

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

by

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Introduction

Badakhshan

Your soil is like a bed for a brave man;
Your soil is like a red flower in the spring and summer;
Full of beautiful scent;
Your mountains and deserts are green;
Your place is proud of the blood of martyrs.

Badakhshan, your earth will be green and full of flowers;
Your aged and youth will be generals;
Your people will wake up from their slumber;
And drive a sword into the heart of the enemy;
All your mountains are full of precious stones.¹
(Shams Ali Shams, 1967).

This thesis describes and analyses cultural performances in Badakhshan, Afghanistan's most north-eastern province (see Maps 2 and 3), at the end of the twentieth century. This was a unique historical period in Afghanistan, a time marked by the convergence of political and Islamic ideologies as manifest in the ultra-extremist militia of the Taliban and the more moderate Islamic State of Afghanistan, the administration officially recognised by the United Nations. Both of these ruling authorities however, promulgated a strict Islamic code of conduct that severely curtailed the free expression of non-religious cultural

¹ Excerpts of "Badakhshan", a poem written in 1967 by Dr Shams Ali Shams in Faizabad, Badakhshan. In 1998, the poem was first read and then later offered to me as a gift in the form of a hard copy. With the assistance of an expatriate Afghan in Australia, the poem was translated in 2000 from Dari into English.

performances throughout the country. Cultural performances thus became increasingly and inherently political and religious in nature.

Accordingly, the key argument of this thesis is that cultural performances in Badakhshan, Afghanistan, are inextricable from their historical, social, political, and religious contexts. Concomitantly, cultural performances in themselves may not only reflect but provide active commentaries on the relationships between politics, religion and society in this conservative and remote, mountainous region. Indeed, not only were the circumstances of many performance events fraught with religious and political tensions and concerns, but both religious and non-religious performances themselves evinced social and political themes. Of central importance to this thesis are the turbulent political changes of the last two and a half decades and the string of political regimes and ideologies propounded during this period – Republic, Soviet-backed Communist, Islamist, ultra-extremist Arab-influenced Islamic, and currently a pro-United States embryonic democracy. Significantly, these diverse forms of government have been accompanied by shifts in interpretations of what is and is not legitimate (*halal*) Islamic conduct. I shall seek to highlight the impact of these changing political and religious perceptions and affiliations by an historical overview of the role and place of a variety of cultural performances – religious, sport, music, and dance – in Badakhshan and Afghanistan. However, since I conducted extensive field research in Badakhshan in 1998 and 1999, I shall therefore be primarily concerned with explicating the position of religious and non-religious cultural practices during the most conservative period in Badakhshan's modern history, that is the final five years of the Islamic State of Afghanistan under President Burhanuddin Rabbani (1992-2001).²

While the eyes of the world have focussed on the major contestants in Afghanistan's complex civil war and, more recently, on its all-too-frequent humanitarian disasters, the impact of over twenty-three years of fighting and civil unrest on Afghan culture continues to be largely ignored. It was not until March 2001 with the destruction of the Buddha statues in Bamiyan, central Afghanistan, that international concerns were seriously raised about the Taliban's determination to implement their controversial Islamic doctrines against Afghanistan's local and pre-Islamic heritage. Yet this blatant and public defiance of international conventions on cultural heritage represented

² Unless otherwise stated, the numbers that appear in the parentheses indicate the period of rule.

the tip of the iceberg with respect to human rights abuses within Afghanistan. Moreover, the global impact of what was developing under the Taliban's patronage was felt on the morning of September 11, 2001, when the world awoke to an unprecedented act of terrorism in the heart of the United States. The suicide bombings in New York and Washington had targeted two seemingly invincible symbols of the might of the world's only superpower and the pervasive ethos of capitalism.

Just prior to the bombardment of Taliban territories led by the United States in October 2001, the orthodox militia ruled approximately seventy percent of Afghanistan. In their territories, all non-Islamic practices had been officially banned. The remainder of the country was controlled by an anti-Taliban alliance under the helm of the first Islamic government of President Burhanuddin Rabbani, a local Badakhshi, and its defence minister, Ahmad Shah Massoud. From 1998, Badakhshan served as the home of the internally exiled Rabbani government, offering the Islamic State of Afghanistan its only functioning airport as well as an important overland supply route with Tajikistan, its non-Taliban-aligned neighbour.³ Indeed, Badakhshan remained the only Afghan province that successfully evaded the control of the Taliban. Inevitably, however, more than three years of constant resistance effected a profound toll on Badakhshan's economy and social life.

Since the September 11 terrorist attacks, which were allegedly masterminded from within Taliban-controlled areas by the Saudi dissident Osama bin Laden through his al Qaeda terrorist network, Afghanistan has become a primary locus of the world's attention as well as the site of international military engagement. Such an extraordinary historical about-turn was unimaginable at the time of my fieldwork. After having successfully defeated the Soviet invaders and then having witnessed a proxy war of internecine fighting between Islamic and Islamist factions, few Afghans would have believed it possible that the Taliban would be defeated and peace finally brokered with the assistance of the United States of America.

³ Pakistan was the only one of Afghanistan's neighbours that was aligned with the Taliban.

A Review of Relevant Literature

While numerous studies have described historical, political and humanitarian developments in Afghanistan, especially since the beginning of Soviet-backed Communist rule in 1978, there is a dearth of literature concerning its cultural heritage and practices. Moreover, whilst a limited number of academic publications from the disciplines of history, anthropology, political science, geography, and ethnomusicology have specifically commented on the province of Badakhshan, most of this research was conducted prior to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. Indeed, with the exception of this study, virtually no research has been conducted in Badakhshan from 1979 until the present day. Furthermore, no other study has explicitly utilised an interdisciplinary methodology as a means of elucidating the nexus between culture, politics and religion in Afghanistan.

The first significant documentation of Badakhshan occurred during the period of the political 'Great Game' between Tsarist Russian-Central Asia and British India in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, when British, Russian, Hungarian, and Danish adventurer officers occasionally returned with reports pertaining to the strategically located province.⁴ It is not surprising, therefore, that the first major academic entry on Badakhshan was produced by the Russian W. W. Barthold (1987 (1913)) while his fellow Russian, T. G. Abaeva (1964) published the province's first comprehensive political history (see Grevemeyer 1982:19).

A number of local scholars have also written historical accounts of the province, which I shall indirectly draw upon in establishing the broader ethnographic, social, political, and religious context of performance events. The most important local source on which Abaeva's monograph draws extensively is A. H. Boldirev's (1959) Russian translation of the Persian *Tarikh-e Badakhshan* ('History of Badakhshan'). Mullah Sang Mohammad has been credited as the most likely author of this important historical manuscript that surfaced in 1913 and that covers the period from 1657-1808/1809 (see Grevemeyer 1982:20). A second *Tarikh-e Badakhshan* based on Mullah Sang

⁴ Some of these British officers included Alexander Burnes (1834), William Moorcroft and George Trebeck (1971 (1841)), John Wood (1841), Charles Masson (1974 (1842)), and Thomas Douglas Forsyth (1875). The Hungarian adventurer Arminius Vámbéry also reported from the region (1865) as did the Danish Lieutenant Ole Olufsen (1904) from the Pamir region. See also Grevemeyer (1982:18) for a list of other Russian scholars.

Mohammad's original manuscript, was discovered in Andijan, in contemporary Uzbekistan, by Mirza Fazl Beg who subsequently updated it until 1907 (see Grevemeyer 1976:63; 1982:20). It was this second document that served as the source for Boldirev's translation. A third version of a *Tarikh-e Badakhshan* was found in 1970 by the Kabuli historian Humuyan Sarwar who names Mohammad Reza Badakhshi as its author (see Grevemeyer 1982:20). In 1973, K. Mohammad Zadeh and M. Shah-Zadeh, two teachers from Gorno-Badakhshan (contemporary Tajikistan),⁵ published another history of Badakhshan in Persian which was also called *Tarikh-e Badakhshan* (Mohammad-Zadeh and Shah-Zadeh 1973). This history is largely based on oral accounts and focuses primarily on the history of Sheghnan, an Ismaili-inhabited region in north-eastern Badakhshan (see Map 3).⁶ In 1922, Nader Shah, who was later to become the first of Afghanistan's Musahiban rulers (1929-1933)⁷ commissioned the Afghan historian Burhan al-Din Khan Koshkaki to write a further history of Badakhshan, *Rahnama-ye Qataghan wa Badakhshan* ('Guide to Kataghan and Badakhshan') (see also Grevemeyer 1982:21; Kreutzmann 1996:31). Koshkaki's source was also that of oral traditions and was published in Kabul in 1923.⁸ More recently, the Badakhshi anthropologist Nazif Shahrani (1978a; 1978b; 1979; 1984a), who is now resident in the United States, published an ethnography of the Kirghiz of the Wakhan Corridor. Shahrani has also written extensively on the impact of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and its post-Soviet governance.

⁵ Gorno-Badakhshan, an abbreviation for *Gorno-Badakhshanskaia Avtonomnaia Oblast* was once part of the historical Badakhshan and is now located in the Republic of Tajikistan. Cultural links between the two Badakhshans remain. Gorno-Badakhshan was integrated into the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics in 1924 and later, in 1929, incorporated into the Autonomous Socialist Soviet Republic of Tajikistan (see Kreutzmann 1996:118).

⁶ See ethnographic descriptions of the Ismailis, a Shiite sect, in Chapters Three and Five.

⁷ Musahiban is a lineage name whose members were the descendants of Sultan Mohammad Khan, a brother of *Amir* Dost Mohammad (1819-1839). The family had been exiled to India, where many of the leading members were educated. In 1901, they were allowed to return. In 1929, Amir Amanullah (1919-1929) was officially replaced by the Musahiban government of Nadir Shah upon his overthrow of the Tajik rebel Habibullah Kalakani who had earlier deposed Amanullah and briefly taken control of the capital Kabul (see Gregorian 1969:220). Afghanistan's last Musahiban monarch was Nadir Khan's son Zahir Shah (1933-1973), who was deposed in a coup by his cousin Mohammad Daoud in 1973.

⁸ A. A. Semenov published an earlier translation into Russian in 1926. Marguerite Reut's (1979) French translation of Burhan al-Din Khan Koshkaki's account was published as *Qataghan et Badakhshân: Description du pays d'après l'inspection d'un ministre afghan en 1922* ('Kataghan and Badakhshan: Description of the Territory according to the Inspection by an Afghan Minister in 1922').

I shall also draw upon a range of academic research that was conducted in the region prior to Communist rule by a number of German scholars in the disciplines of anthropology, sociology, history, and geography: Peter Snoy (1964; 1965; 1985; 1996), Friedrich Kussmaul (1965a; 1965b; 1967), Erwin Grötzbach (1972; 1979), Jan-Heeren Grevemeyer (1976; 1982; 1975), Wolfgang Holzwarth (1975; 1980; 1990), Wolfgang Lentz (1978), and Walter Raunig (1978). In addition, the Austrian historian Ludwig Adamec provides comprehensive historical and ethnographic information in his compilation *Badakhshan Province and Northeastern Afghanistan* (1972), including information obtained by British Indian intelligence officers that was first published in 1914 in the *Gazetteer of Afghanistan*.

Although the focus of this thesis is not primarily historical, the history and ethnography of Badakhshan are critical to the analysis of cultural performances in this province and the explication of their social, religious and political themes and contexts. I will primarily draw upon the two excellent works on the province by the anthropologist and historian Jan-Heeren Grevemeyer (1976; 1982; 1975), especially his *Herrschaft, Raub und Gegenseitigkeit: Die politische Geschichte Badakhshans 1500-1883* ('Rule, Bounty and Reciprocity: The Political History of Badakhshan, 1500-1883'), and the sociologist and historian Wolfgang Holzwarth (1980; 1990) who has produced an excellent monograph *Vom Fürstentum zur afghanischen Provinz: Badakhshan 1880-1935* ('From Princedom to Afghan Province: Badakhshan 1880-1935'). Since these authors conducted field research, which they then complemented with the extensive use of local, Afghan, Russian, and British sources, their publications are an invaluable source of ethnographic data on Badakhshan.⁹ Grevemeyer's historical analysis discusses issues of the feudal system of Badakhshan and its anarchic rule and segmentation (1982:248) whereas Holzwarth describes the more recent history of the province up until the mid-1930s. These two accounts are thus complementary in establishing the historical context of this analysis.

I spent a considerable amount of time and recorded a number of performance events in Badakhshan's Pamir Mountains. This remote region and that of the adjoining Wakhan Corridor have attracted considerable attention from

⁹ In addition to the local and Russian sources that have already been mentioned here, Grevemeyer consults the Afghan histories by Abdulhay Habibi and Mayel Herawi's *Rahnemaye tarikh-e Afghanistan* ('Guide to Afghanistan's History') (1969-1970). Holzwarth refers extensively to sources that he obtained from the London India Office Records and the National Archives of India in New Delhi. Both authors cite the important Afghan historian Mir Ghulam Mohammed Ghoobar's *Afghanistan dar masir-e tarikh* (1967).

geographers and geologists. Several expeditions into the Wakhan-Pamir region are well documented in edited books such as that by Karl Gratzl and Roger Senarclens de Grancy (1973) of the 1970 Austrian scientific expedition, and by Roger Senarclens de Grancy and Robert Kostka (1978) of the Austrian expedition of 1975. Like Nazif Shahrani, Rémy Dor and Clas Naumann (1978) also wrote extensively about Kirghiz culture in the Wakhan corridor. Several scholars have specifically commented on the Sevener Shiite Ismaili sectarian minority who inhabit regions in north- and south-eastern Badakhshan. This research is particularly pertinent since the only public music and dance performances I observed in Badakhshan in 1998 and 1999 arose among Ismailis for whom such practices are permissible. Similarly, during his research in the early twentieth century, the German anthropologist Arved von Schultz (1914) described a number of religious and cultural practices in the Pamir region. Peter Snoy and Friedrich Kussmaul, as well as the Swiss anthropologists Irene von Moos and Edwin Huwyler (1983; 1986), conducted most of their research with Ismailis in south-eastern Badakhshan in the 1960s and 1970s respectively. More recent studies on the Ismailis of Badakhshan were undertaken by the German geographer Hermann Kreutzmann (1996), who produced a comprehensive account of the inter-ethnic relations of various ethnic groups in the Wakhan trans-border region. His monograph includes not only extensive data on the Ismailis of this region but also on Badakhshan in general.

The inherently political nature of cultural performances in Badakhshan in the late 1990s necessitates a political focus in this thesis. Political commentaries on Badakhshan include the work of the political scientist Hafizullah Emadi (1993; 1998) whose analysis of Ismaili communities in north-eastern Badakhshan describes the political and religious oppression that led some elite members of their communities to embrace socialist ideas during the Communist period (1978-1989). The French political scientist Gilles Dorronsoro (1992) specifically discusses a number of *mujahideen* (Islamic resistance fighters)¹⁰ in Badakhshan, who had advanced to powerful political positions by the early post-Communist period in 1991. Interestingly, although many of the above mentioned authors fleetingly comment on opium consumption and production in Badakhshan, only a few researchers, such as von Moos, Huwyler (1986; 1980) and, more recently, Jonathan Goodhand (2000) have specifically addressed this controversial and sensitive issue.

¹⁰ The Arabic *mujahideen* is the plural noun of *mujahid* (Islamic resistance fighter) and literally means Islamic “warriors in the way of God” (Maley 1998:9).

The only detailed tourist guide to have been published on Afghanistan is Nancy Hatch Dupree's *An Historical Guide to Afghanistan* (1977), which includes a section on Badakhshan. Due to the Marxist coup and subsequent civil war that soon followed, however, tourists and researchers have become rare commodities throughout Afghanistan in recent decades. Concomitantly, even the most recent accounts of Badakhshan that have been mentioned in this review, are limited to descriptions of conditions prior to the Communist coup of April 1978.

The final collection of relevant literature dealing with Badakhshan is that of the ethnomusicological studies undertaken by the Americans Mark Slobin (1976) and Lorraine Sakata (1983) who recorded musical traditions in a number of urban areas in Badakhshan in pre-Communist Afghanistan. Slobin's descriptive and structural analysis of musical traits in *Music in the Culture of Northern Afghanistan* is one of the first major works to have examined music in Afghanistan.¹¹ Slobin discusses music in various subcultures and geographic settings in northern Afghanistan, focussing predominantly on their similarities and differences, and commenting particularly on the trans-ethnic music traditions of Tajiks and Uzbeks. His study was influenced by Fredrik Barth (1969; 1981 (1960)),¹² particularly in terms of his categorisation of ethnic groups, boundaries and divisions. Sakata's monograph *Music in the Mind: The Concepts of Music and Musician in Afghanistan* (1983) is similarly divided into three related Persian-speaking, yet geographically distinct regions in Afghanistan. Her linguistically based musical analysis while drawing on 'emic' (local) understandings of musical and social concepts, primarily examines the concept of music and musicians from an 'etic' (analytical) perspective.¹³

Whilst not having conducted research in Badakhshan, John Baily is the third ethnomusicologist to have conducted extensive fieldwork in Afghanistan and who continues to publish widely on Afghan music. Like the studies by Slobin and Sakata, Baily's *Music of Afghanistan, Professional Musicians in the City of Herat* (1988) was conducted in pre-Communist Afghanistan. Yet unlike the two American researchers, he focuses primarily on one social group, the

¹¹ The German musicologist and ethnomusicologist Felix Hoerburger (1969) published the first major work on Afghan music *Volksmusik in Afghanistan: nebst einem Exkurs über Qor'an-Rezitation und Thora-Kantillation in Kabul* (Folk music in Afghanistan: Together with an Excursion into Quran recitation and Torah cantillation).

¹² Barth is an exponent of maximisation strategies and individualist theory-of-games theory, which demonstrated how individuals "invested their resources" (Eriksen 1995:155).

¹³ See glossary for comments on the emic/etic distinction.

professional hereditary musicians of Herat. Baily gives a history of Herati music, especially the emergence of an urban style of art music, and in describing the social organisation and context of the music performances of hereditary musicians, provides valuable insights into local music theory and music genres, and highlights the ways in which the music of this city reflects its social context. In addition to these specific ethnomusicological studies, a number of scholars have examined the relationship between music and Islam.¹⁴

Other than some general remarks in Slobin's and Sakata's ethnomusicological studies, Badakhshan's dance traditions have remained unresearched. In fact, even within the context of Afghanistan, the only accounts of dance derive from research undertaken prior to the Soviet invasion in 1979. Some rare data on women's dances in Herat is presented by Veronica Doubleday (1988), who conducted her research with her husband John Baily, and by the American Katherine St. John (1993; 1995). John Baily's (1988) excellent study of musicians in Herat also mentions men's solo dances. The only other research on dance in Afghanistan was conducted by the German Ingeborg Baldauf (1988), who provides unique insights into the specific genre of dancing boys in north-western Afghanistan.

The paucity of available literature on dance and Islam in general comes initially as a surprise since dancing is a common feature of the cultural heritage of many Muslim societies.¹⁵ For the most part, the available sources are historical (see for example And 1976) and pseudo-historical works (see for example Buonaventura 1989; Friedlander 1975), as well as articles with a strong Orientalist tone (see for example Berger 1961; Meri 1961). Most materials are preoccupied with Sufi dances, particularly those of the 'whirling dervishes', and the *raqs al-sharqi* (oriental dance) which is commonly and

¹⁴ For example, Farmer (1973 (1929)), al Faruqi (1979; 1985), al-Ghazālī (1938), Macdonald (1901-1902), Nasr (1997), Qureshi (1995 (1986); 1997), Roychoudhury (1957), Sawa (1981), Shehadi (1995), Shiloah (1979; 1995), and Ibn Taymiyya (in Michot 1991).

¹⁵ The following authors have dealt with the topic of dance and Islam: al Faruqi (1976/77; 1978), Hamada (1978), Schimmel (1975), And (1976), Lewisohn (1997), and Shay (1995; 1999). There are also numerous ethnographies that have discussed various aspects of dance. These sources occasionally refer to dance in an Islamic setting within a wider anthropological or historical discourse, but mostly only pertaining to the specific group studied. For examples, see Chelkowski (1979), Crapanzano (1973), Levin (1996), Lindholm (1982), Schmid (1997), Barth (1981 (1960)), Eickelman (1976), and Gellner (1969). Several other authors have commented on the practice of Sufi dance and its relation to Islam. For examples, see Trimmingham (1998 (1971)), Ritter (1955), And (1976), Arberry (1950), Chittick (1983), Schimmel (1975; 1980).

derogatorily known in the West as '*dance du ventre*' or 'belly dance' (al Faruqi 1976/77:45).¹⁶ However, the work of Lois al Faruqi (1976/77; 1978; 1985) is notable for her attempts to provide a definition of dance in Muslim societies. In addition, Anthony Shay (1999) presents the first major anthropological account of the dances of mostly American Iranians. His study aims to unravel the significance of improvised Iranian solo dances and also provides a comprehensive review of dance in an Islamic context (see also Shay 1995). Indeed, with the exception of the research conducted by al Faruqi (1978) and Shay (1995; 1999), detailed analyses of the dances of Muslims in Central and South Asia as well as in the Middle East remain virtually non-existent. The gap in research on cultural performances in Badakhshan as well as in Afghanistan more generally since 1979, has been addressed by this author in a number of publications (2000a; 2000c; 2000d; 2001). These articles discuss Badakhshan's cultural heritage during the Rabbani Presidency and comment on the controversies of performance in the conservative Islamic context of Afghanistan.

In comparison with the ethnomusicological studies on Badakhshan and Afghanistan, this thesis addresses cultural performances with a unique interdisciplinary approach that draws upon the academic fields of political science, history, anthropology, and ethnomusicology. I propose that this focus not only facilitates unique insights into the nature and practice of cultural performances in Badakhshan during the Taliban era but in so doing, illuminates the diversity of political, religious and social agendas that underpin the contexts and content of cultural performances. Although as will become clear in the ensuing discussion, the legalities of music, dance and sport are closely connected, the aesthetic practice of dance is generally seen to be an especially controversial practice in Islamic societies. For that reason, it will be specifically addressed. Clearly, this work addresses the silence that exists in both academic and general literature about Afghanistan's culture. More specifically, it provides a detailed historical overview of Badakhshan with a particular emphasis on Islam, culture and politics and their interconnections during the late 1990s. However, this thesis is not explicitly ethnographic since I am mainly concerned with those individuals and groups who were associated in some way with performances in Badakhshan during my field research. Furthermore, in comparison with more conventional ethnomusicological

¹⁶ An Arabic term denoting a woman's improvised dance that is common in the Arab world, but also performed in other Islamic nations such as Iran, Afghanistan and the Muslim Central Asian states. In Afghanistan, this dance is called *raqsi sharqi*.

studies, this analysis of music and dance performances does not employ specialised trait lists such as musical or dance notation, nor are music qualities extensively and exhaustively described or analysed. Instead, filmed excerpts of performances are included that allow the reader to gain a more immediate experience of performance events. Indeed, I suggest that this use of film is more congruent with the primary intention of this thesis, which is to elucidate the broader political, social and religious frameworks and meanings of the performance events observed in Badakhshan in 1998 and 1999.

Issues Related to the Methodology

In order to interpret the processes, relationships and meanings of cultural performances in Badakhshan, which are by nature extremely polysemous, this study draws on a Peircean semiotic analysis wherein cultural practices are viewed as systems of signs. This methodology facilitates a multiplicity of interpretations of both linguistic and extra-linguistic performances with particular emphasis on the explication of their social and ideological contexts.

Undoubtedly, the analysis of 'inside' cultural practices by an 'outside' researcher is inherently problematic, since the researcher's interpretation of an event is likely to differ in many respects from local interpretations. This potential for a variety of interpretations is both an asset and a disadvantage. While the performances certainly left an impact on me as the researcher, my retrospective interpretations have facilitated a deeper understanding of the events and their further "possibilities of signification" (Mills 1991:24). Certainly, it is always inherently difficult to comprehend exactly how performances are understood by participants, and even more so in a cross-cultural situation. This dilemma was further compounded in Badakhshan in 1998 and 1999 when the political and religious censorship of non-religious cultural practices by local authorities meant that it was virtually impossible to discuss events with participants and/or audiences. I was left with impressions of emotions as embodied in such actions as clapping or laughing, or in postures of apprehension or avoidance. As much as possible, therefore, local terms and categories are employed and reflected upon in the analysis so as to ensure that interpretations of performances closely reflect the indigenous understandings and responses – linguistic or extra-linguistic – that were available. At the same time, however, I believe that the sensitive application of non-local analytical categories may assist with the critical interpretation of cultural performances

and in the delineation of their broader social and political relations, which may not be directly or consciously available to local observers.

This study was conducted in a conservative Muslim environment. As a male researcher, I had access only to cultural practices that were performed by males in the male domain. For this reason, I use the pronoun 'he' throughout the thesis. Since my research occurred during a specific historical time – 1998 and 1999 – and place – the province of Badakhshan – the events will be recalled in the past tense. Only events that pertain to the time of writing will appear in present tense.

Research in a Politically Unstable Territory

Given Afghanistan's precarious political situation at the time of my research, the physical task alone of reaching Badakhshan was not only time-consuming, but extremely challenging. Indeed, the only legal means of entering the province was with the humanitarian flights of the United Nations (henceforth UN) or International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) that irregularly went to the provincial capital Faizabad from northern Pakistan. Consequently, I initially spent a lengthy period in Islamabad and Peshawar, liaising with the staff of various Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) that dealt with the provision of assistance to Afghanistan.

Issued with a visa valid for travel only to anti-Taliban territories, I arrived in March 1998 at Faizabad airport, a Soviet-built runway composed of corrugated steel sheets. Although the air traffic control facilities had been destroyed during the *jihad* (Islamic resistance)¹⁷ against the Communist regime, this airport remained Badakhshan's only serviceable port for small aircraft. Upon arrival, I was faced with yet another problem. With the exception of a number of international humanitarian aid workers, the province had received few visitors and certainly no tourists since the beginning of the civil war. Within Badakhshan, hotels and guesthouses catering to international tourists or researchers no longer existed. The only remaining hotel in Faizabad, which once accommodated tourists in the 1960s and 1970s, had become a residence

¹⁷ The term *jihad* is derived from the Arabic, which Shahrani translates as an "Islamic war of liberation" or a "holy war for the cause of Islam" (1984a:343; 1984b:25-30). In this context, *jihad* may be defined as "the ideological framework upon which the armed struggle in Afghanistan rests" (Shahrani 1984b:28).

for visiting commanders. Elsewhere, *chaikhanas* (teahouses) and *serais* (hostels) were other options, but were mostly frequented by traders for overnight stay and were therefore inappropriate for longer lodging. Fortunately, I was generously allowed to rent accommodation or was frequently invited to stay in some of the compounds of the international NGOs that were active in the province. In smaller towns and villages, I was generally offered local hospitality and was invited to stay in *khushkhanas* (guesthouses) that belonged either to a village or a village leader.

Fieldwork necessitated considerable flexibility in terms of living conditions, transportation and the ability to conduct research within time constraints, especially in the light of frequent natural disasters such as earthquakes and droughts, in addition to the constant threat of a take-over by the Taliban. It was almost inevitable that a European researcher would be initially regarded with suspicion, particularly given the uninvited presence of Soviet soldiers less than nine years earlier. While it was difficult to enter Badakhshan as an independent researcher, the fact that I was not a humanitarian worker provided me with additional privileges that otherwise eluded the staff of NGOs, such as the opportunity for unaccompanied travel within the parameters of the existing nightly curfew. This independent status often allowed a more effective rapport with informants. My meetings were not seen to be related to aid activities and for the most part were not regarded in an economic context. It was this combination of being 'somehow' connected with NGOs while working as an independent researcher that allowed me to gain the trust of communities and individuals.

Due to events well beyond my control, my research was interrupted in both 1998 and 1999 and I was forced to abandon fieldwork prematurely. In May 1998, while I was travelling between locations to conduct fieldwork in north-western Badakhshan, I was near the epicentre of a massive earthquake registering 6.9 on the Richter scale which killed over 4000 people. This was the second major earthquake to have hit the same region within four months (see WFP 1998). Luckily, I was outdoors at the time since the vehicle in which I was travelling had been stranded due to a wash-out of the main thoroughfare – a dirt track – following heavy rain. Since all the passengers were waiting near the road and discussing how best to repair it so as to continue the journey, fortunately no-one was injured.

The devastation resulting from this earthquake, however, meant that I inevitably had to evaluate the importance of my research. At the time of the

earthquake's impact, only a few aid workers were present in the province. Since all NGOs operating in Badakhshan were understaffed and unprepared for such a disaster, I temporarily became an emergency humanitarian worker, coordinating and organising relief operations. In this capacity, I later travelled to the epicentre, accompanying a donkey convoy with emergency food provisions, as due to adverse weather conditions and the inhospitability of the physical terrain, this area was not accessible by vehicle. This humanitarian engagement confirmed that my research on non-religious performances was not appropriate at that particular time. The people of Badakhshan were mourning and occupied with assisting survivors and the reconstruction of their villages. Understandably, they were not in a state to discuss sport or entertainment.

My second field trip in 1999 was problematic from the beginning. In response to the bombings of their embassies in Tanzania and Kenya in August 1998, the United States fired cruise missiles that same month into alleged terrorist camps belonging to the Saudi dissident Osama bin Laden, in southern Afghanistan. This military intervention meant that travel into Afghanistan for non-essential humanitarian staff – let alone independent researchers – became extremely difficult. Moreover, UN flights which previously had been funded by the European Union, had ceased to receive financial support from Donor Countries. The consequence was a skyrocketing in fares for non-UN and non-NGO travellers. After several unsuccessful attempts to re-enter Badakhshan by plane, I eventually flew from Pakistan to Tajikistan and managed then to travel overland from Dushanbe with the assistance of a number of international NGOs. Whilst this route has been primarily utilised to enable essential humanitarian aid to reach Afghanistan across the Amu Darya (Oxus River), it is not an official border-crossing and consequently necessitates many essential documents and permits which are obtainable only 'for a price' in Dushanbe. Unfortunately, this field trip was also cut short. In August 1999, the Taliban, having just overrun the Shomali plains, a Massoud stronghold north of Kabul, were making serious advances towards Badakhshan. The province was receiving an influx of internally displaced peoples, while many Badakhshis were making preparations to flee to Pakistan. On the advice of international staff and the UN, I was evacuated. As it later transpired, Ahmad Shah Massoud, the military strategist of the Islamic State of Afghanistan and the main commander of the anti-Taliban United Islamic and National Front for the Salvation of Afghanistan (Jabha-e Muttahid-e Islami-e Melli bara-ye Nijat-e Afghanistan, henceforth United Front), ingeniously managed to defeat the

Taliban on this occasion. This small victory occurred while I was already in the safety of Pakistan.

Travel within Badakhshan would often consist of catching a ride with vehicles that belonged to NGOs. Occasionally, I would therefore coordinate my travel plans when I knew in advance that an organisation was travelling to a particular location. This was by far the easiest method since international NGOs could generally transit through the many checkpoints more easily. In contrast, local travellers were subject to vigorous checking. When I travelled to areas that were controlled by military commanders belonging to different and often opposing factions, such as commanders who were aligned with Rabbani rather than Massoud, I was required to present official travel documents that had been issued by the provincial governor (*wali*) or district governors (*wali* or *alagadar*) so as to secure my passage through these military checkpoints.

Only limited motorised public transport was available within the province. The few operative jeeps belonged mainly to commanders and together with the only other irregular form of motorised public transport – travel on heavily laden trucks – reflected Badakhshan's poor economic state and fragile infrastructure. These unpredictable conditions meant that walking with a loaded donkey or riding a horse was the most reliable form of transport. All roads were unsurfaced and thus prone to frequent wash-outs and landslides. Closures could last for anything from five hours to two weeks. When the province's main trade arteries were impassable, especially the western road connecting Faizabad with neighbouring Takhar's provincial capital Taloqan (see Maps 2 and 3), the usually poorly stocked bazaars were quickly depleted. I recall one occasion when wheat, an essential food item, was unavailable in Faizabad's bazaar and local bakers were forced to close their businesses for three days.

As a result of the armed conflict, my field research was necessarily somewhat constrained and I needed to be able to adapt quickly to the demands of what were often volatile situations. Given the constant potential for emergency evacuations, it was essential that I stayed in frequent contact with the few NGOs in Badakhshan as these organisations were equipped with satellite communication systems. Armed disputes between warring commanders also occurred regularly, at times even within the vicinity of my residence. In one instance, I was unable to return to Faizabad as a result of fighting between feuding commanders belonging to different factions of the Islamic State of Afghanistan. During such times, I was mostly confined to my residence. On another occasion in 1998, I had planned to visit Bazgul Badakhshi, one of

Badakhshan's most famous musicians and comedians, who then lived in impoverished circumstances in a remote village in the province. However, I was prevented from doing so by the outbreak of fighting in the region between two neighbouring and rival *qawms* (kinship associations), each of which was represented by a local commander, one of whom allegedly took Bazgul hostage during this domestic feud. In fact, on a daily basis, the constant presence of heavily armed soldiers loyal to their respective commanders meant that I had to be consistently careful in the conduct of my research, especially in light of the negative interpretations of non-religious practices espoused by some conservative Islamist leaders at that time. My first step therefore was usually to consult with the local staff of NGOs, who would subsequently introduce me to members of the community. With this understanding of the religio-political inclinations of the local commander and his soldiers, and exercising due caution, I found that local bazaars were excellent places to gather information on local performance traditions or in which to locate informants.

Interviews were conducted with my knowledge of Persian acquired at The Australian National University and sometimes with the assistance of the Afghan staff from NGOs who knew some English. Occasionally, members of Badakhshan's elite, many of whom were tertiary-educated, had a considerable grasp of English and were happy to converse in it. However, the topic of non-religious performances is polemical for many orthodox Muslims, particularly given the ultra-conservative interpretations of Islamic doctrines that prevailed in 1998 and 1999 when non-religious entertainment was severely restricted or at best tacitly banned in many areas of Badakhshan. The contentious status of entertainment practices in Afghanistan quickly became clear to me when informants did not respond to my questions. As a consequence, questions had to be phrased carefully and specific inquiries about cultural performances were situational and varied in nature. More usually, information was obtained circuitously. The starting point, especially when I was in the company of military commanders, government officials or religious and conservative locals, was usually the eliciting of general information on local culture (*farhang-e Badakhshan*). Once informants became known to me and a level of trust was established, it was often possible to discuss sport and entertainment practices such as music and dance. Nevertheless, the latter practices proved to be particularly controversial, with only liberal informants willing to comment on them and then often privately. Public acknowledgment of one's approval of such non-religious practices could potentially be interpreted by other locals, who may have been aligned with a conservative political faction, as a sign of weakness or even immorality. Threats to report such reprehensible views or

practices may have been an effective means of extorting bribes, and if payment did not eventuate, the resultant reporting to religious and political authorities may have led to fines or, in the worst case, incarceration. In many respects, therefore, I learned most about the province – its history, cultures, political and religious emphases – and the manifold identities of its inhabitants through my experiences of inquiring about culture and my eventual recording of cultural events.

In these less than ‘ideal’ research circumstances which in themselves bore testimony to the tenuous endurance of the governance of the Islamic State of Afghanistan and the precarious yet valued nature of Afghanistan’s cultural heritage, my somewhat restricted observations were undoubtedly conditioned by an extraordinary amount of *qismat* (luck).

Synopsis of Dissertation

Chapter Two introduces the complexities of culture and performance and details the problematics of research in this diverse field. Cultural performances are described and elucidated not only as microcosms of society, but as forms of metacommentaries on social, political, economic, and religious concerns. I propose that this broader role of performance may be effectively addressed through the use of a Peircean-influenced semiotic framework which facilitates the explication of the meanings and relationships inherent in performance events. Further, the local and Islamic categories of *halal* (permissible) and *haram* (forbidden) are introduced in terms of a continuum on which performance events in Islamic societies are situated.

Chapters Three, Four and Five establish the social, cultural, religious, and political context of Badakhshan. A thorough knowledge of this setting is fundamental to the analysis of cultural performances that follows in Chapters Six and Seven. Chapter Three provides an ethnography of the agrarian society of Badakhshan, describing the various ethnic groups that live in the multi-cultural and multi-sectarian province. Badakhshan’s social and political history is addressed in Chapter Four. After giving an historical overview of the province, the chapter outlines the emergence of political Islam within this region as well as in the larger context of Afghanistan. It becomes clear that while influential to varying degrees in the province since the mid-seventh century, Islam remains the most important cultural and political factor in contemporary Badakhshan. Chapter Five discusses the inherently polemical

nature of cultural performance in orthodox Islamic societies. Arguments concerning the legality of various types of performance are presented and the nexus between Sufism and performance, as well as issues of gender and ideas of appropriate bodily conduct are discussed. In addition, the two sectarian Islamic groups of the majority Sunnis and minority Ismailis in the province are described in detail since their divergent views on aesthetic practices are crucial to later analyses of the performance events recorded in Badakhshan. This chapter also gives an historical overview of the social role and religious interpretations of performances in Afghanistan from the early twentieth century with particular emphasis on the more recent escalation in orthodoxy and the associated interpretation of music and dance performances as 'unlawful'.

Chapter Six describes and analyses a number of cultural practices that were observed as public performances during field research in 1998 and 1999. These religious, sporting and aesthetic performances are discussed in terms of their location on the continua of religious/non-religious, *halal/haram*, cultural practices. Since public religious practices were seen to be clearly legitimate, they continued to be performed without restrictions in Badakhshan. In comparison, non-religious practices were publicly performed only if they were deemed to be acceptable within the prevailing conservative interpretations of Hanafi Islam.¹⁸ Thus in stark contrast to the Taliban-held territories, the non-religious special events of *nowruz* (Persian New Year) and *jeshen* (Independence Day) were celebrated with equestrian and wrestling tournaments. The public performances of aesthetic practices, however, were much more controversial and, as a result, occurred only on two occasions during my research. In one location, a music performance accompanied the *jeshen* festival. In another, albeit more remote region, solo dances were performed by Ismailis during a public entertainment program. These public performances of non-religious sport and aesthetic practices were proudly patronised as Badakhshi heritage and in each case were clearly condoned by the ruling religio-political elite.

Chapter Seven complements the discussion of public performances by surveying cultural practices that took place in the more restricted semi-public and private domains. All of these performance events included music and dancing and were perceived by the ruling Sunni authorities to be 'non-

¹⁸ Hanafi is one of the main Sunni schools of jurisprudence named after the great classical Islamic jurist Abu Hanifa who died in 767. In Afghanistan, as in most Sunni-influenced societies, Hanafi Islam is the major form of Islamic law.

religious' in nature and thus implicitly *haram*. These practices in particular were subject to historical shifts in political and religious ideologies. Significantly, and in comparison with religious performances and also recreational activities, non-religious practices were less clearly defined, more polysemous and generally more ambiguous. They were thus open to many possible interpretations. Indeed, while their themes tended to reflect aspects of the specific locality, ideas of the nation and religious influences, primarily those of Sufism and Ismailism, aesthetic performances also made socio-critical comments that in other contexts within Badakhshan's conservative society would have been clearly inappropriate and prone to harsh religious and political censorship.

Each case example in Chapters Six and Seven is accompanied by QuickTime movie files on accompanying CD ROMs.¹⁹

Chapter Eight concludes this thesis by reiterating the significant interplay of religion and politics in extant cultural practices in Badakhshan. During the era of the Islamic State of Afghanistan and the Taliban, uncertainties about legitimate cultural heritage stemmed from a state of general confusion about the appropriateness of traditional Afghan practices in a conservative Islamic society. Yet both the contexts and the content of performances recorded in 1998 and 1999 testify to the diversity of ethnic, regional, religious, and political identities in Badakhshan. Given the factionalised nature of contemporary Afghanistan, cultural practices, both religious and non-religious, may therefore represent a positive means of nation-building by strengthening community relationships across sectarian, social and political divisions and rebuilding confidence in what constitutes Afghan cultural identity.

Use of Pseudonyms

The unpredictability of politics in Afghanistan renders the naming of informants problematic, making them potentially vulnerable in the event of a resurgence of orthodox Islam. None of my informants, for example, wanted to be known as having belonged to the Communist regime. As this thesis will elucidate, Afghanistan is a volatile country with harsh and difficult living

¹⁹ The CD ROMs are inserted into the back pocket of this thesis. Instructions on how to use QuickTime are provided in Appendix Five.

conditions. Retribution killings were not uncommon during the *jihad* against the Soviet-backed Communist government as well as during the early period of Islamic governance. While Afghanistan is now being reconstructed with international assistance, it remains a very conservative Muslim society and its immediate political future is thus impossible to predict.

While ideally I would prefer to quote sources for attribution, I have been compelled therefore, to use pseudonyms for all individuals and communities who have participated in this research, since genuine security for their lives cannot be guaranteed. Indeed, the identities of my informants were always "intricately situational" (Malkki 1995:3). It is essential that I safeguard the anonymity of my informants, who under adverse political conditions freely shared information and insights with me about practices that at the very least, were regarded as controversial, if not reprehensible. Hence, I will use pseudonyms for all persons with the exceptions of well-known political leaders such as President Burhanuddin Rabbani, and entertainers such as Bazgul Badakhshi, as well as regional commanders and performers who have since been assassinated. Real names of informants are used only if they were not living in Afghanistan at the time of my research or if they gave consent to being cited. Similarly, I have intentionally changed the names of towns and villages in which I conducted my fieldwork, with the exception of the provincial capital Faizabad. Consequently, original places names appear in the historical narrative and maps of Badakhshan, whereas pseudonyms are employed for towns and villages in which research was conducted.

Notes on the Spelling of Arabic and Persian Words

A precise system of transliteration for words of Arabic or Persian origin may be considered a scholarly task in its own right. I have therefore opted for a simplified system without diacritical marks to facilitate easier reading of the text. This transliteration system has been modified from the consonantal system used in the *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*. The main aim has been to approximate the pronunciation for a large and general audience, while the expert should have no trouble identifying the exact pronunciations and spellings of the terms and names recorded.

The Arabic and Persian emphatic consonants of *se*, *sin* and *sad* are all transliterated as *s*. The transliterated letter *h* may refer to two separate Arabic/Persian letters *he*, while the letter *t* may represent the letters *te* and *ta*

(see Glossary). No distinctions are generally made between long (\bar{a} , \bar{u} , \bar{i}) and short vowels (\bar{a} , \bar{u} , \bar{i}). For example, a long a (\bar{a}), as in *khane* (house), and a short a , as in *daf* (tambourine), are both spelt with the same letter. When the letter *he* appears as an ending of a word as in *khane*, the *h* remains silent, thus rendering the term in Persian-speaking regions as *e*. In the Dari dialect, the Persian language spoken in Afghanistan, the ending is, however, commonly pronounced colloquially as *a*, as in *khana*. Occasionally the long a is actually pronounced o in Afghanistan as in the example of *samovar* instead of *samavar* (see Glossary).

The diphthong vowel ‘ow’ (as in the English ‘how’) has been rendered as *aw*, exemplified with the Arabic noun *qawm* (a kinship term), except in cases where a common transliterated form already exists in the academic literature. Exceptions in this thesis, for example, are the words for the Persian New Year (*nowruz* instead of *nawruz*) and April (*saur* instead of *sawr*). The other diphthong vowel “ay” (as in the English ‘pay’) is transliterated as *ai* and is shown with the example of the Persian word *chai* (see Glossary). The Arabic sign *ain* is represented without the opening inverted comma; the term Shi‘ite is thus transliterated as Shiite. The symbol *hamza* that is often transliterated as a closing inverted comma has also been omitted. The Qur’an is therefore spelt here as Quran. The Persian genitive construction (*ezafe*) appears as *e* as in *maidan-e id* (*id* grounds).

The Arabic letter *waw* has been mostly transliterated as *u* as in *dutar* (two-stringed lute), although *o* is occasionally also used as in *kofita* (a meat dish). The letter *qav* is transliterated as *q* and not as *k*, unless a common spelling in English has already been established such as in the spelling of the cities/provinces Kandahar, Kataghan or Kunduz, which technically speaking should be transliterated as Qandahar, Qataghan or Qunduz.

All foreign words that are not in common usage in the English language are italicised and are spelled as they appear in standard publications. The English translation of the initial appearance of a foreign term is provided in parentheses, set off by adjoining commas, or is listed in a footnote. Except at the beginning of a sentence, a footnote or in the title of a publication, all Arabic or Persian words are spelled in lower case. Only foreign names that are common in Western usage are spelled in upper cases. For simplicity and unless otherwise marked, the plurals of foreign terms are mostly formed by adding an unitalicised ‘s’ to the singular noun. In direct quotes, all attempts have been made to retain all original transliterations. Where Arabic or Persian words have

entered English usage or are widely recognised by a particular form, they are presented in the familiar form and are not italicised (such as Allah, Sura, Quran, Sharia, Imam, Caliph, Shah, Taliban). In most cases, a brief note appears in the main text, which is then repeated, expanded upon or summarised in the appended glossary (Appendix One). Arabic or Persian words that are important terms in the context of this thesis, as well as less common English words and acronyms appear in the glossary. In addition, a second appendix offers notes on the system of transliteration used for Persian and Arabic consonants and vowels (Appendix Two).

2

Theoretical Framework and Methodology

It becomes crucial to distinguish between the semblance and similitude of the symbols across diverse cultural experiences - literature, art, music ritual, life, death - and the social specificity of each of these productions of meaning as they circulate as signs within specific contextual locations and social systems of value. The transnational dimension of cultural transformation - migration, diaspora, displacement, relocation - makes the process of cultural translation a complex form of signification. The natural(ized), unifying discourse of 'nation', 'peoples', or authentic 'folk' tradition, those embedded myths of culture's particularity, cannot be readily referenced. The great, though unsettling, advantage of this position is that it makes you increasingly aware of the construction of culture and the invention of tradition (Bhabha 1994:172).

In all societies, performances occur as culturally situated everyday activities and/or special events.¹ They engender meaning through "the sense of putting more into something (in a self-conscious or intentional way) than is absolutely necessary; of loading an act with meaning...of above all insisting on 'meaning to mean'" (Rostas 1998:90). In this chapter, I will be mainly concerned with delineating the nature and significance of performance and establishing a methodological framework for the later analysis of the performances of prayer,

¹ It is, however, important to recognise that it is difficult to establish clear demarcations between such arbitrary constructs and that one category may easily merge into another. Daily activities may be thought of "as the unmarked background condition against which specific events are framed" (Lewis 1999:539), in contrast with extra-daily activities which are marked and framed.

sports, music, and dance – *id*, *buzkashi*, *musiqi*,² and *raqs* – that arose as special events in the highly political and religious context of Badakhshan in 1998 and 1999.

Specific issues related to the interpretation of performance and culture are addressed in the first section of this chapter. The problematic nature of such analyses is seen to arise from a number of factors: culture is not a static and fixed structure, performances tend to be polysemous and bodies are situated in both physical and social contexts. The second section of this chapter proposes the integration of a number of theoretical models – primarily those of Peircean semiotics and phenomenology – as a means of addressing some of the dilemmas that beset the interpretation of cultural performances. Accordingly, in this thesis, performances are treated as classes of signs or in other words, as “physically manifested vehicles that bear culturally endowed meaning” (Parmentier 1987:11). The two categories of religious and non-religious performances that serve as critical points of distinction in Badakhshi society are discussed at length in the third section of this chapter. Given that the majority of performances surveyed in this thesis are non-religious in nature, this category is necessarily subdivided into recreational and aesthetic performances. Finally, the ancillary use of the methodologies of visual anthropology and to a lesser extent, Laban Movement Analysis is presented. I suggest that this eclectic interpretive approach is necessary to explicate the central tenet of this thesis that Badakhshan’s cultural performances are signs which not only reflect, but potentially comment on and engage with the socio-political circumstances of Badakhshan’s society at large.

Culture and Performance

Since the 1960s, a significant shift in anthropological investigation has occurred through the impact of the diverse fields of phenomenology, structuralism, structural linguistics, semiotics, and hermeneutics. Its central tenet of culture has ceased to be understood as a stable entity or set of static structures but rather, has come to encompass a multitudinous matrix of facets

² I have chosen *musiqi* as the generic term for music that was understood by many of my often-urban educated informants in Badakhshan. It must be noted, however, that there are many words to denote music in Afghanistan, of which many are regional (for a discussion on the terminology of music in Afghanistan, see Sakata 1983:41-75). Some of the words may therefore have different meanings in various situations and contexts.

and associated complexities. As a consequence, although remaining “a salient concept around which meanings are mobilized” (Lock and Kaufert 1998:5), ‘culture’ has become difficult to define readily.

A useful approach is that espoused by E. Valentine Daniel (1996:200) who describes culture as emergent, dynamic and processual. While Thomas Eriksen defines culture as the “acquired, cognitive and symbolic aspects of existence” for the members of a society (1995:9), it is important to recognise the role of practice and creativity in culture. In line with this emphasis, Jean and John Comaroff (1991:22) refer to culture as:

the space of signifying practice, the semantic ground on which human beings seek to construct and represent themselves and others – and, hence, society and history. As this suggests, [culture] is not simply a pot of messages, a repertoire of signs to be flashed across a neutral mental screen. It has form as well as content; is born in action as well as thought; is a product of human creativity as well as mimesis; and, above all, is empowered. But it is not all empowered in the same way, all of the time.

Similarly, Randy Martin proposes that culture “is the principle of association present in all forms, sites and expressions of social practice, not simply a particular type of practice” (1998:116). Indeed, he further posits that culture may be understood as “what moves people in the workplace and at home, what drives the experience of love and death” and thus has the potential to inspire “social movements and political parties” (Martin 1998:116). Homi Bhabha (1994:175) eloquently describes these multi-dimensional and multivalent qualities as rendering culture

as much an uncomfortable, disturbing practice of survival and supplementarity - between art and politics, past and present, the public and the private - as its resplendent being is a moment of pleasure, enlightenment or liberation.

Clifford Geertz (1973) and his semiotic schema of cultures as systems of symbols, continue to be of primary influence in contemporary conceptualisations of culture. His version of the text metaphor is frequently adopted as a theoretical framework for cultural studies since it draws out “dichotomies between cultural and biological/genetic, and between public and private sources of information” (Csordas 1994:12). Influenced by Max Weber, Geertz describes culture as “webs of significance” (1973:5). His interpretive ethnography facilitates the deciphering of multiple, layered networks of meaning through a diverse range of symbolic forms including language, actions and conceptions (see Marcus and Fischer 1999:29). All aspects of social life, “from mythology to subsistence practices” are thus sources of insight into cultural phenomena (Ness 1992:230). Daniel, however, disagrees with Geertz’s approach to culture as a system of symbols and meanings.

Instead, his own pragmatic semiotic method conceptualises culture as a complex pattern of *signs*; culture is a creative and inherently communicative phenomenon that is manifested when public and private aspects of human experience become “mutually immanent” in social action (Daniel 1984:13). I believe that Daniel’s approach to culture is extremely pertinent to the analysis of cultural performances in Afghanistan and it will therefore be discussed in detail later in this chapter.

In recent years, a burgeoning of publications in the field of performance studies has led to the development of new ethnographic and inter-cultural perspectives on cultural events and practices. Emerging from feminist, linguistic, literary, and anthropological theories, these significant developments have become a major critical discourse in the humanities. Increasingly, there has been a shift in emphasis away from the primacy of linguistic and textual interpretations of culture and towards a greater recognition of the role of the body. Culture is thus not only dynamic, but embodied; members of communities interact with one another and through enacting, blending, borrowing, and reinventing, continue to (re)develop meaningful cultural practices with which they then identify.

This central role of performance events in culture and ‘cultural heritage’³ is not only being recognised by academic scholars, but also more recently, by international organisations such as UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) and ICOMOS (International Council of Monument and Sites). These influential organisations have created their own terminology for culturally situated practices, which are encapsulated by the categories of ‘intangible cultural heritage’ and ‘intangible cultural property’ (for example see UNESCO 2000).⁴ The concept of tangible properties such as material objects, architecture, literature, handicrafts, and the fine and applied arts, is generally relatively familiar to most people, at least in part due to their

³ In this discussion, the polysemous term ‘heritage’ shall be taken as pertaining to all accumulated cultural [, aesthetic and] artistic productivity...whether produced in the past or currently...which contributes to the effective functioning of society or to the favoured national [or ethnic/territorial] image, and which is thereby worthy of note or preservation for the enjoyment of this or future generations (Tunbridge and Ashworth 1996:2).

⁴ Cultural property is understood here as in Article 1 of the UNESCO Cultural Property Convention 1970, where it is defined as “property, which, on religious or secular grounds, is specifically designated by each state as being of importance for archaeology, prehistory, literature, art or science” and as constituted by several specific categories (quoted in Janke 1998:316).

ready accessibility via archives, exhibitions, visits to historic sites, or through media coverage. In comparison, the significance of performed cultural heritage has been relatively ignored. Clearly, the creation of the term 'intangible' represents a positive attempt to reverse this imbalance of cultural heritage agendas.

The concept of intangible practice is also a useful tool in the context of this thesis as it provides a means of collectively describing all cultural performances through the use of a single category, regardless of whether the practices are artistic, aesthetic, religious, or non-religious in nature. Yet it is important to note that this dichotomisation of cultural heritage into 'intangible' and 'tangible' properties may be somewhat problematic (see Daes 1993).⁵ From a phenomenological perspective, this binary distinction may potentially detract from the tangibility of intangible practices and, concomitantly, the intangibility of tangible events.⁶ As will be discussed in Chapters Six and Seven, the intangible qualities of music and oral poetry may in some instances be more durable than their tangible counterparts. The 'tangible' Buddha statues in Bamiyan, central Afghanistan, for example, did not survive the Taliban regime's strict edicts on non-Islamic monuments and were destroyed on 10 March 2001 (UNESCO 2001). In contrast, the performative practices of sport, music and dance publicly re-surfaced in November 2001, following the fall of Kabul to the United Front who in their role as a caretaker force, immediately reintroduced music on national radio broadcasts.

⁵ In indigenous and many non-Western societies, tangible and intangible aspects of culture are often closely linked. As Erica Irene Daes (1993:39) argues

all of the aspects of heritage are interrelated and cannot be separated from the traditional territory of the people concerned. What tangible and intangible items constitute the heritage of a particular indigenous people must be decided by the people themselves.

For example, many practices of some Australian Aboriginal groups such as the male initiation ceremonies incorporate a combination of tangible and intangible traditions. Terri Janke (1998:80) therefore argues that Australian indigenous heritage is "an holistic approach where traditions are embodied in songs, stories and designs as well as in land and the environment - the intangible interlinked with the tangible."

⁶ An intangible event may even be viewed as being closely associated with the tangible issues of feeling and emotion. Since intangible events are 'felt' through the body, they may be thought to be inextricably linked with the tangible.

Performance

Having touched upon some of the conceptual issues related to the study of culture and cultural heritage, I will now move to the discussion of performance. Performance events are common to all societies. As forms of embodied heritage, cultural performances may be understood to encompass sacred and profane practices and events, language and oral history, and particular beliefs, values, and knowledge. They are often expressed as linguistic (songs, storytelling), extra-linguistic (sport, dance, gestures, physical movements) or religious traditions (rituals such as prayer) that hold significant meaning for a community and are integral to its identity.⁷ These complex and polysemous practices thus hold aesthetic, historic, scientific, and/or social value for past, present and future generations. In this context, both professional and amateur performers may be understood as informants of social values and cultural knowledge.⁸ Concomitant with their communication of culturally significant knowledge and practices to other members of society, they not only reflect, but also create a community's cultural identity.

The category of performance is generally understood by researchers in the humanities as encompassing a diversity of expressive practices ranging from sacred activities such as rituals, to profane recreational and entertainment events like sport, theatre, dance, and music (see Beeman 1993; Reinelt 1992). While the methodology of this analysis draws on a Peircean-influenced phenomenological semiotics, this is not to deny the influence of a number of anthropological approaches in shaping my approach to performance, particularly in terms of their illumination of the broader role and connections of performance events. Both Clifford Geertz and Victor Turner, pioneers in interpretive anthropology and performance studies respectively, have alluded to the importance of "cultural expressions and performances [as]...not mere reflections of society but...[as] metacommentaries on society" (Bruner 1986:23). Edward Bruner (1986:11) also suggests that if an expressive element

⁷ Lowell Lewis refers to extra-linguistic signs as proto-linguistic signs since the signs may or may not come into linguistic conceptualisation and, therefore, may remain at a movement or sound level of understanding without being expressed in language (Personal communication, Sydney, 2001).

⁸ Practitioners of culturally significant performances have been awarded the status of "Living Human Treasures" by UNESCO (2000). These cultural bearers are persons who embody, who have in the very highest degree, the skills and techniques necessary for the production of selected aspects of the cultural life of a people and the continued existence of their material cultural heritage (UNESCO 2000).

is present, a performance may be understood as a means to “re-experience, re-live, re-create, re-tell, re-construct, and re-fashion our culture”.

The work of Victor Turner, however, is especially relevant to this study of the nexus between culture, politics and religion. Turner (1986a:22, 84) regards performances as examples of human social processes that not only reflect the social system like a microcosm, but which at the same time, are reciprocal and reflexive, hence potentially critical of the social life from which they arise. A performance therefore can be seen as a commentary on social conditions (see Turner 1990:17). In Turner’s benchmark research on the practices of ‘play’ and ‘drama’, the genre of performance and its performers are affected by liminal modalities. Borrowed from Arnold van Gennep’s *The Rites of Passage* (1960),⁹ the term ‘liminality’ subsequently became one of Turner’s key concepts to describe experience, primarily during ritual. In fact, this concept has remained influential in contemporary performance studies (such as Kapferer 1983; Lewis 1992; Schechner 1985).

Turner (1974:85) argues that liminal events “tend to be collective, concerned with calendrical, biological, social-structural rhythms or with crises in social processes”. They are thus exemplified by the rituals of small-scale agrarian and often indigenous societies, but may also encompass “frameworks seen as grounded in transcendental, fundamental, or ‘ultimate concerns’” (Lewis and Dowsey-Magog 1993:200). Turner describes a liminal practice as reflecting a “no-man’s-land betwixt and between the structural past and the structural future” (1986b:41), a “fertile nothingness, a storehouse of possibilities” (1990:12). Likewise, Roach (1992:13) formulates the concept of liminality as a “state or process of living on the margins, of crossing the boundaries, of literally being at the ‘threshold’ of culture’s inside/outside”. Liminal performances which are obligatory to a society and are often secluded from everyday practices, such as a religious festival or the rite of passage of a wedding, stand in contrast to voluntary ‘liminoid’, or ritual-like, activities. While tending to originate from a liminal phenomenon, liminoid practices often foster the cohesiveness of social systems; they are manifest in the arts and leisure pursuits of predominantly industrialised societies, but at the same time may express some form of social critique (see Turner 1974:85-86).¹⁰

⁹ ‘Liminality’ stems from the Latin noun *limen* (threshold), a term that was used by van Gennep in the second of his three stages in rites of passage (Turner 1986b:41).

¹⁰ As Lewis (1993:198) argues, liminoid practices “such as theatre, sports, concerts, festivals...may have some elements of ritual, especially the basic sequence, but usually do not

While the distinction between liminal and liminoid is often seen to be rather arbitrary and difficult to clarify, liminal practices tend to involve symbols with common intellectual and emotional meaning for all members of a group. In comparison, “liminoid phenomena tend to be more idiosyncratic, quirky, to be generated by specific named individuals and in particular groups” (Turner 1974:85).

The variety of genres within the category of performance generally have a number of common features: a sequence of limited duration, a demarcated beginning and end, intensity, the participation of performers and an audience, a venue, and an occasion to perform that is commonly set apart from the ordinary routines of life. Cowan (1990:4) describes a performance as a “conceptually ‘bounded’ sphere of interaction...[where] individuals publicly present themselves...and are evaluated by others”. Yet the role of the audience’s identity and participation frequently passes unacknowledged, possibly because, like the performance activity itself, it is not easily interpreted. Remarking on Herbert Blau’s work *The Audience* (1990), Martin (1997:336) postulates that a performance is “as a thing-in-itself, for itself”, whereby the audience may be regarded as a receiver, “the mirror of a semiosis of performance”, or as being contained by the intention of the performance, “the performative agency”. An audience may thus serve as “an object of representation” that is best conceptualised through the notion of participation as it “assumes the internal perspective of the performance event” (Martin 1998:38). The importance of the audience rests with its communicative role since it is “not only part of the event’s reason for being but also its means of becoming” (Martin 1998:38). In fact, the audience’s identity comes into existence only as the performer, the medium of signification, creates the event.

In the search for an effective method of conceptualising cultural performances, the notion of ‘framing’, first developed by Gregory Bateson (1972:184-193), is particularly useful. Within Bateson’s (1972:186) model, a frame is a psychological concept that delimits meaningful actions. Moreover, the frame is meta-communicative, that is it “communicates about communication” (Cowan 1990:19). For example, the framing of a particular performance event that takes place in a particular space and time, may indicate ‘this is wrestling’.¹¹

achieve the totalising, integrative force that has been seen as central to many kinds of ritual practice”.

¹¹ In order to accommodate a more dynamic model for the frame’s apparently static and impermeable nature, other terms such as the metaphor of a flexible, “porous net” have been proposed (Schechner 1993:41).

Erving Goffman (1958; 1974) expands Bateson's idea of 'framing' and applies it more generally, wherein the social interactions of participants may be used to understand the self and others through the use of frameworks of interpretations. Like Goffman, Turner (1986a:140) utilises the metaphor of theatre to explain his theories and also elaborates upon the concept of 'framing':

[T]o frame is to discriminate a sector of sociocultural action from the general on-going process of a community's life. It is often reflexive, in that, to "frame," a group must cut out a piece of itself for inspection (and retrospection).

He suggests that such inspection is enabled by the demarcation of a performance space and time where "images and symbols of what has been sectioned off can be 'relived,' scrutinized, assessed, revalued, and, if need be, remodelled and rearranged" (Turner 1986a:140). The cultural performances in Badakhshan which are the focus of this thesis, were clearly set apart and differentiated from quotidian activities by 'frame-markers' including the explicit naming of events, the establishment of distinct boundaries between these events and the everyday, and/or such other means as the nature of the setting or the clothing worn by participants.¹²

Reminiscent of Turner's concept of performances as microcosms of the social system, Geertz (1973:30) describes performances as "symbolic dimension[s] of social action" through which significant components of a culture can be elucidated. In his now classic work on the Balinese cockfight, Geertz elicits meaning through the operation of symbolic dramatisation. As the performance's interpreter, he brilliantly reads the cockfight as a text in a contextual world and comes to understand its cultural meaning (see Clifford 1988:40). By employing a 'thick description' of ordinary Balinese daily life, Geertz illuminates an "historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols" (1973:89) and interprets the cockfight as a "dramatization of status concerns" (1973:437). The performance acts like a synecdoche,¹³ in which the Balinese cockfight comes to represent a significant locus of Balinese culture.

¹² Even though the daily activity of preparing food may be interpreted as a performance, on a continuum of least special to most special events, the washing up for example does not rate as a special activity since it usually neither involves a performative action nor an audience. For it to serve as a special event, it would require a clear and intentional marking to break its routine and to distinguish it from habitual engagement.

¹³ A figure of speech in which a part is named but the whole is understood or the whole is named but a part is understood.

The larger role of performance is also emphasised by the ethnomusicologist John Blacking (1985:64-65) who defines performances such as dance, music and ritual as

modes of human communication [that] on a continuum from the nonverbal to the verbal...can express ideas of other spheres of human activity: social, political, economic, and religious activities.

Through movement, a performance may demarcate such overarching binary categories as ordinary/special, sacred/profane or private/public, and thereby illuminate people's connections to their social world and cultural environment. While the binary categories of sacred/profane and private/public will be discussed in more detail in Chapters Six and Seven, it is nevertheless important to emphasise here that performance events actually occur on continua 'in between' these dichotomised poles (Lewis and Dowsey-Magog 1993:200, 209). For example, on a continuum of "specially marked performative frameworks" and degrees of participation, rituals may be understood as "the most special, the most important, the most essential...[since] on their performance depends the survival of cultural systems as recognisable forms, as models of and models for action and identity" (Lewis and Dowsey-Magog 1993:208). These events generally evince significant consensus among the participants in terms of belief and practice (Lewis and Dowsey-Magog 1993:209), and may thus be understood as liminal practices. In contrast, events that are "less crucial and more optional" (Lewis and Dowsey-Magog 1993:208) or, in other words, more entertaining and less transformative (Lewis and Dowsey-Magog 1993:209), may be regarded as ritual-like or liminoid performances.

Furthermore, the genres of performance events such as ritual, music, dance, and sport need to be differentiated from each other, largely because they are distinguished in practice by the people of Badakhshan themselves. For example, the performance category of ceremony – a special event – is understood in Badakhshan as consisting of several sub-categories such as commemorative events (such as the Persian New Year) and social (such as a wedding) and religious ritual practices (such as *id*).¹⁴ Games are a performance category with indeterminate boundaries, constituting an integral part of the

¹⁴ *Id*, an Arabic noun, literally means festival. Two major *ids* are celebrated in the Muslim calendar *id-e ramazan* (The Feast of the End of Ramadan) and *id-e qurban* (The Feast of Sacrifice). See Chapter Five as well as Appendix One for further details.

performance culture of many societies and incorporating activities such as sport (for example, wrestling) and play (for example, kite-flying).¹⁵

In this thesis, I suggest that cultural performances represent significant forms of personal and collective communication. Culture itself may be seen to be a performance and more specifically a dynamic and processual practice. As a consequence, the meanings and effects that arise from cultural performances are not necessarily predetermined by what has gone before, but rather, performances have the ability to create new understandings and effects. Building on this concept of performance as a mode of cultural practice which is both delineated and understood through the act of 'framing', in Chapters Six and Seven I will seek to unravel the social and political themes inherent in the cultural performances of Badakhshan. In so doing, I shall draw upon Clifford Geertz's notion of 'native exegesis', firstly deferring to local categories and representations of cultural practices "from the native's point of view" (Geertz 1976:222), before then critically engaging with these interpretations. I am aware, however, that my own life experiences and inherent biases preclude me from experiencing "the native's point of view directly, the best...[I] can do is learn as much as possible about what the natives perceive 'with'—the full inventory of forms, concepts, and meanings that inform their version of reality" (Basso and Selby 1976:8). This brings us to the place of the body in performance and performance studies.

The Body in Culture

There is no such thing as '*the* human body': there are many kinds of body, which are fashioned by the different environments and expectations that societies have on their members' bodies (Blacking 1985:66).

The body is clearly the medium of performative expression wherein "something that was 'inside' surfaces on the 'outside' and becomes noticeable" (Joas 1996 (1992):75). Culture and its signs of habit are intricately linked with bodily experiences and the creation of identity. In fact, 'the body' will have

¹⁵ Brazilian *capoeira*, a multi-dimensional performance comprising martial arts, movement, game, sport and song, provides an excellent example of an embodied practice that interweaves many aspects of the categories mentioned here (see Lewis 1992).

different meanings in different societies, “so that the very category *body* might be problematic for understanding a certain cultural system” (Lewis 1992:225). What makes the study of embodiment complex and often leads to definitional dilemmas is the body’s capacity to function in two respects: “having” a biological entity and “being” a social and philosophical construct (Lock 1993:136). This dilemma may contribute to the controversial positioning of the body in many societies including those dominated by Euro-American cultures in which the ‘body’ tends to remain “a repressed element” (Benthall 1976:92). Chapter Five will elaborate on the place of the body in the particular context of Islamic cultures. For the moment, however, this discussion will focus on contemporary sociological and anthropological theories of embodiment.

Recent theoretical movements in the humanities have clearly deconstructed the Cartesian mind/body paradigm and have highlighted the mutual interpenetration of the physical and the social. Mary Douglas (1966) points out in her major work *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* that ‘the body’ operates “as a symbol of society across cultures, and the rituals, rules, and boundaries concerning bodily behavior can be understood as the functioning of social rules and hierarchies” (Wolff 1997:83). In *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology* (1970), she then provides insights into one of her primary concerns: the binary of ‘the social body’ and ‘the physical body’. Douglas, influenced by Marcel Mauss’ landmark essay *Les Techniques du Corps* (1935), proposes that ‘the physical body’ is a microcosmic reflection of society (Douglas 1970:70). She further stresses that

the social body constrains the way the physical body is perceived. The physical experience of the body, always modified by the social categories through which it is known, sustains a particular view of society (Douglas 1970:65).

This idea is reminiscent of Mauss’ original notion of the ‘habitus’ in which he proposes that “bodily control is an expression of social control” (Strathern 1996:18). Hence, bodily techniques “are not necessarily consciously taught; rather, they are shaped by and express the ‘habitus’” (Cowan 1990:22).¹⁶ It is

¹⁶ Bourdieu (1990:56) defines habitus as

embodied history, internalized as a second nature and so forgotten as history – is the active presence of the whole past of which it is the product. As such, it is what gives practices their relative autonomy with respect to external determinations of the immediate present. This autonomy is that of the past, enacted, and acting, which functioning as accumulated capital, produces history on the basis of history and so ensures the permanence in change that makes the individual agent a world within the world.

The concept of habitus may also be understood as

important to note that the resistance to change implicit in this social inscription of the body contrasts with the more flexible and dynamic concept of 'habit' proposed by the semiotician Charles Sanders Peirce.¹⁷ However, the concept of the 'habitus' is well used by Sally Ann Ness. She describes the body as an "imagined reservoir" of purposeful instances, which she compares to "a human being's *habitus* or lifeway, a reservoir of memory, whose depth and surface may be grasped in its full significance perhaps only via extraordinary, 'metafunctional' practices" (Ness:10). The act of performance, therefore, may provide direct insights into the nature and meaning of both the physical and the social body.

Culture is inscribed in bodily experiences. The grounding of knowledge in the immediate, concrete and sensory lifeworld, the world of lived experience, is the methodology of phenomenology, a twentieth century philosophical movement.¹⁸ Joas (1996 (1992):181) proposes that "the basis of all experience is not just corporeality but the interrelatedness of our experience of our bodies to others' bodies". The body serves the role of "being-in-the-world" (Csordas 1994:12) whereby embodiment, the main tenet of phenomenology, reflects "the concrete, the here-and-now-presence of people to one another, and the complement of senses and feelings through which they communicate with one another" (Strathern 1996:2). Cultural performances are transient experiences executed through the body which tend to be associated with culturally significant, socially constituted and historically specific attitudes. Within and across cultures, bodily movement not only marks gender, age, illness, or health, but also various class, ethnic and national identities as well as biological and cultural characteristics (see Desmond 1998:156). Moreover, the cultural

systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles of the generation and structuring of practices and representations which can be objectively "regulated" and "regular" without in any way being the product of obedience to rules (Bourdieu 1977:72).

Bourdieu's "cultivated dispositions" become "inscribed in the body schema and in the schemes of thought" (1977:15). The idea of disposition has a special meaning in Bourdieu's discussion of habitus, designating "the *result of an organizing action*;...it also designates a *way of being*, a *habitual state* (especially of the body), and, in particular, a *predisposition, tendency, propensity, or inclination*" (1977:214).

¹⁷ Peirce's concept of 'habit' has a wider meaning than its colloquial use and may be understood as repetitions with creative variation (see Peirce in Buchler 1955:277-280), allowing for both continuity and change in accordance with the demands of a particular situation (see also Appendix Three). Peirce's semiotic and phenomenological theories will be discussed in more detail below.

¹⁸ The theories were developed by Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger and later refined by Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Jean-Paul Sartre.

practices of performance, as grounded in the lived body, provide the performer with a sense of kinaesthesia, that is, an experience of his or her phenomenal body, during the movements of prayer, sport or dance. Both body and self are thus central to the 'lived' experiences of a performance.

The study of embodied practices is also greatly reliant upon indigenous understandings (see Jackson 1983:339). Indeed, cultural performances implicitly emphasise doing rather than saying (see Jackson 1983:339). Lowell Lewis (1993:207-208) suggests that

what people do at such [performance] events, whether they stand, sit, or dance, whether they sing along or clap after, is at least as important, and often more so, than what they say about how they felt, although both are indicators.

Discussions of often ambiguous or contentious issues such as sexuality and gender may also be problematic in cross-cultural settings as was certainly my experience in the mostly agrarian and extremely conservative Islamic context of Badakhshan. In such situations, sexuality may be incorporated in "a culturally specific complex of ideas, feelings, and practices" that are anchored and made manifest in performance (Cowan 1990:4). In fact, performances such as dance and sport may represent media through which a gendered or another identity is 'put on', inscribed on the body and expressed. The body is thus "both that which constitutes meaning and that through which meaning is performed or enacted" (Butler 1988:521). Having established that bodily experiences are associated not merely with the biological, but with social and cultural agendas, the next section explicitly addresses their relationship to political structures.

Politics and Culture

Grounded in its respective social context, each cultural performance is inherently linked to a political structure and may reflect social and territorial boundaries as well as ethnic and kinship organisation.¹⁹ As will be discussed in Chapters Four and Five, politics in Afghanistan is permeated by religion as well as by traditional and/or formal methods of governance; problems of social order tend to reflect conflicts between and within groups and sub-groups. During the Taliban era in particular, social and cultural life became infused

¹⁹ This is not to deny the fluid and porous nature of social and territorial boundaries and the plasticity of ethnic identity.

with political agendas. Since their Religious Police were at liberty to intervene in all aspects of life within both public and private domains, any 'unIslamic' cultural performance that occurred during this period had the potential of being interpreted as a political and/or subversive act.

Michel Foucault describes how relations of power "permeate, characterise and constitute the social body" (Foucault and Gordon 1980:93) and are enacted or inscribed upon the physical body. Nicos Poulantzas (1978:29) expounds these power relationships primarily in terms of domination and in the shaping of subjects:

the State is always rooted in its physical constraint, manipulation and consumption of bodies ...through institutions which actualize bodily constraint and the permanent threat of mutilation (prison, army, police, and so on); and through a *bodily order* which both institutes and manages bodies by bending and moulding them into shape and inserting them in the various institutions and apparatuses.

In all political systems,²⁰ members of a society are subjected to both overt and covert forms of social control (see Martin 1998:177). However, it is essential to recognise "peoples' responses to having their bodies appropriated and designated as sites of inscription" (Peteet 1994:33). Indeed, the fact that outlawed performances persisted in Afghanistan during two and a half decades of civil war and more recently under the rule of orthodox Islamic authorities, clearly counters any notion of the dominated, docile body. The continued cultural practice of dance in mostly clandestine circumstances particularly exemplifies the connection between performance and politics whereby a sensuous performance is simultaneously a social or political act.

Certainly, the nature, value and legitimacy of prevailing symbols are commonly nominated by the dominant and/or influential people in that society (see Bourdieu 1984). This has undoubtedly been the case in Afghanistan where orthodox religio-political leaders have sanctioned particular religious symbols such as the *azan* (the call to prayer) or the wearing of certain types of caps and turbans. Symbols may thus be underscored with political agendas, providing "a powerful way in which people's social dependence can be expressed" or fostered (Kertzer 1988:9). In Badakhshan, as is common throughout Afghanistan, members of rural communities are in a mutually dependent relationship with their leaders (that of a patron-client relationship). On the one

²⁰ An ideal-type definition of the state is implied here (see Migdal 1988:19), bearing in mind that not all political territories are endowed with a state. Afghanistan during the Taliban era is such an example.

hand, a patron may depend “for his own power and status on the number of ‘clients’” whereas on the other, the clients rely on his protection (Kertzer 1988:31).

A performance may serve therefore as a context in which the powerful and the powerless interact. It is also potentially an ideal opportunity to communicate and exchange political agendas. For those who have no other means of engaging politically, a performance may even be “a means...to take power,...to have a political influence [and] ...to challenge the position of the elite” (Kertzer 1988:144). This political role of cultural practice is aptly described by the political scientist James Scott (1990:157) who states that “subordinate groups might wish to find ways of expressing dissonant views through their cultural life...as a riposte to an official culture that is almost invariably demeaning”. A performance may thus be understood to contain a “hidden transcript” in which the subordinate performer “presses against and tests the limits of what may be safely ventured in terms of a reply to the public transcript of deference and conformity” (Scott 1990:164-165). Related to this, the psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1979:23) suggests that cultural performances are a means of “reversing the goals and rules of everyday life”. For these reasons, in times of political upheaval and repression as the people of Afghanistan have experienced over the last two decades,

arts and sports increase in value. The more confining the official view of reality, the more feverishly people turn to activities where assimilation can still prevail over accommodation, where one still feels some control over the shape of the world he or she inhabits (Csikszentmihalyi 1979:23).²¹

Any creative use of physical movement thus involves an underlying system of processes that produces and/or reflects “both the system and the product, and [thereby] the socio-political context” (Kaepler 2001). When dance and music, for example, are seen to express cognitive, emotional and kinaesthetic dimensions that create “excitement, fear, and pleasure for performers and observers” (Hanna 1979:146-147), these cultural practices may also be understood to potentially communicate political thought and to influence political outcomes. Using dance as an example, Cowan (1990:20) eloquently summarises the political potential of performance:

Just as dance is used metaphorically to talk about the ambiguities of social action and experience in everyday life, so is talk about actual dancing preoccupied with these same ambiguities. Dance is associated with control by others (‘being danced’) but

²¹ Jazz in Nazi Germany and rock music in the Soviet Union would have performed similar functions.

also with freedom; suffering but also release; sociability but also competition; display but also exposure; sensuality but also the potential for loss of status; power but also vulnerability; expressions of individuality but also of social accountability.

The politicisation of performance therefore most commonly reflects the representation and perception of the body in a particular society. However, an outcry about dance, for example, may not necessarily be due to the actual dancing or related to controversy about the body itself, but rather may be related to activities that accompany dance such as the consumption of alcohol or drugs, violence and sex (McRobbie 1997:212). Nevertheless, the 'dancing body' does tend to be marginalised in Judeo-Christian and Islamic cultures; dance often appears in these contexts as inherently subversive (Wolff 1997:98). Whilst in Islamic societies, dance is rarely mentioned, "the marginality of dance itself as an art form [even] in the West" is made evident when compared to "orchestral music, opera, film, and literature" (Wolff 1997:98). Martin (1998:6) succinctly elucidates the way in which dance, and thus performance, is embedded in and expresses its social and political context:

dancing cannot, by itself, cause change in other social arenas, but beyond the scene of its performance. Nevertheless, what is situated in the world, what people contest in myriad forms, can also be found in dance. More pointedly, dance displays, in the very ways that bodies are placed in motion, traces of the forces of contestation that can be found in society at large.

Social and cultural elements are not inscribed on the body, but transmitted through it with the result that power is generated (Martin 1998:1). Consequently, a dance performance may express "all the intensity of an emergency, yet one that is invariably survived"; it may generate "a sense of being in the midst of a crisis, a break, a rupture, even a loss" (Martin 1998:1). Following on from this idea, seemingly minor mobilisations of life, such as the dance performances of the Ismaili, an ethnic and sectarian minority in Badakhshan, "may reveal more about the weak linkages or mediations that allow our sensibilities to relate to one another within the body politic than may the ways in which we are accustomed to perceiving and evaluating politics" (Martin 1998:182). The analysis of performance in later chapters will also demonstrate the political role of sport in Afghanistan, both during the time of my research, and during the former Soviet era when sporting success was explicitly viewed as a marker of the superiority of their system.²² Moreover, in times of social and political conflict in Afghanistan, cultural practices have

²² In the case of East Germany, this drive to succeed in sport went even so far as to foster a drug culture.

served to unite members of communities, possibly even “counteracting the divisive tendencies that plague[d] their daily social life” (Kertzer 1988:63). Indeed, the performance of music, dance and sport may function to “define more sharply the already established boundaries of moral and political communities; to assist in the creation of new social identities; to give physical expression to certain social values; [and] to serve as potentially contested space by opposed groups” (MacClancy 1996:7).

I will now turn to the frameworks of semiotics and phenomenology which I suggest effectively facilitate analysis of the socio-political meanings and connections that are communicated by both linguistic and extra-linguistic means through embodied performances.

A Semiotic Framework for an Interpretation of Cultural Performances

During the 1960s and 1970s, anthropology’s preoccupation with culture as systems of symbols and meanings led to the emergence of a field that became known as semiotics (see Singer 1978:202). This field concerned itself with the study of contemporary life as systems of signs, and with the deciphering of cultural materials (Marcus and Fischer 1999:114). Within this framework, cultural processes include “all patterned communication in all modalities [and] all non-linguistic aspects of communication” (Singer 1978:212). Two principal strands of semiotics were developed during the second half of the nineteenth century: the semiotic model of the American logician and philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914) and the semiology of the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913). These theorists regarded the structure of language as critical to understanding the structure of any sign system (see Reinelt 1992:110).²³

²³ Peirce defines a sign as “something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity. It addresses somebody, that is, creates in the mind of that person an equivalent sign, or perhaps a more developed sign” (1931-1958:2.228). In a Saussurian definition, a sign is interpreted as “everything which can be taken as significantly substituting for something else” (Payne 1996:497). It can “be something that stands for something else,...the relation between something and something else, or the perception (or misperception) of a relation between something and something else” (Payne 1996:500).

Both 'semiotics' and 'semiology' are general theories of all types of sign systems that utilise relational and structural schema. As a consequence, these terms are often used interchangeably, yet it must be noted that they have significantly different subject matter and methodologies. One of the main differences is that semiology is language-centred and uses a framework of the dyadic oppositions of signifier/signified, whereas a semiotic model is broader, concerned with the process of communication of all types of signs, even extra-linguistic signs such as bodily movements and sound (see Singer 1978:215-216). A Peircean semiosis²⁴ is thus more appropriate to the nature and purpose of this analysis and will underpin the explication of the immediate and broader meanings, relationships and effects of performances (signs) in later chapters even though this terminology will for the most part not be used explicitly. For these reasons, Peirce's concepts will be discussed here in detail.

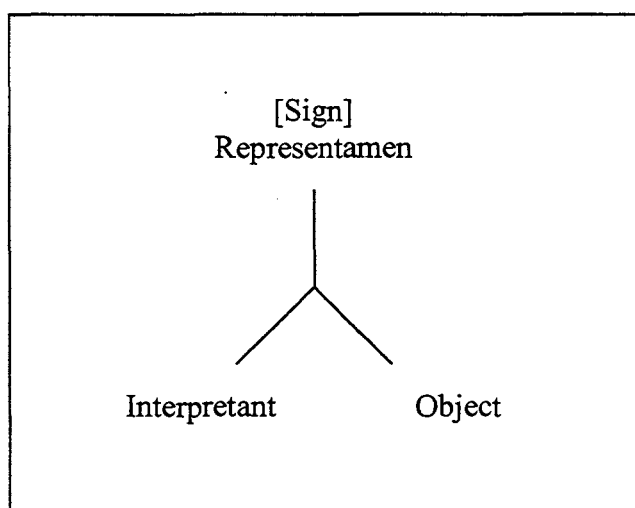


Figure 1: Peirce's triadic semiotic process (adapted from Daniel 1984:19).

Peirce defines the nature of signs and sign processes in the relational terms of an irreducible triadic relation of sign-object-interpretant (see Figure 1). This analytical vocabulary is particularly useful in the cross-cultural analysis of performance events. In later chapters, where relevant, cultural practices in Afghanistan will be discussed in terms of the relationships between the performance (sign), what the performance stands for (object), and the effect it

²⁴ Peirce's exact term for his semiotic phenomenology is 'semeiosis' in order to emphasise the noun's etymological origin from the Greek word *semeion* which he translates as sign. In this thesis, however, I will use the more commonly applied 'semiosis' (see Daniel 1996:213n3).

creates for the observer or performer (interpretant). The trichotomous semiotic concepts of sign, object, and interpretant permit the calculation of “many critical dimensions of ‘signs in society’” (Parmentier 1994:xiv).²⁵ Peirce’s triadic structure of a semiotic process is always connected with its three basic correlates. In this schema, the relationship between a sign and the object may occur in three ways.

Firstly, a sign “is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity” (Peirce 1931-1958:2.228).²⁶ Secondly, its object can be understood as the “‘something else,’ or entity, stood for by the sign, be it in an abstract concept or a concrete object” (Turino 1999:222). The meaning of objects, be they words and concepts as well as “concrete or abstract things, individual behaviours, and social facts” (Nattiez 1990:9) is astutely defined by the music theorist Jean Jacques Nattiez (1990:9), a pioneer in ‘musical semiology’:

An object of any kind takes on meaning for an individual apprehending that object, as soon as that individual places the object in relation to areas of his lived experience—that is, in relation to a collection of other objects that belong to his or her experience of the world.

He further argues that “the meaning of an object exists not only for the person who receives it, but also for its producer” (Nattiez 1990:9). Thirdly, the interpretant can be understood as “the *effect* created by bringing the sign and object together in the mind of the perceiver” (Turino 1999:222). The interpretant is therefore the “translation, explanation, meaning, or conceptualization of the sign-object relation in a subsequent sign representing the same object” (Parmentier 1994:5). Further, the interpretant is associated with the “effect the sign has in/on the observer, including feeling and sensations, as well as ideas articulated and processed in language” (Turino 1999:223).

The methodology of this thesis draws particularly on Peirce’s second trichotomy and its classification of iconic, indexical and symbolic signs. Within this model, an icon may be understood as a sign that resembles its

²⁵ In order to conceptualise various relationships between these three basic components of his semiotic triad, Peirce developed three trichotomies (see also Glossary of Peircean terms, Appendix Three).

²⁶ I will apply the standard convention of citing from *The Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce* (1931-1958). The number that immediately follows the colon marks the volume of Peirce’s *Collected Papers*, whereas the number that immediately follows the decimal point refers to the paragraph in the particular volume.

represented object to some degree (see Singer 1980:491). An example is instantaneous photographs since

they are in certain respects exactly like the objects they represent...[T]his resemblance is due to the photographs having been produced under such circumstances that they are physically forced to correspond point by point to nature (Peirce 1931-1958:2.281).

A cross is another example of an icon, where the existential cross consisting of a stake with a transverse bar stands for a cross to which the extremities of criminals were fastened or even nailed to face death in ancient history. As a symbol, this icon of a cross represents Christianity. Icons are “inherently oriented toward the past, since these signs function meaningfully without the actual spatio-temporal existence of the represented object” (Parmentier 1987:107).

Peirce classified an index by its contiguity with its object and defined it as

a sign, or representation, which refers to its object not so much because of any similarity or analogy with it, nor because it is associated with general characters which that object happens to possess, as because it is in dynamical (including spatial) connection both with the individual object, on the one hand, and with the senses or memory of the person for whom it serves as a sign, on the other hand...Indices may be distinguished from other signs, or representations, by three characteristic marks: first, that they have no significant resemblance to their objects; second, that they refer to individuals, single units, single collections of units, or single continua; third, that they direct the attention to their objects by blind compulsion...Psychologically, the action of indices depends upon association by contiguity, and not upon association by resemblance or upon intellectual operations (Peirce in Buchler 1955:107-108).

The index thus “signifies its object solely by virtue of being really connected with it, as with physical symptoms, meteorological signs, and a pointing finger” (Singer 1978:217). The example of smoke and fire, demonstrates how ‘smoke’ is an indexical sign that signifies ‘fire’ (its object), by being directly connected with it.

A symbol in Peirce’s semiosis denotes a very specific sign. Due to the differences between the meaning of a Peircean symbol and the more generic meaning of symbol in other anthropological theories and in common usage, it is essential to clarify the specific meaning of Peirce’s usage of this term.²⁷ While iconic and indexical signs have a direct relation to their object and do not depend on a mental association, Peirce’s symbol has “a conjoint relation to

²⁷ The use of ‘symbol’ by many authors is often not clearly defined, but in most cases, may equate to and be used interchangeably with Peirce’s ‘sign’, although within his semiosis, a symbol is but one aspect of a sign.

the thing denoted and to the mind” (1931-1958:3.360). The symbol may be defined as not being

related to its object either by contiguity, by shared quality, or by resemblance. Convention alone, links a symbol to its object...In a symbol the conventional sign, object, and representamen are brought together within the sign relation by virtue of an agreement and not by virtue of any quality intrinsic to either object or representamen. Words are of the order of symbols (Daniel 1984:32).

Peirce’s system of semiotics offers a means of interpreting the web of embodied meanings inherent in cultural performances (see Nattiez 1990). Of particular relevance is Peirce’s notion of the pragmatic maxim,²⁸ in which meaning of the various signs may be understood to consist “of all of the effects they have on participants: which includes everything from body movements, through feelings and emotions, to cognitive and linguistic understandings and expressions” (Lewis and Dowsey-Magog 1993:208). Meaning therefore does not solely derive from linguistic or conceptual interpretations, but rather all the effects that the sign may have and even those effects that it may potentially have. This mediated²⁹ meaning of performance is further illuminated by the German sociologist Hans Joas (1996 (1992):79):

the human being who expresses himself is often surprised by what he expresses, and gains access to his ‘inner being’ only by reflecting on his own expressive acts. This draws attention to two peculiarities of expression which the dualistic [Cartesian] model fails to address. Firstly, we form a clear picture of the meaningful substance of what we vaguely have in mind only through our efforts to express it; and secondly, in our efforts to express something, we always present that which is expressed in such a way that other people can appreciate it. Our relationship to ourselves is therefore conveyed via a medium which we share with others.

In line with this interpretation of meaning, Nattiez maintains that “a musical fact” is comprised of three major categories (1990:ix):

the musical work is not merely what we call the ‘text’; it is not merely a whole composed of ‘structures’...Rather, the work is also constituted by the procedures that have engendered it...and the procedures to which it gives rise: acts of interpretation and perception (Nattiez 1990:ix).

²⁸ Peirce (1931-1958:5.401) considers the idea of the pragmatic maxim in the following quote:
Consider what effects that might conceivably have practical bearing we conceive the object of our conception to have. Then our conception of these effects is the whole of our conception of the object.

²⁹ A semiotic mediation as informed by a Peircean analysis may be understood “as any process in which two elements are brought into articulation by means of or through the intervention of some third element that serves as the vehicle or medium of communication” (Parmentier 1994:24).

Nattiez draws on Peirce as well as the work of Paul Ricoeur who defines a musical sign as “a linguistic expression with a double meaning, demanding interpretation” (Ricoeur in Nattiez 1990:35). Likewise, the ethnomusicologist Thomas Turino (1999) utilises a Peircean-influenced semiosis in his music analyses. He suggests that musical signs may be understood as “sonic events that create an effect in a perceiver” (Turino 1999:224). Musical parameters such as scale, pitch and rhythm may thus function as icons, indices and symbols. As an icon, music may directly relate to other songs or genres through the resemblance of various characteristics. In the music of Wagner or in various Indian ragas, for example, music may act as an index and thus a means of expressing feelings, whereas a particular musical piece that has specific meanings through rules of convention, such as a national anthem or a Bach *cantata*, may be understood as a symbol (see Fischer-Lichte 1992:121).

To review the discussion thus far, performance is a broad, wide-ranging genre and hence, its study is inherently difficult. It is common therefore for researchers to draw upon a range of available theoretical models to create frameworks that best suit their specific area of interest. However, there are also considerable difficulties in the development of a vocabulary that satisfactorily accommodates the rich variety of habits and extra-linguistic signs intrinsic to performance. Precise descriptions of physical movements in cultural practices, for example, are often awkward and wordy. Similarly, the construction of the category of ‘intangible cultural heritage’ by international organisations reflects their increasing recognition of the key cultural role of performance. Yet such terminology is not without conceptual weaknesses, in particular the dichotomisation of material and immaterial culture.

Semiotic frameworks that utilise linguistic categories to interpret and read ‘culture-as-text’ generally do not adequately address the abundance of extra-linguistic signs in both the domains of culture and language. Further, while language as a cultural system seems to be mostly integrated and rule-bound, its theoretical structure may not necessarily translate to cultural performances such as recreational sport and aesthetic entertainment (see Lewis:10). In addition, systems of analysis utilising such theoretically constructed and linguistically oriented models are not necessarily “consonant with indigenous [and local] understandings which, in preliterate societies, are frequently embedded in practices (doing) rather than spelled out in ideas (sayings)” (Jackson 1983:339). Indeed, embodied practices such as performance are not reducible to a linguistically-based semiosis, since they “are always open to interpretation; they are not in themselves interpretations of anything” (Jackson

1983:339). A sign such as a performance never communicates “*in vacuo*, but in a context, in relationship to other signs” (Zeman 1977:27).

‘The body’ is therefore situated rather ambiguously, able to be viewed both as a lived body in a phenomenological sense and as an object in a semiotic sense (Garner 1994). Peirce’s theoretical framework, however, offers a means of addressing this difficulty (see Buchler 1955:74-97). In addition to the triadic concept of signs and the trichotomies for the analysis of different aspects of a sign and the relationships between the three components of the triad: sign/object/interpretant, Peirce’s model is also phenomenological (see Buchler 1955:74-97). Peirce has three basic phenomenological categories ‘Firstness’, ‘Secondness’, and ‘Thirdness’ which serve as “basic modes of appearance or experience” (Lewis 1995:238n6). Whilst the terms ‘Secondness’ and ‘Thirdness’ are not relevant to this discussion and thus will not be described here, the category of ‘Firstness’ is useful for the analysis of performance since it is associated with the ‘experiential quality’ of feeling, “the conception of being or existing independent of anything else” (Buchler 1955:322-323).³⁰ All experience therefore depends on ‘Firstness’ and may be thought of as a “‘may be,’ a necessary possibility without which there could be no actuality” (Lewis 1995:236). This Peircean framework has been utilised by a number of anthropologists including Lowell Lewis (1992; 1995; 1999; 1993), E. Valentine Daniel (1984; 1996), Richard Parmentier (1985a; 1985b; 1987; 1994) and Sally Ann Ness (1992), who have been of primary influence in developing the framework of this analysis.

My analysis will primarily, although for the most part implicitly, draw upon a Peircean-influenced semiotic framework as a means of elucidating performance traditions as dimensions of social action. I believe that Peirce’s iconic, indexical and symbolic signs are particularly effective in highlighting the nature of cultural and social elements and meanings and in facilitating an understanding of the relationships inherent in a performance: that between performer and self, performer and audience, and performance and society. Further to this semiotic model, Peirce’s philosophical framework incorporates a type of phenomenology that refers “to basic modes of appearance or experience” (Lewis 1995:238n6), an emphasis which is particularly useful in

³⁰ This phenomenon is the first term in each of Peirce’s three trichotomies: qualisign (Trichotomy I), icon (Trichotomy II) and rheme (Trichotomy III) as well of Trichotomy I, which is “of the sign itself...[and] is the realm of oneness, quality and possibility” (Turino 1999:231). Peirce’s iconic sign, for example, therefore acts as a ‘First’ (see Lewis 1992:84). See appended glossary for definitions of these terms.

the context of this thesis. Now that the main methodological framework has been established, I will examine the main types of performances that were evident during my research in Badakhshan.

Types of Performances: Sacred and Profane Practices

Religious Performances and Recreational Entertainment

The dichotomisation of society into sacred and profane domains was a key concern of Emile Durkheim (1976 (1915)). He believed this binary categorisation was a universal phenomenon in which religious practices, as part of the sacred realm, reflected the attempt of a society to worship itself (Eriksen 1995:198). However, this structural opposition of the sacred and profane is undoubtedly problematic (see Eriksen 1995:198; Schneider 1976:207-208) and at the very least, cannot be seen to be universally applicable. In fact, it seems more likely that there are many cases of borderline or 'in between' categories. Nevertheless, in Afghanistan where the native classification of *haram/halal* (forbidden/permissible) is used, the sacred/profane categorisation can be a helpful distinction in understanding the organisation of cultural practices. This is particularly so when it is utilised in conjunction with a third term that is located between these poles on a continuum of sacred and profane domains. This triadic category (*haram*-‘in between’-*halal*) will be further discussed in Chapters Six and Seven.

Islam's normative traditions, especially the Quran, clearly define many practices as sacred, whereas others, such as aesthetic performances, are seen to be more ambiguous and not easily classified into one category or another. As will be further elaborated in Chapter Five, music in Islamic societies often contains religious elements, especially Sufi symbols, yet it was regarded by many of Afghanistan's political leaders from 1992-2001 as a profane and unIslamic practice, and hence the performance of music was deemed to be unlawful. This ambiguity as to the sacred/profane nature of music is further complicated by the fact that degrees of religious orthodoxy change with the emergence of new political groups or players. For example, during the resistance against the Soviet-backed Communist government, the former Afghan President Burhanuddin Rabbani who is a member of the Jamiat-e Islami political party (see Chapters Three and Four), was regarded by some – although not by all – as a relatively orthodox leader. Yet with the arrival of the

ultra-extremist Taliban militia, his religio-political views were termed by the Jamiat-e Islami party itself as well as by international observers, as 'moderate'. In Afghanistan, therefore, 'religious' categorisation is fluid and contextual, with the consequence that cultural practices may be variously interpreted as *haram* or *halal*.

The cultural performances of religious rituals, such as Islam's *id* prayers, however, are sacred activities that are clearly defined by habit, continuity and predictability (see Myerhoff 1984:151, 173). During these specially marked events participants "engage in embodying their most important concerns" (Lewis and Dowsey-Magog 1993:208). On a continuum of participation, religious performances tend to be more transformative than entertaining and thus accord with Turner's notion of liminal phenomena. Connerton (1989:44-45) succinctly describes such sacred rituals as

formalised acts...[that] tend to be stylised...and stereotyped...Because they are deliberately stylised, they are not subject to spontaneous variation, or at least are susceptible of variation only within strict limits...They do discharge expressive feelings; but this is not their central point...Rites are felt by those who observe them to be obligatory, even if not unconditionally so, and the interference with acts that are endowed with ritual values is always felt to be an intolerable injury inflicted by one person or group upon another...Rites have the capacity to give value and meaning to the life of those who perform them.

Sacred practices can therefore be distinguished from everyday activities by frameworks that are recognisably marked as special, essential and important and that rely on "a high level of consensus in belief and practice" (Lewis and Dowsey-Magog 1993:208-209). A limited vocabulary and a simple repertoire of bodily movement, which is often easily predictable and repeatable, are often common characteristics of religious practices (see Connerton:59-61). While a religious ritual that is expressed through physical movement may draw equally on iconic, indexical and symbolic signs, symbolism is most commonly the significant feature.

Although clear boundaries exist between some sacred and profane activities in Afghanistan, other cases are more ambiguous. Sport, for example, is a practice that is definitely a popular form of non-religious entertainment. Colloquially, it is often associated with "amusement, diversion, fun or pleasure" (Arnold 1979:145-146).³¹ Academic scholars tend to locate the practice of sport

³¹ Chapter Five will discuss some Islamic terms with respect to entertainment.

somewhere between play and games.³² When included within the genre 'game', sport may be perceived as a social system that

always involve[s] fixed and public rules, predetermined roles, defined goals, and built-in criteria for evaluating the quality of the performance. The rules are for the most part nonnegotiable and internally coercive (MacAloon 1984:254).

Sport, therefore, is generally understood as embedded in social values and with explicit "rule-bound, ritualistic and institutionalized" agendas (Arnold 1979:145). However, John MacAloon postulates that in certain contexts, some of the "*affective/experiential* qualities of games" may actually "conflict with the hidebound character of the rules, particularly in cultural milieus where 'fun' is associated with deviance" (1984:255). Indeed, during some games such as that of a penalty shoot-out at a World Cup soccer match, participants may enter "into states of utter earnestness and commitment, at times becoming a rapture or a sickness unto death" (MacAloon 1984:255).

Furthermore, it is important to bear in mind that although generally understood as a recreational practice, sport has a strongly competitive character. Sporting activities entail "whole-bodied exertion, competition, the employment of skill, uncertainty of outcome and some element of danger (Arnold 1979:145). In many societies, sports such as soccer are perceived as "vehicles of identity, providing people with a sense of difference and a way of classifying themselves and others, whether latitudinally or hierarchically" (MacClancy 1996:2). Jeremy MacClancy (1996:4) defines sporting practices in a manner that applies more broadly to the genre of performance, namely as

ways of fabricating in a potentially complex manner a space for oneself in...[a] social world...Sport does not merely 'reveal' underlying social values, it is a major mode of expression. Sport is not a 'reflection' of some postulated essence of society, but an integral part of society and one, moreover, which may be used as a means of *reflecting on* society...a sport is an embodied practice in which meanings are generated, and whose representation and interpretation are open to negotiation and contest.

The Taliban militia, alleging adherence to Islam's normative traditions, banned most sporting activities in the areas of Afghanistan under their control. In contrast and for a range of reasons which will be later elucidated, religious-political leaders in the anti-Taliban United Front seemed to condone sport as a

³² A discussion of the definitions and the relations between these genres with respect to sport is not the aim of this thesis. Further comments may be sought from Huizinga (1949), Callois (1969), Blanchard and Cheska (1985), MacClancy (1996), MacAloon (1984), Arnold (1979:144), and Lewis (1992), who examined these categories in more detail.

profane yet legitimate cultural practice. This issue will be further discussed in Chapter Five.

Aesthetic Entertainment: Music and Dance Performances

All aspects of cultural practices may express an aesthetic judgment, whereby certain ideas of the aesthetic become synonymous with a particular cultural style. While the recreational genre of sport noticeably emphasises a “quest for victory” (Arnold 1979:144), entertainment practices such as poetry, music and dance are mostly concerned with social and cultural values. In Afghanistan, during its modern and Communist periods, aesthetics would most probably have been termed ‘art’, especially by the Afghan elite. In contrast, the censorship of artistic practices throughout Afghanistan during the time of my research in 1998 and 1999, made it difficult to establish whether and on what basis, individuals or communities formulated ideas of aesthetics.

I shall employ the term ‘aesthetic entertainment’ to discuss what is categorised in Western societies, and what was most probably understood by the elite in Afghanistan pre-1989, as an artistic event. However, this is not to imply that an aesthetic domain exists separate from the rest of human life in Afghanistan, or that ‘Western’ notions of art or ‘high culture’ are more highly aesthetically elaborated than ‘traditional culture’.³³ In fact, I shall use the term ‘aesthetic’ to demarcate specifically those performances with an entertainment emphasis that were deemed impermissible (*haram*) during the time of my research, from those mostly recreational performances such as sport, which were considered to be more legitimate (*halal*). For example, prior to the emergence of the Taliban, the ‘aesthetic’ practice of music was generally tolerated. Since their defeat in November 2001, music performances have once again resurfaced as acceptable public events. Hence, the term ‘aesthetic’ is primarily adopted in this analysis to distinguish between practices that were banned and those that were not banned particularly during the Taliban era but also more insidiously with the rise of orthodox Islam during the *mujahideen* period.

³³ An aesthetic value is understood here as

the response derived from the experience of the environment or particular natural and cultural attributes within it. This response may be to either visual or non-visual elements and can embrace emotional response[s], sense of place, sound, smell and any other factors having a strong impact on human thought, feelings and attitudes (AHC 1994).

The problematic conceptualisation of 'art' and 'artist' in an Islamic context is clearly apparent in the domains of music and dance, since art that is expressed through the body is generally considered to be 'unIslamic'. This hierarchy of degrees of 'acceptable' cultural practices means that those Afghans who perform aesthetic practices are usually socially marginalised. Artists – especially in rural areas – are usually members of the lower stratum of a community, performing tasks that are locally regarded as menial as well as providing music at rites of passage or during other celebrations. In fact, in Badakhshan in 1998 and 1999, locals did not refer to the performance of poetry, music and dance as *honar* (art) or *honarmandana* (artistic), nor was a performer regarded as or seeking to be known as a *honarmand* (artist).

Aesthetic entertainment is comprised of both tangible and intangible qualities, that is of objects and actions, and may be understood as a physical manifestation of internalised culture or habit. The body may thus be understood as a social aesthetic field, communicating a range of culturally patterned sensory experiences. However, this is not to deny that aesthetic practices provide the opportunity for individual and personal expression. Indeed, Hans Joas (1996 (1992):80) describes aesthetic expression as

[a] sphere in which a human being, whether creating or appreciating, expresses himself as a whole person; in this respect the realm of artistic [and for that matter aesthetic] expression goes beyond all rule-bound or set purposive actions.

Aesthetic practices, therefore, can be understood as habitual, metaphorical and experiential. This idea is aptly expressed by Raymond Williams (1965:40-41) who describes aesthetic events as involving

highly developed and exceptionally powerful rhythmic means, by which the communication of experience is actually achieved...The dance of the body, the movements of the voice, the sounds of instruments are, like colours, forms and patterns, means of transmitting our experience in so powerful a way that the experience can literally be lived by others. This has been felt, again and again, in the actual experience of the arts, and we are now beginning to see how and why it is more than a metaphor; it is a physical experience as real as any other.

The aesthetic entertainment practices that will be discussed in this thesis are mostly music and dance performances. Undoubtedly, these aesthetic events refer to 'something' but at the same time they are particularly polysemous, that is they generate multiple possible meanings and emotions (see Nattiez 1990:37). Music, like all aesthetic practices, is always embedded in its social and ideological context. It may be produced in three ways. Firstly, by moving the body (vocal cords, limbs), secondly with the assistance of an instrument, or, thirdly, through a combination of the first two (for example, simultaneously

singing and playing an instrument). Since much of the music during my research was vocalised, with the lyrics often poetry, my use of the category 'music' necessarily incorporates linguistic elements and their implications. Related to this, Erika Fischer-Lichte (1992:126) suggests that whereas the meanings of sound tend to largely reflect concrete things, the meanings of music are more commonly abstract in nature.

During my research in Badakhshan, music was often performed to accompany dances. It thus facilitated the "movement of objects, but also the movement of feelings deriving from the bodily movement that music *provokes*" (Nattiez 1990:120). When music is used to accompany dance, the meanings created by the music may

signify...hopping, striding, climbing, jumping, running etc., the kind of movement as well as the changes in position. The musical signs appear in this way to be most closely linked to the proxemic and gestural signs – in a similar way as singing is related to the linguistic signs. Accordingly, the musical signs can modify the meanings created by the proxemic and gestural signs, may reinforce them, or may contradict them and in this way produce new meanings (Fischer-Lichte 1992:126-127).

Hence, in Peircean terms, the feeling of the music may, for example, imitate the feeling of the movement of hopping through an iconic signification. In the case of singing, both the sound of the voice, which functions in this case as the instrument – an extra-linguistic sign – and the vocalised sound of speech – a linguistic sign – are performed simultaneously, mediated by what has been termed the 'singing' and which includes both harmony and rhythm.

Traditional music in Badakhshan is largely based on oral and embodied traditions in which a musician learns from another more experienced musician or grows up in a community of artisans or musicians.³⁴ In that cultural context, music is not conceptualised as a written text as it tends to be in Western music-literate societies. Given that conventional methods of music and dance research are based on European scientific structural analyses, wherein the performance is reduced to its "immanent properties" of notation (Nattiez 1990:ix), these methodologies seem to be inappropriate to the elucidation of the broader social and political meanings of performance in Badakhshan. Furthermore, I suggest that extra-linguistic signs and experiences, such as the emotions of performer and audience, are more effectively highlighted through the use of a Peircean-influenced phenomenological semiosis rather than by systems of notation.

³⁴ A professional hereditary musician in Afghanistan is called *kesbi*.

During the last three decades, research on Afghan music has been dominated by three scholars: the Americans Mark Slobin (1976) and Lorraine Sakata (1983), and John Baily (1988; 2001) from Britain. In comparison with these detailed ethnomusicological studies, the academic research of dance in Islamic societies is often problematic. This is largely attributable to the inherent difficulties of studying a transient event that is often seen to express controversial bodily agendas and which consequently, has tended to be a marginal activity. Whilst there is naturally no general consensus on the theoretical approach to the study of dance, most scholars acknowledge that dance is a form of communication and many researchers employ a semiotic and interpretive framework of analysis.

The elusiveness of dance not only in Afghanistan but in the wider Muslim regions of the Middle East and West Asia, however, is not due to literary disregard. On the contrary, dance and dancing have featured in travel monographs and pseudo-scientific literature for centuries. In early anthropological studies, dance was mentioned, albeit fleetingly without detailed commentary and analysis. These allusions and descriptions were often not only vague, but subject to ethnocentric, romantic, Orientalist, and colonial distortions of non-Western dances.³⁵ An excerpt of the recollection of a performance in Kafiristan at the end of the nineteenth century by the British officer Sir George Scott Robertson, exemplifies a Western colonial interpretation of a local dance in a region that is now divided between Pakistan's North West Frontier Province and the areas of Nuristan and Kunar in north-eastern Afghanistan:

The appearance of the witch-like old women dancing heavily their peculiar polka dance-step, singly or in pairs, was strange, almost weird...What pleased the Mehtar Jao was a dance of little boys, who bobbed about like cork with the ordinary Kalash step enlivened so as to be almost unrecognisable (Robertson 1986 (1896):51-52).

In general, academic research on dance has also been impeded by its stigmatisation, which can be traced to prevailing negative social and cultural attitudes towards the body. In exploring the reasons behind the low social

³⁵ The response of the French traveller M. de Monconys upon observing a performance of dervish dances in Cairo in the seventeenth century, for example, fails to transmit any objective information about what the actual performance was about. For him the performers

danced for more than an hour, shouting and screaming horribly; they whirled violently at such dizzying speed that their dance went beyond anything the wildest imagination can conceive of at a witches' sabbath...Their voices changed frequently from the screaming of enraged wolves to the barking of dogs (de Monconys 1648 in Shiloah 1995xiii).

status of dance in many socio-cultural domains, Ness (1992:236n2) points to “an outgrowth or carryover of deeply rooted negative attitudes toward bodily experiences in general and toward the notion of ‘the body’ itself”. In the Western world, for example, the representation of ‘the body’ is often that of “mortality and instinctive, vulgar animality” (Ness 1992:236n2). Hence, there appear to be parallels between orthodox Christianity and orthodox Islam in terms of their prejudicial attitudes towards the body.

At the same time, ‘dance’ has become a broad, non-specific term that tends to loosely and arbitrarily accommodate all performances of rhythmical human actions. It encompasses physically performed ritual and traditional dances and various stylised art performances such as folk, classical, modern, and postmodern dance. In the Western world, ‘dance’ most typically conjures up images and ideas of eighteenth and nineteenth century classical ballet, a very specific cultural form of ‘high art’ that developed from Central European folk dance. In comparison, Western images of Islamic dance are usually confined to the belly dances of Middle Eastern women. Such popular Orientalist interpretations have rendered dance “as an autonomous world, with minimal connections to ordinary social life or movement patterns” (Lewis 1995:227). As a consequence, there has often been little appreciation of its profound cultural significance.

Whilst many definitions of dance are available and in use today, I will refer here to a select number of relevant anthropological and sociological theories. Written almost two decades ago, Royce’s monograph *The Anthropology of Dance* (1977) stands out as one of the first serious attempts to study dance from an anthropological perspective and with the use of a semiotic framework. Adrienne Kaeppler is also a pioneer in anthropological dance studies, having conducted life-long research in the South Pacific. Like Royce she is an anthropologist with a dance background and uses a structuralist approach that is influenced both by Saussurian semiology as well as Kenneth Pike’s emic/etic distinctions. Kaeppler (2001) sees dance as marked by its expression of movements which are themselves signs and thus function as

cultural artefacts that convey the idea that these movements belong to a specific culture or subculture or that a specific type of movement is being activated for a particular purpose. Movement sequences may be audience-orientated to be admired as art or work, they may be participatory to be enjoyed as entertainment or as markers of identity, they may make political or social statements, bring religious ecstasy or trance, or be performed as a social duty.

Conceptual and analytical concerns arising from diverse definitions of dance have led to a number of attempts to enhance the specificity of terminology. Drid Williams, for example, differentiates between the unitary phenomena of dances, the act of dancing, and the dance (1997:232n1).³⁶ Three excellent and detailed reviews of recent dance/movement studies by Lowell Lewis (1995), Susan Reed (1998) and Brenda Farnell (1999) discuss the current trend in dance research of combining analyses of 'culture', 'embodiment' and 'movement' by utilising phenomenological and semiotic models, while recognising the importance of cultural representation.³⁷ More recently, there has been a further shift away from the analysis of dance towards a more specific study of 'movement' which allows for a "multiplicity of interpretations" (Reed 1998:524). Both Ness (1992) and Lewis (1992) utilise a Peircean-oriented phenomenology in their analyses of performance. In Ness's pragmatic anthropological study of the Central Philippine ritual dance *sinulog*, she refers to dance traditions as 'choreographic phenomena' which not unlike Peirce's idea of 'habit', incorporate "both mental and physical patterns that may signify the dynamic reality of social life and make visible both collective and individual and public and private experiences of that reality" (1992:241n10). Such phenomena include "a range of symbolic body movement processes somewhat broader than the term 'choreography' generally denotes" (Ness 1992:235n1). Ness further suggests that dance may serve "in a distinctive way...the need to be remembered - [and even more so] the need to be rendered animate in an immediate sense" (1992:235n1). In fact, dance may crystallise "people's habits of life and philosophies of action [and enable] access to cultural phenomena" (Ness 1992:233).

During my field research in Badakhshan, the Dari noun *raqs*, which is commonly used in Afghanistan to describe dance, was not a frequently used term. I have therefore chosen to incorporate dance within the genre of cultural performance. This method will allow me to address the movement components of all of the performances (prayer, sport, dance, and music) discussed in this

³⁶ Williams specialises in the study of human actions as sign signification and developed a method called semasiology, combining theories of semiology and semiotics to deal with the semantic content of human body languages.

³⁷ A broader theoretical approach incorporating some of these recent shifts in discussions on dance is evident in the work of a number of anthropologists who have utilised anthropological theory, such as Stephen Wild (1977/1978), Adrienne Kaeppler (1978; 1991), Drid Williams (1981; 1986; 1997), Cynthia Novack (1988; 1990), Jane Cowan (1990), Sally Ann Ness (1992), Lowell Lewis (1992; 1995; 1999), Yvonne Daniel (1995), and Anthony Shay (1999). Some of these researchers have also applied interpretive methods that draw on Geertz's 'thick descriptions' (Wild, Cowan, Novack, Cowan, Ness, Lewis, Daniel and Shay).

thesis, in a more uniform manner rather than in distinctly separate domains, and will further allow me to investigate the linkages between religious and non-religious as well as special and daily events.

If one views movement as a cultural reality, it is possible to deduce its structural properties. This in turn, allows for the articulation of and reflection upon the experiences it may engender, and an understanding of its place within the larger society (Novack 1988:117). As with music and other extra-linguistic media, the meaning of a dance performance can be deduced to a degree through verbal description. Yet, as Nattiez (1990:9) avers, interpreting “the meaning of something in a nonlinguistic domain...in verbal terms...cannot be *limited* to verbal translation” alone. Lewis also stresses that non-verbal performance genres such as dance, are not easily understood through language as they fall within the domains of extra-linguistic iconic and indexical signs (1992:10). Ness (1992:237n2) further comments that problems of distortion are inherent in cross-linguistic, cross-cultural interpretations of dance that attempt to represent embodied performative practices “in textual form, through written language”. Even within Peirce’s semiotic model wherein language is the preferred domain of symbols (see Lewis 1992:10), it is important to recognise that all linguistic representations of symbolic expressive practices are “linguicentric” and “carry cultural baggage of their own sort” and are thus “deeply compromised instruments of communication” (Ness 1992:238n2).

I suggest therefore that the extra-linguistic and cross-cultural aspects of performance are best addressed by a methodological framework that also incorporates a form of qualitative movement description and visual anthropology. The remainder of this chapter will present these ancillary methodologies.

Complementary Methodologies

Qualitative Movement Description

The difficulties associated with viewing and interpreting embodied practices other than as a form of mechanical behaviour, are addressed by the ethnomusicologist Alan Merriam (1974) who recommends the use of a codified terminology. Movement systems that utilise codification such as notation, to describe movement, have been employed over the last century, but

predominantly for generating quantitative records of classical, modern and, to some degree, folk dances.³⁸ There has been limited use of notation systems in anthropological studies which have tended to favour the use of other movement language schemes, particularly the descriptive systems developed by Laban.

Clearly, the Badakhshi subjects of this study do not share the clearly bounded Western categories of prayer, sport, music, and dance. In line with this, the anthropologist and ethnomusicologist Steven Feld, in his study of the songs of the Kaluli people in Papua New Guinea, eloquently describes how “the structure and meaning of Kaluli sounds...[are] inseparable from the fabric of Kaluli social life and thought” (1984:383). This clearly suggests that an evaluation of local concepts is more appropriately achieved through ethnography rather than through the analysis of “decontextualised trait lists” such as music or movement notation (Feld 1984:385). Such an ethnographic approach is adopted within this study and will be supported by filmed excerpts of performances and the use of a modified form of one component of Labananalysis (Effort/Shape).³⁹

In order to provide some objective description of the movement qualities of performances, a version of Laban Movement Analysis (henceforth LMA) that primarily draws on Laban’s conceptual movement components of effort and shape, will be utilised as a methodological tool.⁴⁰ Three categories of Laban’s movement concepts will be employed. The first category of space encapsulates the idea of how a performer’s body forms itself in its spatial environment. The second category informs on the general use of the body, whereas the third key

³⁸ Systems such as Labanotation and Benesh notation are often used in the choreography of ‘high art’ entertainment such as classical ballet and contemporary dance. They tend to be understood only by specialists who have studied and acquired these complex movement notation skills.

³⁹ Labananalysis is a broadly based term that denotes a method of qualitative and quantitative movement analysis and notation systems and draws attention to “dynamics, the use of space and time and weight, to phrasing, transitions, the shape of the movement, parts of the body used or not used, and to the performer’s sense of the space through which he or she is moving” (Siegel 1998:94). Four conceptual movement components are incorporated in this system: Labanotation, Effort/Shape, Space Harmony, which is sometimes also referred to as Choreutics, and the Fundamentals of Body Movement (see Bartenieff et al. 1984:3).

⁴⁰ Cecily Dell (1977:7) defines LMA as “a method of describing changes in movement quality [according to] body adaptations in space”. Pre-1984, LMA studies were referred to as Effort/Shape, however throughout this thesis the term LMA will be applied (Bartenieff et al. 1984:3). In Laban’s technical vocabulary, some terms such as space, effort, flow, and shape, were devised that do not necessarily correlate with the common use of these terms in English. For this reason, definitions of some of these terms are provided in the appended Glossary of LMA terms, Appendix Four.

category comments on the four effort elements: Space, Time, Weight, and Flow, which can be understood in terms of how a performer's body concentrates energy. 'Effort' is a key technical LMA term and may be understood as a "mover's attitude toward investing their energy in movement" (Ness 1996:150n36).

While Laban's abstract series of continua⁴¹ provide an analytical system as well as a language with which to speak about the body moving in time and space (Desmond 1997:50), the theoretical base for LMA is rather problematic. The Laban-trained American dance critic Marcia Siegel (1998:94) identifies a series of interpretive problems that she relates in part to the system's Eurocentricity. She argues that "Laban theory centers on the body and conceives of movement from the performer's point of view, not from the audience's point of view", further asserting that Laban's methods do not address the entire content or process of a performance (Siegel 1998:94).

Certainly, LMA does allow for a description and comparison of movement patterns in particular communities and "provides one model of cross-cultural comparisons of movement lexicons" (Desmond 1997:50). Yet as a sole analytical system, it is insufficient. In fact, an interpretation of embodied movement demands that the character of the performance, "its subject matter, the treatment of that subject matter and qualities that might be ascribed are also understood" (Adshead 1998:167). The performances examined here are not simple physical movements expressing body space and effort qualities but are grounded in experiences and particularly religious, political and social contexts. They thus signify meaning. Lewis (1995:233) also identifies problems with the term 'effort' and points to the difficulties in mediating "the mind/body opposition if one simultaneously reinscribes the related subject/object distinction":

Concepts such as 'effort' are defined in terms of attitude or attention, all of which are explicitly used with the intention of combining what had formerly been seen as separate physical and mental meanings together. This has proved a useful and productive strategy, to some extent, but it is frequently unclear how Laban descriptions relate the experience of embodied movement to the observation of moving bodies (Lewis 1995:233).

⁴¹ Some of Laban's continua include, for example, effort qualities such as "the use of the weight of the body (ranging from strong to light),...the body's attitude toward space (ranging from direct to indirect),...the use of time (ranging from quick to sustained)" as well as the use of space (ranging from free to bound) (Desmond 1997:50).

It seems therefore that the movement actions of any embodied practice are not adequately represented by mere deconstruction to “gross physical movements” (Farnell 1999:360) without relating the experience of the performer and the audience. I am therefore in agreement with Brenda Farnell (1999:360) who argues that movement should be viewed within the context of social reality. The intention of this analysis, therefore, is not to notate the movements of embodied practices (ritual, sport and aesthetic entertainment) or the accompanying sounds (songs) but rather to describe their qualities. Such qualitative data well complements a Peircean phenomenological semiotic approach that seeks to interpret performances in their contexts.

The Use of Film in Recording Performances

Clearly, the interpretation of performances poses some challenges for the researcher, in part because of their simultaneous expression in “three dimensions of space and one dimension of time” (Farnell 1999:362), but also as a consequence of the complexity of relationships between performers and audience. Critical analysis of a performance is made especially difficult by the fact that it is usually conducted after the event has taken place. However, through visual ethnography, an approximation of the original event is established, allowing for further interpretations of the performance by the researcher by re-viewing the film, but also by the researcher’s audience, namely the reader. Film is therefore “a particularly fluent and resourceful means of describing perceptions” (Gardner 1957:348).

The discipline of visual anthropology is concerned with visual materials in anthropological research and with “the study of visual systems and visible culture” (Banks and Morphy 1997:1). The pioneering visual anthropologist David MacDougall (1998:61, 83) perceives visual anthropology as a viable alternative to the written ethnographic text and grants understanding through a “mixing of embodied, synaesthetic, narrative, and metaphorical strands” rather than through unitary meanings. Indeed, an aesthetic performance such as dance, may be considered to be similar to a proto-language that is expressed through “the uttering of the body” (MacDougall 1998:81). Since a verbal description of such an utterance is inevitably prone to the writer’s subjective influences, this proto-language may be captured on film and interpreted by the reader/viewer. MacDougall (1998:83) posits that film “both signifies and yet refuses signification...[and instead] asserts itself as *figuration*”.

Due to the inherent limitations of language in the description of non-verbal performances, visual forms of representation are increasingly being used in cultural anthropological research. MacDougall further suggests that whilst “anthropological writing is effective in speaking about human cultures in general, film, like the imaginative arts, can say much about how individuals live within (and transmit) a ‘culture’” (1998:80). Moreover, film has the ability to represent cultural phenomena such as performances, gender and class,

that exist primarily in relational terms...[and that are] capable of presenting complex networks of images within which a variety of ambiguous cultural constructions and resonances are understood (sexual, ideological, hierarchic) but which are never explicitly acknowledged, or which recur in different combinations (MacDougall 1998:80).

In fact, it is possible that cross-cultural confusions and prejudices can be minimised by the inclusion of filmed events (Gardner 1957). As unchanging documents, unedited film recordings of cultural performances may serve as rich sources of detailed and focused ethnographic information. George Marcus and Michael Fischer (1999:75) find the ability to convey “the subjects’ experience more naturally and unproblematically” a further advantage of film over writing. Hence, the rendering of a realistic account in film may produce reactions in readers/viewers that “in meaningfulness, [have] some approximation to the feelings of those to whom the experience actually belonged” (Gardner 1957:347).

Nevertheless, visual anthropology is not without its critics. The process of filming may in itself change the nature of the performance, with the knowledge of being filmed influencing the subject’s expression. People are often inclined to perform for the camera in ways that they normally would not. The British dance historian June Layson (1998:148) also maintains that films of expressive movement flatten the representation, distorting “space and dynamic,” and, consequently leading to “depersonalized” small images. Furthermore, an edited version of a performance has a “visual perspective distinct from any single view by an eye in the audience” (Martin 1998:35). MacDougall acknowledges that visual representation is prone to misinterpretation and may be overly seductive to the viewer (1998:68). However, while the two-dimensionality of filmed dance does not realistically represent the three-dimensionality of the actual performance with all details and angles, it does serve as an approximation of the actual performance, and is one of the best available methodological tools available to a researcher of performance. It is for this reason that I have included in this thesis a series of cultural performances that I filmed in Badakhshan and later edited and converted to QuickTime movie files. These mini-films will allow readers/viewers some form of direct experience of

the performances of Badakhshan and the opportunity to formulate their own opinions about these cultural practices.

In summary, this chapter has highlighted two main problems that are associated with the interpretation of cultural performances. Firstly, culture is not static and fixed and, secondly, performances – in particular the performing arts – are polysemous. Further to these interpretive issues, the researcher who ‘looks’ into another culture is inherently subjective and culturally biased. In order to offer a relatively objective analysis, I have chosen a modified form of Peircean semiotics as the main methodology for this thesis. I believe that Peirce’s distinctions of sign relations more than satisfactorily facilitate a multiplicity of interpretations of a variety of linguistic and extra-linguistic performances. This approach is supplemented by visual anthropology with the accompanying CD ROMs containing excerpts of the ‘live’ performances, thereby offering the reader the additional benefits of direct sound and visual images. The use of the specific vocabulary of Laban Movement Analysis further provides some objective descriptions of the performed movements.

Local categories and understandings of events, whenever available, are given primacy in this study. At the same time, by drawing on this range of interpretive tools, I shall aim to comment on the broader meanings of some of the performance events that I witnessed in Badakhshan, and to expose the ways in which this field is open to contestation and marked by the dialectics of domination and resistance.

3

Badakhshan: Social and Cultural Context

While Afghanistan itself is landlocked, Badakhshan, within the larger context of Central Asia (see Maps 1), is a remote region that has remained closed and isolated in virtually every respect.¹ Yet in spite of its inaccessibility, Badakhshan like other Afghan provinces has been exposed to a variety of religions, cultures and languages. Cultural influences have included Greek, Arabic, Indian, Persian, Chinese, and Mongolian.² Various major religions such as Buddhism and Zoroastrianism in addition to a number of local religions were once practised but since the mid-seventh century, Islam has been the main religion and continues to be the primary guide in social, cultural and political arenas. Dari-speaking Tajiks constitute the majority of the province's population, although the living spaces are extensively shared with other ethnic groups, primarily the bilingual Uzbeks, Pushtuns and Kirghiz.³ Badakhshan is thus a heterogeneous society.

¹ One may argue that some areas in Afghanistan are located in South Asia and others in Central Asia. Afghanistan's political boundaries touch four distinctive geographic areas: the Indian subcontinent in the east, the Far East in its most north-eastern corner, Central Asia in the north, and the Middle East in the west. Its neighbours are thus Pakistan, China, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Iran.

² For detailed accounts of these pre-Islamic periods see, for example, Klimburg (1966), Dupree (1973) and Gregorian (1969).

³ Dari is the Persian language spoken in northern Afghanistan and is common in Kabul as well as in other urban centres. This language belongs to the west-Iranian sub-branch of the Iranian group of Indo-Iranian languages and is categorised as an Indo-European language (see Kreutzmann 1996:390). As a literary language, Persian emerged in the ninth century in Khurasan (present eastern Iran), in competition with Arabic which had been introduced with Islam. The Afghan historian Hasan Kawun Kakar (1979:143) notes that Dari is slightly different in phonology, vocabulary, and to a lesser extent, morphology, from the modern

This chapter presents the social and cultural context of Badakhshan as a necessary preliminary to later discussion of the main players and particular settings of performance events in this province. Twenty-three years of civil war throughout Afghanistan, from the time of the Marxist coup in 1978, have exacted a profound and far-reaching toll on Afghan culture. From what was ostensibly a conflict between Islam and Communism, the independence of the Afghan state versus the imposition of a foreign social and political structure, ethnic and religious tensions have come to the fore as major political factors. Similarly, in Badakhshan, manifold identities and allegiances have meant that social, cultural, religious, regional, and political disputes have become central features of everyday life. These in turn have impacted upon local understandings and the continued practice of cultural heritage.

Borders, Geography and Population

The province of Badakhshan was once known as the 'Kingdom of Badakhshan' and according to local legend, its royal family could trace its lineage to Alexander the Great (see Barthold et al. 1960:852; Holzwarth 1990:36). In 1883, the territory controlled by the aristocratic Yarid dynasty (see Chapter Four), which comprises contemporary Badakhshan, was incorporated in the newly established Province of Badakhshan and Kataghan (*welayat-e qataghan wa badakhshan*) (see Holzwarth 1990:14).⁴ Until the border treaties of 1873, 1879 and 1893, Afghan Badakhshan, as the province is now known, included eastern Takhar as well as Gorno-Badakhshan which now

Persian of contemporary Iran. Dari had usually been the language of both the court and administration in Afghanistan and was spoken by Tajiks, Hazaras, Qizilbash (Twelver Shiite Persian mercenaries of Turkic origin), and Aimaq (mostly Sunni but also some Twelver Shiite Persian-speaking nomads of western Afghanistan with Turkic, Mongol and Tajik influences) (see Gregorian 1969:36; Kakar 1979:143; Orywal 1986a:29-30). While Afghanistan's Constitution in 1964 declared Dari an official language, during Daoud's Republican period (1973-1978), however, Pushto was made the official language of Afghanistan (see Shalinsky 1994:35n3). The written languages in Afghanistan are Pushto, Dari and Uzbek; the others exist only as oral languages. The ethnonyms Tajik, Uzbek and Kirghiz are used here in both linguistic and ethnic contexts. The terms therefore refer to the Tajik-, Uzbek- and Kirghiz-speakers as well as the Tajik, Uzbek and Kirghiz ethnic groups. Both Uzbek and Kirghiz are Altaic languages, belonging to the north-western group of the Turkic languages (see Shahrani 1979:47).

⁴ Kataghan is the former name for what has since 1970 been divided into Kunduz, Baghlan and Takhar provinces. A number of traditions such as music and dance are still referred to as Kataghani and will be discussed in Chapters Six and Seven.

belongs to Tajikistan (Grevemeyer 1982:9).⁵ Not until 1896 was the Province of Badakhshan and Kataghan formally integrated into the territory of Afghanistan. In 1963, the province and its administrative districts were reorganised and the regions of Badakhshan and Kataghan subdivided into the provinces of Badakhshan, Takhar, Kunduz and Baghlan (see Adamec 1972:26).⁶ Since 1964, the demarcation of Badakhshan's internal borders has persisted (Holzwarth 1990:14).

In the north and north-east, Badakhshan adjoins Gorno-Badakhshan by the natural border of the Amu Darya,⁷ that is the Oxus River of antiquity (see Maps 1, 2 and 3). The upper part of this river, the Panj-e Darya, drains some of Afghanistan's largest snowfields since the mountain ranges of Tajikistan, Pakistan, China, and Afghanistan converge at the Pamir Mountains near the north-eastern Wakhan corridor. The Pamir Knot alone claims as many as one hundred peaks ranging between 6100m and 7620m (see Dupree 1973:1), with high mountain valleys thus "hemmed in by parallel mountain ranges" (Shahrani 1979:11n3).⁸ Not surprisingly, locals refer to the region as *bam-e dunya* (Roof of the World) (see Afghanaid 1995:14). The Wakhan Corridor connects Badakhshan with China through a short stretch at the province's most north-eastern point. In the north of Badakhshan, the mountains of Darwaz create a further natural boundary with Gorno-Badakhshan. The Khwaja Mohammad range, a northerly mountain ridge extending from the Hindu Kush,

⁵ This once united territory of Badakhshan is now divided into Gorno-Badakhshan in Tajikistan and Badakhshan in Afghanistan, but separated only by the Amu (Oxus) River.

⁶ In 1963 Badakhshan was re-divided into the following administrative divisions (*woluswali* and *alaqadari*): Jurm, Darwaz, Keshem, Wakhan, Ragh, Shahr-e Bozorg, Baharak, Koran-e Munjan, Khwahan, Zebak, and Sheghnan (see Adamec 1972:26). During the Communist regime (1978-1992), these divisions were further re-divided into seven *woluswalis* or districts: Darwaz, Ishkashim, Faizabad, Jurm, Keshem, Ragh, and Wakhan and six *alaqadaris* or smaller districts: Baharak, Koran-e Munjan, Khwahan, Shahr-e Bozorg, Sheghnan, and Zebak (see UNIDATA 1992:1). It is likely that similar administrative divisions were recognised by President Burhanuddin Rabbani (1992-2001) and the provincial government of Badakhshan.

⁷ The Amu Darya runs along the northern border of Afghanistan. It originates in Badakhshan in the Wakhan Corridor between the Hindu Kush range in the south and the Pamir mountain range in the north.

⁸ The Pamirs are divided into the 'Great Pamir' (known locally as *Pamir-e Kalan* or *Pamir-e Chong*) and the 'Little Pamir' (*Pamir-e Kuchek* or *Pamir-e Kurd*) (see Afghanaid 1995:14; Kreutzmann 1996:51; Senarclens de Grancy 1978; Shahrani 1979:11). The Great Pamir consists of the upper part of the Pamir Darya (Pamir River, originating in Tajikistan) and the basin of Sar-e Kul (or Zor Köl meaning 'Great Lake' at the border Tajikistani Gorno-Badakhshan and Afghan Badakhshan), whereas the Little Pamir includes the upper part of the Aksu River (located in the Chinese Pamir, Xinjiang Province) and the lakes Besh Ötök Köl (also Chinese Pamir) and Chakmaktin Köl (Afghan Pamir) (see Kreutzmann 1996:49, 51).

largely demarcates the province from that of neighbouring Takhar (see Kussmaul 1965a:19). Along its south-eastern border of the eastern Hindu Kush, Badakhshan abuts Pakistan near Zebak and provides a seasonal, but mostly non-motorable route to Pakistan over the Dorah and Shah Salim passes.⁹ In the south of the province, Badakhshan connects with the Anjuman Pass,¹⁰ whereas in the west in the Keshem valley, the mountains gradually diminish into a terrain of hills and plains.

Wolfgang Holzwarth (1980) suggests a triadic categorisation of the province that is a helpful means of conceptualising its natural features and settled areas as well as the multiplicity of its historical dominions. The province may thus be divided into the western mountain regions that include the urban areas of Ragh (1520m), Shahr-e Bozorg (1800m), Faizabad (1200m), Argu (1800m) and Keshem (960m); the central basin with Jurm (1550m) and Baharak (1480m) as well as settlements along the lower valley sections in which the Kokcha, Warduj and Zardew rivers converge; and the high mountain regions of Zebak (2600m), Ishkashim (2660m) and Koran-e Munjan (2550m) in the southern, eastern and northern regions of Badakhshan (see Holzwarth 1980:179-180; Snoy 1996:118; UNIDATA 1992:3).¹¹ So as to take best advantage of

⁹ The Dorah Pass (approximately 4260m) is also known in Badakhshan as Topkhana (see Dorronsoro 1992:7; Jennings 1999), whereas the literature generally uses the term Dorah Pass (Kussmaul 1965b:27; Olufsen 1904:19; Senarclens de Grancy 1978:23). Biddulph (1880) and Wood (1841) offer detailed maps of this pass. During the *jihad* against the Soviet-backed government, as well as during the anti-Taliban resistance, this pass served as an important supply route for commanders and international aid agencies (see also von Moos and Huwyler 1983:134). The Norwegian Afghanistan Committee (NAC) and the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (henceforth UNICEF), for example, used this pass to transport educational materials into Badakhshan (see Heneghan 2001; Youngs 1999). Once in Pakistan, the path leads to Garm Chashma before arriving in Chitral in the North-West Frontier Province.

¹⁰ In Dari, this pass is known as the Kotal-e Anjuman (4200m) (Holzwarth 1990:13) and leads to Nuristan Province and the Panjshir Valley of Kapisa Province.

¹¹ Whilst exact demographic figures for Faizabad do not exist, according to the estimates of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in Afghanistan, Faizabad district, inclusive of the settlements of Argu, Daraim, Tishkon and Yaftal (for a map of these valley regions see Snoy 1996:116), has a population of 216,095 (Personal communication January 2002 United Nations Regional Coordination Officer (UNRCO) Badakhshan). The population figure for the period of 1998-2002 was higher, primarily due to fighting between the Taliban and the United Front near the borders of the province, which continued until approximately September 2001. World Food Programme (WFP 2001) stated that over 100,000 persons alone were internally displaced in Faizabad even prior to 11 September 2001. Keshem district has a population of 112,714, Baharak district is thought to have 70,981 inhabitants, and Ishkashim district has a population of 11,219 (Personal communication UNRCO, 2002). Argu is in a fertile loess-covered agricultural area at approximately 1800m above sea level. The Kokcha River eventually empties into the Amu Darya near Ai Khanoum in Takhar province.

sustainable agricultural practices, most settlements in Badakhshan are situated near river or mountain valleys or plateaus. For example, the provincial capital of Faizabad is located near fertile loess foothills that dominate the landscape of the Kokcha and Mashad river valleys in central-western Badakhshan.¹²

The physical territory of Badakhshan covers approximately 47,000 square kilometres (Hayward 1995:6) and ranks fifth in size amongst Afghan provinces (see Mokhtarzada 1994:3). For the last two decades, however, no reliable demographic figures on any of Afghanistan's 32 provinces have been available.¹³ Moreover, pre-existing statistics are likely to be inaccurate since in 1979 when the first partial national census was conducted, the inhabitants of the regions surveyed were already embarking upon rebellion. A considerable number of the population therefore would have been fleeing to Pakistan and many of those Afghans remaining behind, would have been unwilling to participate.¹⁴ In 1999, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (henceforth UNOCHA) estimated the population of Badakhshan at 765,999.¹⁵ For comparison, Gorno-Badakhshan in Tajikistan with a territory of 64,000 square kilometres had an estimated 200,000 inhabitants in the year 2000 (Grevemeyer 1982:9; UNDP 1999). However, in 2001, prior to the commencement of the United States' military campaign, over one million Afghans were said to be internally displaced (UNHCR 2002). There is no doubt that although Afghanistan has since entered a new phase in

¹² The Oxford English Dictionary (henceforth, OED) defines loess as "a deposit of fine yellowish-grey loam which occurs extensively from north-central Europe to eastern China...and elsewhere, esp. in the basins of large rivers, and which is usually considered to be composed of material transported by the wind during and after the Glacial Period" (OED 1989-2002). These valleys are fertile agricultural regions and provide good grazing land for seasonal nomads (see also Grevemeyer 1982:11-12; Holzwarth 1980:179-180). The entire province has an approximate population of 710,000 (Personal communication with UNRCO Badakhshan, 2001).

¹³ The provinces (*welayats*) are Badakhshan, Takhar, Kunduz, Baghlan, Sar-e Pul, Samangan, Balkh, Jawzjan, Faryab, Badghis, Herat, Farah, Nimroz, Helmand, Kandahar, Zabul, Ghazni, Paktya, Paktika, Uruzgan, Ghowr, Wardak, Logar, Nangarhar, Kunar, Laghman, Bamiyan, Kabul, Kapisa, Parwan, Khost, and Nuristan (see Map 2).

¹⁴ As a result of fighting and natural disasters, large numbers of refugees fled Afghanistan from the late 1970s until the end of 2001. Before the United States-led military attack against the Taliban and al Qaeda members in Afghanistan in October 2001, 3.6 million refugees were living in camps due to drought and fighting (see UNHCR 2002). The repatriation of Afghan refugees since the defeat of the Taliban has thus far proved highly successful. In mid-June 2002, UNHCR announced that over one million Afghans had returned, with a further million expected by the end of 2002.

¹⁵ The source of this figure is from World Health Organization (Personal communication 12 January 2002 UNRCO Badakhshan). In comparison, in 1998 UNOCHA estimated the population of Badakhshan to be approximately 500,000 (see 1998:48).

its political history, refugee movements will continue for some time as a result of continuing political instability, drought and famine. Relatedly, since 1992, the concomitant factors of civil unrest and internecine fighting have led to a dramatic increase in the size of urban areas throughout Afghanistan.¹⁶ The ethnic, religious and political diversity of Badakhshan has been further compounded by the fact that many inhabitants of neighbouring provinces sought shelter especially in its capital of Faizabad in the period from 1998 to 2001 as the rapidly shifting frontlines between the United Front and the Taliban encroached upon their villages.

Ethnic groups and associations of social affinity

Since the formation of the political territory of Afghanistan in 1747, all inhabitants of this plural society have been referred to, by non-Afghans, as 'Afghans'. In fact, the term 'Afghan' is actually best understood as a colonial cultural construction used to conveniently categorise and coalesce the diverse peoples living within the territorial borders of Afghanistan. The use of this terminology fails to acknowledge the multiple, sensitive and highly political nature of ethnicity in Afghanistan. Indeed, the ethnonym 'Afghan' is particularly problematic since the term has been traditionally applied to the ethnicity of the ruling elite (1747-1992), the Pushtuns.¹⁷ Increasingly, since the 1960s, non-Pushtun groups have rejected Pushtun dominance (Roy 1995:106) with the consequence that the Tajiks, Hazaras or Uzbeks, for example, often tend to identify themselves firstly in terms of their own ethnic group and only then as Afghan. It is thus essential to recognise that the Afghan and likewise Badakhshi population, consists of many different ethnic groups.¹⁸ This situation is further complicated by the fact that many of the ethnic groups in Afghanistan, such as the Uzbeks, Tajiks, Pushtuns, and Turkmen, extend across national borders. Furthermore, it is important to recognise that ethnic

¹⁶ Kabul, Afghanistan's largest city, has an estimated population of 1.7 million. Due to the massive return of refugees to Kabul since the defeat of the Taliban and their retreat from the capital in mid-November 2001, the size of this city has increased significantly. Herat and Kandahar have approximately 200,000 inhabitants and Mazar-e Sharif approximately two million (see ReliefWeb 2000).

¹⁷ This is despite the fact that two rulers of pre-1992 Afghanistan were not Pushtun – the Tajik Bacha-e Saqqao and Babrak Karmal who was alleged to be of Tajik parentage (see Chapter Four).

¹⁸ The people of Badakhshan refer to themselves as 'Badakhshani' or 'Badakhshi'; the latter term will be used throughout this thesis to identify the inhabitants of the province.

identities in Afghanistan are not only diverse and complex, but also manipulable. In the same way that 'culture' has ceased to be understood as a stable entity that coincides with a nation, society, or ethnic group, ethnic identity is no longer conceptualised as "tightly territorialised, spatially bounded, historically unselfconscious, or culturally homogenous units" (Lock and Kaufert 1998:5). Given that few ethnic groups have existed in total isolation, the use of sharp boundaries to delineate them can in itself prove problematic since boundaries become noticeably porous as a consequence of shared histories and intermarriage.

Traditionally, scholars have typically utilised 'etic' forms of classification, with such categories as religion, language and culture, to determine who does and does not belong to a particular ethnic group. The understandings generated by this approach may contrast markedly from 'emic', or local ideas of ethnicity, although the latter may not always be readily forthcoming or accessible. Accordingly, the Swiss anthropologist Erwin Orywal (1986b:74) proposes that the concept of ethnic identity must be understood as situational, whereby ethnic groups may be regarded as temporally and spatially positioned with respect to each other, representing their recognition, inclusion or exclusion of other groups. The important point here is that a group is constantly in dynamic process and thus may not necessarily be seen to have clear and definite boundaries (see Orywal 1986b:73-74). Moreover, this perspective of ethnicity incorporates the 'emic' factors of perceptions, feelings and actions of social affiliation (Orywal 1986b:74), with individuals potentially seeking to join a particular community for a range of economic, political, social or emotional benefits (see Schetter 1999:94). In Afghanistan, the connections between ethnicity and politics have become particularly apparent in the last two decades. Among the various *mujahideen* (members of the Afghan Islamic resistance) that first fought against the Communist regimes (1978-1992), and then against each other under the Islamic State of Afghanistan (1992-2001), and during the Taliban's Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (1997-2001), each group vied for representation in any future government. It was thus inevitable that the selection of Afghanistan's post-Taliban interim government in Bonn in November 2001 was also marked by ethnic rivalries, with each particular group claiming a stake in the new administration. The establishment of an ethnically balanced government was thus a key issue for the Emergency *Loya Jirga* that was held in Kabul in June 2002.

While bearing in mind the complexities inherent in the concept of ethnicity, in the following paragraphs I will discuss some of the major groups living in

Badakhshan: the Tajiks, Pushtuns, Uzbeks, Kirghiz, Moghols, and Hazaras. In Badakhshan, people tend to associate themselves with the geographical region from which they originate, preferring to identify themselves as Yaftali,¹⁹ Wakhi, Keshemi, Ishkashimi, etc. However, the social organisation of the various groups and micro-societies within these regions is complex. Both the extended family (*khanawada*) and the network of kinship relations (*kheysh wa qawm*) are important social units whose members tend to be hierarchically organised and linked through affiliations of solidarity, common interests and values (see Shahrani 1998:218-219). Prevalent among most ethnic groups in Afghanistan, in particular the tribally-organised Pushtuns, the Arabic word *qawm* is polysemic.²⁰ This term may stand for tribe, clan, group, nation, linguistically- or vocationally-based association, local lineage, village cluster, and/or family (see Glatzer 1998:170; Orywal 1986b:78-79; Tapper 1991:47).²¹ *Qawm* thus encompasses a variety of networks based on relations of reciprocity and solidarity. More usually, however, it denotes a large kinship association that is based on patrilineal descent and related by marriage (Shahrani 1998:218). In Badakhshan, in addition to the frequent use of the term *qawm*, the term *konda* is common and refers to small groups of kin which usually do not consist of more than six to eight houses (see also Holzwarth 1990:173; Kussmaul 1965b:522-523, 525). In addition, the term *khel* is sometimes used to denote a patrilineal group of relatives (see von Moos and Huwyler 1983:115n2), especially in Sunni and Ismaili (Sevener Shiite Muslim) Tajik communities.²²

¹⁹ Yaftal valley is located north of Faizabad. Yaftalis are thought to be one of the oldest groups in Badakhshan (see Holzwarth 1990:33).

²⁰ I use the term 'tribe' carefully in light of recent conventions in which a tribe is defined as a repetitive, dynamic and reversible process, "both in structure and in membership" (see Glatzer 1998:172; Manz 1989:29).

²¹ While the categorisation of a group into 'tribe', 'clan', or 'lineage' is useful for a sociological or anthropological analysis, their use, like the term 'ethnic group', is also problematic. These terms are constructs and do not entirely capture the complex characteristics of the group's social organisation (see Tapper 1983b:9). In this thesis, the terms 'tribe' and 'clan' are used synonymously within the context of a subgroup of a major lineage.

²² The living arrangement of a *khel* is called a *qeshlaq* (von Moos and Huwyler 1983:125).

Tajiks

Most commonly inhabiting the northern regions of Afghanistan, the Tajiks are the largest ethnic group in Badakhshan.²³ The role of a number of Tajik men as the main actors in cultural performances will be discussed in Chapters Six and Seven. The contemporary notion of a Tajik is that of a sedentary, Dari-speaking, non-Pushtun Sunni Muslim, often vocationally engaged as a subsistence agriculturalist, skilled artisan, trader or merchant. According to Nasir Khusraw, the eleventh century Persian poet, philosopher and Ismaili missionary, Dari was already spoken in Badakhshan when he sought exile in the province (see Holzwarth 1990:33).²⁴ In some northern areas, such as along the Amu Darya border regions of Badakhshan, Takhar and Kunduz, the Dari spoken is occasionally called Tajiki. Yet like the categorisation of 'Afghan' people, the classification of 'Tajik' is also problematic since, as Berndt Glatzer (1998) perceptively notes, "no recognisable cultural, social or political boundary between them and others" exists (1998:170). Indeed, many Dari- or Tajiki-speaking, non-Sunni Muslims in Afghanistan, without any obviously identifiably unique phenotypical features, may refer to themselves as Tajiks so as to avoid discrimination or persecution by predominantly Sunni leaders and government authorities (see Sakata 1983:6). In contrast, Dari-speaking Pushtuns are never referred to by Tajiks as 'Tajiks', but always remain locally categorised as 'Pushtuns'. Furthermore, in Badakhshan, numerous non-Sunni Tajik communities exist that while sedentary and Persian-speaking, resolutely identify themselves as Ismailis, a Sevener Shiite sectarian group.

A number of factors may have contributed to the formation of an ethnically based categorisation of Afghans. As will be elaborated in Chapter Four, during

²³ The ethnonym 'Tajik' was initially first used to refer to the Arabs in the region, since at that time an Iranian who converted to Islam was thought to become an Arab (see Kreutzmann 1996:43n21; Orywal 1986a:22; Sawez 1986). The term 'Tajik' was then later assigned to Muslim Iranians who lived in the territories which are now termed Afghanistan and the Central Asian republics (see Klimburg 1966:124; Schurmann 1962:73-74). With the increasing exposure of Central Asian Iranians to Turkic culture, the term 'Tajik' was then applied to those Muslim Central Asians who still remained sedentary and retained their Iranian language. The Tajiks mainly inhabit areas in north-eastern Afghanistan, the capital Kabul, areas north of Kabul, west of the Hindu Kush, and particularly the Herat province. This ethnic group is therefore strongly represented in the provinces of Kabul, Kapisa, Parwan, Baghlan, Badakhshan, Takhar, and Herat. Many Tajik communities also live in Kunduz, Samangan, Balkh, Jawzjan, Sar-e Pul, Faryab, Badghis, and Ghowr, smaller groups are in Paktya, Zabul and Ghazni.

²⁴ Nasir Khusraw is a central figure in the *Weltanschauung* of the Ismailis in Badakhshan and will be further discussed in Chapter Five.

the period of the *mujahideen* resistance (1978-1992) and under Islamic rule (1992-2001), the civil war led to considerable internal displacement, forcing many Afghans to flee as refugees into neighbouring countries. In exile, these refugees then tended to be grouped together according to their ethnic affiliation rather than in terms of their linguistic or sectarian associations. In addition, the considerable interest of the foreign media in this ethnic categorisation as well as its use by some Afghans for political gain, may have fostered the perception of ethnicity as an important marker of Afghan identity (see Roy 1995:105-106). This more political ethnicisation was a departure from the affiliations of kinship that had been central to traditional Afghan society. And as a consequence, the category 'Tajik' came to include most Sunni Persian-speakers.²⁵ This classification implicitly overlooks marked regional differences. For example, while the Tajiks of Herat in western Afghanistan are embedded in the history and culture of Khurasan and speak a Persian dialect related to that of eastern Iran (Farsi) (see Sakata 1983:7),²⁶ the language of the Tajiks of Badakhshan has been influenced to a degree by the Turkic-speaking Uzbeks of that region as well as by Tajiki, a Persian dialect spoken in neighbouring Tajikistan and nearby Uzbekistan.

The Ismailis of Badakhshan who inhabit the Wakhan corridor and the Pamir Mountains around the Darya-e Panj as well as the mountains near Koran-e Munjan north of the Anjuman Pass, also refer to themselves as Tajiks. During the nineteenth century, colonial writers termed the Ismailis of this region '*ghalcha*', which translates as 'Mountain Tajik' or 'Pamir Tajik' (von Schultz 1914:19-20).²⁷ More recently, the construct 'Pamiri' has been assigned to the people of this region (Orywal 1986a:47; Snoy 1986:140), although similar problems to those of the terms 'Afghan' and 'Tajik' have inevitably arisen. Indeed, of primary importance is the need to appreciate that the appropriateness

²⁵ Prior to Communist rule in Afghanistan, a person's identity would be established by the lowest level of social membership, followed by the name of settlement (such as Keshemi), regional/provincial association (Badakhshi), and linguistic association (*farsiwan*, i.e. Persian-speakers) (see Roy 1995:105). According to Olivier Roy (1995:105), the term Tajik denoted "a subgroup of Persian-speakers, mainly inhabitants of Badakhshan, who had no other ethnonym, such as Baluchis, Sayyids, Arabs etc."

²⁶ The historical territory of Khurasan today spans the territories of Afghanistan, eastern Iran and neighbouring Central Asian regions. The cities of Bokhara and Samarkand, for example, have large Tajik populations.

²⁷ For the use of the term *ghalcha* in the literature see, for example, Lentz (1978:11-12), Biddulph (1986 (1880):157-158) and Olufsen (1904:60). Shahrani (1979:44), Holzwarth (1990:35-36) and Kreutzmann (1996:42) have referred to the Ismailis as either Pamir Tajiks or Mountain Tajiks.

and hence the use of these categories may be disdained by the Ismailis themselves.²⁸

The oral languages of the Ismaili peoples of the northern and southern mountain regions in Badakhshan while mutually incomprehensible, are both forms of east-Iranian languages.²⁹ Although Badakhshan's Sunni Tajiks have generally been classified by Afghan historians as 'Tajiks', Ismaili Badakhshis are usually referred to either directly as Ismailis or by their eponymic classification such as 'Wakhi' (the people of Wakhan), 'Ishkashimi' (the people living in Ishkashim) and Sheghni (the people of Sheghnan), (see Holzwarth 1990:36). Holzwarth (1990) postulates that the Ismailis' strong ethnic and cultural identification with their locality may reflect the remnants of a system of categorisation used by Badakhshan's royal families, possibly pre-sixteenth century, and based on their oral genealogies that dated back to Alexander the Great (see Holzwarth 1990:36). In contrast, the decreased importance attributed to locality by Badakhshis living in other areas of the province may be connected to their conversion to Sunni Islam and their subsequent preference for the term 'Tajik' so as to distance themselves from the Ismailis (Holzwarth 1990:36-37).

Chapter Five will discuss the sectarian group of the Ismailis in more detail since they evince a unique relationship to their intangible cultural heritage, which combines elements of local culture, Islam and Sufism. Chapters Six and Seven will present a number of recorded examples of both religious and non-religious aesthetic performances of Badakhshan's Ismailis.

Turkic Minorities

The Uzbeks are the second largest ethnic group in Badakhshan and possibly the fourth most important group in Afghanistan with approximately one and a half

²⁸ I was made aware of the sensitivities of the term 'Mountain Tajik' during a seminar presentation at Humboldt University, Berlin, in August 2000. After having mentioned the term in my presentation, I was politely rebuked by a former member of the Ismaili elite from the Pamir region of Badakhshan who described 'Mountain Tajik' as derogatory in nature. Instead, he advocated the use of 'Tajik' or 'Tajiks living in the Pamir region'.

²⁹ They are sometimes also referred to as Pamir languages and have been categorised into the north- and south-east-Iranian sub-branches of the Iranian group of Indo-Iranian languages that are Indo-European languages (see Kreutzmann 1996:390).

million members.³⁰ As an ethnic group, the Uzbeks are related to Central Asian Turkic tribes and are the principal Turkic-speaking group of Afghanistan. Over the last one to two centuries, they have departed from their nomadic traditions and have increasingly become concentrated in larger settlements predominantly in northern Afghanistan from Faryab Province in the west to Badakhshan in the east. Two types of Uzbeks may be distinguished. The first is an autochthonous group that lived in this region prior to the creation of the nation of Afghanistan in the eighteenth century. The second group of Uzbeks immigrated to Afghanistan as a result of Tsarist Russian expansionism and subsequent Sovietisation in Central Asia (see Glatzer 1998:172).³¹ In Badakhshan, the Uzbeks are believed to have originated as nomads from Dasht-e Qipchak (the steppes of Qipchak) in the Ural and Altai mountain region (see Holzwarth 1990:23),³² having crossed the Amu Darya into Badakhshan as early as the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (see Grevermeyer 1982:31-51; Holzwarth 1990:23). The Uzbeks are strongly represented in the central and western parts of the province, especially in, as well as near, Baharak, Jurm, Khash, Faizabad, Argu, and Keshem. Like the majority of Badakhshis, they are Hanafi Sunni Muslims and engage in sedentary occupations as village-dwelling peasants, merchants or artisans.

The Kirghiz are another, albeit much smaller Turkic-speaking pastoralist group living in the north and north-east of the Wakhan Corridor in the Pamir region.³³ They are originally from the Altai Mountains in Central Asia (see Shahrani 1978b:238) and speak Kirghiz, which like Uzbeki, is an Altaic language belonging to the north-western group of Turkic languages (see Kreutzmann 1996:390; Orywal 1986a:40-41; Shahrani 1979:47). The Swiss anthropologists Pierre Centlivres and Micheline Centlivres-Demont suggest that approximately

³⁰ Glatzer estimates the population of the Uzbeks to be equal that of the Hazaras, that is, approximately 1.5 million (1998:170, 172). The provinces of Faryab, Jawzjan, Sar-e Pul, Balkh, Samangan, Kunduz, and Baghlan have especially large concentrations of Uzbek communities (see Centlivres and Centlivres-Demont 1983:93), whereas in the north-eastern provinces the Uzbeks share the living areas with the Tajiks. The Uzbeks are speakers of a north-western branch of Turkic languages (see Holzwarth 1990:23; Orywal 1986a:44-46).

³¹ For comments on this group of Uzbeks that are known as *muhajerin* (refugees) see Mark Slobin (1976:12), Audrey Shalinsky (1979; 1986:290), Pierre Centlivres and Micheline Centlivres-Demont, (1983), and Nazif Shahrani (1984:143).

³² Dasht-e Qipchak is also known as the Kazakh steppe.

³³ The Kirghiz also live in the Wakhan border regions of Tajikistan, China and Pakistan.

3000 Kirghiz lived in the Wakhan just prior to the Marxist coup in April 1978.³⁴

Several villages in Badakhshan, especially in the Kokcha valley between Faizabad and Atin Jelaw as well as near Argu, are associated with what were originally Turkic-speaking Moghul families (see Map 3 and Holzwarth 1990:31).³⁵ The Moghols in Badakhshan are also referred to as 'Chung' who according to oral legends are believed to be the original descendents of Genghis Khan.³⁶ One of my informants pointed out a village near Jurm by the name of 'Chung', that was supposedly a typical Moghul village, although I was unable to confirm whether they still spoke Turkic. Indeed, most of these communities have now become Tajik-ised and speak local Dari dialects.

³⁴ The current number of Kirghiz in the Wakhan would be significantly lower than these estimates. Many Kirghiz were also killed during the Communist regime. Three months after the coup, the leader of the Kirghiz in the 'Little Pamir', Hajji Rahman Qul, with approximately 1300 members of his group, went into exile in neighbouring Pakistan. In August 1982, the Kirghiz refugees were invited by the Turkish government to resettle in Anatolia, Turkey (see Centlivres and Centlivres-Demont 1983:103).

³⁵ Atin Jelaw is a village in western Badakhshan with an important and old caravanserai that continues to serve the Faizabad-Taloqan section of the ancient Wakhan-Baharak-Faizabad-Keshem-Taloqan-Kunduz/Sar-e Pul trade route.

³⁶ The Chung are supposed to have arrived in Badakhshan with Genghis Khan (Personal communication with Badakhshi informants, see also Snoy 1996:118). Schurmann (1962) believes that the Chung belong ethnically to the Moghuls and are occasionally also called Ali-Moghul (1962:100-101). In his opinion, these groups are part of the Chagatai Turks that conquered the subcontinent and established the Moghul dynasty (Schurmann 1962:100-101). Snoy (1996) suggests that the Moghols may even have originated from Eastern Turkestan (the larger territory around Kashgar, contemporary Xinjiang Province, China) and therefore may be descendents of the Chagatai and Genghis Khan (1996:113, 127). In contrast, Holzwarth (1980) puts forward the thesis that the Moghols may have originated from a number of Turkic and Turkicised Mongol groups from during the eight to sixteenth century (1990:27), and only later were referred to as 'Moghul'. From 1500-1650, the locals began to call these Moghols 'Turk' (Holzwarth 1990:27), their language being termed 'Turki' (Holzwarth 1990:28). One interesting story was told to me by a member of the local elite in Faizabad in June 1998:

When Genghis Khan and his khanate, his moving palace, arrived in this region, the local population had increasingly become frustrated with his horses which grazed on local fields of grass and wheat. Upon the advice of an old woman, the villagers of Jurm decided to grow poppies. The horses ate the poppies and naturally died from poisoning. The locals' revenge was successful and ensured their survival. Since that time, many villages near Jurm have grown opium poppies.

Pushtuns

Whilst it is impossible to provide exact figures, the Pushtuns are commonly believed to be Afghanistan's largest ethnic group and may account for approximately forty-two percent of its total population of around twenty-five million (UN 2002).³⁷ There is now a strong view, however, that given the Pushtun losses and dislocation over the last twenty years, the number of Pushtuns living in Afghanistan may actually constitute a number either slightly less or equivalent to that of the Tajiks (see Ahady 1995).³⁸ In Badakhshan, the Pushtuns represent a minority group comprised of families of former governors, administrators, military officers, traders, shopkeepers, and nomads.

Since the emergence of Afghanistan as a nation in 1747 until the end of Najibullah's regime in 1992, the Pushtuns have provided Afghanistan with almost all of its political leaders.³⁹ Two large Pushtun confederations live in Afghanistan: the Durrani and the Ghilzais, both of which originate near Kandahar.⁴⁰ While they are the second largest Pushtun tribal confederacy, the Durrani have been the most politically important ethnic group in Afghanistan, having effectively governed Afghanistan for most of its monarchic and

³⁷ Conrad Schetter (2001) raises this problem of statistics in his recent article, claiming that it is "unclear whether the Pushtuns constitute 65, 60, 45 or 38 percent of the Afghan population". In Pakistan, the Pushtuns are also referred to as Pathans, an Indianised form of Pushtun, as well as Pukhtuns. According to Henry Walter Bellew (1999 (1888)) and Henry George Raverty (1888), the etymological explanation is possibly a derivative from the Tajik word *pusht*, meaning "the back of a mountain range" (quoted in an account given by Gregorian 1969:26).

³⁸ Shahrani (1998:230n31) suggests that one of the reasons why a national demographic census was never completed may have been due to fears that Afghanistan does not have a Pushtun majority.

³⁹ The only exception in this period was in 1929 during the nine month rule by the Tajik rebel Habibullah Kalakani (also known derogatorily as 'Bacha Saqqao', the 'Son of a Water-carrier') (see Dupree 1973:452-454). Habibullah Kalakani was from Kohistan, a border region between north-eastern Afghanistan and north-western Pakistan. On 17 January 1929, he took control of the capital (but not of the entire country) and called himself *Amir*, thereby becoming the first non-Pushtun ruler of Afghanistan, albeit for a very brief period indeed – he held the position until 13 October 1929. He was a social and extremist Islamic activist, not unlike a combination of an Afghan version of 'Robin Hood' and the Taliban's Mullah Omar (see Rashid 2000:25). He mobilised the rural people who were disadvantaged by government taxes, and by encouraging adherence to ultra-orthodox Islamic values, offered the abolition of these unpopular taxes and the cancellation of outstanding arrears. As will be seen in Chapter Four, the extremist Taliban militia shared many values with Habibullah Kalakani, such as the introduction of Sharia law (Islamic law) and the abolition of girls' schools.

⁴⁰ The group of Abdali Pushtuns of the Saddozai dynasty of Ahmad Khan, who was the founder of the Afghan state, later became known as the Durrani confederation. After Ahmad Khan's election by the *Loya Jirga* (Council of Elders), he assumed the title of Shah and called himself *Badshah, Durr-i-Durran*, literally "Pearl of Pearls" (Dupree 1973:333).

republican periods since the times of Ahmad Shah Durrani in the mid-eighteenth century until the Marxist coup in April 1978. During the reign by members of the Durrani confederation, members of its affiliated kinship groups held influential administrative, diplomatic, and military posts.⁴¹ With the nomination of Hamid Karzai as the leader of Afghanistan's interim administration on 22 December 2001 and his subsequent (indirect) election during the *Loya Jirga* on 19 June 2002 as President of the Transitional Authority, a Durrani Pushtun of the Saddozai dynasty has again become the leader of Afghanistan.⁴²

Unlike the Durrani Pushtuns, the largest Pushtun group of the Ghilzais live throughout Afghanistan's provinces without a clearly defined homeland (see Glatzer 1998:175). While the two confederations often vied for power, the Ghilzais only once gained supremacy to control large parts of Afghanistan just prior to the creation of the nation.⁴³ However, during the second half of the nineteenth century, Afghanistan's rulers such as Sher Ali Khan (1869-1879) and Abdur Rahman Khan (1880-1901) for a short period placed predominantly Ghilzai Pushtun governors and administrators who were supportive of the royal family, in Badakhshan (Holzwarth 1990:85).⁴⁴ Only after the overthrow of the

⁴¹ From 1747-1818 and 1839-1842 – and now again from December 2001 – most leaders in Afghanistan have been Durrani Pushtuns from one of the two Abdali groups of the Saddozai dynasty, that is members of the Popalzai and Barakzai sub-groups. In 1819, the Mohammadzai group from the Barakzai lineage, named after *Amir* Dost Mohammad, began to rule Afghanistan (which they did 1819-1839, 1842-1929 and 1930-1978). The period of the Musahiban rulers that began with Nadir Shah in 1929 after the nine months interregnum of the Tajik rebel Habibullah Kalakani, ended with Mohammad Daoud in 1978 and brought the Mohammadzai rule to an end.

⁴² Karzai is the head of the Popalzai lineage. This lineage originally emerged from the Saddozai dynasty (1747-1823) (see Colwill 2001; Klimburg 1966:111).

⁴³ *Mir* Wais, a Kandahari Hotaki Ghilzai leader, rebelled against the dominant Safawid rulers in 1709. In 1722, he even dethroned the Shah of Persia and took the Safawid capital Isfahan in eastern Iran. By 1729, however, Ghilzai power had faded (see Aslanov et al. 1969:18-19; Dupree 1973:324; Glatzer 1998:174). In 1739, Nadir Shah, a Chagatai Turk and former slave of a Safawid claimant, entered Delhi and defeated the Moghul ruler Mohammad Shah (1719-1748) (see Dupree 1973:331). In 1740, with the assistance of some Abdali Pushtuns whom he had previously defeated, Nadir Shah eliminated Ghilzai power which consequently facilitated the rise of the Abdali Pushtuns in Kandahar (see Gregorian 1969:46). In 1747, Ahmad Khan Abdali, a Pushtun who previously was an ally of Nadir Shah, plotted against and killed him, thus starting the Durrani Pushtun rule in Afghanistan that lasted basically until 1978 (Gregorian 1969:46).

⁴⁴ In an attempt to break up the powerful positions that were assumed by Ghilzai Pushtuns, the Afghan ruler Amir Abdur Rahman Khan from 1886-1889 also increasingly used Qizilbash for these political positions (see Holzwarth 1990:85). The Twelver Shiite Qizilbash were originally Persian mercenaries of Turkic origin in the Persian Safawid army who subsequently migrated to Afghanistan as mercenaries in Ahmad Shah Durrani's army (see Gregorian 1969:36; Olesen

Musahiban rulers who were descendants of Sultan Mohammad Khan, a brother of *Amir* (King) Dost Mohammad (see Chapter One, footnote 7) in 1978 by a Marxist coup, did Ghilzai Pushtuns gain recent prominence in Afghan politics. Not only did they dominate the Hezb-e Demokratik-e Khalq-e Afghanistan (People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan, henceforth PDPA) during Communist rule (1978-1992) but,⁴⁵ three of the seven Peshawar-based *mujahideen* groups that were to decide on the first post-Communist administration, were led by Ghilzais and had strong Ghilzai memberships. Powerful Ghilzai organisations were Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, an extremist Islamist from Kunduz, and leader of the Hezb-e Islami (Islamic Party), the slightly more moderate Islamist Mawlawi Younus Khalis from Nangarhar Province and his identically named Hezb-e Islami, as well as the Saudi-backed conservative Abdul-Rab al-Rasul Sayyaf from Paghman near Kabul and his Ittehad-e Islami (Islamic Union) (see Roy 1995:24). The Taliban were also led by a Ghilzai Pushtun, Mullah Mohammad Omar, and their core Ghilzai members came from Omar's stronghold in Kandahar.

Of all the ethnic associations in Afghanistan, the Pushtuns are most clearly able to trace their descent to the apical ancestor Qais Abdur Rashid (Tapper 1991:40). They are organised as relatively rigid clan organisations and adhere to *pushtunwali*, a code of conduct (see Glatzer 1977; Steul 1981).⁴⁶ Most Durrani and Ghilzai Pushtuns speak Pushto which is an east-Iranian sub-branch

1995:54). By the 19th century, the Afghan rulers became concerned about their Twelver Shiite beliefs and often connected the Qizilbash with their unpopular co-religionists, the Hazaras. Subsequently, Hindus temporarily were entrusted with important government positions (Olesen 1995:54) but were soon also mistrusted and were then increasingly replaced by Pushtuns from major tribes that were linked to the Durrani royal family (see Holzwarth 1990:86). In addition to Durrani administrators, *gholam bacha* (local youth who had been trained by the central rulers in Kabul to adopt the Pushtun manners of the Afghan rulers) were also installed (Holzwarth 1990:87).

⁴⁵ In fact, three of the four main leaders during Afghanistan's Communist period were Ghilzai Pushtuns: Nur Mohammad Taraki (1978-1979), Hafizullah Amin (1979) and Najibullah (1986-1992). The ethnic background of the fourth Communist leader, Babrak Karmal (1929-1996) remains unclear; his ethnicity may have been Tajik, Tajikised Pushtun, or alternatively, he may have been a descendent of a Kashmiri family living in Kabul (see Anwar 1989:276n12; Rubin 1995:126).

⁴⁶ The 'emic' concept of *pushtunwali* approximately translates as a Pushtun *Weltanschauung* that incorporates the totality of social norms and values and is embedded in genealogy, applying to a large heterogenous territory (Glatzer 1977:225). Willi Steul (1981:308) argues that this code is aimed at the "preservation and conservation of the society and for the behaviour patterns of the individual...the term...includes both the values of the society and the socially accepted behaviour patterns of the individual and the group derived from it."

of the Iranian branch of Indo-Iranian languages (see Kreutzmann 1996:390).⁴⁷ Although most Pushtuns tend to live in southern and south-western Afghanistan, small pockets of Pushtuns whose ancestors were forcibly resettled by *Amir* Abdur Rahman at the end of the nineteenth century, live in northern Afghanistan, including Badakhshan (see Shahrani 1998:226n25).⁴⁸ Many of these Pushtuns are bilingual and speak fluent Dari, whereas in other regions, there are Pushtuns who for various reasons cannot speak Pushto.⁴⁹ The simplistic categorisation of Pushto-speakers as members of the Pushtun ethnic group is thus problematic.

The Pushtuns of Faizabad are often the descendants of public servants who had been employed during the period spanning the end of the nineteenth century to 1992. Many Pushtun families that were closely connected to the Afghan royal family were resettled to Faizabad during the reign of *Amir* Abdur Rahman from the 1890s onwards (see Shahrani 1978a:18). In addition, from 1884, *Amir* Abdur Rahman also encouraged, or more often forced Durrani and particularly Ghilzai Pushtun peasant and nomad families from southern and western Afghanistan to resettle in northern Afghanistan, including the former region of Kataghan and Badakhshan (see Holzwarth 1990:80; Tapper 1983a). Between 1888 and 1900, after Abdur Rahman opened grazing pastures in the Lake Shiwa area north of Baharak to non-Tajik groups living outside of Badakhshan (see Map 3), the first non-Badakhshi nomads arrived each summer with their herds of sheep, goats, camels, and horses, to the high mountain pastures (Holzwarth 1990:81).⁵⁰ Pushtun *maldars* or *kuchis* (pastoral nomads) were also

⁴⁷ Pushtun communities are concentrated in the regions west and south-east of Kandahar and around Chaman. The Ghilzais predominantly inhabit the regions between Kandahar and Ghazni.

⁴⁸ Mostly Pushtun pastoral nomads and peasants were resettled in northern Afghanistan (especially in Badghis, Faryab, Maimana, Jawzjan, Baghlan and Kunduz) (see Shahrani 1998:226n25). It was during this time that Pushtun nomads were given permission to graze in the high mountain pasture in the Lake Shiwa vicinity of Badakhshan. More recent forced resettlement occurred during the Taliban rule. Since their take-over of Kabul in 1996, Pushtuns were once again settled into formerly non-Pushtun areas (see Shahrani 1998:226). As the Taliban conquered a region they immediately appointed a Pushtun governor, but also sent male teachers and mullahs from other Taliban-controlled provinces so as to teach their brand of extremist, orthodox Sunni Islam.

⁴⁹ Conrad Schetter (2001) emphasises this problem, "Pashtuns in Kabul, who insist on their Pashtun identity, often do not know a word of Pashtu, while 'Tajiks' in Jalalabad and Hazara in Ghazni do speak it". In addition, it is not possible to generalise that all Pushtuns are Sunnis. For example, small Pushtun Shiite minority groups such as the Turi, live in Kabul and Kandahar as well as along the Afghan-Pakistani border region.

⁵⁰ These nomads consisted of Ghilzai and Durrani Pushtuns, Pushto-speaking Moghol herders from Kunduz and Baghlan (see Schurmann 1962:403), and Tajik-speaking Arabs who

resettled in the former province of Kataghan and Badakhshan in the 1930s and 1940s.⁵¹ From the 1950s onwards, Pushtun communities also settled in Badakhshan's district centres such as in Baharak and Ishkashim (see Shahrani 1978a:18-19) with wealthy Pushtun immigrants from the south becoming shopkeepers in the urban centres. In addition, as infrastructure improved in the province, Pushtun traders of tea, salt and clothing, immigrated from southern regions of the Hindu Kush and penetrated beyond the district centres into its rural regions (see Shahrani 1978a:21).⁵²

The large Ghilzai population in Kunduz as well as in other areas of northern Afghanistan was of paramount significance during the Taliban rule, when it became the militia's main centre in the region. With the Taliban's advance into northern Afghanistan, the Ghilzais, who had for the most part been previously associated with Hekmatyar's Hezb-e Islami, were the first group to switch allegiance. In fact, after the fall of Kunduz to the Taliban in 1998, Hezb-e Islami members in the western regions of Badakhshan near Keshem also briefly switched to the Taliban and only realigned themselves with the United Front when Ahmad Shah Massoud sent reinforcements.⁵³

Other ethnic groups

During my research in 1998 and 1999, I was told of the existence of other much smaller ethnic groups, but unfortunately was unable personally to visit any of these communities. The information presented here is therefore largely based on the accounts of informants with support from archival sources. Small Baluch settlements predominantly comprised of agriculturalists are located in western Badakhshan near Keshem.⁵⁴ Members of these communities have

originally had migrated to Kunduz (and possibly were descendents of the region's first Arab conquerors or from Samarkand's Syrian Arabs that were settled there by Tamerlane) (see Holzwarth 1990:80; Orywal 1986a:39).

⁵¹ Some of these nomads were "Durrvanized" Ghilzai Pushtuns (Shahrani 1978a:18).

⁵² Some of these traders were also Tajiks from the regions south of the Hindu Kush, or Tajiks and or Uzbeks from Baharak, Jurm or Faizabad (see Shahrani 1978a:22).

⁵³ Perhaps not surprisingly, Kunduz was one of the last Taliban territories to fall in November 2001, shortly before Kandahar fell to the soldiers of the United Front with the assistance of US troops.

⁵⁴ In Afghanistan, Baluchis mostly live in Nimroz Province in south-western Afghanistan, as well as in smaller communities in Helmand, Farah, Herat, Faryab, Jawzjan, Kunduz, Kabul, and Kandahar (see Orywal 1986a:34-35). The Tajiks and Uzbeks of Badakhshan refer to these people as Baluch.

assimilated and share their living spaces with Tajiks and Uzbeks. They no longer converse in Baluchi,⁵⁵ but speak local Dari/Tajiki dialects. Politically, many of these groups around Keshem were affiliated with Hekmatyar's Hezb-e Islami party during the time of my research. In the Koran-e Munjan area of southern Badakhshan, a number of Nuristani families from the neighbouring province of Nuristan have settled mainly near communities dominated by Sevener Shiite Ismailis (see Kussmaul 1965a:14; Snoy 1965:111).⁵⁶ The anthropologist Peter Snoy also commented on the presence of Gujur nomads from the Swat valley of Pakistan's North West Frontier Province (see Snoy 1965:121), but I was unable to confirm their existence.⁵⁷ Lastly, although the Persian-speaking Hazara are one of the largest ethnic groups in Afghanistan and primarily constitute the largest Shiite group (*Dovazdah* Imami or *Ithna Ashari*, that is Twelver Shiite Muslims), they are a minority in Badakhshan and often tend to refer to themselves as Tajiks (see Mousavi 1997:76).⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Like Dari, Baluchi is a west-Iranian sub-branch of the Iranian group of Indo-European languages.

⁵⁶ Nuristanis have lived isolated existences in the Hindu Kush region, mostly in the provinces of Kunar and Nuristan. Prior to 1895/1896, members of this ethnic group were called Kafirs (Unbelievers). They practised a polytheistic religion and were the last group in Afghanistan to have converted to Islam under the violent Islamisation programs of *Amir Abdur Rahman*. For further ethnographic information on Nuristan see, for example, Klimburg (1999), Jettmar, (1986), Frembgen (1983), Snoy (1965), Jones (1974), Robertson (1986 (1896)), and Biddulph (1986 (1880)). The German anthropologist Friedrich Kussmaul (1965a:14) and Peter Snoy (1965:111) as well as the Swiss Iren von Moos and Edwin Huwyler (1983:123) mention that Nuristanis have settled in Nao, the most southern village in the Munjan valley, Badakhshan. Some other families also lived in Koran during the times of their research (Snoy 1965:111). The German geographer Erwin Grötzbach (1964:32) also mentions some Nuristani households in the Farkhar valley, Takhar Province, near Badakhshan's south-western border.

⁵⁷ The Gujurs speak Gujri, a middle-Indian sub-branch of the old-Indian branch of Indo-Iranian languages (see Kreuzmann 1996:390; Orywal 1986a:44-46). According to Grötzbach (1972:96), Gujur communities live near the Farkhar valley at the border of Badakhshan and Takhar province as well as in isolated areas of Kunar and Nuristan province.

⁵⁸ Hazaras have Arabic, Turkic and Persian influences and are believed to be descendants of the Mongols (Mousavi 1997:29). They speak a Persian dialect called Hazaragi that includes many Turkic and Mongol words (see Glatzer 1998:170; Mousavi 1997:6, 24). Gregorian (1969:33) views the Hazaras as the third largest ethnicity in Afghanistan, numbering two to three million, whereas Mousavi (1997:xiii) even postulates that they are the second largest ethnic group. The Hazaras are divided into several main groups and mostly inhabit the provinces of Bamiyan, Uruzgan and Ghowr, and are well represented in Kabul, Herat, Farah, Kandahar, Ghazni, Parwan, Baghlan, Balkh, and Badghis (see Mousavi 1997:xiii). In Badakhshan, Daraim, an Ismaili settlement south of Faizabad, is locally known as a Hazara settlement (Personal communication with UNRCO, Badakhshan, 2002). UNIDATA (1992:5) also noted small Hazara communities in Faizabad and Snoy mentions several Hazara communities that have settled in the western Kokcha region such as in the valleys of Argu and Atin Jelaw (1996:116-118).

Economy and Infrastructure

The climate of Badakhshan is extreme, corresponding directly to variations in altitude within the province. In the valleys of central and central-western Badakhshan, summer temperatures average around twenty degrees Celsius, but with approximately only one hundred frost-free days per year (see Grevenmeyer 1982:11; Holzwarth 1990:16). Faizabad, Baharak and Keshem have intense spells of heat during summer, and cold winters. The higher altitude regions in the north, north-east and south-east endure long, harsh winters and are often snowed in from November until April. Throughout spring, the valleys of Keshem, Faizabad, Baharak, Jurm, and Warduj experience heavy rainfall leading to significant wash-outs of the main thoroughfare that often block access in all directions. This ample rainfall, however, allows unirrigated cultivation (*zeraat-e lalmi*) (see Holzwarth 1990:16), while further agriculture is made possible through the use of intricate irrigation systems (*zeraat-e abi*) fed by nearby rivers. In addition, small gardens (*baghs*) are maintained by families and villages.

Badakhshan's provincial economy is almost entirely dependent upon subsistence agriculture. In addition to crops of wheat, rice, barley, and millet, the cultivation of opium poppies is also very common (see also Hayward 1995:6). In summer, potatoes and green, broad and kidney beans are available as is a variety of fruit grown in orchards: mulberry, apricot, peach, melon, pear, cherry, and pomegranate. Sunflower, sesame and rape seeds are used for the production of vegetable oil. The harvest of pistachios and almonds is still common, although since fuel is scarce, once abundant pistachio trees have disappeared at alarming rates near urban areas. In fact, due to Badakhshan's economic isolation and the high cost of imported fuel resources, deforestation is rampant throughout the province. Moreover, during their resistance against the Communist regime (1978-1992), the *mujahideen* deforested many regions whose communities were perceived to be loyal to the government. These included the villages of the marginalised and largely unarmed Ismailis in the high mountain regions of the south, who were then often forced to abandon their homes (see von Moos and Huwyler 1983:136). At the same time, government troops logged entire forests close to their military bases out of fear that they may offer protection to invading *mujahideen*. Inevitably, these actions have had environmentally disastrous consequences. The muddy brown water of the Kokcha river during the snow-melting season, for example, is primarily due to the erosion of mountains and the frequency of landslides that are directly attributable to uncontrolled deforestation.

The grazing of livestock, especially sheep, goats and cows is common in both urban and mountain regions in Badakhshan when sufficient winter fodder is available. A herd is a valuable resource for many communities, supplying them with wool, milk, meat, and leather. Donkeys and horses are the main forms of transport throughout the province and due to a lack of machinery, oxen are still used as the main agricultural power. The hunting of native game, fishing and the collection of wild fruit and herbs also contribute to the local economy. Pre-1978, small local industries produced woollen and straw mats as well as leather products (see UNIDATA 1992:5). Natural resources such as salt and the semi-precious stone *lajvard* (lapis lazuli) continue to be mined.⁵⁹ While there is still an abundance of lapis lazuli, Badakhshan's most famous stone, the decrease in world market prices and the lack of fuel to run generators have meant that it is no longer mined extensively. However, the Massoud faction of the Jamiat-e Islami and the United Front both used lapis lazuli mines to finance their armed struggle initially against the Soviet-backed government, and then later against the Taliban militia. In 1986, Massoud claimed that taxes imposed on the mining of semi-precious stones constituted one third of his revenue (see Rubin 1995:236).

The geographical location of Badakhshan has facilitated its role as an important and much-frequented crossroads for international caravans travelling the Silk Road. Many caravans originated in China and traversed Badakhshan from the Wakhan in the north to Ishkashim, Zebak and then onwards via the Warduj valley to Baharak, Faizabad, Argu to Keshem in the west (see Map 3).⁶⁰ From Faizabad, caravans had the option of travelling westwards to Keshem, Rostaq, Chah-ab, Taloqan, Khanabad, Kunduz, before eventually reaching Balkh (Mazar-e Sharif) (see Grevemeyer 1982:94; Raunig 1978:554).⁶¹ A second thoroughfare led from Baharak southwards to Munjan and then over the Anjuman Pass through the Panjshir Valley (Kapisa Province) before eventually reaching Kabul (see Maps 2 and 3 as well as Kussmaul

⁵⁹ Lapis Lazuli is mined predominantly in southern Badakhshan as well as to a lesser degree in Chile. Badakhshan's most abundant mines are in Sar-e Sang, between Koran-e Munjan and Jurm (see Map 3).

⁶⁰ In China, this ancient trade route branched into smaller sections: the southern route moved through the Tarim Oasis in contemporary Xinjiang via the towns of Niya, Khotan, Yarkand, and Kashgar to the Wakhan Corridor in Badakhshan (see Dupree 1973:301).

⁶¹ From Rostaq and Chah-ab it was then also possible to travel across the Amu Darya to Kulyab, in contemporary Tajikistan (see Grevemeyer 1982:94). From Kunduz, routes also connected with contemporary Tajikistan, whereas from Mazar-e Sharif it was possible to enter present Uzbekistan. At Khanabad, the Silk Route connected with Pul-e Khumri (contemporary Baghlan Province) and then led southwards to Kabul.