

*Juan Ignacio Castien Maestro*

*Professor, Department of Social Psychology in the Faculty of Political Science and Sociology, Complutense University of Madrid.*

*E-mail: [jicastien@hotmail.com](mailto:jicastien@hotmail.com)*

## MODERNISATION AND REGRESSION IN AFGHANISTAN. AN INTERPRETIVE ESSAY

### **Abstract**

*Afghanistan's most recent history is a history of truncated modernisation. The current regression in the country's earlier process of modernisation could, however, be seen as being simply another case of regression alternating with other periods of genuine modernisation. The foundations of this odd process of alternation seem to lie in the instability of its modern institutions as compared to the solidity of its traditional and, to a large extent, tribal forms of organisation. These traditional forms of organisation have generally complicated the march of modernisation and have become strengthened whenever modernisation has been blocked.*

### **KeyWords**

*Afghanistan, tribes, Islam, modernisation, clientelism.*

## MODERNISATION AND REGRESSION IN AFGHANISTAN. AN INTERPRETIVE ESSAY

### TRUNCATED MODERNISATION

Afghanistan's most recent history is, without doubt, dramatic. However, the country's current stagnation does not justify any type of historic fatalism. Tribalism, inter-ethnic rivalries, religious obscurantism and the country's orographical conditions have, since time immemorial, conspired against any hope of progress for the Afghan people. This widely-spread essentialist concept scorns both a past peppered with moments of great glory as well as the well-known progress experienced previous to the Soviet invasion. What has happened over recent decades, then, is not so much a mere prolongation of a secular backwardness but more the story of truncated modernisation. More specifically, Afghan history over the past two decades shows a strange alternation between modernisation and regression, between periods of creation of a more complex, diverse and integrated society and other periods of partial fall-backs towards more simple social structures and towards less internal cohesion. This peculiar fluctuation has not been strictly circular, however. Rather, it has been more of a slow upward spiral. Certainly, despite all the setbacks the country has suffered, Afghanistan has experienced modernisation over time. This combination of advances and set-backs has been the result of an unstable balance between opposing tendencies. In this article we aim to offer a broad understanding of this dynamic, unravelling the main factors that have led to it. To that end, we have studied the literature of the different periods of Afghan history and, based on that, drawn up a necessarily abstract overview of this history. Our aim was to identify certain patterns rather than to describe historical events in detail. We have focused our interest on historical sociology as opposed to a more descriptive historical study, which does indeed have its virtues but also its limitations.

### PRELUDE. TRADITIONAL AFGHAN SOCIETY

For more than a millennium, the territories that today make up Afghanistan were part of the area of classical Islamic civilisation, shaped by the expansion of Islam during the Middle Ages, mainly through military conquest. This is a group of societies connected to each other by land, for whom, to a large extent, Islamic ideology continues to be the cultural backbone even today. Perhaps the most significant feature of this classical Islamic civilisation has been the intense contrast between the aridity and

impenetrability of certain areas, such as the mountains and deserts, and the fertility and accessibility of others. This geographical division has served throughout history as the basis for a marked division between social systems. While some areas were dominated by nomadism and subsistence agriculture, bound almost always to tribal systems and relatively egalitarian, in others more productive agriculture, sophisticated urban life, well-developed state organisation and marked social hierarchies prevailed. The relationship between these two social systems was very complex. Often the dwellers of the tribal areas plundered and conquered cities and their lands, and were a clear obstacle to development. But in other cases, these peoples provided markets for products from cities and valuable military contingents, thanks to the superior combat training of the tribal populations. Sometimes these mercenary forces ended up taking power and founding new dynasties. The tribal regions were also those that connected the different urbanised and stratified regions to each other, and it was through these zones that profitable long-distance trade flowed – often providing excellent resources for sustaining urban and state structures, much as was the case with the war spoils obtained during military expeditions. Tribal peoples were also often involved in these trade flows, whether as highwaymen, protectors or caravaners (cf. Amin, 1986: 27-39; Castien Maestro, 2013: 169-171).

The cornerstone of this tribal organisation was patrilineal filiation. Members of the same paternal lineage were expected to work together and show solidarity towards each other, both at work and at war. In this way, the lineage unit was often also a corporate unit. Likewise, these filiation ties were closely linked to those based on marriage alliances, as cooperative ties could also be established with the patrilineal lines of the wives and mothers. Nevertheless, the connection between lineage units and the existing cooperative units was never absolute. At times there may have been no cooperation with relatives for whatever reason, and in the same way it may have been more beneficial to work together with people who had no alliance or filiation ties. In these cases, the family tree was usually manipulated so as to adjust it to the situation on the ground, or the non-family member would be integrated into the family through arranged marriages. Furthermore, the lineage units could differ as regards their reach and internal density. They could be far reaching or narrow, i.e. they could include individuals who were further removed from or closer to patrilineal ties depending on how distant their common ancestors were. This criterion allowed for the distinction between narrower genealogical units such as “clans”, and broader units such as “tribes” which had more members. In general, the broader a lineal unit, the lower the density was as regards social relations. In other words, the broader lineal unit did not clearly correspond to one single economic and military cooperative but rather grouped together several different ones. For this reason, these large units tended to play a much less important role in the daily lives of their members. Possibly, the identity linked to these larger units was only activated under certain circumstances, such as a military campaign, and the rest of the time they remained something more virtual (cf. Tapper, 2011).

In principle, the tribal world presented a high level of egalitarianism due to its scarcity of material possessions and its obligations towards its weakest members, both of which prevented large concentrations of wealth and power. Certain lineages, however, had more and better land or had become wealthy through trade and war. This allowed them to impose themselves upon other less fortunate filiation groups and led to the establishment of a hierarchy among lineages. In the same manner, within each group there were some individuals who stood out thanks to their charisma, military capabilities and generosity. These individuals were able to build up an informal type of leadership and turn their relatives into followers, among whom they could share out their war spoils, for example, and also recruit allies through a skilful policy of marriage alliances. The leader thus recreated clientelistic relations with those followers. Nonetheless, this leadership remained weak and precarious. There was a risk that clients may tire of an overly authoritarian and demanding leader and his leadership may have been subject to challenge from possible rivals. The situation would change when greater wealth became available thanks to better agricultural or livestock yields, war or trade. Leaders could then establish more substantial clientelistic links. Social differences would then not only broaden but become more lasting or even hereditary. As a consequence, traditional institutions, such as assemblies of relatives, would also lose much of their former democratic stamp and become a closed shop where leaders freely manipulated clients whose role was reduced to one of offering their support against competitors. The whole system then took on a “semi-feudal” character, creating what could be referred to as a tribal aristocracy. All of this had obvious repercussions on the lineage system itself. Most probably, a clear hierarchy between lineages was established, which was then justified by the unequal evaluation given to the different eponymous ancestors. A final result of this hierarchisation process was based on the densification of the tribe, i.e. the increase in relevant social relationships within the broadest lineage unit. The existence of a more stable leadership facilitated the mobilisation of the tribe as a whole. The tribe thus took on a more stable existence thanks to the tribal aristocrats who revitalised it in order to serve their specific interests (Gregorian, 1969: 39-43; Rubin, 2002: 22-32).

This process of hierarchisation was able to develop much more easily when the tribal system was not isolated, but rather was interacting with other more complex social systems that benefited from greater wealth, as was precisely the case in the classical Islamic world. With the tribal system in contact with more urbanised and stratified areas, greater profits could be collected that were able to fuel this process of internal differentiation. These profits were very varied: commercial benefits, taxes or gains from plundering. There is a double paradox in this situation: on the one hand, contact with a non-tribal social system actually made the tribal system more powerful. And on the other hand, this same strengthened system became a huge barrier to consolidation of urban and state areas and, thus, became one of the key reasons for the brake on development experienced across the classical Islamic world. And there is a further, even greater, paradox. The tribal system was a privileged space to develop clientelistic

relations that could eventually result in the domination of a warrior-type aristocracy whose triumph would mean the end of traditional egalitarianism. The tribal system would then be a type of framework for the emergence of the state that, over time, would end up obstructing the whole process. After all, tribal ties continued to have a partially egalitarian nature and the traditional tribal institutions continued to maintain some of their original democratic character. So, the establishment of a pure “feudal” hierarchy was obstructed by the remnants of tribal egalitarianism. This complicated the full conversion of tribal areas to state control and kept these areas in a kind of hybrid state. Yielding urban and statified areas to tribal areas may have advanced the process and tribal aristocracies would have become fully integrated into the state system, becoming “detrivalised” and “feudalised” in a progressive manner. But, right up to the present day, states have rarely been able to do this, limiting themselves to “encapsulating” tribal areas and avoiding direct confrontation with them. They have, however, promoted their differentiation and internal hierarchisation, strengthening their aristocracies by awarding them certain administrative functions and financing them in return for their cooperation. In exchange, the tribal areas also somewhat tribalised urban and statified areas. Often, ruling dynasties would make a show of their tribal origins, trying to maintain ties with their community of origin. Even more frequently, many of the administrative and military personnel were of tribal origin. So, relations based on a combination of parentage and clientelism operated to a large extent at the heart of the state apparatus itself and this frequently turned it into a battle ground between rival lineages. Clearly it was difficult to streamline an administration with these characteristics, and this then constituted a new factor blocking any possible modernisation (Castien Maestro, 2013: 162-171).

This general model can help us to better understand traditional Afghan society and, above all, understand why its modernisation has historically been so complicated. It is not surprising that many of the constitutive elements of this model can also assume an extreme nature. Take the fact that the vast majority of Afghan territory could easily be located in tribal areas with difficult access. Afghanistan is a very mountainous land, and that in itself is a characteristic that favours tribalism and complicates the development of a strong state. In addition to this, it is a border land. Just as in other regions in the classical Islamic world, this land has also historically been a space that stretched between more developed, urbanised and statified regions, such as the Iranian and Indian worlds. Afghan territory has been a transit land between different civilisations and between different empires since ancient times. This was the case both for trade, with the famous Silk Road running through the north of the country, as well as for military expeditions. This condition of border land also brought with it several ambivalent effects. It was the source of considerable economic enrichment, and supplied the resources needed for the flourishing of outstanding cultural life in cities such as Herat, Kabul and Mazar Esh-Sherif, as well as for the development of states based in the region such as those of the Ghaznavids and the Ghurids. But it also condemned the country to periodic destruction and generated a

level of ethnic diversity that was very difficult to control. The extreme way in which this combination of tribalism and dependence on distance trading existed, which was so very typical of the classical Islamic world as a whole, also created a very specific type of vulnerability, in the Afghan case, to changes in trade routes. This was precisely what began to happen with the arrival of the Age of Discovery. European merchants managed to divert a large proportion of the caravan trade from the interior of Asia towards the coasts of the Indian Ocean. The Silk Road then entered into a progressive decline which largely ruined urban life across the whole of Central Asia. The British conquest of India accentuated this decline. A second setback came fast on the heels of the first. The victory of the Safavid Shia dynasty in Persia left the Sunni world split in two and isolated Central Asia from the large cultural and economic centres of the Middle East, which in turn influenced the decline of urbanised areas. The final result was the regression of certain regions to subsistence economies and towards a more tribal organisation. But this regression was merely another clear indicator of the precarity of the more complex organisational forms that always existed before society would fall back into another recession. (Gregorian, 1969: 10-24)

## THE EMERGENCE OF THE AFGHAN STATE

It was precisely in this context, so unfavourable to any centralisation process, that the first Afghan state emerged. Specifically, the enthronement in 1747 of Ahmed Shah, patriarch of the Sadozai clan of the Durrani tribal confederation could be considered as being the starting point for an institutional continuity that, with the necessary transformations, has endured to the present day. Of course, this was not the first state to appear on Afghan territory, but it was the first consolidated state dominated by the Pashtun ethnic group, hegemonic in Afghanistan ever since. This was a novel situation given that previous long-term state experiences had been built on Turkish-origin lineages. This change was made possible thanks to two favourable circumstances linked to the border and tribal conditions of these lands. The first was the fleeting weakness of the two neighbouring empires – the Persian Empire and the Mughal Empire – two empires that had shared control of most of the country since the 16th century. This new circumstance left a gap in power, filled by the Pashtun aristocracy.

The second favourable circumstance was linked to certain specific advantages enjoyed by the Pashtun ethnic group. Firstly, they benefitted from a solid and elaborate tribal organisation that allowed them to mobilise large groups of combatants. And secondly, despite having been a stateless people within their own territories until that point, the Pashtun had extensive experience of statehood in other countries. Since the Middle Ages, their warriors had been recruited by several of the conquerors of India, such as the Ghurids in the 12th century and the Timurids in the 14th century. Once established on Indian territory, some of them broke away from their masters and founded their

own local dynasties (Caroe, 1958: 117-150). In addition to the experience they already had, part of their population had already gone through a process of hierarchisation in line with the general model explained in the previous chapter; more specifically, as a consequence of interaction with the Safavid State. It was during this process that certain aristocratic lineages within the Abdali confederation (later Durrani) hatched. By contrast, in other regions, such as the mountains that now make up the Pakistan tribal belt, it was much more common for the former egalitarian structures to continue to exist. (Rubin, 2002: 29)

Certainly, the new Durrani Empire had a much looser institutional structure. Its core was made up of a coalition of Durrani aristocratic clans, led by their respective patriarchs and grouped around the dominating clan. This tribal coalition stayed unified thanks to a complex system of balance between the clans, through which positions of state responsibility were carefully shared out among their members. These balances were managed through the *loya jirga*, the Grand Assembly – a development of the traditional *jirgas* held on a smaller scale. But the main guarantor of the functioning of the system was the sovereign himself; the crown of an entire sanctions and recompenses distribution system. A third and important characteristic of this new state was its close association with tribal structures and with ethnic Pashtun identity. Clearly this was not a national state. But, just like other traditional states, it held what we could call an ethnic base. The Pashtun were the hegemonic ethnicity within this state. The reigning dynasty, as well as most of its leaders, belonged to this ethnicity and the Pashtun people enjoyed a whole range of privileges, such as tax exemptions, that then had negative consequences for other ethnic groups. The link between this state and one specific ethnic group that enjoyed obvious benefits from its existence fostered greater commitment by its members to the vicissitudes of fate. So, the fact that this link was established with the Pashtun ended up being very beneficial to the state itself, as they – the Pashtun – had already developed a clear ethnic identity many centuries previously that was based on two pillars. One was life style. The Pashtun were governed by a strict code of conduct, the *pashtunwali*. This was a code in keeping with the way of tribal life that extolled bravery, a sense of personal independence, solidarity with relatives, and respect of strict rules governing sexual decency, especially for women, all of which fundamentally underpinned the patriarchal system and, over and above this, a tribal system based on patrilineal lineage. Alongside this strict tribal code of honour, the second pillar of Pashtun identity was defined by the genealogical link to the legendary ancestor of all Pashtun people, Qais Ar-Rachid. In this way, through belonging to a series of ever broader and more inclusive lineage units, every Pashtun was integrated into one single people and thus linked to all other Pashtun (Caroe, 1958: 3-24). The tribal system ended up creating a global identity as a people. This didn't merely encourage particularism and factionalism, but also unity and integration. Ultimately, there was a clear contradiction between this global Pashtun identity and the more partial identities of tribe and clan; in the long-term, this became an impediment to greater integration and social modernisation. But this problem still hadn't become

manifest at that time. Back then, the tribal system continued to operate as an effective framework for ethnic identity, although later it would become a barrier to the further development of said ethnic identity. The same also happened ultimately with the privileged link between the Afghan state and the Pashtun identity, as this created a strong sense of unfair treatment among the rest of the population. Shaping a more inclusive Afghan national identity that doesn't privilege any one ethnicity in particular is one of the main ongoing tasks the country still has to deal with, two centuries later.

This first Afghan state was, likewise, a true predator state. Like many other states in the region, its fundamental aim was war and, more specifically, pillage. Even more so as traffic from trade and the economy as a whole had been declining. Faced with the weakness of the Persian and Mughal Empires, the new Durrani Empire managed to enter India, obtain rich spoils, and expand to the Punjab region whose non-Pashtun population was subjected to harsh tax burdens. The urban population suffered the same fate, particularly non-Muslim minorities such as Jews, Hindus and Christian Armenians specialised in trade and lending. This authentic fiscal extortion was no different from that implemented by many rulers since ancient times, both within the Muslim world and outside of its confines. It involved fattening up on a weak and relatively rich sector of the population whose wealth, partly in monetary form, was very easy to collect. And in this way compensation was made for the exemptions given to the Pashtun tribal population. In the long-term, however, this policy complicated urban and trade development and led to the impoverishment of the country. It also deprived the sovereigns of a convenient means of support against the tribal world, with a view to a future process of political centralisation. But the greatest obstacle to this centralising process was the progressive strengthening of a section of the tribal groups and their aristocracies thanks to the spoils they managed to collect during military campaigns, and to tax exemptions and land concessions granted to them in exchange for their military cooperation (Gregorian, 1969: 47-48 and 61-67; Kakar, 1979: 73-91). The Durrani Empire was, then, a weak state, as would soon become clear. Following the death in 1793 of Timur Shah, son of the founder, a bloody battle for the throne broke out between his sons. The ensuing civil war that lasted for three decades not only tore the country apart but had three further consequences. The first was the rupture of the fragile equilibrium between the Durrani clans – an equilibrium upon which the system was built. The Mohammedzai clan rose up against the Sadozai clan, establishing a new dynasty in 1826 under the aegis of a highly gifted leader, Dost Mohammed Khan. The second consequence was serious land losses. The emerging Sikh State took control of many territories populated by the Pashtun as well as taking control of the rich Punjab region. This was a particularly severe blow that deprived the new monarchy of a key source of resources. Finally, in the course of all of this disorder, the tribes became stronger thanks to both pillage and the appropriation of new lands. Thus the country experienced a new regression to a more primitive and tribal organisation. (Duprée. 1997: 343-401; Gregorian; 1969: 49-51; Rubin, 2002: 45-47)

The new Mohammedzai State was poor and anarchic. It was also subject to growing intimidation by two expanding empires – the Russian Empire and the British Empire. It could have ended up being broken up or conquered by either of these two European powers. But this didn't happen due, in part, to its solid Pashtun tribal base and, in part, to the role it acquired as a buffer state between the two empires. But being situated in this middle ground also came at a high price. Alongside successive land plundering at the hands of its powerful neighbours, Afghanistan also had to deal with two British invasions, in 1838-1842 and 1879-1880. Both invasions were overcome, but at the cost of much damage. In both cases, resistance was shown mainly by the tribes while the regular army, that had only just started to form, was ineffective and, together with a large portion of the administration, was destroyed by the war and the chaos that ensued. This was a new regression. A second regressive consequence was the ensuing high level of hostility towards the European infidels and the rejection of anything related to them, reviving and fostering a whole series of ideological positions, fruit of centuries of troubled neighbour relations with Hindus and Sikhs. This xenophobic feeling ended up reinforcing the conservative version of Sunnism, characterised by its decidedly hostile position towards social change that had prevailed across the whole of the Sunni world since the middle of the Middle Ages (Gregorian, 1969: 16-17). A combination of xenophobia and conservatism of this kind, encouraged by most of the religious dignitaries, has since remained a significant barrier to the modernisation of the country. Successive Afghan governments have always had to try to find some kind of balance between the necessary reform policies and the interests of ensuring they do not overly alienate the more conservative segments of the population. Generally speaking, Muslim identity, and above all Sunni identity, became a key element of the Afghan identity in formation. The obligation to resist the infidels was then a key argument used by the incipient state propaganda that turned the necessary fraternity between Muslims into the foundations of a concomitant solidarity between compatriots and an obligatory loyalty to a threatened Muslim state (Gregorian, 1969: 118-128; Kakar, 1979: 176-179). In the same way, Afghan sovereigns progressively used the caliphal title Commander of the Faithful, Amir-el-Mouminin, contrasting with their Sadozai predecessors who had chosen the more secular Shah (Gregorian, 1969: 77-78). This appeal to the powerful Muslim identity contributed positively to reinforcing the developing national identity and thus to the modernisation of the country. It also helped in marking the boundaries of this proto-national identity from the Pashtun ethnic identity. Nonetheless, its links to a very conservative version of Islam clearly went against any quest for modernisation. The same happened with the connection to Sunnism, as opposed to Islam in general, which meant the Shia population – around 15% of the total population – became not just a heretical population but also a less national one, and even a potential fifth column at the service of neighbouring Persia.

## EXPERIENCES OF SELECTIVE MODERNISATION AND ITS LIMITS

The response of the Mohammedzai leaders to the European advancement also presented a second aspect. They proceeded to a form of selective modernisation, i.e. to taking on certain western innovations that would best enable them to reinforce their power, while ensuring that there were in line with the conservative Sunnism to which they so strictly adhered. Both Dost Mohammed Khan as well as his son and successor Sher Ali Khan made a certain amount of progress in this aspect. Their reforms centred on the creation of modern military units equipped with European weaponry and trained by European instructors, although the results were rather mediocre. They introduced administrative reforms and lay the foundations for a national postal system and a ministerial organisation (Gregorian, 1969: 73-73 and 85-90). These small advances, however, were undone by the second Anglo-Afghan war, and the new Emir, Abdur Rahman Khan (1880-1901) had to start anew, almost from zero. His political cornerstone was, once again, the strengthening of the regular army in order to safeguard national independence. To achieve this, he extended the policy on recruiting foreign instructors and importing arms, and even built factories to manufacture arms at home. Barracks were also built and a logistics system to cater for the troops was introduced (Abdu ar-Rahman, 2005: 14-60; Kakar, 1979: 192-200). The living conditions of these new soldiers were terrible, the discipline draconian, and desertion frequent. It is doubtful whether an army in such conditions could have successfully defeated another European invasion. The army did, however, turn out to be extraordinarily effective in subduing the numerous internal rebellions, which converted it into an instrument of the first order for the monarch's centralisation project. In the same way, a police force was created and prisons were constructed in cities. Crime levels, previously very high, reduced dramatically but at the cost of living under a reign of terror. Executions, imprisonment and torture became commonplace (Gregorian, 1969: 132-134 and 139-141; Kakar, 1979: 36-40 and 93-114; Rubin, 2002: 148-152). Similarities with other experiences of despotic modernisation, such as Peter the Great and Mehmet Ali, are evident. In all of these cases, the repressive state restricted and broke up the society, making the state even more independent from said society, and reinforcing its propensity towards arbitrariness when faced with any possible administrative streamlining. All of this translated into complete sabotage of the modernisation project from the inside.

Another pillar of this policy was the state takeover of Islamic clergy. The assets from which they lived, the awqaf, were nationalised and the clergy was reduced to a group of employees at the service of the state – a process similar to that in other Muslim states. Despite losing their previous autonomy, the clergy now benefited from greater state support as compensation for the expropriation of their assets. Equally, the centralisation process - the submission of tribes to the state - involved applying Islamic law where previously common law had prevailed, which also clearly benefitted

the religious class (Gregorian, 1969: 133-136; Kakar, 1979: 50-53). Modernisation of the country was thus associated with even greater Islamisation. In fact, an official discourse pointing to the need for convergence between both processes was beginning to emerge. The defence of Afghanistan against the threat of the infidels required its modernisation, and this was taking place for the greater glory of Islam (Abdu ar-Rahman, 2005: 14-17 and 79-81). The monarch was the Commander of the Faithful, as designated by God; anyone who challenged his power was disobeying Him, and was thus a genuine apostate. The previous policy of making pacts with the tribal aristocracy had to be replaced by a far more autocratic regime. Local and tribal particularisms were also assimilated into the *fitna*, to this internal dispute so heinous to traditional Muslim thinking (Gregorian, 1969: 130-132). Recourse to Islam lent, then, greater legitimacy to the desired administrative centralisation. Parallels with the practices of the old European absolutism systems are striking.

This whole modernisation strategy was impeded, however, by the dramatic lack of economic resources. The country was poor and had lost its earlier riches from military campaigns, trade and the Punjab taxes. Under these circumstances, it had to resort to subsidies from British India which was interested in keeping Afghanistan as a buffer state when faced with Russian expansion. Recourse to this type of aid created an uncomfortable feeling, particularly as it was a hostile neighbour that had invaded the country twice. This friendly bearing also contrasted with an often radically aggressive discourse directed towards the infidels from inside. In any case, these subsidies were key for building up the new Afghan state and its army. The Afghan state was converted into a rentier state and, in one way or another, has continued to be so through to the present day (Rubin, 2002: 62). Moreover, the condition of rentier state had very ambiguous consequences for the modernisation process that had been embarked upon. On the one hand, it benefitted this process as it provided the state apparatus and its leaders with quite a high level of autonomy as compared to society as a whole, which then enabled the state apparatus to deal with and dominate the groups that were most hostile to the modernisation process. On the other hand, this isolation from society brought with it less social integration. Paradoxically, this situation was simply a type of continuation of an older situation in which weak and precarious states, supported to a large extent by long-distance trade income, coexisted with a tribal world somewhat independent from them (Castien Maestro, 2013: 169-170). These same contradictions were apparent in some of the actions of the “Iron Emir”. He employed all manner of arbitrariness when collecting taxes, and an extremely harsh tariff policy complicated both relations with the outside world as well as the development of a native bourgeoisie (Kakar, 1979: 201-227).

Abdur Rahman’s successor, Habibullah Khan (1901-1919) continued along the same lines with respect to domestic and foreign policy. The simple fact of him succeeding his father in a peaceful manner without civil war breaking out between siblings and without numerous local lords taking advantage of the occasion to revolt and expand their power was, in itself, clear proof of how far institutional strengthening

had come during his father's reign. Habibullah focused his efforts on strengthening industrial development and opening the first modern educational centres, staffed by foreign teachers. The sons of the tribal aristocracy and urban dignitaries, called upon to form the new administrative elite, were educated there. These measures came in combination with a clear mitigation of state coercion. The secret police were dissolved and a much less punitive legal system began to be constructed. A second remarkable feature of this reign was the emerging expansion of Islamic reformism at the hands of the notable figure of Mahmud Tarzi (Duprée, 1997: 430-440; Gregorian, 1969: 161-205). This rather late dissemination was of huge importance as it provided an ideology that, in principle, appeared able to combine what Clifford Geertz (1987: 203-218) called essentialism and epochalism, a connection to one's own cultural tradition and adjustment to the needs of a modern society. The new ideology spread among one sector of the governing elite and among a part of the urban and cultivated minority, albeit a very small part. But it did not strike a chord with the vast majority of the tribal and rural population, and clashed with the ideas of the clergy.

Following the death of Habibullah and the accession to the throne of a new monarch, Amanullah Khan (1919-1929), son-in-law of Mahmud Tarzi, and leader of the most reformist wing of the ruling group, Islamic reformism had its great opportunity. Amanullah broke away from his two predecessors' strategy of selective and moderate modernisation and embarked on a more ambitious policy. Industrialisation accelerated and much effort was put into education and the construction of infrastructure. However, two groups of measures were adopted that caused a fatal frontal collision with the more conservative sections of society, and especially with the clergy. The first was an attempt to make the legal and education systems increasingly independent from the clergy. The second line of reforms was focused on eroding the prevailing patriarchal system. In this way, certain measures enacted by his grandfather were stepped up, such as making it obligatory for a bride to give her consent to marriage and placing a limit on wedding expenditure and payments required from the wife's family. New measures were also added. Polygamy was officially discouraged. The king was monogamous, which was something completely new at the time, and state officials were obliged to be so too. The idea of women abandoning the use of the burqa was promoted, and the queen and other women of the royal entourage appeared in public without it. These measures reflected a democratic and modernist ideal – a component of which is equality between the sexes. But this attack on patriarchy meant taking apart the tribal system underpinning it and tackling the largest obstacle to the modernisation of the country. Arranged marriages were a privileged means of establishing alliances between lineages, the high prices for the bride and the wedding costs reinforced hierarchical differences, and these expenditures also played an important role as displays of power and wealth – an incredibly important aspect within the framework of a clientelistic system (Duprée, 1997: 441-457; Gregorian, 1969: 227-274; Poullada, 1973).

While pushing through all of these reforms, and arousing a huge amount of opposition, Amanullah's modernisation project continued to suffer from certain

deficiencies. The most important one lay in the weakness of his army, an army without which it was impossible to overcome the resistance of several tribes that had been “pacified” by his ancestors but never truly suppressed. Amanullah, unlike his predecessors, didn’t make any great efforts to strengthen his armed forces. He introduced a series of reforms designed to modernise them but they merely ended up weakening them. Conscription by lottery was introduced which deprived the local chiefs of their former role in the selection of recruits. This generated a strong feeling of resentment among them and among the population who felt deprived of one of their means of influencing the authorities. It was a normal reaction to a policy of centralised administration that threatened the traditional “intermediate bodies”. In addition to this, there was intense fiscal pressure which added to this discontent. This intensified fiscal pressure was understandable considering the state’s lack of resources and the new expenditures necessary for the modernisation process – a process that offered a superficial kind of ostentation, focused as it was on setting up new factories and constructing fine buildings from which the vast majority of the population would never gain any benefit but were obliged to finance. All of this eventually culminated in a Pashtun tribal rebellion that rapidly turned into a general one, with the enthusiastic support of most of the clergy, and which led to the overthrow and exile of the reformist sovereign. The tribes and the clergy gained strength from this clash and entered into a new process of social regression which sounded the death knell for the reforms and led to chaos and pillaging for several months. Amanullah’s accelerated modernisation had, to a large extent, broken the traditional patronage ties that bound the monarch to the tribal leaders and thus to the population as a whole, and had done so without managing to replace them by more modern ties. The result was a kind of political vacuum. The king had been floating in the air and ended up crashing to the ground (Gregorian, 1969: 266-274; Poullada, 1973: 143-213 and 267-275; Rubin, 2002: 54-58).

Following the above-mentioned period of disturbances, Amanullah’s cousin, Nadir Khan came to power, succeeded by his son Zahir Shah. Over this period, which lasted until 1973, governors returned to the path of conservative and moderate modernisation, dropping Amanullah’s more radical strategy so as not to suffer the same destiny. An extremely conciliatory policy with the Islamic clergy was introduced, handing over to them control of the judicial system, and initially there was a return to the traditional standards applied to women. But, at the same time, economic developmentalism and the construction of a modern state continued. A limited liberal democracy was even introduced, with a parliament elected by popular vote and vested with restricted powers, although political parties were not allowed (Duprée, 1997: 458-666; Gregorian, 1969: 293-398; Rubin 2002: 54-80). Despite all of this moderation, modernisation was progressively intensifying various social contradictions. The most important contradiction was the one that already existed between the small urban comfortable minority that had started to develop mainly around state activities, and the much more traditionalist rural and usually tribal majority. Women with a more liberal life style, who studied and worked and went out in public without a veil had started to appear

at the heart of this modernist minority, and this was a ground-breaking situation. This urban minority was profoundly discontent with the backwardness of the country and with the nature of the state itself whose elite continued to be dominated by the Durrani aristocracy and their closest clientele. All of this pushed some of the urban class towards militancy through leftist or Islamic movements that were particularly active in universities and secondary education centres but that didn't capture the attention of the vast majority of the population (Étienne, 2002: 43-46; Requena, 2011: 52-56; Roy, 2001: 69-83; Rubin, 2002: 75-105). The weakness of the state also determined the weakness of this dependent minority. The isolation and autonomy of the state from society also affected the population. As stated by Barnett Rubin (2002: 81), a rentier state also produces rentier revolutionaries. Hence, also, their limited real knowledge of their own society and their concomitant inclination towards simplistic and messianic solutions. In addition to this, there was also the problem of their limited links to other social sectors. Their ability to act at the vanguard of modernisation, capable of putting together a broad coalition of forces, was very lacking. The peasantry remained under the control of the rural dignitaries, as shown in successive parliamentary elections. And likewise, a large section was made up of small property-owners. The concentration of agricultural property was relatively low and the local potentate was also often a person with whom close clientelistic and even kinship links were maintained (Étienne, 2002: 53-57; Kakar, 1979: 115-131; Rubin, 2002: 32-37). None of this favoured a possible peasant mobilisation away from their traditional leaders.

## THE RADICALISATION OF MODERNISATION AND ITS FAILURE. FROM DAUD TO NAJIBULLAH

In 1973, Mohammed Daud, the king's cousin and former Prime Minister, led a coup d'état, proclaiming a republic that he himself would govern. The new regime could be defined as modernist authoritarianism. The former limited democracy was abolished and was followed by harsh repression of any political opponents, particularly Islamists. The aim was to abandon the path of moderate modernisation and advance more rapidly, concentrating power in the modernist minority and silencing the large conservative mass. And so, agricultural reform was passed, the emancipation of women and a greater secularisation of the state was promoted, and cooperation relations with the USSR were strengthened in order to collect the funds necessary for financing the economic modernisation. In a way, Amanullah's previous strategy was resumed. However, this project faced certain obstacles. Its social base was not particularly broad, and it had very few of its own frameworks. The core of the movement was a group of members of the upper class, linked by kinship ties and the exchange of favours. Under these conditions, it was necessary to establish a tactical alliance with the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), a party with a pro-Soviet ideology. It was a small party but was firmly established among the urban minority who had managed

to win some seats during the period of liberal democracy. It also had many followers among the middle-ranking officers and their help was vital in organising the coup d'état. The party was divided into two factions, who each took their name from their respective print media. The Khalq, "Masses", group was more radical and called for the revolutionary seizure of power and the immediate implementation of deep-reaching reforms. The Parcham, "Flag", group were in favour of participation on a broad front of progressive forces and, logically, were more inclined to support Daud. From his point of view, this alliance with pro-Soviet communists was extremely awkward. After all, both he himself as well as his closest associates were rich aristocrats. It should come as no surprise, therefore, that he broke away from the PDPA, began to hound it, and tried to distance himself from the Soviet Union. Confrontation was inevitable and led to a military uprising in 1978 resulting in the death of Daud and hundreds of his associates and relatives (Etienne, 2002: 47-59; Requena, 2011: 56-62).

The new government was composed mainly of members of the Khalq group, who progressively marginalised the Parchamis. Their policy was to radicalise previous reforms, together with the decision to impose said reforms by fire and sword. Anti-patriarchal measures were intensified, arranged marriages and the "bride price" were prohibited, and an agricultural reform based on expropriation of land belonging to landowners and the redistribution of this land was enacted, with debts owed to rural moneylenders by peasants being cancelled. In parallel, a wave of terror was unleashed against aristocrats, Mullahs, leaders of the Sufi brotherhoods, political opponents and, in general, all members of the urban minority who were not aligned with the new regime, such as teachers, military personnel and civil servants. Victims ran into tens of thousands. The Khali government's aim was to broaden its small support base through a rapid series of advanced reforms that would mobilise a previously passive population. The idea, then, was to construct a social base from the top down. And in the meantime, mass-terror would crush resistance, neutralising any opponents. With Soviet help, the state would also be able to invest heavily in infrastructure, education and health, thus improving the living conditions of the majority of the population and gaining their sympathy. But the exact opposite occurred; one year on and rebellion had extended across almost the entire country leaving the government fenced into the large cities, while desertion decimated the army. This mass rebellion occurred for several reasons. Firstly, the majority of the population saw the reforms as being an unacceptable intrusion by the state in the traditional autonomy of local communities. These reforms were also seen as being an attack against the traditional way of life, without making it clear what would replace it. The fight against arranged marriages and the payment of bride prices broke down the whole system of family alliances. Moneylenders no longer existed but they weren't replaced by a good system of bank credits. The local potentates were displaced but no one took over the work of mediating with the authorities or arbitrating in internal conflicts. Land was distributed but access to irrigation was not improved. Even education campaigns were seen as external imposition, taking away time from work and not providing any immediate

benefits. The Amanullah drama was repeating itself but this time on an even greater scale. And at the same time, everything was being blamed on a government whose ideology went against Islam, the fundamental building block of the collective identity (Etienne, 2002: 61-63; Requena, 2011: 62-67; Roy, 2001: 84-97; Rubin, 2002: III-122). The Khalq failure was, thus, the failure of revolutionaries isolated from the population who, unlike their contemporaries in China or Vietnam, to give two examples, had no roots whatsoever among the peasant majority.

The final irony of this whole episode was the Khali government trying to bring about a peasant mobilisation, and being successful...but with the mobilisation going against them. There was no progressive mobilisation, but there was a conservative one. The response to an attempt at radical reform was a radical reaction. Just as happened in the rebellion against Amanullah and in the two Anglo-Afghan wars, the population mobilised against what they saw as an attack against their most deep-rooted customs. Just like in these other cases, the peasantry transcended its usual focus on its most local daily problems to mobilise in a defensive way and to do so, almost always, under the direction of its traditional leaders. Admittedly, this defensive mobilisation was easier to bring about than the revolutionary mobilisation. It was acting at the service of an already known order, from familiar ideological parameters and within known social frameworks such as tribal, ethnic and religious links. There was therefore no need for great innovation. The rebellion had ambivalent consequences as regards the country's modernisation process, in so far as mass mobilisation reaching beyond the usual bounds of localism could subsequently favour greater social integration. At the same time, this mobilisation was carried out within the traditional frameworks and under the direction of two very conservative sectors – the local potentate and the Islamic clergy. In fact, the state disappeared in many places and was replaced by rudimentary administrations led by these traditional figures. The clergy also saw their social influence boosted. On the one hand, the rebellion was legitimised by appealing to a conservative Islam and so the clergy, as representatives of this ideology, saw their social role bolstered. And on the other, the clerical class was often more combative than the old dignitaries, accustomed as the dignitaries were to ending up reaching an agreement with the authorities. In many places, the clergy alone was capable of uniting different groups once the mobilisation had gone beyond the strictly local level. And so the rebellion acquired a strong clerical character, alongside its Islamic one (Roy 2001: 98-109 and 150-153; Rubin, 2002: 184-195). This salient feature of the rebellion facilitated its convergence with Islamic movements. These movements had previously been urban in nature with very a weak presence across the country as a whole. But now the time was ripe. Their ideology, although distinct from conservative Islam, maintained clear continuity with it, unlike what had occurred with the Soviet Marxism of the PDPA. Likewise, their contribution was very useful for the rebellion. They had urban and well-educated members who could be contained in an organised manner. They were also capable of moving beyond the merely defensive nature of the movement and turning it into a general project: the construction of a genuinely Islamic

society. These virtues, together with generous Saudi and Pakistani support, meant that the insurgency movement was rapidly hegemonised by Islamic organisations (Requena, 2011: 72-80; Roy, 2001: 127-138; Rubin, 2002: 179-225).

Faced with a mass rebellion that threatened to quickly topple an allied regime and establish within the country's borders an Islamist regime that could destabilise the Central Asian republics, the Soviet response was to rush forward. In 1979, they sent in their army and saved the PDPA from imminent defeat. They also overthrew the Khalq faction and replaced it with the more moderate Parcham one. In this way they tried to rectify the former extremism and win over a section of the population. To that end, they reduced political repression, moderated agricultural reforms and adopted a more conciliatory attitude towards Islam. Massive investment was also carried out to further the development of the country. If these measures had been put in place from the beginning, perhaps this policy would have had more support. But it was now being implemented following a traumatic experience of mass radicalisation and terror, and by a government imposed by a foreign invasion. As a consequence, this invasion led to even greater radicalisation of the rebellion and intensified foreign support it enjoyed, turning Afghanistan into a pawn in the struggle between the two blocks. The exhaustion of a Soviet Union on the brink of disintegration and the formidable capacity for combat shown by the Mujahideen pushed the Soviet and Afghan sides towards a new regression. The new Afghan leader, Mohammed Najibullah, backed by Gorbachev, set out on a process of transformation from inside the regime, similar to processes being implemented by other Soviet-style regimes of the time, from Hungary to Angola. The PDPA left Marxism-Leninism behind and became a nationalist, progressive and, of course, Muslim party, while remaining reformist. It also renamed itself the Patriotic Party. Multi-party politics was adopted, civil liberties were broadened, the aim of constructing socialism was abandoned, the market economy was reintroduced and there was a strong case for a policy of national reconciliation. In a way, this was a return to the times of Daud, who had been killed by the PDPA several years previously. The objective of this policy was to draw in some of the rebels, particularly those least influenced by Islam. A regime with a much less marked ideological profile may have been much more acceptable to many of the rebels. It also tried to appear to the population and to Western powers as being a moderate alternative to the fundamentalism of the majority of the insurgents. This internal transformation was completed by a co-optation policy of different local leaders, including many Mujahideen leaders. They were given financing, grouped together in militias and entrusted with security tasks. The new strategy was remarkably successful and allowed the regime to survive until the Soviet withdrawal in 1989. It only fell in 1992 when it stopped receiving supplies following the fall of the USSR. But this policy also came at a price. It meant largely returning to the old clientelistic pacts between a weak central government and local forces motivated mainly by their own specific interests. It is not surprising that when Najibullah stopped financing them, the militias switched sides. Right up until the end, the regime had a weak social base

and depended entirely on foreign support (Requena, 2011: 91-97; Rubin 2002: 122-175). Under such circumstances, any restructuring such as that done successfully by the old single-party states of Angola, Mozambique and others was unlikely to triumph.

## **THE RISE AND PARTIAL FALL OF SOCIAL REGRESSION. FROM THE MUJAHIDEEN TO KARZAI**

Social regression heightened with the fall of the regime. Afghanistan was left at the mercy of armed factions who waged battle with each other and pillaged the population for years (Requena, 2011: 100-107; Zaef, 2010: 57-65). The state apparatus collapsed and its former members joined the various factions, according, for the most part, to their ethnic and tribal identities. The reasons for this fatal outcome were various. The long and destructive war had split the country into different territories that were in the hands of local leaders. The urban and modernist elite had been decimated and the more conservative sections of the country had gained in strength. The war had also made the Afghan state even more rentier in nature and dependent on foreign powers, which also made it even more vulnerable to the subsequent loss of supplies. This rentier nature also affected the Mujahideen who depended to a great extent on their foreign funders. This dependency favoured a double clientele: the armed organisations to their foreign patrons, and a large section of the population and local combatant units to these organisations (Rubin, 2002: 196-203). Clientelism had been given a huge boost, as had ethnic and tribal links which, as we have seen, were often put to use. These links helped create broader social coalitions that were able to transcend the narrow local confines; here they were playing a clear integrative role. Nevertheless, at the same time, they also strengthened fragmentary identities that hindered more global integration (Castien Maestro, 2013: 174-185). And so what was at work here was reactivation on a different scale of this same contradictory process that already existed in traditional society. Within the framework of this general process of ethnicisation, the leading role of non-Pashtun and non-Durrani communities grew. Through their participation in the war against the pro-Soviet regime, these communities had gained more power, a greater level of organisation, and a more defined collective identity (Etienne, 2002: 110; Roy, 2001: 223-225). All this was a clear reversal of the process that had begun with the creation of the first Durrani State. And although these changes could be considered positive as regards overcoming secular discrimination, in the short term they merely meant the collapse of the previously existing order and hand-in-hand with this collapse, a new source of instability.

The centrifugal factors were certainly very powerful, but there were also other factors that were working in the opposite direction. And so, some of the responsibility for the final domination of the divisive tendencies should be placed on the Islamic organisations that lead the resistance movement. In theory, Islam acted as an integrating factor,

and these organisations were able to group together the population based on the fact of belonging to a relatively structured organisation and due to loyalty to an explicit programme that went above and beyond traditional links. Islamic ideology could also work in a modernist direction. It maintained a clear link to traditional conservative Islam and its leaders, except in the case of the Wahhabi minority, while at the same time calling for the creation of a modern state with a parliament, division of powers and public administrations, with the concomitant incorporation of certain elements imported from the West. This Islamism would appear capable of promoting a certain modernisation process that would be basically compatible with the traditional culture of the country and with the aspirations of the majority of the population, reconciling the essentialisms and “epochalisms” mentioned above. This was the hope held by certain perceptive analysts, such as Olivier Roy (2001: 6-9). Today it is clear that this is not what happened. The reasons lie mainly, in our opinion, in the limitations of Islam in general as well as in the limitations of Afghan Islam in particular. As regards Islam in general, this is down to an unstable combination of Islamic modernism and fundamentalism; with fundamentalism being a simplified, totalitarian and aggressive version of Islam. Under these conditions, the usual lack of precise action plans and their replacement by simplistic slogans in favour of social justice should come as no surprise; and, above all, puritanism in customs, seen as the cure for all social evils (Castien Maestro, 2013: 179-180). If this is the case for Islam in general, it is even more pronounced in Afghan Islam. This particular Islam was closely connected to the strong religious conservatism of the country and was also heavily influenced by the more radical versions of Islamic ideology, such as that concocted by Sayyid Qutb. It lacked any clear and realistic social and political project. These absences seem to have contributed decisively to preventing Afghan Islam from overcoming the traditional fractionism of the country and to promoting its final absorption into this same fractional framework, dividing itself into a series of factions partially dependent on ethnic and tribal affinities.

It is within this context that the rapidly growing success of the Taliban movement since 1994 should be understood. This movement emphasised certain characteristics present in a section of the Mujahideen, where it originated. This was the case with its extreme fundamentalism and puritanism in particular. Despite being a minority, the movement was in no way marginal, and was capable of winning over many people who were, in principal, more moderate. After all, the origins of the Taliban movement go back to groups of combatants integrated within some Mujahideen fronts who were grouped around religious teachers and who placed the obligation of Jihad above any other political, personal, tribal or ethnic objective, while at the same time behaving in a particularly pious manner and making every effort to improve their religious training (Zaeef, 2010: 21-46). This recourse to Islam as a priority social link was being promoted due to different circumstantial factors. Clearly, the war against a regime considered atheist favoured it. The war also fostered the mixing of peoples, of combatants of different allegiances, who were united simply by force of being Muslim.

In many cases it also produced profound uprooting. Families were scattered and people regrouped as best they could in refugee camps. Numerous orphans were raised and gathered together in madrassas. But it wasn't simply the leading role of Islam in general that was accentuated, but also that of a deeply conservative Islam, explainable by the lack of rooting of Muslim modernism among the Afghan population. This modernism was now associated with those urban minorities who had collaborated in part with the pro-Soviet regime, and who were obviously hated by many. When faced with the subtleties of reformism, a simple and hard-line ideology proved to be extremely attractive in the current catastrophic context. The imposition of their mandates upon others offered an easy exit for a sadism fed by the frustrations of a pitiful existence. That this repressive sadism was first and foremost focused on women was by no means accidental. Men dominated women, and this traditionally supported, and now extreme, subjugation served as relative psychological compensation for their weakened self-esteem. Promiscuity in refugee camps, where thousands of strangers were gathered together, compelled restrictions on feminine conduct to be maximised so as to preserve family honour (Rashid, 2001: 163-180; Requena, 2011: 120-122). It should be pointed out, however, that the extreme strictness shown by the Taliban ended up proving counterproductive to any integrating objective. It exacerbated the division with the Shiites, the more modernist minorities, and those who lived a more traditional and less demanding Islam. This extreme strictness also gave rise to a strategic alliance with al Qaeda, which was to result fatal for their regime.

A second aspect of the Taliban movement – a movement in which certain characteristics present among many Mujahideen were accentuated - was the extremely lax internal organisation. The Taliban never set themselves up as a movement with statutes and a defined militancy. They operated through informal relations that enabled them to assemble their initial core, a core composed of southern Pashtun, veterans of the resistance and former pupils of the madrassas. New members joined onto this solid core, also bound by informal links. Some of these were local leaders with their own clientele. And so the initial core, the most committed and ideologised group, seems to have operated as a kind of axis around which different sections grouped – sections that were made up in part like clientelistic coalitions around a local leader who, in many cases, had joined the movement for simple temporary convenience. And so, personal, often clientelistic, links and links based on kinship or ethnicity continued to play a fundamental structural role (Étienne, 2002: 93-95; Rashid, 2001: 149-162; Requena, 2011: 122-125; Zaeef, 2010). The movement thus ran in a way that was not so far removed from that of the old Mujahideen organisations. This model had its advantages and disadvantages. It was admittedly plastic and flexible and allowed the winning side to rapidly incorporate new members without asking too much of them. This was doubtless one of the cornerstones of the Taliban's rapid triumph. At the same time, however, the movement also presented a series of shortcomings. What held it together so easily could also disintegrate with the same ease if things started to go badly for the movement as a whole. After all, the movement was reusing the old forms

of tribal and clientelistic organisation and all that that entailed. As its emergence was the result of extreme social regression, it had no plans or technical specialists to manage a modern society. Under such circumstances, it should come as no surprise that, other than achieving a certain level of pacification of the country albeit at the price of terrible repression, its general way of working was ineffective.

The new regime installed by the foreign intervention in 2001 has broadly stood out for its desire to break with the regressive drift of the Mujahideen and the Taliban, and for returning to a strategy of moderate modernisation in line with the former monarchy. Indeed, it is led by a descendant of the Durrani aristocracy who, however, just like his predecessors, has extended and even accentuated the country's traditional dependency on the outside world. His budget is fed by international agencies, his administration has been partly managed by foreigners and the same goes for his security forces that were built up by expeditionary forces that are now withdrawing, with no certainty that the Afghan police and army will be capable of keeping the situation under control. Recent events in Iraq only further fuel this suspicion. Without doubt, some important progress has been made compared to the previous situation. A system of representative democracy has been formally installed. Elections are held and there are different political groups, plurality of newspapers and of NGOs. There has also been some economic development in certain areas and very tangible progress in schooling, health and women's emancipation (Requena, 2011: 175-222). However, the darker side is also fearsome. Above all, the mafia-like system born of the disintegration of the country in the 80s and 90s has continued to develop on a large scale. One of the main problems that Afghan modernisation traditionally came up against was the lack of exports that were sufficiently profitable to finance said modernisation. Curiously, the new Afghanistan is overcoming this former shortcoming in part through its total immersion in an export economy of illegal products such as heroine and arms smuggling. This strange form of insertion into a global economy has important practical consequences.

First off, these illegal practices cannot be allowed to benefit the state. Authorities should combat them, or at least appear to be combating them. They cannot turn them into state monopolies, neither can they levy them with formal taxes. Secondly, due to their illegal nature, they involve an artificially low number of providers, making the products more expensive and thus bringing in strongly monopolised revenues. A minority composed mainly of the former leaders of the political-military factions are becoming spectacularly rich in this way. The revenues gained are mostly invested in prestigious goods, to be flaunted as symbols of power, and in recruiting new followers. The resulting clientelistic coalitions infiltrate into state administration and are then able to use it as required. They also monopolise and divert international funds to their advantage and largely pervert the system of representative democracy which ends up being reduced to just another stage for the struggle between warring factions. Alongside all this, the typical consequences of clientelism are intensified. Formal and meritocratic administrative hierarchies are disrupted as far as their functioning

and selection of staff go, and the same happens with the productivity criteria in the generation of goods and services (Castien Maestro, 2013: 182-183). These anti-modernisation consequences exist wherever mafia organisations are powerful, from Italy to Russia. But their consequences are much more detrimental in places where the state and civil society organisations are already extremely fragile. In this regard, Afghanistan is a paradigmatic case. The internal breakdown of Afghan society is what has allowed this trade to achieve its current strength. But once established, its corrosive effects have rocketed. The local potentates now have their own armament and their own sources of income thanks to the drug trade and foreign aid, and at levels that former tribal leaders could never have even dreamed of. Certainly, localism and centrifugal trends have been strengthened. This can be seen through the phenomenon of the warlords, a modern and extreme version of the former military clientelism that is partially underpinned by tribal and kinship ties, but at the same time partially based on modern structures such as armies, political parties and administrative bureaucracies (Rashid, 2009: 162-187 and 407-433; Requena, 2011: 197-198, 212-216, 232-237 and 255-257). It is a highly damaging fusion of traditional and modern elements. Under such circumstances it should come as no surprise that the Taliban are once again winning support and gaining control of numerous territories. Once again, the precarity of modernisation favours a process of social regression.

The history of Afghan modernisation resembles Sisyphus' ongoing labour, where progress and regression constantly alternate. What is more, each time there has been an attempt at pushing for progress too rapidly, the following regression has been more intense. The traditional system, more or less transformed, has been strengthened by the crises caused by foreign intervention or by the imbalances introduced by modernisation. And so the country has actually seen some progress, but at a much slower rate than most countries, which has condemned it to a progressive backwardness in comparative terms. This backwardness, together with its attractive strategic position, are factors which have allowed for its repeated subordination by foreign interests, which has further dismantled the country, to the benefit of its centrifugal tendencies. Under these conditions, the future of the Afghan people remains somewhat uncertain in the medium term. Precisely determining possible future scenarios is a task that falls outside the scope of the specific objectives of this paper.

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