zaman 1999a:81), based on their understanding of the circumstances of the Prophet Mohammad during the seventh century, many teachers and students from these madrassas became strongly opposed to non-Sunni minorities, Islamic modernists and any non-Islamic practices. The “urban, madrasa-based, religious elite” of the

104 These government madrassas taught some modern sciences such as mathematics, physics and geography. Education was based on a Western model of teaching, such as class teaching, class plans and timetables, and followed a standardised curriculum (see Olesen 1995:187-188).

105 The Faculty of Sharia was opened in 1952 and financially assisted by the Al Azhar University in Cairo (Olesen 1995:188). This department in particular, through its close ties with Al Azhar University in Cairo and its offer of a curriculum that was almost entirely based on Sharia law, led to a “shift in spiritual inspiration from the Subcontinent to the Arab world” (Olesen 1995:189).

106 The Dars-e nizami is a collection of variedly interpreted writings largely attributed to the eighteenth century Mulla Nizem al-Din Muhammad (died 1748). These writings are commonly taught in madrassas throughout South Asia and include texts from the ninth to the eighteenth centuries from Iranian, Central Asian and Indian scholars (see Zaman 1999b:303-304).
Deobandi, for example, specifically aspired to disengage Muslims from local traditions such as "inherited, customary beliefs and rituals" (Zaman 1999b:304).

Wahhabism, like Deobandism, promotes the literal interpretation of the authoritative texts. But even more than the Deobandi ideology, Wahhabism strictly prohibits Sufi praxis especially the veneration of saints, poetry and the aesthetic practices of music and dance (see Marsden 1998:71). Relatively, it is strongly opposed to traditional local culture and instead advocates Arabian cultural values derived from Wahhabi ideology. Mohammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab (1703-1787), the founder of the movement, was inspired by the ninth century Islamic jurists Ibn Hanbal and Ibn Taymiyya (see Roy 1986:212; Zaman 1999a:63), and advocated the use of *ijtihad* (personal interpretation) as well as the declaration of a *jihad* (armed struggle) against those Muslims who did not concord with his puritanical views.\(^\text{108}\) Already aware of the pervasiveness of these extreme interpretations at the end of the nineteenth century, the Afghan *Amir* Abdur Rahman Khan had tried to stem the rise of Wahhabism in Afghanistan by circulating anti-Wahhabi pamphlets (Olesen 1995:80-81).\(^\text{109}\) Nevertheless, Wahhabism slowly spread and in Badakhshan, a number of Sunni Badakhshi *mawlawi* (local clergy) in Zardew as well as around Argu have been exposed to Wahhabism since the 1950s.

As can be seen from the institutions which Afghan religious students attended, the *ulema* – when educated in Afghanistan – were either trained in traditional private Hanafi *madrassas* (especially prior to Amanullah's rule) or in often Deobandi-influenced state-controlled *madrassas* (after 1930). If they had studied abroad, then it was usually at Dar ul-Ulum in Deoband or affiliated *madrassas* initially in India and, after 1947, in Pakistan, or at the modernist Anglo-Mohammadan Oriental College at Aligarh in India. A smaller, but nevertheless significant portion of religious students attended *madrassas* in

\(^{107}\) See also the discussion about Ibn Taymiyya earlier in this chapter.

\(^{108}\) Abdul Wahhab was patronised by the Saudi ruler Mohammad bin Saud (died 1765) and was also related to the royal family through the marriage of his daughter to Abdul Aziz, Mohammad bin Saud's oldest son (see Champion 2001:35). In the early 1920s, Abdul Aziz used this ideology to serve his own political interests in a bid to reform the nomadic tribes of central Arabia into a unified *umma* (Muslim community) (see Marsden 1998:71-72). Abdul Aziz conquered Mecca in 1924, but required British help to consolidate his position. In 1932, Abdul Aziz proclaimed himself King of Saudi-Arabia and established the Saud dynasty (see Marsden 1998:73).

\(^{109}\) This form of Wahhabism, however, mostly emanated from what was referred to as Indian Wahhabism.
Afghanistan and Pakistan that were close to Wahhabi ideologies (especially Ahl-e Hadith from the 1950s). Hence, the legality of all cultural practices in Afghanistan has always been subject to the judgments of *ulema* who had trained in mostly conservative religious institutions.

From the time of Amanullah’s modernising reforms, and later, when they were continued by the ruling Musahiban family, there was evidence of increasing friction between students who were secularly-educated and those from traditional *madrassas*. By the 1950s, the *ulema* were being intellectually challenged by Islamists, who contested their exclusive right as an intermediary authority, which had been granted to them since the inclusion of Hanafi jurisprudence in 1924. In contrast to the *ulema* who advocated maintaining “the legal structure of society rather than installing the ‘just society’”, the Islamists – while remaining “traditional in their formulations” (Olesen 1995:239) – have been concerned with a modern society that necessitated “a new interpretation of the Qur’an and a critical review of hadith” (Olesen 1995:237). The Islamists thus proposed a renewed emphasis on *ijtihad* (individual inquiry to establish the ruling of Islamic law). As was discussed in Chapter Four, during the *jihad* against the Soviet-backed government, ideological differences between Islamists and the *ulema* were temporarily put aside in the interests of political unity.

Afghanistan’s modern era can be thought of as beginning with Amanullah’s reformist period in the 1920s, then continuing primarily from the mid-1960s initially under King Zahir Shah and after his displacement in 1973, under President Mohammad Daoud, and extending to the Communist regimes. It ceased with the inauguration of an Islamic state in 1992. This modern period was marked by the emergence of an awareness of Afghanistan’s cultural heritage and in spite of the historical controversial status of performance in Islam, it seems that traditional sport, dance and music events occurred to varying degrees in public, semi-public and private settings during this time (until 1992), without too many restrictions.\(^\text{110}\) Celebrations and outdoor festivals such as *jeshen* (Afghanistan’s Independence Day), *nowruz* (Persian New Year) and *id* (major Islamic festival) were positive forms of relaxation and entertainment. In addition, performances also arose in the private domain, especially during the life-cycle events of weddings or after the birth of a child.

Further, at the royal and presidential court as well as among the elite, aesthetic entertainment was provided by *kesbi* (hereditary) performers.

Trends in modernisation were reflected in government publications that utilised modern print technology. From 1947 to the 1980s, a quarterly journal *Afghanistan* was published in Dari, English and French by the Afghan Historical Society and featured articles on Afghanistan’s cultural heritage (see Dupree 1977:225). In the late 1960s/early 1970s, the pro-Western journal *Lamar* published articles on Afghan culture in Dari and Pushto (Mills and Ahrary n.d.). From 1973, this journal was superseded by *Folklore*, a bimonthly publication in Dari and English by the newly established Folklore Department of the Ministry of Education. This publication covered a range of topics including Sufism, wedding ceremonies, folk music, poetry, games, food, and natural remedies and even articles on non-religious customs (see also Dupree 1977:232). Authors contributed in Dari, Pushto and English. This publication, with a couple of name changes, continued to be produced during the Communist period until the late 1980s.\(^\text{111}\)

In the 1960s, with improved radio transmission and a gradual increase in the availability of transistor radios throughout the country, large sectors of society became exposed to public music programs consisting of traditional Afghan and classical music genres (see also Baily 1994; Slobin 1974).\(^\text{112}\) These music programs were influenced by court musicians trained in the Hindustani classical music genre,\(^\text{113}\) Western-trained military band musicians, as well as the input of foreign advisers (Turkish, Soviet, American, British, German) (see Slobin 1974:244). In 1965, during Afghanistan’s constitutional monarchy, a Ministry of Culture and Information was established to which an Arts and Culture department was later attached. In 1973, Prime Minister Moosa Shafiq created the four new departments of Fine Arts, Theatre, Literature and Folklore, and Music, which thus reflected the growing interest in Afghan cultural heritage (see Dupree 1973:691; Dupree 1977:203). It is even possible that during this modern period, both genders may have danced together at

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\(^{111}\) This publication was renamed *Farhang-e Khalq* (‘Culture of the Masses’) under the Presidency of Hafizullah Amin. Its name was changed once again to *Farhang-e Mardom* (‘People’s Culture’) under the Presidency of Babrak Karmal from the early-to-late 1980s.

\(^{112}\) Afghanistan was first exposed to limited radio in 1925 under Amanullah (see Grevemeyer 1987:320) and regular broadcasts in Kabul went to air from 1941 onwards (see Dupree 1976:7; Slobin 1974:244-248). From the 1960s, music programs which were receivable on transistor radio constituted the main form of mass entertainment.

\(^{113}\) See footnote 55 for history of court musicians.
private events such as weddings or at other special occasions in urban, secularly-educated circles. Occasionally, public drama, music and dance programs were performed in the theatres of Kabul, and to a lesser degree in the cities of Herat and Mazar-e-Sharif. These more liberal attitudes to performance reflected the fact that a growing number of clergy had been educated at government-controlled madrassas such as Dar al-Ulum-e Arabia in Kabul which included some modern subjects in their curricula. In the lead up to the elections of the *Wolesi Jirga* (Lower House) in September 1969, traditional forms of music and dance were publicly performed during the election campaigns of some candidates. It seems therefore that aesthetic performances were used in this political context to drum up support for individual candidates (Dupree 1971). The staging of the First International Rock Festival in Kabul in 1975 was perhaps the strongest indication of the modern direction of Afghanistan’s secularly-educated, urban youth (see Dupree 1976:1). Music and dance performances were also held in urban theatres, but the public broadcast of dance performances in which men and women were seen dancing side by side remained a radical and provocative event.

Initially, attitudes towards performance during the Communist regime from 1978-1992 did not differ immensely from the periods of rule of King Zahir Shah and President Mohammad Daoud. Sport and aesthetic entertainment were patronised with the aim of establishing a ‘national cultural heritage’. During Nur Mohammad Taraki’s Khalq-dominated regime in 1978/1979 (see Chapter Four), national television was introduced, although it was largely limited to Kabul (Grevemeyer 1987:320-321). From that time, the state-owned radio and television networks broadcast mainly traditional folk music and dances from various Afghan provinces. It was also during this era that the musician Bazgul Badakhshi came to prominence.  

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114 Personal communication with expatriate Afghan, former member of elite, Australia, 2000.  
115 Following the 1964 Constitution, a *shura*, a bicameral parliament consisting of a fully elected *Wolesi Jirga* (Lower House) and a partly elected *Meshrano Jirga* (Upper House) was established (Dupree 1973:587).  
116 Dupree (1971:3, 12) includes in his report two pictures of *atan* performers in Parwan and Ghazni provinces.  
117 During Faizabad’s Communist period, a volleyball tournament was organised by the provincial government of Badakhshan on the third day of the celebration. Public or private aesthetic performances, however, were rare during the *id-e qurban* celebrations of the Communist period in Badakhshan. (Personal communication with expatriate Badakhshi, 2001).  
118 Television sets were unaffordable for most of Afghanistan’s population, especially in the rural areas.  
119 Personal communication with expatriate Afghans in Australia, 1999. Raja Anwar argues that the subsequent government of Karmal Babrak and its elite members were less inclined to
Nevertheless, during this era, a shift was evident in the understanding of cultural heritage and its bearers who became valued contributors to the egalitarian Communist society. This represented a break from previous regimes when performers, particularly hereditary entertainers, were marginalised in Afghan society. In line with Soviet ideology, the Afghan Communist regime utilised recreational and aesthetic entertainment as a means of developing a single national identity and preferably a Communist identity, rather than multi-ethnic and religious identities.\textsuperscript{121} This development of new political identities seemed to be aimed at undermining existing cultural relationships and the authority of traditional political stakeholders such as the ulema, members of the royal family, government administrators who were often close to the ruling families, as well as Sufi organisations (see Levin 1996). Indeed, the establishment of Sovietised entertainment styles in Afghanistan seems to have been clearly intended to supplant local traditions and their implicit associations with Islam. Moreover, the creation of music or dance ensembles, for example, was encouraged as a hybridisation of performing styles with a general emphasis on the construction of a syncretic ethnicity for the sake of Communist ideals.\textsuperscript{122} The emphasis of this era was clearly on non-religious entertainment and the suppression of Islamic values, although Islamic practices were not altogether outlawed and for the most part, religious duties remained

favour traditional types of aesthetic entertainment such as folk music and, instead, seemed to prefer Hindustani-influenced classical music that was performed by professional urban musicians (see Anwar 1989:49).

\textsuperscript{120} Following my inquiries about popular Badakhshi musicians, Bazgul Badakhshi was nominated almost unanimously as the best known musician, both within Afghanistan and among expatriate Afghans. He was known particularly for his style of singing and storytelling in which he impersonates the voices of women. Bazgul used to perform on Radio Afghanistan in Kabul during the period of King Zahir Shah and Mohammad Daoud in the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s. He maintained his status as a folk musician during the Communist regimes until the early 1990s. With his appearance on television, Bazgul became a national figure and developed the image of a Badakhshi cultural icon, a 'voice of Badakhshan'. With increasing age, he ceased performing on his trademark instrument, the ghichak, instead performing predominantly as a folk comedian. Many of the Badakhshis I interviewed during my research were of the opinion that he had died, whereas others reported that he had been seen begging during the nowruz buzkashi tournament in Faizabad in 1998 (see Chapter Six). In May 1998, I attempted to visit Bazgul in his hometown, but was unable to complete my journey due to fighting between local commanders one of whom had apparently taken Bazgul hostage. While this account of his use as a hostage could not be confirmed, it was more than likely that if he were still alive, Bazgul would have been in a severely impoverished state.

\textsuperscript{121} This reflected the attempted implementation of a 'nationalities' solution which was directly derived from the Soviet approach in the former Soviet Central Asian republics in the 1920s (see Micheline Centlivres-Demont in Bourdieu et al. 1981:41; Korgun 1993:105, 112-113).

\textsuperscript{122} Policies on sport and aesthetic practices were relatively successfully implemented in Soviet Central Asia which saw the rise of state-sponsored sport teams as well as professional music and dance ensembles.
relatively unaffected. It seems however, that the Communist regime mostly targeted the religious practices of Sufi orders, perhaps because these groups may have been perceived to be potential political threats. Evidence for this discouragement of mystical practices may be found in an undated publication from the Ministry of Islamic Affairs of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan which states as its aim “[t]o prevent superstitions and customs which disturb the civilities and orders of social and economic life of the country” (Olesen 1995:259). Mystical practices of any form therefore were not to be encouraged.123

**Performance during the Mujahideen, Rabbani and Taliban Eras**

With the escalation of civil war and the encroachment of mujahideen forces on Kabul, it seems unlikely that public recreational and aesthetic performances would have been performed, especially during the interregnum of President Najibullah (1989-1992). In addition, the conservative attitudes of some influential members of the mujahideen parties, including the Harakat-e Inqilab-e Islami, Hekmatyar’s Hezb-e Islami, Khalis’ Hezb-e Islami, Sayyaf’s Ittehad-e Islami, and even the Jamiat-e Islami, meant that they did not look kindly at non-Islamic practices. A number of these conservative Islamists had been either formally trained at Deobandi and Wahhabi madrassas in Pakistan, or at least, been exposed to their ideologies.124 Their prevailing negativity towards non-Islamic cultural expression is well exemplified in the (undated) manifesto *De Afghanistan de Is/ami Hezb maram* (‘Objectives of the Islamic Party of Afghanistan’) of Hekmatyar’s Hezb-e Islami, which prior to the collapse of Communist regime, stated that:

> The Qur’an and the hadīth shall be the primary sources of law, and the Hanafi jurisprudence will be followed in matters of interpretation and *ijtihād*. To materialise this, a new organisation will be established with the expressed purpose of harmonising all the laws and regulations with the principles of Islam (Art. 1, 2)... Legislation concerning social reforms shall aim at the prevention of adultery (*zinā*), wine drinking, gambling and moral depravity. Films, books and publications which corrupt social mores will be banned (Art. 6, 8). The “Shari’a veil” shall be


124 Younis Khalis (Khalis’ Hezb-e Islami) and Mohammad Nabi Mohammedi (Harakat-e Inqilab-e Islami), for example were trained at the Deobandi Haqqania in Pakistan’s NWFP. The Wahhabi influences of Abdul-Rab al-Rasul Sayyaf (Ittehad-e Islami) have been described in earlier sections of this chapter as well as in Chapter Four.
restored for women; the present system of coeducation will be abandoned; and men and women shall no longer work together in the same place (Art. 7, 31, 80) ... (cited in Kamali 1985:246).

Some aspects of this manifesto are certainly reminiscent of the Taliban’s edicts post-1996, which will be discussed in a later section. However, while a number of mujahideen interpreted aesthetic performances as haram, and thus offensive to Islamic morality, not all Islamists prohibited non-religious performances. During the jihad against the Communist regime, music, for example, was either banned or limited to patriotic jihadi music in areas that were controlled by the mujahideen (see Gardish 2002). In fact, the Jamiat-e Islami produced audio tapes with mujahideen ‘fighting’ songs that promoted Islamic ideals and denounced the Communists. These religio-political lyrics were accompanied by traditional music and performed on traditional instruments. In 1999 in Badakhshan, I also viewed an unpublished video which documented the success of the mujahideen and included in its coverage music performances as well as an atan-e meli that were performed in a mujahideen base in the mountains.

Following the collapse of the Communist regime in 1992, neither the conservative ulema, nor the Islamists encouraged participation in non-Islamic practices such as music or dance performances. Yet, while all of the mujahideen parties that had successfully defeated the Soviet troops pleaded for adherence to Islamic guidelines, no agreement on “what Islam means in everyday life” could be formulated (Roy 1998:200-201). With the exception of Abdul Rashid Dostum, the secular and openly modern Uzbek leader of the Junbesh-e Melli, all Sunni and Shiite political parties were generally conservative. In 1991, the Jamiat-e Islami Afghanistan publicly announced that they would patronise Persian culture, although this largely referred to religiously-oriented heritage such as poetry (see Rubin 1995:220). In fact, during this transition phase, entertainment remained implicitly associated with the Communist regime which was alleged to have fostered un-Islamic behaviour. As a consequence, conservative mujahideen targeted performers who had publicly expressed Communist ideals or performed for Communist

125 I would like to thank William Maley for mentioning this source and allowing me to listen to his personal copy.
126 See Chapter Six for further comments on the atan. The video was shown in the home of a local Tajik commander who was aligned with Massoud’s shura-e nazar. It consisted of many roughly edited clips that were filmed during the jihad from a variety of different sources. The exact date of its production is unclear (1980-1992).
governments. The assassination by mujihadeen of the Badakhshi musician Faiz-e Mangal from Jurm, who had been a well-known performer throughout Afghanistan, is such an example.127 This fraught political environment, together with the diversity of religious interpretations and emphases, led to considerable uncertainty about the role and legality of the expression of local cultural practices within the new Islamic state.

As mentioned in Chapter Four, the new Islamist rulers of 1992 sought to found the Islamic State of Afghanistan on Sharia law and aimed to remain close to the guidance of the normative texts. Recreational activities, such as wrestling and other sports, continued to accompany the religious celebrations during the early period of the Rabbani government.128 Yet aesthetic performances were much more controversial as seen in 1992, when Afghanistan’s premier music venue, the Kabul Theatre was destroyed during the internecine bombing on Kabul by forces of mujahideen parties. As a result of this fighting, the Kabul Music School was also demolished and never rebuilt. Perhaps as a direct consequence, no government publications on culture were ever produced during the Presidency of Rabbani (1992-2001). Aesthetic performances were in theory permitted under Sharia law; in reality, such events rarely took place. Since there were no official edicts against non-religious entertainment, cinemas continued to operate at the beginning of Rabbani’s term (from 1992-1996) and screened entertainment films in Kabul (Roy 1998:207). In general, whilst not officially banned, music events were not commonly performed in public but rather were confined to the private homes of those families who did not follow the views of extremist Islamists such as Hekmatyar and Sayyaf. Outdoor music performances of all kinds were generally discouraged; indoor music programs continued to be performed periodically in the auditorium of Radio-Television Afghanistan (also known as Radio Kabul) but also in private houses during weddings. The radio and television station during the Rabbani Presidency (1992-1996) in Kabul also broadcast Afghan music programs.

Some official government functions included a music program, although usually once the religio-political leadership had left.129 The Rabbani

127 I have not been able to ascertain the exact date of his murder, but it appears to have been either in the interregnum period of Najibullah (1989-1992), or during the early Rabbani Presidency (approximately 1992-1995).
128 Personal communication from Dr Najibullah Lafraie, Afghanistan’s Minister of State for Foreign Affairs during the Rabbani regime (1992-1996), March 2001.
129 For example, Massoud held a function for the US Assistant Secretary of State of South Asian Affairs, Robin Raphel in a guesthouse at Estalif in the Shomali valley, north of Kabul in
government in Kabul maintained a military orchestra which sporadically performed during jeshen celebrations and on rare occasions, for state guests. While government functions during the rule of Zahir Shah and Mohammad Daoud as well as the Communist regimes would often have included a music program, these were mostly discontinued during the Rabbani government as a result of its tense political alliances with extremist Islamic groups such as Sayyaf and Hekmatyar.130

In contrast to the Communist government’s liberal attitude, dancing was seen as lewd and subsequently dancing as well as the screening of films that included dances were banned. Dances with musical accompaniment were sometimes performed at modern wedding receptions, though they were once again segregated by gender. This marked disapproval of aesthetic practices was most evident during the first and last three months of Islamic governance,131 when even the traditional performance of private music and dancing at weddings became infrequent.

It is important to note that conservative allies of the Rabbani government such as the Sunni Tajik Ismail Khan, a Jamiat-e Islami commander who ruled over Herat and neighbouring provinces in western Afghanistan, imposed their own restrictions on performances. In Herat, for example, in 1994, music was heavily censored under Ismail Khan and the proposed content of music programs had to be given clearance by local authorities. Songs that lamented the mujahideen cause, however, were approved, whereas love songs and dance songs were banned (see Baily 2001). In contrast to Ismail Khan’s censorship as well as the generally conservative attitude of other coalition members of the Rabbani government, only the secular leader of Junbesh-e Melli, the Uzbek Abdul Rashid Dostam, had not imposed any bans on aesthetic practices in the territories that were under his control in north-western Afghanistan.132

April 1995. Once Massoud had left the function, the musical program began and in this instance, even included dancing (Personal communication with William Maley who received an account of the function from a close associate of Massoud, Canberra, October 1999).

130 As outlined in Chapter Four however, Hekmatyar was only really part of an official alliance for three months before the fall of Kabul in 1996.

131 For further information on the negative attitudes on aesthetic performances during the Rabbani Presidency in Kabul, see comments that were made by a Rabbani spokesman as well as the former Head of Bakhtar (State Press Agency) that appeared in an article in the Pakistani newspaper The Muslim on 15 July 1996, and which are cited in Baily (2001:34).

132 At the end of August 1996, upon the invitation of Dostam who at that time was the governor of Balkh province, Jan van Belle (2001) was able to record a music performance that was sanctioned by the provincial government, in the library of the cultural centre of Mazar-e Sharif.
Towards the end of Rabbani's leadership in Kabul, the advent of Hekmatyar as Prime Minister from late June until September 1996 led to a marked shift in the position of the Islamic State of Afghanistan towards non-Islamic practices. The burqa immediately became compulsory and aesthetic entertainment was virtually banned. The rapprochement of Hekmatyar with the Rabbani government indicates the degree to which the latter had to accommodate important allies, regardless of their radical tendencies, in order to ensure their continued support. Extremist Islamic doctrines which were mostly espoused by Hekmatyar meant also that all aesthetic practices that were not clearly condoned by Islam's normative texts were entirely prohibited. In reality, any performances that could potentially be interpreted as 'un-Islamic' were banned or, at the very least, significantly limited in the territories of ultra-conservative commanders.

With the rise of the Taliban in 1994, many characteristics of orthodox Islamist and Islamic ideologies resurfaced (see Chapter Four). As a predominantly ethnic Pashtun phenomenon, the Taliban imperceptibly assimilated Sunni ultra-orthodox ideologies with local Pashtun traditions, melding pushtunwali, the ulema, the system of rural madrassas, Deobandi and Wahhabi ideologies, as well as a strong rejection of Sufi practices (see Glatzer 1998:169; Rashid 2000:112; Roy 1998:204). Strongly influenced by distorted Deobandi interpretations (Rashid 2000:88), the Taliban gave these doctrines precedence over the traditional Hanafi doctrines taught at madrassas in Afghanistan. Rashid (2000:90) states in 1999 “at least eight Taliban cabinet ministers in Kabul were graduates of...Dar-ul-Uloom Haqqania and dozens

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133 This information was gathered from a variety of informants in Badakhshan who lived in Kabul during that time.
134 Written communication with Dr Najibullah Lafraie, March 2001.
135 Personal information with member of Badakhshi elite, Faizabad, 1999.
137 It is important to recognise that many members of the Taliban who were trained in Pakistani madrassas would have known little about Afghan traditions.
138 It must kept in mind that while Afghanistan's ulema were influenced by Deobandi ideology, in reality vast differences in interpretations, ranging from moderate to perverted, existed between urban and rural madrassas and which were reflected in varying degrees of approval/disapproval of cultural performances. Many Taliban had attended Deobandi madrassas that were linked to the Jamiat-e Ulema-e Islam, a political party in Pakistan, for example the Dar ul-Ulum Haqqaniya (see Maley 2002:225-226), which taught a controversial interpretation of Deobandi.
more graduates served as Taliban governors in the provinces, military commanders, judges and bureaucrats”. Music and dance performances were branded impermissible and un-Islamic in a manner which seems to echo the arguments of medieval Islamic writers, especially Ibn Taymiyya. Furthermore, the Taliban’s interpretation of Sharia law mirrored the ultra-strict Arabian Wahhabi doctrines, which had filtered into Afghanistan since at least the 1950s. This influence was most apparent in the extreme censorship of non-Islamic performances that was enforced in territories under their control.

Within hours of taking the capital Kabul at the end of September 1996, the Taliban introduced the strictest Islamic system of the contemporary world and immediately made public their views on aesthetic and entertainment practices. Among other things, music, dancing, television, and cinemas were immediately banned, as were all social institutions including libraries and entertainment venues (see Paik 1997). This censorship was enforced by special Taliban units under the ‘Religious Police’, which was virtually a replication of a similar organisation that has existed in Saudi Arabia since the mid-eighteenth century (see Kepel 2002:229-230, 405n23; Maley 1998:15): Amr bil-maroof wa nahi an il-munkir (The Department for the Promotion of Virtue and Suppression of Vice). In comparison, aesthetic Islamic practices such as the singing of the azan (the Muslim call to prayer) and the namaz (the obligatory prayer consisting of a prescribed routine of patterned physical actions) continued to be condoned by all Islamic groups.

Interviews recorded with senior Taliban officials in 1996 and 2000 provide some insight into the state of aesthetic performances in Afghanistan during the Taliban era and further substantiate the militia’s extremist Islamic views. In an Associated Press interview in 1996, Taliban’s Education Minister at that time, Mullah Abdul Hanifi, claimed that music must be opposed “as it creates a strain in the mind and hampers the study of Islam” (AP 1996). In an interview in the 22 May 2000 edition of ‘Time’ magazine, the former Taliban Justice Minister, Mullah Nooruddin Turabi, stated:

We are Muslims and we are required to follow the Holy Koran and

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139 The Wahhabi disapproved of any deviation from their ‘pure’ interpretation of Islam and declared that “any Muslim who disagreed with the Wahhabi interpretation of Islam deserved severe punishment” (Marsden 1998:72).
140 Roy (1999:7:n1) notes, however, that the Taliban generally restrained themselves from one of the Wahhabis’ main concerns in opposing the veneration of shrines. It seems that the Taliban may have in some way recognised the Sufi influence in Deobandism as well as local traditions and, for that reason, mostly left Sufi shrines intact.
When asked why it had been necessary to ban non-religious music and dancing, the Minister, in line with orthodox medieval Islamic jurists, replied that such performances “can lead you astray. It is wrong to think the people want them” (Fathers 2000a). The Taliban’s former Foreign Minister, Mullah Wakil Motawwakil, was also interviewed for the same ‘Time’ magazine edition. When asked about the Taliban’s apparent violations of concerns for human rights, Motawwakil responded:

We do not believe we have denied anyone their rights....If there are some restrictions it is because of our culture. People accept this. It is not a Taliban issue, but something which people have always followed (Fathers 2000b).

This latter statement confirms that Islamic extremists within Afghanistan believed that there was only one culture, namely an Islamic culture that was strictly based on the normative texts. In Taliban territories, largely as a result of the ubiquitous Religious Police who incarcerated anyone perceived to have contravened the Taliban’s strict edicts, there was little effective public opposition to the dogmatic prohibition of non-Islamic performances.

At the pinnacle of their regime, the Taliban controlled over eighty percent of Afghanistan. Concomitantly, it seems that some authorities in areas controlled by the United Front gradually adopted more conservative policies. This may be attributable to their anticipation of the Taliban’s inevitable occupation of Badakhshan wherein conservatism would have facilitated their assimilation with the incoming Taliban leadership. Alternatively, it may also represent the espousal of more conservative Islam by groups such as the Uzbeks associated with Hezb-e Islami and Pushtuns associated with Wahhabism, as a means of differentiating themselves from the official and more moderate position of the Tajik-dominated leadership of the Jamiat-e Islami dominated-Rabbani government. In 1998 and 1999 in Badakhshan, a general trend towards ultra-conservative Islam was noticeable among the local population and commanders alike. Indeed, with the politicisation of Islam during the jihad and later with the establishment of an Islamic State, non-religious performances had become rare events. This was especially the case in regions that were occupied by often-opposing factions such as in Faizabad, where many political parties and independent commanders kept offices. At the same time, however,
the weekly internet audio programs provided by the media outlet of the anti-Taliban alliance, Afghan Mujahideen Publications,141 introduced and ended news segments with traditional Afghan instrumental music. This organisation, largely under the influence of Massoud’s *shura-e nazar*, did not officially oppose non-Islamic performances. While the Faizabad television station, which had been established in 1985 and which at the time of my field research was the only functioning station in Afghanistan, continued to broadcast mostly government and religious programs, it had ceased broadcasting public music or dance programs due to their sensitive nature.142 As will become evident in the following chapters, aesthetic entertainment occurred in either a private or public setting only if the local commander or community leader condoned it.

With the exception of the Communist period, Badakhshan has always been a relatively orthodox territory. Both religious and non-religious practices in the province have been exposed to a range of diverse influences including Hanafi Sunni, Nizari Sevenener Shiite Ismaili and Naqshbandi Sufi Islam, as well as Communism and modernism, in addition to local traditions. The incorporation of the emotional and spiritual elements of mystical Islam, initially through more liberal Ismaili doctrines, then later through the emergence of Sufism from the ninth and tenth centuries onwards, influenced the praxis of otherwise orthodox scriptural Islam. Hence, although it has generally remained a conservative society, the impact of mystical Islam is evident in sacred and everyday practices, such as in the religious and non-religious music of both Sunnis and Ismailis. With the politicisation of Islam, especially since the mid-1970s, Islam in Badakhshan, as in the rest of Afghanistan, has been consolidated as the central cultural influence on society. Yet while Badakhshi Islamist leaders are guided by Sharia law, the impact of Sufism remains considerable as exemplified in the popular practice of veneration at *ziarat* and in the widespread appreciation of mystical poetry. Hence, varying perspectives of Islam are manifest in Badakhshan with the consequence that differing philosophies exist about what constitutes a ‘good’ Muslim.

Conservative attitudes towards artistic performances as manifested by both the Islamic State of Afghanistan and the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, were also

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141 Massoud’s Shura-e Nazar initially produced a hardcopy and then later an electronic/internet political newsletter from the Panjshir in Kapisa Province under the name of *Payam-e-Mujahid* (‘Message of the Mujahid’). The URL of the website for this ongoing publication by Afghan Mujahideen Publications is [http://www.payamemujahid.com/](http://www.payamemujahid.com/).

142 Interview, director of Badakhshan’s TV station, June 1998.
reflected in the lack of inclusion of these practices on their websites. The internet homepage of “Shariat Online” (2001), a Pakistani-based Taliban mouthpiece, included a section entitled “Ariana Encyclopedia” which listed a number of Quranic Sura recitations as well as two *taranas* that were classified as folk songs. It is interesting to note that the term “folk song” was employed to categorise an event in a non-ritual context, even though it was a musically accompanied liturgical recitation. A *tarana* is considered to be a type of nationalistic song, but the term also applies to religious Islamic songs. Since the Taliban envisaged an Islamic society in which all aspects of government were entirely grounded in Sharia law, these *taranas* were inevitably based on Quranic texts and contained pro-Taliban messages (see Baily 2001:7). Importantly, within Taliban ideology, these recitations were not considered to be music, but rather as a form of religious practice.

Neither Islam’s primary authoritative religious text – the Quran – nor the *hadith* explicitly mention the (il)legality of aesthetic performances. No firm conclusions can thus be drawn from these normative texts as to the legitimacy or illegitimacy of aesthetic practices. In fact, the Islamic scholar Seyyed Hossein Nasr’s (1997) states that

> [t]he legality of music [and dance] in Islam still remains and will always remain ambiguous as divinely willed. This ambiguity serves a useful purpose in that it accepts varying modes and forms of music [and dance] without permitting that music [and dance] which separates the listener from religion and is an obstacle to the remembrance of God... There is *no* music [or dance] in the Islamic world which does not remind one of God. Even music to which people dance at weddings carries with it a reminiscence of the classical modes, which themselves are related to inner states combined with the yearning of the soul for God (1997:230).

Nevertheless, either official or tacit bans on all non-Islamic performances were evident throughout Badakhshan in 1998 and 1999. This reflected the conservative influences of Islamists such as Rabbani (Naqshbandi doctrines), Hekmatyar (Ibn Taymiyya philosophies) and Sayyaf (Wahhabi ideology), as well as independent Wahhabi-associated groups who denounced aesthetic performances as ‘improper’ conduct for Muslims. In stark contrast, other influential figures particularly Ismaili religious and political community leaders

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143 Immediately after the attacks in the United States on September 11, 2001, most websites dealing with Afghanistan were defaced or closed by computer hackers or were forced to close as a result of hate mail. These sites may currently no longer be available for viewing.

144 Prior to September 11, 2001, two examples of Taliban *taranas* were available on the website “Shariat Online” (the page no longer exists), “Tarana 1” and “Tarana 2” (Shariat 2001); another example is listed on Freemuse’s website “Taliban Chant” (Baily 2001).
publicly valued the expression of local recreational and aesthetic practices as essential aspects of their cultural heritage.

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The extensive review of literature in this chapter indicates that although cloaked in ambiguity, non-Islamic practices have a significant historical place within Islamic culture. In Afghanistan, the political importance of aesthetic practices is exemplified by the traditional performance of an atan (circle dance) which originally had the function of preparing a tribe for war by facilitating their entry into a semi-ecstatic state (see Klimburg 1966:119), or in the late 1960s, by the performance of music and dance during the election campaigns of political candidates. More recently, Hekmatyar’s Hezb-e Islami party, attempted to discredit Ahmad Shah Massoud, the pivotal leader of the United Front, by circulating an undated video which portrayed him as being entertained by a group of dancing boys (see Rzehak 1997:41:n8).\(^{145}\) The nexus between politics, religion and culture as manifest in the performances of music and dance will continue to be unravelled in the next two chapters.

\(^{145}\) The non-Islamic practice of dance was thus used as a means of charging Massoud with engagement in homoerotic activities. An even more interesting fact, however, is that the leader of Hezb-e Islami, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, was himself accused by the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan of homosexual activities (see Olesen 1995: 263).
Public Performances in Badakhshan

In all societies, cultural practices are regulated to some extent by convention—a fact that tacitly confirms their social value. Accordingly, performance events are “always shaped and constrained by cultural frameworks that rely on territory, community, institutions, and performative genres” (Lewis 1999:539). They are thus inextricable from their social, political and historical contexts. The previous chapters have introduced the controversial nature and challenges of performance in the Islamic context of Badakhshan, Afghanistan. In an attempt to elucidate the frameworks and meanings of particular performances, this chapter and that which follows will describe the nature, settings and circumstances of a range of cultural practices witnessed during field research in 1998 and 1999.

The performances of prayer, religious music, equestrian and wrestling tournaments, as well as entertainment music and dance, can be interpreted as variously positioned on a continuum of ritual and ritual-like practices. For example, *id-e qurban* may be understood as a pure ritual or as an explicitly ‘liminal’ event, in that there is a “high level of consensus in belief and practice” (Lewis and Dowsey-Magog 1993:209) as manifested by the “egalitarian solidarity and spiritual integration” of its participants (Lewis and Dowsey-Magog 1993:201n4). In contrast, *jeshen* (the public festival commemorating Independence Day) or *mehmanis* (private parties), although evincing elements of ritual, are less special or elaborated, and thus may be seen to concord with Turner’s notion of ‘liminoid’ practices. To facilitate comprehension of the positionings and meanings of performance events in the social and political context of Badakhshan, this analysis will utilise a number
of binary categories that draw on either commonsense local terms (religious/non-religious) or my own (daily/special, public/private, indoor/outdoor, rare/common). However, as discussed in Chapter Two, since such dichotomisations are actually located on continua, I will also necessarily consider types of performance that occur ‘in between’ these categorical poles in an attempt to address the inherent dynamics “between official self-presentation and what goes on in the privacy of collective introspection” (Herzfeld 1997:14).

In Badakhshan, the most important distinctions of cultural practices accord with Islamic categories based on Sharia law. Specific religious terms classify whether a cultural practice is *halal* (that is, permissible according to Sharia law) or *haram* (that is, forbidden and/or illegitimate).¹ This pragmatic differentiation is largely based on Islam’s normative texts and tends to reflect a binary categorisation in that a practice is usually perceived either as religious or non-religious, and therefore as legitimate or illegitimate. Yet, as can be seen from the discussion of al Faruqi’s model in Chapter Five, a number of Islamic categories and terms have the potential to vary considerably and to often overlap.² Similarly, my observations of religious and cultural performances in Badakhshan confirmed the existence of the triadic classification of ‘halal-uncertain-haram’ and as a consequence and in contrast to the local Islamic-based binary categorisation of cultural practices, my use of theoretical constructs will primarily draw upon ternary categories. As noted in Chapter Two, this idea corresponds with Peirce’s semiotic phenomenology in which any binary relation requires “a third, mediating term” (Lewis 1995:239n19). While many cultural events were clearly sanctioned by Sharia law (such as the *id* prayers), others (such as those arising at *mehmanis*) were frequently mired in ambiguity. I believe therefore that the use of ternary categories will assist in elucidating the combination of features, for example religious and non-religious elements, in these less clearly defined events. Particular emphasis will be placed in both this and the next chapter on discussing what I have previously termed ‘aesthetic performances’. This categorisation allows me to distinguish between those performances, primarily dance and music but also some oral poetic traditions, which were prohibited from those that were not. ‘Aesthetic performances’ will be discussed here with respect to the public domain and will then be addressed more specifically in Chapter Seven when I

¹ See Chapter Five, especially al Faruqi’s model of the hierarchy of *handasah al sawt* genres (1985:175-191).
² Sufi music is such an example that calls for the recognition of borderline categories.
describe semi-public and private events. The sub-categories of public and private events, mediated by the category of semi-public or semi-private, are thus employed to highlight the contrasts and interrelations between performances and their contexts.

One of my primary aims in this analysis is to embed performances in the social and political world of Badakhshan and to provide Badakhshi individuals with a voice about their own practices. For that reason, each cultural performance will be interpreted and positioned in terms of local categories and descriptions such as: ‘this is buzkashi’, ‘this is local Badakhshi music’, or ‘this is local Badakhshi dance’. Moreover, given that the methodology of this thesis regards performances as polysemous sequences of signs “that bear culturally endowed meaning” (Parmentier 1987:11), each event will then be reflected upon more analytically, primarily through recourse to the sign relations identified through Peircean semiotics, even though for ease of comprehension, Peirce’s terminology will generally not be used explicitly. The complementary methodology of Laban Movement Analysis (LMA) will also be drawn upon in order to elucidate the representation of bodily interactions or “physical dialogues” (Lewis 1992:12). In addition, the lyrics of most songs have been translated from Dari into English. Discussion of performance events is supplemented with brief audiovisual films which appear as QuickTime movie files on the accompanying CD ROMs. It is essential that these short films are viewed in conjunction with the relevant sections in the main text. This framing of social interactions supports the conscious and literal differentiation of a specific type of socio-cultural engagement from more common day-to-day community processes in Badakhshan. Unlike the historical examples of cultural performances that were mostly organised and ‘staged’ by influential others such as the researchers of the 1963 Stuttgart expedition, the performances I recorded in 1998 and 1999 arose relatively spontaneously; they were initiated by the local Badakhshis themselves and filmed by me. Hence, I suggest that analysis of these more authentic – or at least less contrived – events will be constructive in elucidating some of the salient themes and multiple sets of relationships inherent in the cultural performances of Badakhshan at the end of the twentieth century.

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3 See glossary of Peircean terms (Appendix Three).
4 See Chapter Two.
5 The songs were translated with the assistance of Dr Mohammad Torabi and Hafizullah Natiq.
Religious Performances

The id-e qurban Prayer in Sunni-dominated Faizabad

In Islam, especially in Shiism and orthodox Sunni Islam, a religious practice is usually understood as rule-bound, controlled and based on authoritative scriptural sources. Performed in a serious and respectful manner, Islamic religious practices tend to encourage inner experience rather than the overt expression of emotion or enjoyment. With the exception of the daily practice of namaz (prayers), religious events are clearly marked on the Islamic calendar and are thus framed as special events set apart from quotidian activities. Whilst such practices would tend to be viewed by orthodox Muslims as spiritual duties rather than as performances, the participation of the entire Muslim community and their enactment of simple, repetitive and predictable movements during these special events lead me to posit that such religious practices may be understood as religious performances. In 1998 and 1999, religious performances which were based on major Islamic traditions and clearly defined in Islam’s normative texts were patronised by both the Islamic State of Afghanistan and the Taliban and thus continued without restriction as obligatory practices. In contrast, religious practices that are expressed in a more aesthetic manner, such as Sufi practices that incorporate music and dance, were clearly not permitted by the Taliban, nor were they condoned by dominant Sunni leaders within the Rabbani Presidency nor within Badakhshan’s provincial government.

In Afghanistan, as in all Sunni and Shiite Muslim territories worldwide, two major religious festivals are celebrated annually: id-e ramazan and id-e qurban. Id-e ramazan (The Feast of the End of Ramadan) is a three-day celebration marking the end of the fasting month which occurs during the ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar. Forty days after this holiday, a more elaborate celebration of three days duration, id-e qurban (The Feast of Sacrifice) commemorates Ibrahim’s willingness to sacrifice his son Ismail at the command of Allah. Id-e qurban is thus indexically linked (through a
contiguous association) with Islamic tradition and heritage. Moreover, it is central to the construction of broader Islamic and local social identities. Participation in this ritual fosters a direct connection between Muslims' personal and collective experiences. Memories and associations arising from past celebrations of this significant religious festival are linked to the present and future; as adults, men will recall attending this ritual as children with their fathers. Further, in contexts such as in Badakhshan, the practice functions as an important social and cultural touchstone wherein it serves as a sign of the lives of all id participants and not as “signs about them” (Turino 1999:236). Hence, the religious performance of id-e qurban reinforces individuals’ personal connections to a living and historical Islamic community.

Both the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (1996-2001) proclaimed by the Taliban militia and the Islamic State of Afghanistan (1992-2001) celebrated Islam’s normative rituals such as id-e qurban as major cultural events. In 1998, the sighting of the moon on the evening of 6 April introduced the beginning of id-e qurban in Faizabad. Rounds of tracer ammunition were shot into the air by Kalashnikov-carrying soldiers loyal to the United Front. The cacophony of bullets was not only heard, but the exploding bullets were visible from the region’s surrounding mountains. The following morning, ruz-e id (The Day of Id), as is customary in Afghanistan, children received new clothes and played the game of tokhum bazi.9 Later that morning, the Faizabad’s entire male population consisting primarily of Sunni Muslims of the Hanafi school of jurisprudence, and numbering at least seven hundred people, congregated to publicly perform the id ritual at the maidan-e askari (military ground), the city’s id ground.10

The ritual began with a series of speeches by Badakhshan’s governor, Wali Sayyid Amin Tareq (a Sunni Tajik Badakhshi Islamist affiliated with the Jamiat-e Islami),11 and by a number of senior mullahs (representing Faizabad’s ulema). These political and religious authorities addressed Faizabad’s adult and

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9 The gift-giving tradition is also celebrated on the morning of id-e ramazan. Tokhum bazi is a Persian term for a game called ‘knocking eggs’ or literally ‘egg-fighting’. In this game, the two contestants are each equipped with an egg and in order to win, one has to break the other’s egg.

10 Since Faizabad’s main mosque is too small to accommodate all participants, maidan-e askari serves as the main outdoor venue for the prayer. In Afghanistan, it is common to have a dedicated id ground. The maidan-e askari is also referred to as the maidan-e id (id ground) and is located at the outskirts of Faizabad, near the provincial government building and the Kokcha River in Shahr-e Kohne, the old part of town.

11 In Afghanistan, the Arabic noun wali denotes the occupation of provincial governor (see also Glossary).
adolescent males who were seated on the ground on shawls or blankets and aligned in narrow parallel rows facing the presenters. This seating arrangement may be seen to bear an iconic relationship (through resemblance) to the sacred geography of Islam, since it physically and visually reproduced the alignment of Muslims in the courtyard of the al-Haram Mosque (Grand Mosque) in Mecca, as they face the Kabah, Islam’s holiest shrine. During the speeches, the relatively relaxed phase of the celebration, some participants quietly chatted and several beggars circulated through the narrow seated rows, collecting zakat (alms). It is the duty of every Muslim, as a member of the umma (Islamic community), to give alms to the poor on such religious occasions. This direct action of ‘giving’ money to disadvantaged members of the community is symbolically connected to religious purification. Badakhshan Television, Afghanistan’s only television station at that time was also present to film the id speeches which were broadcast later in the afternoon.

The id speeches were followed by more sacred practices, in particular the public communal prayer of the id-e namaz (id prayer). As specified in the normative texts, the namaz is one of the five obligatory daily prayers which every Sunni and Shiite Muslim is required to perform. Normally performed individually in private homes, the prayer is publicly and communally performed during joma (Muslims’ obligatory Friday midday prayer and rest day) as well as during important religious festivals such as the two ids. Yet

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12 While several boys had accompanied their fathers, girls and women were not present at this ritual. The speeches were amplified with the assistance of a microphone connected to a small battery-operated amplifier. They could thus be heard throughout large parts of the residential areas of Faizabad.

13 The Kabah is a cube-like building in which the al-hajar al-aswad (Black Stone) is located. It is interesting to note that the Kabah itself is infused with spiritual force (baraka) which is iconic with the power of Allah.

14 It is important to appreciate that the Faizabad television station is not comparable to broadcasting offices in developing or developed countries. The television station functions more at the level of a small rural community broadcaster. The broadcasting equipment was relatively professional and was originally set up by Soviet technicians in the 1980s. The only recipients of this local station in Badakhshan were the few households in Faizabad that owned a battery-operated television set. As a consequence of a lack of electricity in the entire province, any electrical equipment necessitates battery operation and thus requires the purchase of batteries which were considered to be expensive luxury items in Badakhshan. Since the beginning of Islamic governance in 1992, the content of the television programs has been almost exclusively religious in nature, with occasional government announcements. The station manager, however, showed me some of the archives which included old fiction movies, as well as music and dance programs that were recorded during the Communist period.

15 Twelver Shiite performances of namaz are basically similar to those of the Sunnis. The minor differences in execution are not relevant to this discussion.
Public Performances in Badakhshan

unlike the namaz-e joma which is conducted as a weekly observance in a mosque, namaz-e id commonly attracts all members of Faizabad's umma and for that reason, is held at a large outdoor venue.

As a special form of the daily namaz, the namaz-e id uses a similar normatively-specified number of physical movements and recitations of fixed liturgical texts (see Kusic 1996). The structure of the prayer includes the physical actions of qiyam (standing), rakat (bowing), sajda (prostration), and qowud (sitting) which are performed while the participants silently or barely audibly recite the Quranic texts (see Kusic 1997). The prayer is always (indexically) oriented in the direction known as qibla, that is towards Mecca and the Kabah, and its ritual movements constitute important habits that are in turn, concrete manifestations of social and cultural identity as well as group cohesion. This orthopraxy may thus be seen to be an index of the obedience of Islamic communities to Allah, as indicated by the Quran, and as culturally uniting Muslims worldwide (see Anderson 1991:170-171). Through their engagement in this ritual, therefore, the participants of the id-e qurban in Faizabad were indexically, symbolically and iconically connected with the original Muslim community in what is now Saudi Arabia [view movie clip eidprayer.mov; CD ROM 1].

The physical movements of the members of the namaz-e id congregation are performed on a sagittal plane towards qibla, which reinforces the indexical link with Mecca. All participants adopt a narrow base of support (feet close together) and move their arms minimally within their "kinesphere". In marked contrast to the 'gestural' movement characteristics of the non-religious dances that will be discussed later in this chapter and in Chapter Seven, in which the arms predominate and move in a range of different directions, the physical actions of the namaz are mostly executed in a 'postural' fashion, that is they tend to maintain the alignment of the body. Moving from a neutrally erect

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16 See glossary (Appendix One) for additional information and the spelling of these prescribed physical movements.

17 The use of the LMA term 'sagittal plane' may be understood as primarily having a forward-backward and, secondarily, an up-down orientation.

18 A person's 'base of support' is a LMA category providing information on the general use of the body and thereby on postural characteristics and types of weight transference. The limit of a performer's capacity to reach into space without having to shift his or her position, has been termed a person's "kinesphere" (Dell 1977:69). See Appendix Four for a glossary of LMA terms.

19 The terms 'gestural' and 'postural' are used to describe the actual involvement of the person's body in movement. 'Gestural' movements refer to those movements in which only a
starting position, the *id* participants in Faizabad gradually lowered their bodies by flexing their trunks, hips and knees until their knees touched the earth. During the final prostration, the men’s arms first reached towards the ground so as to support their bodies while their foreheads touched the ground. The movements of this ritual were thus characterised by restraint, control and precision, qualities which accord with Laban’s concept of ‘bound flow’.

In addition to these prescribed physical movements, the *namaz* also incorporates linguistic elements, which have symbolic, yet personal and contextual meaning for participants. The mullah’s recitation of the sacred words ‘Allah-u Akbar’ (God is Great), for example, may be interpreted as ‘God is Great (and I am small)’, and hence that human life has small significance within the greater context of humanity and, for that reason, may be surrendered. Alternatively, the sacred words may also be interpreted as ‘God is Great (so I am empowered)’ in the sense that a Muslim’s life may be strengthened and uplifted by the ‘Greatness of God’. Hence, while the individual life of a devout Muslim may not be viewed as greatly valuable in the context of the whole of creation, it is important since a devout life glorifies God and may empower fellow Muslims. This paradox of significance can be seen in the extreme case of suicide bombings during which militant Muslims are known to utter ‘Allah-u Akbar’ before sacrificing their lives, an action which renders them martyrs and which testifies to the simultaneous insignificance and the significant impact of individual lives and deaths.

Whether performed in private, public, indoor, or outdoor domains, *namaz* is always marked by a serious demeanour, a sign of inward fervour. The worshipper believes that Allah is present during the prayer and that Allah is aware of the worshipper’s presence. The act of praying brings each member of the *umma* into a direct and contiguous relationship with Allah. It is therefore likely that most participants at Faizabad’s *namaz-e id* experienced a heightened part of the performer’s body predominates. By comparison, the term ‘postural’ is applied to movements employing the whole body (see Dell 1977:79).

*Bound flow* may be understood as “the apparent quality of controlling the flow of movement through the body (as opposed to a visible intent to release that movement flow out and beyond the body’s limits)” (Ness 1996:149n25) and is one four Laban effort qualities (Flow, Weight, Time, Space). Moreover, the spatial path of the participants was strictly direct, utilising both sagittal and vertical dimensions. In Laban’s system, each dimension may be understood as travelling along a linear direction from one point to another. A limitation of the three dimensions is a person’s ‘kinesphere’ (see Dell 1977:69). The sagittal dimension, therefore, has a forward-backward orientation, and the vertical dimension an up-down orientation (see Appendix Four).
awareness of their Muslim identity, in terms of the cultural imaginary of the unity of Islam particularly within the context of north-eastern Afghanistan that was controlled by the United Front.

With the conclusion of the official speeches and the public performance of the final group prayer, the men and boys returned to their respective homes, walking slowly in small clusters of relatives and friends. Later, within the confines of the private residences of those families who could afford it, a sheep or a calf was ritualistically sacrificed and its meat distributed in equal portions to close relatives, neighbours and the poor. For the rest of that day, and over the following days, groups of gender-separated adults and their children visited each other’s homes. The men met in the khushkhana (guestroom) of a residence, whereas the women gathered in specifically designated female spaces within the house. During these reciprocal visits to relatives in the neighbourhood, guests sat on carpets on the floor and rested against cushions which were placed against the walls of the rooms. A dastar khwan (dining cloth) was spread out in the centre of the room and covered with small plates of sweets, such as noql (sugar-coated nuts), thermoses filled with the ubiquitous green or black tea, as well as urns with the popular Badakhshi beverage shir chai (milk tea). Mastawa, a lentil and barley soup, the meat of the qurbani (the animal sacrificed during the id ritual) as well as a specially made kulcha (hard biscuit), are the main dishes consumed during this time.

During the id festivities of 1998 and 1999, while the majority of Muslims in Faizabad and for that matter Badakhshan, adhered to the prescribed norms of namaz, other public cultural practices were either permitted — sport — or severely restricted, if not prohibited altogether — music or dancing. These bans corresponded with the rise of orthodox Islam in the province and the tacit and at times overt categorisation of all non-religious aesthetic entertainment as un-Islamic (see Chapter Five). In comparison, prior to 1992, aesthetic entertainment periodically accompanied such religious festivals. But during my field research, only the unaccompanied recitation of religious texts, which was characterised by mellifluous intonations, was condoned during the namaz, since this aesthetic cultural style is not marked in any Muslim society as a form of aesthetic practice (see Baily 2001:21; Kusic 1996).

Kulcha is a hard, round cookie which is prepared by women two to three days before the id celebration. Together with shir chai and halwa sabodi (a dessert made with milk and pistachios), these three food items were considered by most Badakhshis to be culinary specialities unique to Badakhshan.
Ismaili Religious Music

A critical difference between Badakhshan’s two major sectarian groups of the Hanafi Sunnis and Sevener Shiite Nizari Ismailis lies in their divergent attitudes towards the incorporation of aesthetic expression in their religious praxis. The majority Sunni population of the province is clearly guided by authorised interpretations of normative texts and their religious praxis, as elsewhere in Afghanistan, is marked by a total absence of instrumental musical accompaniment.\(^\text{22}\) In contrast, while their religious doctrines are less transparent to outsiders, Ismaili communities in Badakhshan are considerably more tolerant towards the inclusion of music and poetry.\(^\text{23}\) In fact, the incorporation of religious oral literature such as the *qasidas* or *ghazals* of Nasir Khusraw or other influential Persian Sufi poets, particularly Hafez and Rumi, and accompanied by vocal and instrumental music played on local and/or regional instruments (Pamiri rubab, daf, zirbaghali, and ghichak), is an important mode of cultural differentiation between the two Islamic sects.\(^\text{24}\) Under certain conditions such as religious education, musical accompaniment may serve as an acceptable feature of Ismaili religious praxis, whereas dance is always strictly prohibited in a religious context.\(^\text{25}\)

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\(^\text{22}\) Prior to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan however, the religious praxis of the Chishtiya order, which was particularly well-represented in Kabul and Herat, would have included vocal and instrumental music (Afghan rubab, harmonium, tabla) during religious events. Most members of this order became either refugees in Pakistan (predominantly Peshawar) or would have stopped using instruments during the period of Afghanistan’s cultural confusion (1992-2001). Personal communication with a pir of a Chishtiya-affiliated khanaqa in Peshawar, August 1998.

\(^\text{23}\) The incorporation of aesthetic expression in religious performances, Iranian Shiites engage each year in a major religious performance that includes aesthetic expression – the *taziye* (see Beeman 1992; Chelkowski 1979). In the context of this thesis however, I am specifically referring to Sevener Shiite Islam as practised locally in Badakhshan. A detailed analysis of the significant and complex Sunni-Ismaili differences in Badakhshan is not within the scope of this thesis.

\(^\text{24}\) A *qasida* is an Arabic noun for a lyrical ‘ode’, a common verse form used in classical Arab and Persian music (Shiloah 2001), whereas a *ghazal*, an Arabic noun for a short poem, literally means ‘to talk amorously with women’ (see Powers 2001). The *ghazal* is often influenced by Sufism; it is metaphysical and philosophical, while its common themes of love make it superficially appear to be sensual and erotic. Refer to the appended glossary (Appendix One) for further information on these poetic genres. The string and percussion instruments mentioned here will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter. The fourteenth century Persian poet Shamsuddin Mohammad, also known as Hafez (circa 1320-1389), was from Shiraz.

\(^\text{25}\) Khalifa Gul Mohammad, the local Ismaili leader in Chashma Bozurg, firmly stressed this point about the prohibition of dance in a religious setting in 1999. Many Afghan Ismaili Badakhshis accuse their relatives and co-Ismailis in Gorno-Badakhshan, Tajikistan, of having combined religious music with non-religious entertainment genres from the time they were
As a musical tradition, Ismaili religious music has received very limited scholarly attention. Although music research was undertaken in the Pamir region by the Russian musicologist Viktor Beliaev (1975) and the American ethnomusicologists Mark Slobin (1976) and Lorraine Sakata (1983), little was written on this genre until the Dutch linguist Gabrielle van den Berg and musicologist Jan van Belle conducted research into the religious music and poetry of the Ismailis in Gorno-Badakhshan in southern Tajikistan (van den Berg 1997; van den Berg 1998; van den Berg and van Belle 1993-1995). In 1998, during my first visit to the Ismaili region of Buz Dara in north-eastern Badakhshan, neither my informants nor the Ismaili authorities commented on the existence of religious music genres. Over the course of interviews about extant artistic practices, I was told only about the genres of music and dance that are performed predominantly during weddings. However, in the summer of 1999, when travelling in this region towards the end of my second field trip to Buz Dara, I was fortunate to record some religious Ismaili songs in Chashma Bozurg, a nearby village. After noticing numerous Pamiri *rubabs* (six-stringed lutes) in the houses of many local Ismaili residents in the Buz Dara region, I inquired about specialist performers of this local instrument. It was in this context that two local Ismaili political authorities, Habib Shah and Qasim, who were both *wakils* (delegates) and landowners (*zamindars*), informed me of the existence of two musicians in Chashma Bozurg. The first, Gul Mohammad, was the *khalifa* (Ismaili religious leader) of Chashma Bozurg, who had an excellent reputation in the wider Buz Dara communities as a performer of religious songs and as a player of the Pamiri *rubab*. The other musician was his brother Nasruddin, also a Pamiri *rubab* player.

Initially, I was unable to contact Gul Mohammad, since he was often away, visiting nearby villages in his capacity as *khalifa* and performing duties such as officiating at funeral services. When I finally met with him in his residence, he talked to me about an Ismaili religious music genre which he referred to as *qasida* (a form of religious poetry). Yet he stressed that this type of public music is usually only played by Ismailis during special religious events that integrated into the former Soviet Union. In comparison, in South Asia, Ismailis have developed an artistic genre, *ginans* (songs), which integrates poetry and music in local vernaculars and is performed in both religious and non-religious settings (see Nanji 1987).

26 Pamiri pertains to the Pamir region or an inhabitant of the Pamir region in north-eastern Badakhshan (see also Chapter Three). *Rubab* is a Persianised version of the Arabic noun for lute.
arise in the idle periods of the winter months. Unfortunately, the logistical inaccessibility of this isolated Ismaili territory in the Pamir mountains made it impossible for me to reach this region during winter and consequently, I was unable to attend any Ismaili religious ceremonies during my field research. However, Gul Mohammad, together with Nasruddin and Abdul Qadir, a fellow-villager from Chashma Bozurg, who played the zirbaghali (a goblet-shaped clay drum with a single membrane), offered to perform a number of religious songs in a non-religious and semi-public setting for the purpose of demonstration. This performance of religious Ismaili music is thus an example of how a religious event may be dynamically positioned on a continuum of private and public, in accordance with the particular context. While this music is traditionally performed publicly, it is only done so for the Ismailis of this region. Within the context of the influential Sunni minority who coexist with the Ismailis in this region, this genre is controversial and performances are thus private and secretive events. In my case, the religious music performance assumed the characteristics of a semi-public event. Whilst Chashma Bozurg is an Ismaili village, the performance took place during daylight but in the restricted space of Gul Mohammad’s house. It seemed that the performers preferred to keep the performance somewhat restricted, perhaps to ensure that it was not audible or visible to conservative Sunnis who may have been passing through the village.

The songs performed on this occasion were attributed to well-known Persian poets such as Shams-e Tabriz, Jalal al-Din Rumi and Nasir Khusraw, in addition to local poets. The reference to the poetry of Nasir Khusraw is especially significant, given that this classical Persian poet is one of the strongest spiritual influences for the Nizari Ismaili community of the Pamir region (see Chapter Five). The movie clip from this performance is entitled “Rawan” (literally, ‘flowing’ or ‘Soul/Life’) [view song rawan.mov; CD ROM 2], and is an example of one such local Ismaili musical genre, a qasida, which was performed in local Pamiri dialect and may be understood as an embodied, sonic cultural marker. The musicians knew the poet, title and the genre of this song, and had memorised it as an oral tradition, having adopted several stanzas from “Rawan” in Nasir Khusraw’s Diwan (‘Collection of Poems’) (Khusraw in Taqavi 1929:230-232). While the stanzas of this qasida

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27 Van den Berg and van Belle refer to the religious music of the Ismaili in Tajikistani Badakhshan as madah (panegry) and ghazal (see van den Berg and van Belle 1994:11).
are difficult to understand, a particularly noticeable feature is the repetition of the poet's name. This feature may be understood as an indexical sign, a direct link to the period of the poet's life in the eleventh century and perhaps by extension, to the expansion of Ismailism during the Fatimid period. Indeed, an historical link between Nasir Khusraw and musical expression in Ismailism was discussed in Chapter Five, with respect to the description by Mahmud bin Wali of his visit to Nasir Khusraw's shrine in Hazrat-e Sayyid in the seventeenth century.

The Pamiri rubab, the main instrument in this event and which was also referred to in Wali's account, continues to hold an important place in the culture of Badakhshan's Ismailis. This short-necked, fretless lute has a retracted peg box and a bowl-shaped belly, which gives this instrument a very different appearance from the more common Afghan rubab which will be discussed later in this chapter. Five of the six strings of the Pamiri rubab are attached to the peg box with wooden pegs, whereas the sixth and most superior string connects at mid-level to the neck of the lute. The rubab is plucked with a triangular-shaped wooden plectrum which is often attached to the back of the soundbox via a piece of gut string. A small wooden bridge is also inserted between the soundbox and the dorsal side of the strings. Since it is not played by any other ethnic or sectarian group in Afghanistan, the Pamiri rubab functions as an index of Ismaili identity. Moreover, it is contiguously related to Ismaili religious education and cosmology due to its use during the performances of religious texts. In contrast, the zirbaghali is a popular drum used in northern Afghanistan as a non-religious instrument.

Musically, the song differed from others that I recorded in Badakhshan. It was sung primarily by the two Pamiri rubab players Gul Mohammad and Nasruddin, while Abdul Qadir, the zirbaghali player provided additional backing vocals. Although it was not entirely clear as to who was leading what – the musicians' singing or their lute playing – the voices seemed to imitate the

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28 As a result of the Pamiri dialect, both Afghan and Persian translators encountered difficulties with the translation of this song.

29 The Pamiri rubab is tuned approximately to F Sharp, which seems to act here as a tonic. In Western music, the tonic may be understood as the key note of a major-minor tonal system. The first two strings of the Pamiri rubab, that is the bottom two strings, are tuned in unison approximately to the tonic of F Sharp, the third and fourth strings are also tuned in unison to a fifth to approximately C Sharp. The fifth string is tuned to a low F Sharp whereas, the sixth and uppermost string appears to be tuned to C Sharp. All strings of the Pamiri rubab are made of gut.
sound of the rubabs. The vocalisation was characterised by the singers’ momentary sustaining of the last syllable at the end of each poetic phrase as a long note. The pitch of their voices periodically seemed to go up a note and then down again. Their vocalisation was characterised by a ‘throaty’ and ‘nasal’ quality that seems to have been the result of ‘back of the throat’ singing. The mood of the qasida appeared to be extremely solemn. The rhythmic pattern was not even and appeared to fluctuate between duple and triple meters. Another unique characteristic was the percussive style of strumming effected by the rubab players, which had a rhythmic function and which markedly contrasted the more melodic strumming of the lute players in the forthcoming music examples. The drummer followed the strumming of the lutes and the rhythm of the song, in an ostinato style (that is with a frequently repeated musical structure), while also continuously appearing to be switching from a duple to a triple metre. From a Western musicological point of view, the musicians gave the impression of being ‘out of rhythm’ at the beginning of the track. In fact, it seems that the Pamiri rubab players corrected the rhythm of the zirbaghali player at the beginning of the song (0:15).

Analysis of the category of religious performances has confirmed that normative Islamic religious practices continued publicly in Badakhshan in 1998 and 1999. In contrast, the religious music of the Ismailis was performed publicly only for Ismailis. With respect to the presence of the politically dominant Sunni Badakhshis in the region, the religious music events occurred somewhat more privately and only in the absence of non-Islamis. The Ismaili religious song of “Rawan” is therefore the rarest form of musical artistic expression that I recorded during 1998 and 1999. Indeed, it would have been unthinkable for a Sunni mullah to condone such a musical performance in Badakhshan, or even to accompany religious texts with a musical instrument at

30 This singing style may be defined by Slobin’s (1976:125) description of “a parlando-rubato style (rhythm associated with declamatory speech patterns).”
31 These metres varied between a ‘shuffled’, uneven rhythm (\(1 \ 2 \ 3\)) and a ‘straight’, even rhythm (\(1 \ 2\)). The first two underscores here represent two uneven ‘shuffled’ beats between a rest, whereas the second underscores represent two even pulses.
32 The song’s melodic structure seems to have been performed over a whole octave ranging from approximately C to C. The lower pitch of C was used by the lutes as the tonal centre for the drone string. The musical phrase included an ascending pattern, then a pattern that descended to its resolution of the drone note. The middle of the phrase was usually performed against the drone, which was then resolved in the second half of the section. The slower pulse was played as a steady beat, whereas the more rhythmic pulse seemed uneven and fluctuated between duple and triple beats.
33 In this chapter, the numbers which appear in parentheses indicate the exact location of the text’s reference on the respective movie track.
any time. The determined local efforts to keep this aesthetic religious tradition alive during Afghanistan's Taliban era is highlighted in the following statement by Nasruddin, the Pamiri rubab player:

We have kept this music secret, since the Sunnis don't like it. During the previous regime, the Communist authorities were only interested in our entertainment music such as the music we perform at weddings and other parties, but they did not approve of our religious music. Now that the situation is likely to further deteriorate, we feel that it is important that we play our music to foreigners before it is lost altogether. When the Taliban arrive, the first thing that they will do is ban our music and destroy our instruments. 34

**Non-Religious Performances**

**Sporting Contests at National Commemorations**

*Nowruz* is a popular commemorative festival in Afghanistan and celebrates the appearance of the vernal equinox and the arrival of spring around March 21. 35 In Badakhshan, this festival also unofficially marks the end of winter and the concomitant isolation of many valleys and villages. 36 Until the rise of the Taliban, the *nowruz* festival was celebrated as a holiday throughout all Persian-speaking regions of Afghanistan, including the capital Kabul. Traditionally, it included music and dance performances and also recreational events such as equestrian sport, wrestling and amusements at the *nowruz* fair. In the 1960s, in some of Afghanistan's urban centres, the festival was celebrated for a period of forty days (see Slobin 1976:40). In Mazar-e Sharif, for example, a special entertainment quarter for music, dance and story-telling events was established by local authorities near the shrine and mosque of Hazrat Ali (see Slobin 1976:146). Slobin also mentions the highly popular performances of Pushtun dancing boys from the provinces of Kabul and Logar that occurred in Mazar-e Sharif during this time (1976:146). Similar *nowruz* celebrations were observed by Sakata in Herat in the late 1960s and early 1970s (Sakata 1983:18):

during the thirteen days following the first Wednesday of the New Year...the people

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34 Personal communication with Nasruddin, Chashma Bozurg, August 1999.
35 *Nowruz* is a Persian word that literally translates as 'new day' and refers to the New Year of many Persian-speaking communities. This festival seems to have incorporated Zoroastrian elements in which the new life of spring is seen to represent the triumph of goodness over the forces of evil which are portrayed by the darkness of winter.
36 Spring does not appear uniformly in all of the province's districts. In some high altitude districts, such as Buz Dara, winter continues throughout the month of March.
of Herat and the surrounding areas like to go on picnics and outings (mela). During this time people within the city gather in the parks to pass the day with friends, talking, eating and listening to music...This is a busy time for vendors and musicians...Some musicians go from house to house offering a little entertainment for a small fee to those who stay at home. Besides the traditional outings, sporting events such as wrestling matches are common at this time.

During the Communist governments (1978-1992), nowruz was celebrated in Faizabad for seven days.\(^{37}\) The evening before the festival commenced, women, boys and girls would generally paint their hands with henna, while men would generally colour a single finger. On the first morning of nowruz, many people, particularly women dressed in their new clothes, would visit the shrine of the local Naqshbandi Sufi poet Ghiasi, to witness the \textit{janda bala kardan} (Raising of the Standard).\(^{38}\) On that occasion, the descendants of Ghiasi were also known to give money and food to the poor. In the late morning, the residents of Faizabad would then proceed to the grounds of the provincial government to participate in a tree-planting ceremony. In the afternoon, men, women and children would congregate at a ground on the outskirts of Faizabad to visit the numerous stalls set up by government departments and individual families that offered non-alcoholic drinks and food. Occasionally, stall owners hired amateur or professional musicians from Badakhshan or even Kabul to provide entertainment.\(^{39}\)

The subsequent first Islamic Government under President Rabbani continued to endorse the nowruz tradition as a national holiday. In urban centres such as

\(^{37}\) The following accounts stem from the conversation with an expatriate Afghan, former member of the Badakhshi elite, 2000. While I have no records of the modern period in Badakhshan under King Zahir Shah and Mohammad Daoud (other than the accounts given by Slobin and Sakata), it seems likely that many of the observations recorded here also pertained to the period prior to Communist rule.

\(^{38}\) Ghiasi lived in the 1750s and, according to local legend, was originally from Jurm (Personal communication, elite Badakhshi, Faizabad, 1998). Since the local population at that time did not appreciate his Sufi inclinations, he emigrated to India. In old age, he returned to Badakhshan and died in Faizabad. His \textit{ziarat} is to be found in Faizabad's Shahr-e Kohné district. On the night preceding each of the festivals of nowruz and \textit{id}, local disciples gather at his shrine and silently pray and perform the practice of \textit{zikr}. I was told that, traditionally, at the beginning of the nowruz festival, the \textit{janda} (a standard, that is pieces of textiles strung on a pole) is raised at his shrine. This event parallels the raising of the flag at the mosque of Hazrat Ali in Mazar-e Sharif, but on a much smaller scale and with a smaller crowd. In this ritual in Faizabad, local Sufis gather at the shrine of Ghiasi for silent prayers, after which the old pole is lowered and people attempt to snatch the old, colourful materials that adorn it. These pieces of textile have spiritual value for the locals. Subsequently, the new flag with its new adornments is raised.

\(^{39}\) Personal communication from Badakhshi expatriate, Australia, 2001.
Public Performances in Badakhshan

Kabul, Mazar-e Sharif or Herat, special programs for farmers and recreational activities such as equestrian competitions were commonly organised; aesthetic practices, however, were not a major emphasis. In 1998, I observed two types of rule-bound games that had historically been played in accordance with oral traditions: *buzkashi* (equestrian tournament) and *kushti giri* (wrestling). Local informants stated that the European games of volleyball and soccer were also popular, but were restricted by the lack of available specialised equipment. In comparison, the local sports of *buzkashi* and wrestling required little, if any, formal equipment.

On 28 March 1998, I participated in the final days of the *nowruz* festivities at the *maidan-e sang-e mahr* (the ground of the Mahr Stone), a public space in Faizabad’s Shahr-e Naw district, the history of which was described in Chapter Four. During Badakhshan’s modern period under King Zahir Shah (until 1973), President Mohammad Daoud (1973-1978) and the Communist leaders (up until the late 1980s), the *maidan-e sang-e mahr* had functioned as the site for Faizabad’s temporary outdoor theatre. This theatre was run by students and occasionally, plays were performed at public festivals such as *jeshen*. However, with the onset of fighting between government troops loyal to the Communist regime and mujahideen forces in the late 1980s, the theatre had ceased to operate. For the purpose of the *nowruz* equestrian tournament in March 1998, however, a VIP lounge had been temporarily assembled on the *maidan-e sang-e mahr*, at the top of the former outdoor entertainment structure.

The participants of this annual public celebration comprised Faizabad’s adult male population as well as local boys and girls who had travelled by foot, horse, donkey, or on the back of a Kamaz (a Soviet-made transport truck), to attend the primary entertainment attractions for this *nowruz*: an equestrian and wrestling tournament and the typical *charkhak* (a fair). After the quiet and relative solitude of winter, the *nowruz* fair is a chance for men to socialise and for children to play before they must devote their lives to studying and working to support their families. In 1998, the *charkhak* offered a range of recreational activities such as *charkh-e falak* (ferris wheels) and merry-go-rounds once common at these fairs.

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40 Personal communication from Dr Najibullah Lafraie, March 2001.
41 Sport balls were not readily available in the main bazaars of Faizabad, Dasht-e Islam and Bagh-e Zard and had to be imported from Pakistan, Iran or Tajikistan.
42 This *maidan-e sang-e mahr* is different from the *id* ground mentioned earlier.
43 Personal communication with a member of Badakhshi elite, Faizabad, 1998.
44 The fair is locally referred to as *charkhak*, possibly referring to the amusement activities such as *charkh-e falak* (ferris wheels) and merry-go-rounds once common at these fairs.
amusements including rifle shooting, manually-operated merry-go-rounds and swings, as well as stalls and hawkers selling pistachio nuts, sultanas, biscuits, sugar-coated almonds, roasted chick peas, sunflower seeds, cups of Kokcha River water, and homemade soft drinks. Men gathered at the samovars (temporary tea-houses) and engaged in conversation with friends. The seats of one of the merry-go-rounds built during the Communist period were shaped in the form of military rockets and planes, while those of another had seats shaped like horses. Local boys playfully expressed aggressive male behaviour as imitating mujahideen or chapandazan (riders), they 'rode' the merry-go-rounds' rockets, planes or buzkashi horses. Horses and rockets were thereby conjoined as past and present indices of male aggression

The highlight of the annual nowruz festivities in Badakhshan continues to be the traditional horse tournament buzkashi. Historically, buzkashi in this province accompanied special events such as weddings, the end of Ramadan, the birthday of King Zahir Shah, visits by VIPs, other festivities such as jeshen (Afghanistan's Independence day), and, as in this case, nowruz (see Gratzl and Grancy 1973:64; Kussmaul 1965:64). Buzkashi is an open and vivid expression of masculinity, a display of "courage, strength, [and] dominance" (Azoy 1982:12). For the duration of this festive week, the equestrian tournament was held for approximately three hours each afternoon in Faizabad on the maidan-e sang-e mahr. Prominent leaders such as President Rabbani and the provincial governor of Badakhshan, Sayyid Amin Tareq, as well as important United Front commanders, were seated on the temporary VIP stage and were provided with a basic tea service. The almost exclusively male audience encircled the entire buzkashi grounds, with the majority concentrated near the officials and the fair. As a result of the orthodox Islamic values espoused by the Rabbani government at that time, clearly demarcated male and female domains existed

45 Samovar is a Russian term for a teahouse, otherwise known in Dari as a chaikhana.
46 Chapandazan is the Persian plural of chapandaz (rider). This Dari term is mostly used in northern Afghanistan and stems from the noun chapan (coat). In the past, a buzkashi champion, a chapandaz, was presented with a chapan as a prize, hence the name.
47 Interestingly, the horse is a key theme in the cultural system of Badakhshan, being strongly linked to nomadism and pastoralism, and of course, vital to the traditional sport of buzkashi (see below).
48 The Persian word buzkashi literally means 'goat-snatching'. This equestrian game is common not only to Persian and Turkic-speaking peoples in northern Afghanistan, but also throughout the wider trans-Oxus region of Central Asia (see Parkes 1996:44). It is not exactly clear when the goat was replaced by a calf. Informants told me that the calf is more suitable to this game, perhaps referring to its greater sturdiness.
throughout the province and women were unable to participate actively in public celebrations. Nevertheless, in 1998, some sixty women watched the festivities from a distance by standing on the flat roofs of residences near to the field. Their white, green or blue burqas rendered them only faintly noticeable. It seems that even during the Communist period, however, women rarely attended buzkashi or public festivals in Badakhshan, but used this opportunity to visit relatives or to organise a picnic with the friends and relatives of recently married women, since the remainder of Faizabad was virtually deserted [view movie clip buzkashi.mov; CD ROM 1].

The buzkashi ground is roughly the size of two-to-three soccer fields and was marked by a small circle engraved in the dry soil and by a blue flag pole placed at the opposite end of the field near the fair. Male riders aim to score points by grabbing the headless body of a calf, which acts as a ball, riding around the flag pole and then placing the calf with great skill in the designated circle before another competitor snatches it again. The challenge is to grab the carcass, lift it to the saddle and then to ride with it while being attacked by members of the opposite team who aim to prevent the carcass from being placed in the circle. In order to avoid falling off their horses, the chapandazan necessarily adapted their trunks in a ‘postural’ supportive fashion, while using their arms in a ‘gestural’ manner. Due to the large number of competitors in the Faizabad tournament, and the concomitant high risk of injury, the riders, whilst confined to the saddles of their horses, skilfully ‘shaped’ their bodies by extending their torsos to the limit of their kinespheres. This shaping was especially evident when the competitors were engaged in melées and when their bodies had to adapt quickly to the limited available space. Most movements were performed as ‘directional, spoke-like’ actions with a ‘bound’ movement quality. Riders’ legs in particular were ‘bound’ due to the need to hold on, while their arms were freer and alternated between holding and pulling. This effort was prevalent throughout the game, since any relaxation was potentially hazardous. ‘Strong’ physical actions were executed in grabbing the calf and galloping to escape a melée, sudden and ‘quick’ actions were essential to charge rapidly so as to score a point, whereas ‘sustained’ movements were required to hold onto the calf while others attempted to pull the carcass away.

49 Personal communication with female Badakhshi expatriate, Australia, 2000.
50 See Appendix Four for LMA terms.
Chapter Six

The calves are usually donated by the government and are ritualistically decapitated on the field; the headless carcass can easily weigh up to seventy kilograms. A good chapandaz therefore not only has to be an excellent horseman but also a good wrestler in order to fend off many co-contestants. Different teams of chapandazan, who are marked by either red or green ribbons pinned onto the back of their shirts, compete for the calf. Once a rider has triumphantly dropped the carcass in the nominated circle, usually to the accompaniment of the entertaining commentary of the announcer and the roaring applause of the audience, the chapandaz approaches the refereeing officials and is firstly presented with a red ribbon which is attached to one of the horse’s ears, and then secondly and most usually by the owner of the horse, with a wad of Afghan money or occasionally with US dollar notes.

The physical and often aggressive nature of buzkashi means that injuries are virtually inevitable, but due to the excellent training of the horses and the incredible coordination between riders and horses, fatal accidents are relatively rare and the hooves of the horses generally stay clear of a dismounted rider (see also Dupree 1970:18). This is fortunate given that none of the riders wears any form of protective clothing. Strict sporting dress regulations, as demanded by Taliban authorities, were not enforced during the buzkashi tournament in Faizabad. Indeed, for the most part, the horsemen in 1998 wore a range of clothing styles of their own choosing: the shalwar qamiz, the ubiquitous Afghan male attire, military uniforms representing the Islamic State of Afghanistan, as well as the more traditional buzkashi outfit consisting of a short, dense cotton jacket, shawalak (thick calf-length woollen trousers), and muza (knee-length boots).

One of the most distinguishing features of a chapandaz is his headwear. Many riders don a telpak, the traditional buzkashi fur-trimmed hat, whereas others prefer to wear a taqin (local skull caps) and a turban, the headwear commonly worn by Badakhshi men. Some competitors, however, appeared in pakol's

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51 Over the last two decades and reflecting a strong Pakistani influence, the shalwar qamiz has become the most common form of attire worn by Afghan men. It consists of a long, loose shirt that reaches to the level of the knee and baggy trousers that are fastened by a piece of string. Formerly, a shirt and trousers were known in Afghanistan as tombon wa pirahan.

52 During my research, the military clothing itself was an index of the Rabbani-led Jamiat faction with many of its members originating from Rabbani’s Faizabad shura. This clothing differed slightly from that of Massoud’s shura-e nazary military personnel.

53 A telpak is a fur-trimmed hat and is possibly an Uzbek noun. A taqin is an Arabic noun for a skullcap. In Badakhshan, the taqin is usually embroidered and has a curved top and is worn under the turban.
(rolled woollen caps), which were symbolic of their political affiliation with the Jamiat-e Islami and United Front and indexically linked with Ahmad Shah Massoud who was well-known for his appearances in his trademark cap. The headwear in particular served as an index for political factions, since a hat’s form directly pinpointed a player’s political affiliation, and was clearly understood as such by both participants and members of the audience. In contrast, other types of headwear such as taqins and their accompanying turbans were indexically associated with local culture and traditional costumes that had been worn prior to the civil war. The fact that some participants did not use any head covering at all was also significant. Such acts of sartorial defiance would have been punishable offences in Taliban-held territories since they contravened the militia’s code of appropriate Islamic dress. It is possible that these competitors were defying what seemed to them to be nonsensical regulations, their bare heads signifying their freedom in the comparatively more liberal environment of Badakhshan.

An integral feature of this equestrian Afghan heritage is the participation of the audience. Not unlike the bulls charging through the narrow streets in Spain during local festivals, the buzkashi audience in Badakhshan also seeks the thrills of being as close as possible to the action. As soon as the riders charge through the field, boundaries between riders and audience become very loose and the horses, often covered in clouds of dust, charge in a seemingly uncontrolled manner towards and sometimes even through the crowd, regardless of any obstacles such as tea tents and sweet-sellers who may be in the way. It is significant that sport competitions were not only condoned by Badakhshan’s political leadership in 1998 but that they were held during such special events as the pre-Islamic festivals of nowruz and the non-religious nationalistic festival of jeshen. Spectators were permitted to express their

54 The pakol is a flat topped woollen cap with a folded/rolled lower end. The cap was possibly introduced to North West Frontier Province and Northern Areas region of India during the British colonial period. The Nuristani in north-eastern Afghanistan also wear a similar cap. During the jihad against the Soviet-backed Communist regime, the Jamiat-e Islami under the military leadership of Ahmad Shah Massoud popularised this cap as a symbol of the mujahideen.
55 The significance of the headwear was made apparent to me when after I purchased a pakol in Faizabad, locals would walk up and comment on my affiliation with Massoud. Later, I found the wearing of a baseball cap to be more neutral.
56 I was told to ‘duck’ when a group of riders was approaching at incredible speed and was led to believe that at the right time, the riders would instinctively jump over me. Unfamiliar with this tradition, I chose instead to turn and run along with many of the other bystanders.
57 It is important to appreciate that while these festivals are either pre- or non-Islamic celebrations, they have over time incorporated Islamic elements.
enjoyment of this non-religious entertainment by physically and emotionally responding to the game with clapping, whistling and cheering.\(^{58}\) The audience became especially animated when riders approached the crowd, tackled other riders (2:35), or scored a point (3:15).\(^{59}\) The *chapandazan* also reacted emotionally to the game, yelling and screaming when having to dodge other riders or upon scoring a point. Such modes of response – clapping, screaming, whistling, and extreme emotional reactions – were forbidden by the Taliban in the territories under their control. The sanctioning in Badakhshan of these non-religious interpretants thus stood in marked contrast to the religious edicts of the Taliban who perceived this game as potentially distracting players and members of the audience from the worship of Allah. In Taliban-approved sports, only religious chants that included the Arabic phrase *Allah-u Akbar* (God is Great) were permitted as modes of emotional expression (see Reuters 2001).

On the last day of the festival, the last *chapandaz* to score a point in the tournament is hailed as the overall winner of the *nowruz buzkashi* tournament and is then awarded a green flag.\(^{60}\) The champion rider proudly parades through the crowd, receiving money from supporters in acknowledgment of his outstanding sporting achievement.\(^{61}\) The colour green, by convention, symbolises Islamic values such as peace and prosperity.\(^{62}\) The flag paraded by the winner is thus dynamically connected with the literal concept of ‘carrying Islam’. In this context, the green flag is a recent development, superseding the red flag that was used during the *buzkashi* tournaments of the Communist regime.\(^{63}\) It thus simultaneously stands for victory and Islamic values but also symbolises the importance of Islam in Badakhshan. In contrast, during the early Communist period under Taraki, the bright red flag linked victory to Communist ideals and the Soviet state (see Chapter Four).

With its combination of sport, game and artistry, *buzkashi* is clearly a popular recreational activity. Yet the equestrian event can also be interpreted as a

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\(^{58}\) In Peircean terms these expressions may be referred to through the use of emotional and energetic interpretants.

\(^{59}\) The numbers in the parentheses refer to the time codes (minutes:seconds) on the QuickTime movie tracks.

\(^{60}\) Prior to Communist and Islamic governance, the final winner would have received a *chapan* (coat) as a reward.

\(^{61}\) The buzkashi tournament concluded in the afternoon of 30 March 1998.

\(^{62}\) Since the exact origins of this sign are not known, it hence serves as a symbol.

\(^{63}\) Personal communication with Badakhshi expatriate, 2001.
means of expressing political matters, an opportunity for political rivals to
display their authority and to act out their differences.64 A vivid metaphorical
expression of “chaotic, uninhibited, and uncontrollable...competition” (Azoy
1982:3), it is valued not only as a local expression of northern Afghan cultural
heritage, but as a means of acting out political allegiances and agendas. In
1998, many of the riders were patronised by commanders who were usually
affiliated with a particular Islamist party active in Badakhshan. In fact, many of
the competition horses are owned by landowners or military commanders who
lend them to the best horsemen.65 However, some riders also represent and
compete for a specific municipality or village.

Certainly, subtle and even overt political agendas were evident during the
nowruz celebration in Faizabad in 1998. The shift from play to politics became
especially apparent when a heated dispute between two chapandazan broke out
after an on-field collision. These riders were not only sportsmen, but
commanders from different political groups within the United Front (Jamiat-e
Islami and Hezb-e Islami). Anticipating a potentially volatile outcome to this
political feud, particularly since in the past such confrontations had regularly
turned into armed duels, the audience quickly left the buzkashi grounds and
raced to their homes. While the chapandazan themselves were not armed, their
supporters who were standing nearby in the audience, would more than likely
have been carrying weapons. These potent conditions of possibility inherent in
buzkashi are encapsulated by what Azoy describes as the fine line between
“non-serious play and non-playful seriousness” (Azoy 1982:10).

Historically, until the advance of the Taliban and the disintegration of central
government in Kabul, buzkashi was employed to serve national political
agendas. Since the early twentieth century, in the northern provinces of
Afghanistan, equestrian events tended to be sponsored by Pushtun provincial
governors at religious or national events (Azoy 1982:86). Only on such

64 Buzkashi’s political game is brilliantly described in Azoy’s monograph (1982).
65 The equestrian horses are well-groomed and cared for. The ownership of buzkashi horses is
regarded by Badakhshi communities as a sign of prestige and, consequently, the price of a
buzkashi horse is much higher than that of a good riding horse. The diet of a competition horse
consists of an extraordinary menu – high quality barley, eggs and butter – which is of a higher
standard than that of many peasants. Given the combination of political turmoil, harsh
economic conditions and widespread famine, this special treatment seems quite remarkable.
Prior to and in between the buzkashi season, which lasts approximately from March to
September, the horses graze on nearby meadows, sometimes even on high mountain pastures,
whereas in winter these competition horses are kept near the villages.
occasions as weddings or parties, was buzzkashi patronised by regional hosts.\textsuperscript{66} As early as the 1950s, national governments aimed to utilise this northern Afghan cultural practice and its attributes of bravery, strength, skill, and invincibility, to serve their own institutional and nationalistic interests in constructing an Afghan identity. Later, during the modern period of Afghanistan, the equestrian game became a popular stadium sport in Kabul on days of national and religious significance (Azoy 1982:83, 88).\textsuperscript{67}

The fact that both the Islamic State of Afghanistan and provincial authorities condoned buzzkashi as a cultural practice in Badakhshan during nowruz in 1998, in contradistinction to the bans imposed on this performance by the Taliban, means that the entire performance can be seen as a political statement. Indeed, in the political climate of rising Islamic orthodoxy, buzzkashi was an extremely rare event even in northern Afghanistan. In addition, extreme poverty and economic hardship made it difficult to maintain well-fed and trained buzzkashi horses, or to find sponsorship for major tournaments in Badakhshan. Certainly, there were no confirmed reports of the continuation of buzzkashi in Taliban regions. It seems most likely that their censorship of this cultural practice related to their interpretation of buzzkashi as a form of non-religious entertainment and consequently as haram (illegitimate). Further, it is doubtful whether the Taliban militia would have been willing to support a non-Pushtun and non-Islamic cultural practice that was so potently linked to northern Afghanistan.

The buzzkashi tournament is a traditional practice, an indexical link to Badakhshan’s cultural heritage. In the context of the prohibition of non- and pre-Islamic practices by extremist Sunni Muslims in Afghanistan – particularly the Taliban and to a lesser degree, ultra-conservative Muslims in Badakhshan – this game also manifested tensions between Afghan and Islamic identities. While buzzkashi is a valued Afghan cultural practice, it is not particularly Islamic, although it has to a degree incorporated Islamic elements, for example, the halal slaughtering of the calves before and during the tournament.

\textsuperscript{66} At the wedding of a wealthy family in Badakhshan, for example, a buzzkashi tournament would usually last for a week (Personal communication with expatriate Badakhshi, April 2001).

\textsuperscript{67} Mohammad Daoud may be particularly credited for patronising this game during his time as Prime Minister (1953-1963), and then later as President (1973-1978) (see Azoy 1982:83). Following the Marxist coup in 1978 and throughout the Communist regime, consecutive leaders continued to sponsor buzzkashi on national and religious occasions as an important form of Afghan cultural heritage (Azoy 1982:84).
Furthermore, the tensions expressed through *buzkashi* are also associated with ethnicity. The Taliban who were mostly Pushtun and thus did not traditionally play *buzkashi*, did not approve of the predominantly Uzbek, Tajik and Turkmen game. However, their censorship of this non-Pushtun practice was legitimised through their extremist interpretation of the normative texts.

While the *buzkashi* tournament was without doubt the major attraction of the *nowruz* celebration in Faizabad, another highlight was a wrestling competition whose athletes, like the *chapandazan*, came from all districts in the province. Wrestling is a popular sport not only in Badakhshan, but throughout Afghanistan and Central Asia. The provincial government in Badakhshan during the Rabbani Presidency (1992-2001), for example, organised annual wrestling tournaments during *jeshen* as well as in the autumn.\(^68\) In Badakhshan, wrestling games, known as *kushti giri*, are performed during the spring and summer months and at dusk throughout the province small groups of men and boys would frequently gather at public outdoor spaces for practice matches.\(^69\)

A wrestling contest was held on the second last day of the *nowruz* festival. The two wrestlers were dressed in a short *chap* (a martial art-like cotton shirt), a *shawalak* (woollen trousers) and a *futa* (a long belt),\(^70\) which strongly resembled a judo outfit and which revealed parts of their bare chests, arms and legs. The rules of this ancient sport demand the display of strength through the overpowering of an opponent by holding him at his *futa* and throwing him to the ground so that he lands on his shoulders. Since there seem to be no edicts against this sport in Islam’s authoritative texts, wrestling is generally condoned under Islamic law. In theory, therefore, it was not explicitly banned in Taliban-controlled areas.\(^71\) Nevertheless, in order to participate in any of the sporting activities periodically condoned by the Taliban, athletes were required to interrupt their games during official prayer times and to adhere to the Taliban’s

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\(^{68}\) Private as well as government wrestling clubs existed in Kabul during, and probably before, the Rabbani years.  
\(^{69}\) *Kushti giri* is a common Persian noun for wrestling. This term is also used in Iran and Kabul and is derived from the verb *kushti geraftan* (to wrestle). In Badakhshan, the term *qustin* was also used to describe the recreational practice of wrestling.  
\(^{70}\) A *futa* is a five metre long belt that is tied around the waist of the wrestler and holds his shirt together.  
\(^{71}\) Under the Taliban, the practice of sport was ambiguous and authorities often vacillated as to its legality. Hence, sporting events were censored, then permitted, only to be censored again at any time and without any warning (see Baily 2001). These quixotic policies were monitored and enforced by the militia’s Religious Police, the Department for the Promotion of Virtue and Suppression of Vice.
austere idea of Islamic deportment which demanded that all limbs remained covered at all times, that a skullcap be worn and that men grow a beard at least three finger widths long (see AP 2000). In spite of the Taliban's strict policies on sport, it is interesting to note that cricket, a truly British and non-Islamic game, was encouraged by 'friendly' military advisers from cricket-obsessed Pakistan, possibly to break the isolation of the Taliban which had resulted from the sanctions imposed by the United States and United Nations. In this case, Taliban authorities were able to make an exception to their strict dress code and accepted cricket's standard costume (BBC 2001). 

As can be seen from the accompanying movie clip, the conditions of deportment were much less stringent in Badakhshan during the nowruz festival in 1998. It is interesting to note also that the pahlawan (wrestling champion) is treated in a very similar fashion to a chapandaz [view movie clip wrestling.mov; CD ROM 1]. The wrestling competition also has a complex historical background. This sport was mentioned in Ferdowsi's Persian epic Shahnama and is related to both pre-Islamic and Persian Islamic cultural heritage. The pahlawan (victor in this physical contest) is sometimes associated either explicitly or implicitly with the ancient Persian hero Rustam. In terms of a conscious association, the wrestling champion thereby

72 Sports such as wrestling, that were believed to have been practised during Mohammad's time, were generally favoured, but some modern games such as volleyball, soccer, tae-kwando, and cricket were progressively tolerated by moderate factions within the Taliban (see Clark 2000). Boxing, for example, was thought by Taliban authorities to have the potential to cause head injuries and consequently was banned on the grounds that it was an un-Islamic sport. A more likely reason for this prohibition, however, was the international boxing association's 'un-Islamic' dress requirement, which demanded that athletes wear shorts and a singlet, thus exposing forbidden parts of their bodies (see AFP 2000a). For this reason, Afghan boxers were banned from competing in Pakistan in 1998 and they were suspended by the International Olympic Committee in the same year (see BBC 2000). Not surprisingly, particularly given their uncompromising prohibition of women's participation in sport, the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan was not allowed to participate at the Sydney 2000 Olympics.

73 In the Taliban's appropriation of cricket, the sporting outfit completely covered the players' limbs. This decision was testimony to the Taliban's ideological inconsistency with respect to bodily practices and further added to the ambivalence with which they were viewed. The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan's first cricket team consisted entirely of ethnic Pushtuns whose first international match took place in and against Pakistan in May 2001 (see McCarthy 2001), a fact which confirms Pakistan as one of the Taliban militia's main political allies. In a perhaps macabre twist to their new found love of this British colonial sport, a team of Afghan cricketers competed in Pakistan in October 2001 while the home towns of the players were being bombed by US planes (see AFP 2001).

74 The legendary pahlawan, wrestling champion, in Ferdowsi's eleventh century epic poem (1990 (1967):76-77) is called Rustam - a hero who constantly saved his country from evil forces:
enters into a “direct and existential connection” with this mythical figure (Zeman 1977:37). At the same time, the pahlawan is also an index of his local community and ethnic identity. As with the buzkashi tournament, the excitement of the members of the audience was expressed physically through clapping and waving. After the wrestling match, the winner was celebrated as if, like Rustam, he had just defeated an enemy in battle. The pahlawan’s supporters and fellow villagers kissed and hugged him, forms of intimacy that in other social contexts in Afghanistan, would be regarded as uncharacteristic behaviour among adult men. And like the chapandaz, the pahlawan also received monetary gifts that signified the prestige of victory.

In comparison with buzkashi, however, the rules of the wrestling competition in Faizabad in 1998 were much simpler, the duration of the contests much briefer, and the overall structure of this game appeared to be less chaotic. The posture of the competitors was characterised by a wide body stance which provided them with maximum support and stability while their trunks were mostly fixed in a forwardly inclined position. Their main actions were directed in a sagittal plane, but they periodically also moved strongly from side-to-side. A contestant’s strategic changes in body height were used in a ‘shaping’ fashion so as not to allow his opponent to maintain his own posture. The arms of the wrestlers were mainly involved in holding onto an opponent’s belt and costume, and a combination of ‘sustained’ and ‘sudden’ movements, such as pushes and pulls, were performed whilst occasionally twisting the trunks, to surprise an opponent or to throw him off balance. The prime body actions thus consisted of ‘spoke-like directional’ and some rotational movements (0:31); contestants pushed their weight forwards in a sagittal direction against each other, thereby creating an oppositional effect. These effort qualities markedly contrasted those of the dancers that will be discussed in later sections of this chapter as well as in Chapter Seven.

The virtues and strengths of the Badakhshi people including their determination to remain firmly grounded in a moderate Islamic and, at that time, anti-Taliban society, are expressed in these sport practices. A wrestling contest, even more so than a buzkashi tournament, has the potential to

[Rustam:] Our custom is not this, and our law demands a different practice. When a man engages in a wrestling contest and thrusts his older opponent’s head into the dust, he does not on first pressing his back down on to the ground cut off his head, even to exact vengeance. If he brings him down a second time, he receives the title of ‘Lion’ for his prowess, and it is then lawful for him to sever the head from the body. Such is our custom.
iconically represent virtually any adversarial struggle, such as between two villages, two political parties, or two religious factions, in terms of conflict and ultimate victory. Indeed, one may speculate that the popularity of the highly competitive sports of wrestling and *buzkashi* in Badakhshan may be at least in part related to the ubiquity of warfare in Afghanistan.\(^{75}\)

**Public Aesthetic Performances**

This discussion of cultural practices has thus far concentrated on performances of a religious nature and those of sports contests which occurred during major non-religious festivals. While the recreational events of *buzkashi* and wrestling and amusement activities such as those associated with the *nowruz* festival were not frequently evident in Badakhshan during the period of my research, they were nevertheless practised publicly and without censorship by the Islamic State of Afghanistan, the provincial administration or local authorities. All of these cultural practices remained relatively unrestricted and unaffected by Afghanistan’s ‘Talibanisation’. In comparison, the performance of aesthetic practices was contingent upon the attitudes of local military commanders whose conservative or even extremist interpretations of Sharia law tended to be asserted by the public presence of armed soldiers in the urban areas of Faizabad, Dasht-e Islam and Bagh-e Zard. This military presence effectively served to reinforce the tacit prohibition of non-religious aesthetic entertainment. Moreover, the assassinations of well-known Badakhshi musicians such as Faiz-e Mangal by mujahideen were still current topics of conversation in 1998 and 1999.\(^{76}\) As a consequence, music was very rarely publicly performed in geo-strategic areas that were under the control of Sunni Badakhshi Tajik, Uzbek and Baluch military commanders who were aligned with the Jamiat-e Islami or Hezb-e Islami. Instead, as will be described in Chapter Seven, the infrequent performance of music arose mostly in the

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\(^{75}\) Accordingly, one possible interpretation of Ferdowsi's passage mentioned above in footnote 74 may be that the holding of the head of a wrestling opponent to the ground may equal a metaphorical death (cf. Lewis 1992:2, 167-168). The adjective ‘metaphorical’ is understood here in a Peircean context, that is as an iconic/indexical relation in language. In the example of a verbal play in Brazilian capoeira, Lewis (1992:167-168) describes another embodied practice that may express a metaphorical death through a “killing intent”.

\(^{76}\) Like Bazgul Badakhshi, the musician Faiz-e Mangal from central Badakhshan had come to prominence with the establishment of national television during the Taraki regime from 1978. He was killed by mujahideen as his repertoire of songs was interpreted as being influenced by Communist ideology.
security of the private domain and accordingly these practices became clandestine or ‘underground’ in nature.

The accounts and analyses of a limited number of aesthetic practices that were publicly performed in Badakhshan during this period of cultural upheaval and which were largely perceived by the province’s conservative Islamist authorities to be controversial if not illegitimate, thus complement the preceding discussion of public religious and sport practices. Chapter Seven will specifically address aesthetic performances which arose in semi-public and private domains.

Unlike towns in neighbouring Central and South Asian countries where music is an essential part of the background soundscape, arising either via the live performance of musicians or, at the very least, from a tape recorder or radio, Badakhshi bazaars, tea-houses and residences were devoid of music during the time of my field research. Although small battery-operated transistor radios existed in most settlements, their use was rationed, in part due to a shortage of batteries both in terms of quality and quantity, and consequently, they served the sole purpose of providing national and international Pushto and Dari news broadcasts.

**Flute Music during nowruz**

The public celebrations of Faizabad’s 1998 *nowruz* festival did not include any official public or even private programs of aesthetic performances. This contrasted with their inclusion in the *nowruz* celebrations of neighbouring Persian-speaking countries such as Iran or Tajikistan. On *joma* of that festive week, however, I noticed an amateur musician in a scenic spot near a popular walking path. Hamid, a Pushtun Badakhshi from Darwish Deh, one of the surrounding villages of Faizabad, was sitting on a grassy patch next to a fruit orchard, with the Kokcha River at his back, and was entertaining an attentive friend by playing tunes on his flute. Although in a slightly secluded public space that was relatively removed from any residences, the two young men

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77 Hamid’s family was forcefully relocated to Badakhshan from southern Afghanistan during the reign of Amir Abdur Rahman Khan at the end of the nineteenth century. Like many other ethnic Pushtuns living in Badakhshan, Hamid does not know his family’s Pushto language, but speaks in the local Badakhshi Dari dialect.
could be seen by passing pedestrians and soldiers. Indeed, promenading along
the Kokcha River is a popular leisure activity for groups of male friends
especially during holidays. The sounds of the rapidly flowing river however,
effectively dampened the sound of the flute so that it could not be easily heard
from the main walking path. Yet, whether it was unheard or benignly tolerated,
this relatively public performance of music did not provoke a response among
Faizabad’s generally conservative population or even from the United Front
soldiers. To some degree, this may be attributable to the semi-public/semi-
private location of the flute performance, but it seems also that the musician’s
unobtrusive playing was generally perceived to be a harmless or innocent
aesthetic activity. Certainly, in a more public space such as in front of a
mosque, the performance would have been undoubtedly regarded as unseemly
and quite possibly would have led to a direct confrontation with religious
and/or military authorities.

In other regions of Badakhshan, I also regularly observed boys and shepherds
playing on homemade flutes. The continuation of this aesthetic practice
highlights some of the inherent tensions in Badakhshan society, namely that a
continuum of ‘appropriate’ aesthetic actions exists wherein some instruments
are categorised as more legitimate than others. Although music was generally
not encouraged in Badakhshan during the Taliban era, instrumental flute music
seemed, to a degree, to be permissible. Why the performance of other
instruments was opposed more vehemently is not entirely clear, but it may
relate to the fact that lutes and drums were commonly used during the
monarchic period at the court or during secular entertainment patronised by
elite families.

The amateur musician Hamid performed on a *tula*, a horizontal six-holed metal
flute, on a whole scale of eight notes. This is a popular instrument throughout
Badakhshan, although the vertically held wooden flutes are probably more
common. Many young boys are given crude homemade *tulas* as presents
during the *nowruz* and *id* festivals. Young shepherds traditionally play them
during their lengthy stays on *ailaq* (mountain pastures) and when droving
flocks through passing villages. Local tunes, including the popular folk genre
of *falak* (local genre of folk song), are the most common forms of music

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78 *Tula* is a Dari term for a wooden, vertically-held flute with six frontal finger holes and one
dorsal thumb hole.

79 The *falak* may be understood as a reflection of the environment in which the tune or song
originates (see Shahrani 1973:68). This genre is especially common in Badakhshan and is
performed on the Badakhshi tula. Hamid also performed loose interpretations of popular folk/pop songs from the 1970s, such as those of the now legendary Ahmad Zahir. The example I have chosen is a falak [view track localtune.mov; CD ROM 1].

Hamid’s performance created an evocative ambience. When I asked him what the song meant to him, he explained that “this music makes me think of the people I love”. It seems then that the tune brought Hamid into “immediate contact with the song’s objects” (Zeman 1977:32) and generated feelings of love and longing. Hamid’s experiential feeling thus corresponds to Peirce’s emotional interpretant (see Turino 1999:224) and may also be understood in terms of a ‘First’, that is a “fundamental...phenomenal state more basic than thinking” (Lewis 1995:236). The immediacy of the connection between Hamid’s emotions and his musical rendition is clearly reflected in his attempts to articulate his feelings by using the word ‘love’, which in this context seems to have implied unrequited love. Hamid’s statement of longing for “the people I love” touched on some controversial issues. As a consequence of Afghanistan’s strict gender separation, which is enforced at all levels of society, it is extremely difficult for unmarried youths or even adults to meet members of the opposite sex. Nightly curfews during the political crisis had even made it difficult for friends of the same sex to get together.

noted for its sad expression. Lorraine Sakata translates a falak as “‘sky’...[which] metaphorically means ‘fortune’ or ‘destiny’...Falak is also used in a general sense meaning ‘verse’, paralleling the term bait used in other parts of the country...The feeling of sadness stems from a longing for a lover, friends, family and home” (1983:54).

Ahmad Zahir, the son of the former Prime Minister Abdul Zahir (1971-1972), was Afghanistan’s most popular singer, integrating traditional Afghan, classical Indian, Western classical, and modern Western musical genres. He was mysteriously killed in 1979 in an allegedly politically motivated assassination (Madadi and Baily 2001) under the early Communist regime of Hafizullah Amin. Since the defeat of the Communist government, Ahmad Zahir has become almost a cult figure, idolised by many Afghans, especially young people.

With the exception of “Rawan”, I created the titles of the movie clips based on the responses I received from the performers when asked the titles of particular pieces they performed. Usually the musicians responded in terms of the genre (ghazai, rubai, qasida, falak, Kataghani, etc.) or by mentioning a phrase or word from the song’s lyrics.

One of the central characteristics was the use of an eight note scale which was performed in tetrachords. Using brief pauses, Hamid repeated the song’s main melody, which was performed several times clearly and in an articulated fashion, although a relatively abrupt halt was evident at the end of a musical phrase.
Music at jeshen in Buz Dara

While the buz kashi during Faizabad's nowruz celebration had been exciting and captivating entertainment and gave the impression of an important state function, a month later, in April 1998, in Buz Dara, a small town in an Ismaili-inhabited region of north-eastern Badakhshan, I witnessed a second, much smaller equestrian tournament. This occurred during jeshen, a public outdoor festival commemorating the defeat of the Communist regime and the beginning of Islamic governance. Significantly, at the commencement of this festival, I attended a public music performance. This was one of two public music performances I observed during my entire field research.

Jesheh was originally introduced as Afghanistan's Independence Day on 18 August 1919 by King Amanullah to celebrate the securing of independence from Britain following the Third Anglo-Afghan War.\(^{83}\) Since then, the date of this festival has shifted in accordance with the interpretation of independence by successive governments. During the Communist period, for example, jeshen was celebrated on 27 April to mark the overthrow of the Republic in 1978. With the defeat of this regime, however, jeshen was moved by one day to 28 April.\(^{84}\) In spite of this date switching, from the time of its inauguration until the collapse of Communist governance, jeshen was traditionally marked by days of public music and dance performances as well as buz kashi in many districts of northern Afghanistan and in Kabul. During Afghanistan's modernising period from the 1950s onwards, jeshen was characterised by an atmosphere of entertainment and included amusement fairs. It was common for people to listen to music and to dance the atan (see Klimburg 1966:161).\(^{85}\) The following passages from the first-hand accounts of the German diplomat Kurt Ziemke (1939:284-285) who described jeshen in Kabul in the 1930s, provide insights into the liberal attitudes towards performance activities that prevailed

\(^{83}\) On this day, the British army was defeated for the third time.

\(^{84}\) In 2002, the Transitional Authority of President Hamid Karzai again celebrated jeshen on 18 August, thereby marking its eighty-third anniversary.

\(^{85}\) The atan is a traditional Pushtun group dance, accompanied by the atan tune performed by one to two musicians playing the dohol (a double-headed barrel-shaped frame drum) and the surnai (a double-reed wind instrument). This group dance was originally performed as a war dance by some Pushtun tribes (see Klimburg 1966:119). Due to its popularity and sponsorship during national and private events and its popularity as a trans-ethnic Afghan dance, the atan has been elevated to a national dance, the atan-e me/i. Examples of the atan performances in Badakhshan will be discussed in Chapter Seven.
Public Performances in Badakhshan during the monarchical reign of Zahir Shah and which persisted during the subsequent presidency of Daoud.  

It is a genuine people’s celebration, where everyone is not only reminded of the historical significance [of jeshen] but also encouraged to celebrate and to have fun. The government offices remain closed for one week and every Afghan has time off work during this period.

Stalls are set up on the festival grounds and there is an atmosphere of a fair. People rush to Kabul from afar, the neighbourhoods and the rural areas. The amusement activities of the people who can afford them are harmless, their enjoyment is modest; there is a lack of noise, rejoicing, spirits [geistige Getränke] are proscribed, a search for female dancers is futile. Amusement stalls entice with cheap prices; in front of the kebab stalls customers are squatting on their heels while listening to monotonous music, a simple merry-go-round is squeaking, clairvoyants, storytellers and magicians are attracting circles of onlookers, humorous fellows in costumes caricature citizens of European nations. I saw one [comedian] imitating a drunk European who, as a result, received roaring laughter for his comical and realistic performance. Bears are dancing, fruit lemonades in the most dazzling colours are on offer, as are pistachios, almonds, nuts and sweets. At dusk, colourful garlands with electrical bulbs illuminate the stalls section of the grounds; fireworks are on display. Many peasants from the rural and mountainous regions encountered many new experiences.

It is a festival for men, and at dusk veiled women with their chadors vanish to their homes. During the day, they [women] are however allowed to watch the stick dancers and wrestlers...It is worth noting that religion has very little to do with this festival, it is a genuine national celebration, an entertaining festival for the people.

He later describes the music of two military ensembles and the performance of several dances (Ziemke 1939:289): In the afternoon, we observe rural dances from different tribes from our podium. Naturally, only men perform these dances. Ghilzais, Mangals as well as Nuristanis (Kafirs)  were performing. The Ghilzais...follow the rhythm of an oblong drum, and subsequently toss their long black hair; they form into circles, move into lines, they dance battle and war. The dance movements of the Mangals...were occasionally abrupt and their circles wilder. Quite in contrast [to these movements], the [dances of the] Kafirs differed; they danced as a circle around a flautist and a drummer who were playing in the circle...They [the Kafirs] did not gyrate in a wild fashion and they also kept their heads still. They indicated the beat with their hands. This is perhaps how peasants dance at a harvest festival.

The biggest attraction, however, was a buzkashi tournament with three thousand riders (Ziemke 1939:291).

Other European researchers have provided similar accounts of jeshen and confirmed the historical occurrence of artistic performances during this

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86 The following passages by Ziemke have been translated by this author from German into English.
87 Military music in Afghanistan was strongly influenced by Turkish military music.
88 See Chapter Three, footnote 56, for information on Nuristanis and Kafirs.
festival. In the 1970s, Karl Gratzl and Roger Senarclens de Grancy (1973:65, 66), as well as Mark Slobin and Lorraine Sakata described the occurrence of music and dance performances in Badakhshan during jeshen which at that time was celebrated in August (Slobin 1976:40). Slobin comments that [d]uring Jeshen, the best performers...flock to Faizabad, and the public at large takes over the town in a manner reminiscent of Mazar crowds for Nowruz, though on a much smaller scale...It is the one time in the year when Badaxšanis from different regions meet for entertainment and business in the centre en masse, and Faizabad is ready for this friendly invasion. The provincial officials clear a large space near the center of town as a parade ground and exhibition area, and the word goes out to sub-governors to collar all the available talent in their regions for entertainment (1976:150).

Sakata confirms that jeshen in Badakhshan was the only time of the year when there is any semblance of public entertainment in Faizabad. Parades, musical performances, and exhibitions are held in the khiābān [main street] or in the schools (1983:27).

The nature of jeshen celebrations inevitably reflected the ideological nature of governance. During the Communist period, a military and national emphasis was evident in the festivities. Jeshen began with a military parade on a ground near Faizabad’s military headquarters at the maidan-e askari and included a display of local handicrafts as well as a lottery. Kabul’s military parade was also simulcast on radio and broadcast via amplifiers in Faizabad and while buzkashi tournaments were generally not held, each province would send a volleyball team to the jeshen tournament in Kabul. Under the early Rabbani government, sporting activities, especially gymnastics, and a military parade continued to crown the jeshen celebrations, but aesthetic performances were not on the agenda. The year 2000, representing Afghanistan’s 81st Independence Day anniversary, was the first time that the Taliban acknowledged the event in areas under their control (see AFP 2000b), but since all recreational and aesthetic activities remained prohibited, jeshen was celebrated in Kabul with a military parade but without the accompaniment of military music ensembles.

89 Karl Gratzl and Roger Senarclens de Grancy conducted their research in the early 1970s, whereas Mark Slobin conducted his in the late 1960s and early 1970s.
90 The lottery was not a local tradition; it was introduced to Badakhshan from Kabul (Personal communication with Badakhshi expatriate, 2001).
91 Written communication from Dr Najibullah Lafréie, March 2001.
92 In 2001, the Taliban held a similar jeshen celebration.
In 1998 in Buz Dara, although the *jeshen* celebrations were nothing like the historical events described by Kurt Ziemke (1939), *buzkashi* was sanctioned by local Ismaili and Sunni authorities and was clearly the main public event.\(^3\) The festival began with the rehearsal by high school boys of a patriotic song about Afghanistan, which was conducted in the presence of the school’s administrative staff. This song was not unlike a *tarana* (a nationalistic song)\(^4\) and eulogised the achievements of the *mujahideen* and the Rabbani government. Hence, it was clearly distinguishable from the only versions of *taranas* condoned by the Taliban which were either purely religious in nature or referred to the triumphs of the militia [view track anthem.mov; CD ROM 3].

**Anthem**

Oh homeland! Oh homeland!
The land which is the creator of man.
Oh homeland! Oh homeland!
You are the symbol of the reawakening of religion.

Your region is tulip-coloured all year round.
All of your deserts are filled with blood red colour.
All the country’s children are your property.
Your *kafir* [unbeliever] enemy is humbled by you and your descendents.

Oh homeland! Oh homeland!
The land which is the creator of man.
Oh homeland! Oh homeland!
You are the symbol of the reawakening of religion.

Here, religion is deeply entrenched in the barracks of God.
There is no place for enslaved men.

Oh homeland! Oh homeland!
The land which is the creator of man.
Oh homeland! Oh homeland!
You are the symbol of the reawakening of religion.

Those people who have given their souls and hearts to your love,
will devote their lives in the way of your high manner.

Oh homeland! Oh homeland!
The land which is the creator of man.
Oh homeland! Oh homeland!

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\(^3\) In this region, a *buzkashi* tournament may last from three to seven days. In addition to *jeshen*, other occasions such as *nowruz*, the end of autumn and wedding celebrations may lead to *buzkashi* performances. It is interesting to note that the ploughing season immediately followed the *jeshen* *buzkashi* tournament in this high mountain region. The ground’s soil was noticeably loosened after the game.

\(^4\) A *tarana* is a nationalistic, patriotic song.
You are the symbol of the reawakening of religion.

Oh homeland! Oh homeland!
The land which is the creator of man.
Oh homeland! Oh homeland!
You are the symbol of the reawakening of religion.

The use of a choir leader and a responding chorus in this performance might be seen to function iconically as a sign of political leadership and popular unity (cf. Lewis 1992:162).95 Musically, the melodies of the ‘call and responses’ differed slightly, but the simple and repetitive lyrics and melodies allowed the school boys to respond strongly and confidently; the texts could be easily remembered and vocalised, thereby creating a powerful sense of solidarity.96 The teachers reacted to this song with solemn expressions and stiff postures. It is likely that the regnant symbols of watan (homeland) and mazhab (religion) evoked nostalgic memories of times when the Afghan regime was unified, stable and well-functioning. The word lala (tulip), for example, is typically associated with the historical image of Afghanistan as a beautiful and fertile land. The tulip referred to in this song is a distinct species of red tulip which grows wild in the trans-Oxus region of Central Asia and is particularly famous in Afghanistan for its blooms in Mazar-e Sharif, around the period of nowruz which coincides with the beginning of spring. Symbolically, particularly among Twelver Shiite Muslims, the red tulip also represents love, renewal and beauty, and as far back as the thirteenth century, it was celebrated by Persian poets such as Saadi and Hafez who described imaginary gardens of tulips and fragrant roses.97 In Persian poetry, the wild tulip is also associated with a youth who has died prematurely. Indeed, since the Iranian Revolution and the jihad in Afghanistan against the Soviet-backed Communist government, the tulip has come to be a metaphor for martyrdom (see Centlivres 1988:58).

The exact origin of the words, melody and structure of this song is unclear. Furthermore, it seems likely that this song was slightly modified in the context of jeshen, Afghanistan’s Independence Day, to suit the ideology of the Islamic State of Afghanistan and as a consequence, it was thematically reflective of Afghanistan’s national anthem. This version of the tarana genre may be

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95 According to Lewis (1992), song texts may offer semiotic possibilities, “especially in the more direct fields of semantic and pragmatic meaning. Here continuities between the game and society at large can be made explicit...any aspect of culture the players choose to comment on” (1992:162).

96 Not surprisingly, these features are common to many nationalistic songs.

97 Saadi, for example, mentions the tulip in his Gulistan (1988).
understood to convey the idea of Afghanistan as a sovereign nation. Moreover, the chant may be interpreted as an object of direct experience (a rhematic index) that functions as a sign of “possibility and imagination” (Turino 1999:245), its performance reflecting a hypothetical and imagined political situation. Hence, through the performance of this song, the school’s administration was perhaps attempting to foster an image of a safe, forward-looking and heterogenous Islamic state under the leadership of President Burhanuddin Rabbani. For the schoolboys, the performance of this nationalistic chant also served to mark a school holiday and the opportunity to watch an exciting *buzkashi* tournament, a rare form of entertainment during that period in Badakhshan.

After this rehearsal, the boys paraded from the school via the tiny bazaar to the *buzkashi* ground, chanting as they marched. Until the rise of the Taliban, such a public performance of patriotic songs was a common feature of national festivities during all Afghan regimes, the nationalistic sentiments of the lyrics reflecting the official ideology of the time. Yet for the most part, the Taliban banned *tarana*s and even *madahs* (praise songs to Allah and the Prophet), permitting only the performance of the *azan* (call to prayer), *qiraah* (Quranic recitations) and, as Baily notes, “‘chants’, which are panegyrics to Taliban principles and commemorations of those who have died on the field of battle for the Taliban cause” (2001:7). Certainly, the Buz Dara *tarana* would have been prohibited by the Taliban for two reasons – the references to the Rabbani government and the performance by predominantly Ismaili children. The Taliban’s notorious relationship with non-Sunni groups was borne out in their massacres of Shiite Hazaras in Mazar-e Sharif and in Bamiyan.

After the parade of the local school boys, the equestrian tournament officially began on the outskirts of Buz Dara. Since *jeshen* was a public holiday, the stalls of the bazaar were closed and the entire male population of the wider region, including the district’s Sunni and Ismaili religious and military authorities, gathered at the *buzkashi* field. In contrast to the events of the *nowruz* *buzkashi* tournament in Faizabad, this equestrian event was accompanied by the performance of a local musician. The Ismaili Ahmad Ali, who was not aligned with any of the major political parties, was one of the most popular musicians in the region and well-known throughout Badakhshan and neighbouring Dari-speaking regions of northern Afghanistan. During the Communist regime, Ahmad Ali had been a nationally renowned singer and leader of a music ensemble who, having attained prestigious status as a consequence of the recording of his songs by Kabul Television, had travelled
frequently to provincial capitals and earned a reasonable income from his performances. However, with the denouncement of music by Islamist authorities from 1992, his performing career, like that of all artists across Afghanistan, came to an abrupt halt and he was forced to eke out an existence as a subsistence farmer. In 1998, Ahmad Ali’s previous status as an acclaimed musician during the Communist period meant that he was generally stigmatised by the Sunni Badakhshi elite.

Ahmad Ali’s music combines regional, trans-ethnic and Central Asian cultural elements and is firmly cemented in the culture of Northern Afghanistan. Reflecting the historical tradition in which musical knowledge was handed down through a lineage of performers, he was initially taught by his father. Later, he became influenced by an older generation of well-known Badakhshi musicians (Bazgul Badakhshi and Dur Mohammad Keshmi) who performed regularly in teahouses, at festivals, weddings, _nowruz_ celebrations, the birth of a son, or on holy days. In Buz Dara, Ahmad Ali initially performed on a harmonium 98 and later on his main instrument, the _dambura_, a long-necked, unfretted plucked lute with two nylon strings. Soon after his solo performances, he played in an ensemble with two local musicians, Hasan who played the _daf_, a frame drum resembling a tambourine that is often ornamented with small cymbals or jingling discs, and Karim Beg who played the _ghichak_, an unfretted and bowed spiked fiddle with two metal strings. 99

In light of the general disapproval of musical entertainment by influential Sunni United Front commanders, it was remarkable that Habib Shah, an influential leader of the local Ismaili community, was successful in gaining permission from Buz Dara’s Sunni political and military authorities to organise Ahmad Ali’s performance at this public commemorative event. As briefly mentioned in the description of the genre of Ismaili religious music, Habib Shah’s political position stems from his role as a district _wakil_, that is a community-elected delegate who represents Badakhshan at a national level such as at a _Loya Jirga_, in addition to being a _zaminadar_ (landowner), as well as a staunch ally of Massoud’s _shura-e nazar_. Not only was Habib Shah’s own

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98 The harmonium, referred to in Afghanistan as _armonia_, is a free-reed aerophone with a bellow-operated keyboard. This originally British instrument was introduced to Afghanistan during the British colonial period in the Subcontinent, possibly during the reign of Amanullah in the 1920s (see Baily 1988:27). It is especially popular in Radio Afghanistan-influenced urban music, but also in the performances of Hindustani classical music as well as Qawwali (religious Sufi music) and Sikh religious music.

99 Both the _dambura_ and the _ghichak_ are usually tuned to an interval of a fourth.
patronage of music exceptional, but the conding of this public entertainment program testified to the more moderate Islamic views of the Sunni leadership in this region. According to local informants, however, a public music performance had not occurred in Buz Dara since the collapse of the Communist regime in 1992. While the Ismailis tended to place a greater emphasis on aesthetic practices, public performances were restricted in this region largely as a result of the political administration of Badakhshi Sunnis who are a minority in this predominantly Ismaili territory. This outdoor performance six years later may thus be regarded as an exceptional occurrence in Badakhshan, and furthermore, as extremely unlikely elsewhere in Afghanistan.

All members of the elite of the Buz Dara region attended the *buzkashi* tournament: the district’s Sunni Tajik governor, the mullah, several local Sunni and Ismaili commanders, who were all aligned with Massoud’s *shura-e nazar*, some Sunni Pushtun, Uzbek, and Tajik Afghan engineers from other Afghan provinces who were employed by international NGOs and who were mostly secularly-educated, as well as regional and local Ismaili leaders consisting of *wakils* and the Shah of the Ismailis. These members of the local elite were seated on the margins of the *buzkashi* field near, but not in direct view of the musician. The rarity of public entertainment in Badakhshan meant that Ahmad Ali’s renditions were greatly appreciated by the local male spectators who encircled the performers and listened attentively. Many members of the audience were armed with long wooden sticks to fend off competing riders and their horses. Others, local soldiers of the district’s United Front-aligned military commander, carried Kalashnikov AK 47 machine guns over their shoulders. Whereas the sticks were used solely for the purpose of the *buzkashi* game, the weapons also served as indices of the civil war still smouldering at the time. Ironically, the Soviet-made Kalashnikov rifles were once signs of the mujahideen’s *jihad* against the Soviet-backed government. During the time of the performance, the weapons were indices of the uncertain political landscape, which demanded that troops be continuously on alert to thwart any advances by the Taliban or renegade local commanders.

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100 It is interesting to note that many of the Sunni Badakhshi elite in the Buz Dara region who were acting as government officials or commanders were descendents of *mir* families who, traditionally, have been in powerful political positions (see Chapter Four).

101 Badakhshan’s Ismaili communities are overseen by three Shahs. These religious leaders are *zamin-e shahi* (landowners), as well as administrators of *awqaf* (religious endowments) and *zamin-e sakari* (land belonging to the Aga Khan) (see Holzwarth 1980:202). In this case, the Shah was the regional Ismaili leader whose sphere of influence included the greater Buz Dara region.
Ahmad Ali sang a range of folk songs from the local area and other Afghan provinces, including *falaks*, *ghazals* (a form of love poetry) and *rubais* (quatrain) whose lyrics were characterised by sad, comical and romantic themes and, at times, even sexual allusions.\(^{102}\) I will discuss three songs from his solo music performance at Buz Dara. The first song “Advice” is a *ghazal* about the virtues of friendship. The performance of this *ghazal* indexically signified an association with traditional Badakhshi and local cultural heritage since the performance invoked past experiences of similar aesthetic events which were no longer permitted by orthodox authorities in Badakhshan [view song advice.mov; CD ROM 1].

*Advice*

\(^{103}\)

Don’t keep company with bad people  
I’m scared that you may also adopt bad manners.

*matla*

Don’t declaim your friends in front of those you don’t know.  
Instead of mentioning the shortcomings of others,  
ask others about your own shortcomings so as to correct your mistakes.

One day your enemy may be your guest.  
Everything that you have – give to him, don’t tell him any lies.

Don’t declaim your friends in front of those you don’t know.  
Instead of mentioning the shortcomings of others,  
ask others about your own shortcomings so as to correct your mistakes.

A time will come in which you are able to maintain friendships,  
So you should appreciate this present time and not destroy the garden of flowers  
when I appear with a flood of tears; don’t humble me in front of my friends.

Respect your real friends and don’t accompany bad friends.  
Don’t break relationships with your loyal friends.

Don’t declaim your friends in front of those you don’t know.  
Instead of mentioning the shortcomings of others,  
ask others about your own shortcomings so as to correct your mistakes.

It will bring happiness if you bow in front of friends and Ayyubi.  
Don’t bow in front of a person with weaknesses.

Don’t declaim your friends in front of those you don’t know.

\(^{102}\) A *rubai* is also a style of love poetry, consisting of four hemistichs or half lines (Sakata 1983:54). In Afghanistan, this style is also referred to as *chahar baiti*.

\(^{103}\) A *matla* is an Arabic term for the opening distich of a poem, such as a *ghazal* or a *qasida* (see Neghat and Burhan 1993:683).
Instead of mentioning the shortcomings of others, ask others about your own shortcomings so as to correct your mistakes.

For many listeners, words such as *gulshan* (literally, a ‘place of flowers’) and *gulha* (flowers) would have evoked the tradition of Sufi poetry and ideas like the renewal of life, beauty, the expression of love, a beloved (in a metaphorical sense), and the spiritual world. The musical characteristics of Ahmad Ali’s pitch, scale, timbre and rhythm, further functioned to convey a range of similar feelings.  

The second piece, entitled “Mahmud and the Donkey”, was an ostensibly humorous folk song about a donkey and his master. As can be seen in the movie clip, the song provides a lot of amusement for the audience whose enthusiasm confirms their valuation of such artistic performances [view song donkey.mov; CD ROM 1].

**Mahmud and the Donkey**

Everyone was untouched by the mishaps of the world except Mahmud and his donkey. Mahmud and his belongings were left in the hands of fate and destiny, the negative aspects of the world befall only them.

The poor jenny had only a little barley to eat, since she was always forced to consume poor quality grass near the sewage drain.

The she-ass was so blind and devoid of any hair that she could not run.

Moreover she did not have a new saddlecloth and only a poor quality saddle bag.

Listen, she gave birth to a foal last week!

[I translate’s note: At this point everybody in the audience is laughing].

I’ll come straight to the point: Mahmud and the donkey came together. Mahmud hit the donkey’s head and said: “Quickly stand up.”

The she-ass responded: “Oh man! You oppress me like the cruel Nimrod oppressed Moses! My back, chest and waist are tired and worn.” While trying to get up from the ground, she suddenly fell back to the ground.

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104 Ahmad Ali performed the song within one octave and used the notes A and E, both as the pitch centres and drone notes. Moreover, this song was characterised by his application of short rhythmic phrases within the main melody. One of Ahmad Ali’s particular playing techniques consisted of his strumming style on the *dambura*. The downward and upward strumming with four fingers of his right hand was almost reminiscent of the strumming style of Spanish flamenco music, known as *rasqueado*. I do not, however, claim that there are any links between these two styles.
Her legs collapsed and the jenny was unable to stand. Mahmud got angry and fetched a stone and hit her with his arms. Finally, he hit the she-ass’s head with another stone and with that blow finished her off.

Mahmud felt sorry for his cruel action. He was upset and held his head low.

The scene was confusing: All that was left, was the donkey’s harness, saddle cloth and saddle. The poor jenny was on its last breath. When Mahmud looked around, he cried and yelled like a donkey himself!

([Ahmad Ali:] Now the donkey complains!) “All my life I did not see a new saddle bag. With the exception of the grass near the sewer’s canal,

I was not offered any onions from you. With the exception of cool water, I did not get to taste any sweet drinks.” When Mahmud heard the jenny’s complaints, he felt distressed.

([Ahmad Ali:] Now Mahmud is going to report the incident to his father). He told his father: “Oh my father! The donkey gave her life to you, which now has expired. She gave her life to you and now she will give her meat to the dogs.” When the father heard the news, he responded from the depth of his heart: Oh!

He said “Oh my jenny, oh my blond jenny! I am ninety years old and close to dying. I will not forget you until I die. Who has ever done something like this, which stupid Mahmud has done?”

In Afghanistan, the polysemous word *khar* (donkey) means that this story about a donkey may also be interpreted as a political comment. The ubiquitous donkey may be associated with many meanings such as the underdog, workers, or the dispossessed. Often, the term is used in connection with a person’s humiliation, a particularly popular theme in many Afghan jokes and stories. These humorous stories may also reveal traces of Sufi thought since the term donkey is often used by Sufis as a metaphor of humiliation for village mullahs who strictly adhere to Islam’s normative and exoteric traditions (see Azizi 1995; Dupree 1973:128-131; Mills 1991:13). Further, a song about a donkey may be seen to function as an “ideological and political challenge” and as a means of commenting on current or past political leaders (Mills 1991:13). A donkey may also suggest a community’s poverty and therefore represent a critique of wealth and of local elites who in 1998 were successful commanders loyal to either Rabbani or Massoud. The effectiveness of this polysemous song
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was thus achieved through the "transformative power on everyday experience by a...funny process of ironization and inversion" (Mills 1991:13).

The third and final song which describes a conversation between a husband and wife, has a sexual theme. Most probably for this reason, Ahmad Ali requested the permission of the Sunni political authorities before performing it. As in the performance of "Mahmud and the Donkey", the audience was noticeably affected by the song "Wife and Husband", reacting with outbursts of laughter [view song husband&wife.mov; CD ROM 1].

_Wife and Husband_

Listen to the story of a wife and a husband.
The wife was a very vulgar daughter,
She was like a bitch.

In our village, there was once a couple like this,
who were biting each other like snakes
from morning until evening.

They had no belongings and nothing to eat.
They had no money and - no prejudice - no built home.

Their home was in ruins and full of spiders and lice.
One day the unemployed husband said to his wife,
come on and feed some elastic through my tomban. 105

His wife replied, where is the string?
We have no string, and the lamb is also not cheap!

You are a vulgar son....

The lyrics make fun of an impoverished couple and include some 'racy' language. Such a song could not help but call to mind issues of gender separation and to be heard as a reaction against the general taboo on sexual expression in a poor orthodox Islamic society. In such a repressive climate, the audience’s hearty laughter may have reflected a heightened sense of enjoyment at hearing such rare – and public – risqué allusions. The rhythmic pattern of this song consisted mainly of a three beat schema. 106 Ahmad Ali’s singing predominated and included short and rhythmically based melodic phrases similar to the piece “Advice”. While the lyrics do not refer to the _buzkashi_ horses, the strumming sound of the _dambura_ was evocative of their galloping

105 A _tonban_ colloquially pronounced _tomban_, is the name for the baggy trousers worn by all Afghan men.
106 The rhythm of Ahmad Ali’s strumming was in patterns of triple beats (that is 1-2-3-4-5-6-7, etc.).
and through this possible iconicity, the musical performance may thus have formed a further connection with the immediate context.

Playful and suggestive songs have long been part of Afghanistan’s cultural heritage. Prior to Afghanistan’s Islamic governance, marginal kesbis (professional performers) would have been at liberty to present a wide variety of satirical and even critical styles, but which even at that time would have implicitly reflected their social low status (see Mills 1991:12). Prior to 1992, a performance like that of Ahmad Ali’s “Wife and Husband” song would have been a marginal but still acceptable cultural activity. In order to earn money, artisans such as musicians have traditionally been in a position to provide socio-critical commentary and even to discuss women – who are generally secluded from public life – in an otherwise demeaning way through mocking and humorous activities. During the time of my research, however, sexual or humorous songs were extremely problematic given the escalation of orthodoxy throughout the province and as a consequence, musicians had to exercise particular care in terms of when and where they performed such songs.

**Dances in Chahar Deh**

The only public dance events that I observed in Badakhshan occurred several weeks after jeshen in Chahar Deh, an ethnically and religiously homogeneous Ismaili village. Chahar Deh is in relative isolation from the district town of Buz Dara, even more remote than Chashma Bozorg, and thereby relatively sheltered from local and district Sunni Badakhshi military commanders and authorities. My visit to a voluntary work project in this village seemed to function as the stimulus for a spontaneous public aesthetic performance. The project, a joint scheme between Chahar Deh and an international NGO, sought to improve the village’s access to clean drinking water. Until then, the villagers had been entirely dependent upon a small stream that was channelled from a spring about two kilometres above Chahar Deh. Given the extreme altitude of 3000-3250m, the stream froze annually from autumn to spring, which meant that villagers had to make an arduous and often dangerous trip by foot or donkey to collect water at its source.

Enayatullah Qurban, who served as both the village leader and khalifa, was the organiser of the local labour for this project. Astounded by my interest in local cultural heritage, he not only condoned but actively patronised an aesthetic
performance by sending a worker to fetch musical instruments from the village, a ninety-minute return journey from the work site near the mouth of the spring. During the morning tea as well as the lunch break, the khalifā then asked the local amateur musicians who owned the instruments, to play. The other workers sat on the ground in a circle around the musicians who played a Pamiri rubāb (an index of Ismaili culture), a ghichak, and a large-sized daf which is also unique to the Ismaili-inhabited regions of Badakhshan and was referred to in Mahmud bin Wali’s seventeenth century historical account of Nasir Khusraw’s shrine (see Chapter Five and earlier discussion this chapter).¹⁰⁷ The songs performed were of a local genre, mahali, but since they were also at times referred to as falak, it seems that these two categories are often used interchangeably.

The dances were not announced, but seemed to arise spontaneously; they marked the end of each entertainment set and appeared to be the high points of a typical public event. Only two members of Chahar Deh’s community, who seemed to be the village’s dance specialists, performed solo and duet dances. The other villagers who encircled the dancers, whilst not dancing themselves, were engaged by clapping. All participants at this impromptu performance were civilians and were not associated with any of the Islamist groups. In fact, during a number of visits to the Chahar Deh village, I did not ever encounter any armed villagers. This was a relatively rare experience in Badakhshan.

Towards the end of the first music set that was performed during the morning break, Barakat Beg, one of the local volunteer labourers who had been sitting with the other workers, rose to his feet, cleared stones from a small area of the ground directly in front of the musicians and entered the circle of the audience to dance to the accompaniment of the ensemble’s music [view dance localsolodance(od)Ikm.mov; CD ROM 2].¹⁰⁸ Throughout his subsequent

¹⁰⁷ According to informants, the large-sized daf is only played by Ismaili men in Badakhshan, whereas a smaller daf is played by women and girls of all sectarian groups in Badakhshan during weddings as well as religious and non-religious festivals. For a more detailed account of the female daf in other Muslim territories see Doubleday (1999).

¹⁰⁸ The location of this performance at high altitude and outdoors made it impossible to record the ensemble’s sound satisfactorily. The rhythmic accompaniment during Barakat Beg’s solo dance was unclear; the musicians created an uneven rhythm in which the beats appeared to fall a little too early. Two main beats were noticeable which seemed to lie somewhere between a five-, six- and seven-beat rhythm. The musicians’ execution of the second beat created a ‘pulling’ effect. In contrast, the members of the audience clapped a ‘straight’ and relatively even rhythm. However, they did not appear to be always clapping in synchrony with the rhythm of the music. The ghichaknawaz (ghichak virtuoso) played a melodic phrase which was
improvised solo dance routine, Barakat Beg’s attention was mostly directed towards the visitors and honoured guests: an Afghan engineer who was supervising the NGO project, and me. Barakat Beg used a very narrow base of support and constantly maintained close contact with the ground, travelling minimally through the available space via repeated sideways shuffles, steps and spins. His repertoire predominantly incorporated his arms while his torso remained relatively erect and centred. In Laban terminology, his arms produced ‘gestural’ actions through the use of frequent ‘arc-like’, ‘indirect’, and outwardly directed movements. In contrast, his lower limbs served a ‘postural’ function, providing firm support and balance. Barakat Beg spun mostly in an anti-clockwise direction while he rotated many parts of his upper torso. Infrequent changes to his body shape were largely generated by his arms which accessed his near-reach ‘kinesphere’ and which evinced gentle, curvy and ‘free-flowing’ movement qualities that conveyed a sense of weightlessness. The spinning suggested an upward direction of the dancer even though he did not physically leave the ground.

Several minutes into this solo dance, a second local worker, Jafer Baba, also eagerly moved into the circle to dance with Barakat Beg. Both dancers were dressed in their everyday work clothes (shalwar qamiz). The villagers seemed familiar with the dance routine of these performers and after this duet, the morning break concluded and they resumed their labour. However, during the subsequent lunch break, the khalifa again asked the amateur musicians to play. After a few songs, the previous seemingly-improvised dance routine was repeated, with Barakat Beg firstly dancing alone, and then performing a duet with Jafer Baba [view dance localduet(od)Ikm.mov; CD ROM 2].

In this performance, Barakat Beg tended to remain in the background and danced in place, while Jafer Baba danced in the leading capacity, his individual dance style utilising large amplitude arm movements and rapid turning actions of his body. For the most part, the two dancers performed together in what appeared to be a semi-structured routine, but occasionally they also performed their own improvised solo dances. Their apparent familiarity with their movement repertoire and with each other gave the impression that the performers had regularly danced together at similar functions in the past. While

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repeated throughout the piece. The sound of the Pamiri rubab largely drowned out the daf and ghichak. This, in addition to the strong wind rushing through the valley, rendered the sound recording virtually inaudible. Towards the latter part of the song, the Pamiri rubab player started to sing a local folk song, a falak that again was almost inaudible on the sound recording. 

109 See Chapter Two and the glossary of LMA terms (Appendix Four).
the two dancers mostly faced each other, they did not make any form of physical contact during the entire dance. This effect of being kinaesthetically complementary functioned to confirm their familiarity and experience as co-dancers. Several other sign-object relations, such as the placement of Barakat Beg’s right foot and Jafer Baba’s left foot in front of their bodies, the simultaneous raising of their arms and mostly anti-clockwise spinning, were further indicative of a familiar and complementary performance style and genre. Moreover, since many of the elements of these dances movements resembled qualities of historical dances recorded in Munjan over three and a half decades ago (these will be discussed below), they may also reflect a long-standing dance tradition. Undoubtedly, these dance performances constituted a form of embodied local heritage and testified to the vitality and continuing pride of the community in their local culture. According to local informants, dancing only ever occurred in the village in the absence of Sunni military commanders.

When one of the two strings of the ghichak snapped during this duet and the musician was forced to feed a new string into his instrument, Khalifa Enayatullah Qurban reached for the daf and used this opportunity to demonstrate his own skills as a musician. He immediately initiated a faster beat and thereby changed the musical mood and rhythm. As in the solo dance, the sound of the Pamiri rubab was not audible. Towards the end of the performance, the ghichak player joined the khalifa’s drumming and the strumming of the Pamiri rubab player. The dance styles during both sets of performances at the morning tea and lunch breaks were very similar and described by the villagers as raqs mahali (local dance). Some musical similarities such as a relatively ambiguous rhythm that fluctuated between duple and triple meter, were evident between this piece and the religious qasida “Rawan” in Chashma Bozurg and may thus possibly indicate a religious element in the performance at Chahar Deh or further support the notion of a local musical tradition. The audience was actively engaged with the dancing throughout both performances, responding with laughter and clapping in time with the dancers’ stepping, the daf player’s duple metre or even in their own rhythm.

In 1963, men’s solo dances and the duets of men and boys from Wilgue village in the Munjan valley of south-eastern Badakhshan were recorded during the

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110 The rhythm was again ambiguous but seemed to include a seven-beat rhythm as well as an overall duple metre. The ghichakanawaz, however, played a repetitive basic melody.
Badakhshan expedition of the Linden Museum in Stuttgart, Germany, under the anthropological leadership of Friedrich Kussmaul and Peter Snoy and the film-maker Helmut Schlenker (1963). Like Chahar Deh and Chashma Bozurg, Wilgue is a homogeneous Ismaili village (see also Snoy 1964:669). But in comparison with the spontaneity of the performances in Chahar Deh, those recorded by Snoy and Kussmaul were staged as an official display of local culture and for the purpose of filming a ‘typical’ local performance. Nevertheless, comparison of this historical footage with the performances I witnessed in Chahar Deh three and a half decades later indicates the endurance of local heritage in this region in spite of the tremendous political and social upheavals that have occurred during this time. While the instruments played by the musicians from Munjan can be seen to be two dafs and a tula, unfortunately, limited technology at the time of filming in 1963 meant that no sound was recorded.

Unlike the event in Chahar Deh when the dance space was improvised, a permanently designated area functioned as Wilgue’s venue for festivities, gatherings and meetings, and was used on the recorded occasion. At the beginning and end of each performance in Wilgue, the dancers formally acknowledged the VIPs. The solo dance was characterised by skilful anti-clockwise and clockwise spins which were led by soft, flowing and indirect arm gestures that extended to the limits of the adult dancer’s kinesphere. This dancer, like the

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111 The villages in the Munjan valley are in relative proximity to Pakistan’s border and adjoin the Afghan province of Nuristan in north-eastern Afghanistan, which is inhabited by ethnic Nuristanis (see Maps 2 and 3). It is therefore important to appreciate that as a result of this proximity, some cultural overlay may exist between the neighbours of this region. I was unable to visit the Munjan valley, but would imagine that differences in cultural practices exist between villages in the Munjan valley and Chahar Deh.

112 Personal communication with Dr Peter Snoy, Germany, 2000.

113 The role of governor was played by the researchers’ Afghan translator. At the time of the performance, the musicians were already known to the anthropologists (Personal communication with Peter Snoy, 2000).

114 The original footage is archived at the Institut für den Wissenschaftlichen Film (IWF) in Göttingen, Germany, but sound recordings do not appear to be in existence (Personal communication with the IWF and Peter Snoy in Germany in 2000).

115 Personal Communication with Peter Snoy, August 2000. Snoy actually referred to this space as a classical dance venue, “ein klassischer Tanzplatz”. It was common for any member of the community to start to dance and others could join in at any time. The performance space was surrounded by megalith-like seats. A large rock also adjoined this space and was used by the village’s youth for weightlifting exercises. Another stone was used to play a board game equivalent to the German game Mühle (Nine Men’s Morris). For details of this game see Gomme (1984:414-419).
performers of Chahar Deh, consistently remained in contact with the ground through a series of complex patterns of foot placements. Wrist movements were also frequently used in a gestural fashion. This solo dancer gave the impression of being a well-accomplished and experienced performer.

Another dance performed in Wilgue by two adult villagers also evinced many similarities with the previous solo dance as well as with the duet of Chahar Deh in 1998 [view dance historicalduet.mov; CD ROM 3]. At the end of the duet, the performers received a monetary tribute from the event’s patron, which seemed to represent a reward for their successful performance of local cultural heritage. The second duet at this public event was performed by two boys [view dance historicalboys’dance.mov; CD ROM 3]. Their dance also shared similar gestures, structures and qualities with the previous performances, yet their execution of movements was more fluid and coordinated and included faster spins. The boys’ dance style thus seemed to be more professional and less improvised than the previous solo dances. Some gestures, such as their use of outstretched arms, were reminiscent of the wings of a bird. The white-turbaned boy in particular, danced elegantly and confidently, periodically skipping and being momentarily airborne, but retaining an introspective demeanour and avoiding eye contact with the audience.

Several gestures and movement qualities in this dance, such as the arching of the back of the white-turbaned dancer, could be interpreted as icons of femininity. However, due to the cultural sensitivity of this practice (see Chapter Five), I have not been able to confirm this hypothesis with Afghan informants. These apparently effeminate gestures may be linked to the bache bazi tradition, but it is also possible that the dancer naturally danced in this style or that he was imitating a male dancer who may himself have been exposed to the bache bazi tradition. The emotional responses of the audience were again manifested through their physical actions of clapping and smiling throughout the performances.

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116 The dancers, well aware of each other’s presence, seemed to perform a familiar routine. The spins, as with the previous dance, were performed in both anti-clockwise and clockwise directions and with a complex shuffling pattern. One dancer would generally take the lead while the other dancer responded. It seems highly likely that these dancers had previously performed together.
The public performances of religious traditions such as the outdoor prayer at id-e qurban, which is influenced by its Arabian religio-cultural background and conducted in a similar fashion throughout the global Islamic community, remained unaffected during the time of my research. These religious practices were viewed by ruling Sunni military and religious authorities as legitimate (halal) cultural performances and served as truly liminal practices. They were marked by an orthopraxy which included restraint, containment and solemnity, and represented a means by which sacred knowledge is indexically (through contiguity) brought from the past into the present, yet at the same time is connected to the future through embodied memory.

In contrast, the performance of more complex or composite religious practices such as the religious music of the Ismailis which blends Ismaili, Sufi and local traditions, were more restricted. Sunni authorities at best regarded these performances with ambivalence, but more commonly accorded them a non-religious status and hence interpreted them as forbidden (haram). The religious music of the Ismailis in Badakhshan was seen to be controversial therefore and consequently, performances were rare, secretive and covert so as to evade the attention of Sunni authorities. Yet these musical events are both integral to the religious praxis of Badakhshan’s Ismailis and serve as important markers of their cultural difference from other sectarian groups. Indeed, the restrictions imposed by Sunni religio-political authorities on Ismaili religious practices concurred with the historical, social and political marginalisation of Ismailis in Badakhshan. At the same time, it seems that it was exactly this positioning on the fringes of mainstream Badakhshi society that granted some Ismaili leaders, such as the community leader and wakil Habib Shah and the Khalifa Enayatullah Qurban, the freedom to publicly patronise a range of extremely restricted aesthetic practices – those of public music and dance performances. Economically and politically, the Ismaili leaders may have had little to lose but much to gain in terms of the support of their own constituencies as well as the sheer enjoyment of participating in cultural aesthetic performances.

The sports of both buzkashi and kushti giri are associated with Badakhshan’s local culture and possibly with the wider Turkic- and Persian-speaking culture of northern Afghanistan. Originating during pre-Islamic times, buzkashi, for example, is generally taken to be an index of the local population’s nomadic ancestry. These ancient games represent bodily practices in which players have the potential to express warlike qualities of aggression, toughness and
resilience and to enact contests of mythical or epic-like proportions. Although these contests were superficially forms of public entertainment, they also expressed significant political agendas. As I witnessed during the *buzkashi* tournament in Faizabad in 1998, much more was at stake than just scoring points. Unresolved personal feuds frequently flared but seemed to be also resolved during this game. Moreover, many competitors were the agents of local or district military commanders who were often aligned with Islamist factions of the Hezb-e Islami and Jamiat-e Islami. In addition, contestants were often also members of either Rabbani’s Faizabad *shura* or Massoud’s *shura-e nazar*, a fact which occasionally led to intra-party rivalries. Furthermore, contestants and their political mentors were supported by audience participants who were generally members of the sportsperson’s or commander’s *qawm*, but may have also been connected through regional alliances.

These non-religious activities occurred during the special public events of *nowruz* and *jeshen*, celebrations customary to Afghanistan. While the Taliban strictly banned the *nowruz* festival, they did permit the celebration of *jeshen*, albeit without entertainment. In Badakhshan, these public festivals were deemed by the Badakhshi religious and political authorities to be acceptable under Hanafi jurisprudence. Interestingly, the two sport activities of *buzkashi* and *kushti giri* were the only two practices listed in the ‘culture’ section of the internet homepage of the Jamiat-e Islami (1999). Clearly, these recreational performances were seen to be more preferable forms of cultural heritage than the contentious non-religious aesthetic practices of music and dance. In fact, while the public performance of music was rare, the even more controversial nature of dance meant that it was not even alluded to in public discourse in Badakhshan and on only one occasion in a very remote location, did I witness dancing in the public domain. As will be further elucidated in Chapter Seven, in Badakhshan in 1998 and 1999, music and dance events arose mostly in the physical absence of local military and religious authorities or on the more rare occasions that authorities viewed such performances as significant forms of local cultural heritage and which they did not interpret as conflicting with Islam.

While the effects of the local binary *halal/haram*, religious/non-religious, were apparent in many of the performances described here, it is important to appreciate that most events combined aspects of both categories. For example, *buzkashi* includes some Islamic rituals such as the *halal* killing of the calf, and non-religious music often contained references to normative and/or mystical Islam. The Ismaili religious music is clearly considered by the Ismailis