



Passive Politics and Poetics of Spiritual Resistance in Taliban Afghanistan

Taliban Yönetimi Altındaki Afganistan'da Pasif Siyâset ve Mânevî Direniş

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Abstract

Peoples of Central Asia in general and Afghanistan specifically have been traumatized by Western colonial aggression, occupation and low intensity forever wars for more than a century. Much has been written about their armed struggles in this region, but their passive and spiritual resistances have been for the most part ignored. In this paper I discuss two significant forms of their passive resistance: the saga of the repeated century-long transnational migration of a small community of Kirghiz (Kirgiz) from the Osh Valley to the Pamirs of Afghanistan and from there to the safety of Anatolia in eastern Turkey; and the reliance of the educated Afghan youth on the spiritual resistance poetry of Rumi and other masters to cope patiently with the tyrannical environment of the Taliban controlled Afghanistan.

Key words: Spiritual resistance, poetic of resistance, migration, Afghan Kighiz, Afghan youth, Taliban.

Özet

Genel olarak Orta Asya, özelde ise Afganistan halkları, yüzyılı aşkın bir süredir, Batı'nın sömürgeci saldırı-ganlığı, işgalleri ve bitmek bilmeyen düşük yoğunluklu savaşları nedeniyle büyük sarsıntılar geçirmekte. Söz konusu halkların bölgedeki silahlı mücadeleleri hakkında çok şey yazılıp çizildi; ancak gösterdikleri pasif ve mânevî direniş genellikle göz ardı edildi. Bu yazıda ben, bu pasif direnişlerin öne çıkan iki önemli örneğini tartışıyorum: Küçük bir Kırgız topluluğunun, Oş Vadisi'nden Afganistan'ın Pamirleri'ne ve oradan da Anadolu'nun güvenli doğu topraklarına yüzyıllar boyu süren ulusaşırı göçünün destanı ve eğitilmiş Afgan gençliğinin Taliban yönetimi altındaki Afganistan'ın acımasız ortamıyla sabırla başa çıkmak için Mevlânâ ve diğer tasavvuf büyüklerinin mânevî dayanıklılığı pekiştiren şiirlerine itimadı.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Mânevî dayanıklılık, direnişin şiirselliği, göç, Afganistan Kırgızları, Afgan gençliği, Taliban.

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I

Forty-five years of forever wars -of direct intervention by the great powers and violence by their domestic and regional proxies- have resulted in massive suffering, unprecedented poverty and oppression in Afghanistan, today. The post-9-11-2001 UN sanctioned American-led NATO and others' military intervention cost more than \$2 trillion in treasures and considerable blood, mostly of Afghan lives and fewer international casualties. This so called "war on global terror", promised to combat terrorism and its enablers, and liberate the peoples of Afghanistan from the Taliban rule, especially liberate Afghan women and girls. But, twenty years later, on August 15, 2021, the Americans and their allies abandoned Afghanistan, handing the country back to the Taliban, whom they had been fighting as terrorists for two decades. The irony is, the Taliban's current governing leaders' names are still on the UN's terrorists' black list. Such ending of the West's war on terror has disillusioned the rest of the world including the peoples of Afghanistan to the core, especially the educated youth, men and women alike. The outcome of America's longest war in history has left many in Afghanistan questioning the very meaning of the world order. For some Afghans, the meaning of even life itself is being questioned.

The peoples of Afghanistan while under persistent duress, especially the bulging youth bellow the age of 35 who make up an estimated 60% to 70% of the country's population of about forty million, however remain spiritually resilient and hopeful about Afghanistan's future. But *how*? Specifically, how has one of the world's most Muslim country (over 99.9% Muslim) coped with decades of persistent spatial displacements, war, tyranny and anguish? How have Muslim Afghans coped with persistent conditions bringing their lives to the edge of looming disasters, what Clifford Geertz has called "the ultimate problems of meaning. ... [when..] chaos -a tumult of events which lack not just interpretation but *interpretability*- threatens to break in upon man: at the limits of his analytic capacities, at the limits

of his power of endurance, and at the limits of his moral insight?" (emphasis is in the original).¹

My aim in this brief reflection is twofold: to draw attention to many Afghans voting with their feet during the past decades, and the great many of its youth today, using their rich poetic and spiritual resources to resist and resolve their tenacious fundamental problems of meaning, both individually and collectively. I do so both as someone born, raised and initially educated through two years of college in Afghanistan, and as someone who got professionally trained as a native anthropologist in the US, studying and teaching the history, society and culture of the country with a focus on its politics, uses and abuses of religion/Islam by its rulers and clerics alike. Ultimately, my goal is to explore how "particular attempts by particular peoples to place... things in some sort of comprehensible, meaningful frame"² makes it possible for them not only to survive the mental anguish of impending chaos, but to remain hopeful and even in some rare instance –thrive.

II

Much of the recent literature on Afghanistan has been necessarily focused on the war and the armed resistance. Here, I would like to focus on two instances of important, assertive but non-violent experiential cases of resistance: a) my own half a century-long ethnographic engagement with a small community of mostly non-literate Afghan Kirghiz pastoralists constantly striving to comprehend their predicaments and to find a meaningful frame as a

1 See Clifford Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System" in *The Interpretation of Cultures*, (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 100. In this widely read article on the definition of "Religion as a Cultural System", Geertz suggests that the primary function of religion is to "resolve", but not solve, the problems of meaning -i.e., addressing the existential questions of why a disaster happens and why to me; why extremes of suffering and pain and how to endure them; and why injustice, specifically the problem of theodicy (why bad things happen to the good people or good things happen to the non-deserving people?)

2 Ibid. 30.

Muslim community amidst endless threats of anomie brought upon them. Their feelings of threat and uprooting were caused primarily by their fear and the reality of 20th century Communist atheism (*kufir*, denial of the Truth). And, b) I would like to focus on the efforts of the well-educated, mostly urban Afghan Muslim youth, now trying to cope and survive Taliban despotism and oppression in the name of Islam. Let me begin with the plight of the Kirghiz first.

The over a century-long saga of this small, vulnerable Central Asian Kirghiz (also Kyrgyz or Kirgiz) community of mobile herders, has been a significant part of my life-long academic endeavors. I examined their attempts to preserve their spiritual and communal integrity as Muslims in the face of repeated forced transnational displacements and the consequences of their resettlement in eastern Anatolia. Their forced migrations begun as a result of the Russian Bolshevik Revolution (1917) from the Osh Valley (now in southern Kyrgyzstan), to the Pamirs of Afghanistan, above 12,000 feet altitudes, in the Wakhan Corridor. In 1945 they were forced to flee to the Chinese occupied Eastern Turkistan (Xinjiang), due to Soviet Russian hostilities against them. They returned to the Afghan Pamirs in 1949, after Mao's successful Communist Revolution in China; only to take refuge in Northern Pakistan (1978) because of the Communist coup in Kabul and Soviet invasion of Afghanistan (1979). They were then resettled as refugees in Van, eastern Turkey, in 1982. The last four of their displacements were led by one man, Haji Rahmankul Khan (Kutlu).³ The sole motivational drive for the Kirghiz *hijra*, voting with their feet, has been their love of God and maintaining the integrity of their tribal community as Kirghiz Muslims intact. A refugee, according to Lenin "is a man who votes with his feet."⁴ For this

group of Kirghiz, ironically, it has been search for a refuge from the threats of Communism. Fortunately for them, they have succeeded finding their refuge in Türkiye.

Spiritually inclined and relentlessly dedicated to safeguarding his Muslim community, their tribal leader, Rahmankul Khan, led them from Central Asia to the safety of Anatolia, in Türkiye. Born in about 1913, he was but a child when his father, a Mingbashi (a tribal judge) in the Tsarist administration, decided with his two brothers and their Qochqar (Ram) clan members, to take refuge in the remote Pamirs of Afghanistan, an area some of them previously used as their summer pastures. Rahmankul's father, Haji Jabbarkul (the Mingbashi), had taught Rahmankul the Qur'an, reading and writing using vernacular Islamic didactic texts -i.e., he had become a Mullah. Tall, well-built, ambitious and conscientious of their vulnerabilities, he had demonstrated his courage and leadership abilities early in his youth. During WWII, he had waged *jihad*, leading raids into the Soviet territories across the border while the Russian Communists were busy with the war in the Western front. After the war, in retaliation, the Soviets had raided Rahmankul's camp and taken him prisoner to Soviet territory. After about six months of detention, he got released. In the Soviet lands he had become enamored by transistor radio and newspapers. Once back, he had decided to lead most of the Kirghiz away from the Soviet Russian's threat, moving them into the Taghdumbash Pamirs next door in Chinese Turkistan (Xinjiang). He had proven a capable leader negotiating good terms with the Chinese officials during their brief stay in Chinese territory.

But, Mao's success in 1949, forced them to return to the Afghan Pamirs, to preserve their Muslim faith from Communist atheism. By then, Rahmankul had gained the title of Khan (chief), and the story

3 In Central Asia, the Kirghiz did not use family names, the last name "Kutlu" was assigned to the family of the Khan by the Turkish government upon arrival and resettlement in Türkiye.

4 See M. Nazif Shahrani, "Afghanistan's *Muhajirn* (Muslim 'refugee-warriors') in Pakistan: Politics of Mistrust and Distrust of Politics" in *Mistrusting the*

Refugees, edited by E. Valentine Daniel & John Chr. Knudsen. (Berkeley, Los Angeles & London: University of California Press, 1995).

of his bravely fighting the Chinese Communist border guards to return to the Afghan Pamirs had spread widely in northern Afghanistan, reaching even the royal court in Kabul. While in China, he had acquired his first transistor radio, a critical information technology he owned and used avidly thereafter, listening to multiple vernacular broadcasts daily, including the BBC, Radio Moscow, and Islamic broadcasts from Muslim countries in the region.

By late 1950s, Marco Polo sheep hunting in the Afghan Pamirs had become a sought-after prize for international trophy hunters and a source of income for the Afghan government. Hunting trips to the Pamirs among foreign diplomats and government officials in Kabul had also become popular. Khan's help facilitating and ensuring security of such VIP's had become necessary. In early 1960s, even King Zahir Shah (r. 1933-1973) of Afghanistan went for a royal hunting trip to the Pamirs and Rahmankul hosted him. He may have asked the King's permission then to go to the Hajj. Rahmankul made the pilgrimage to Mecca and shortly after he became Haji Rahmankul Khan. After that, he made annual/biannual trips to Kabul in the autumn, staying for several weeks in Kabul hobnobbing with diplomats, religious scholars/dignitaries and officials as well as trading. It was during this period, when as a boarding school student in Kabul, I saw the famous anti-Communist warrior Khan of the Kirghiz. His special relations with the monarch and courtiers in Kabul had boosted his prestige immensely, especially in Badakhshan province, where the Pamirs are located. It was also during this calm period, at the height of the Khan's fame, during 1972-1974, that I conducted my dissertation research among the Kirghiz. I revisited them during the summer of 1975, accompanying a documentary film crew from Granada TV, UK, as a consultant anthropologist, to film them for the well-known, *Disappearing World* series. An updated edition of it with re-edits was screened in 1981 in the US as part of the PBS's ethnographic series, the *Odyssey*.

During my initial dissertation field work, the Khan enjoyed perks from his government contacts and trading in Kabul, benefitting himself and the Kirghiz community as a whole. The Kirghiz had successfully adapted to the stresses of high altitude (hypoxia), extreme cold and closed borders. They also adapted well with virtually all neighbors, except within Afghanistan.⁵ But, that brief tranquility was shattered by the Communist coup in April 1978 in Kabul. After ascertaining the Communist orientation of the regime, Rahmankul decided to leave the Pamirs to the safety of Pakistan, and virtually all of the Kirghiz in the Little Pamir valley, some 1200 souls joined him in his flight to Pakistan. Those living in the Great Pamir valley to the north of them, about 600 persons, due to terrain, distance and security, were not able to join him on this journey and were regrettably left behind.⁶ The Kirghiz spent four difficult years in Pakistan, but the Khan managed to negotiate their successful resettlement as refugees in eastern Turkey. They were settled temporarily in Afet Evleri near the village of Karagündüz, close to the city of Van, and some were placed in Afet Evleri in Malatya, while their permanent village, Ulupamir Köyü, near the town of Erciş on Lake Van, was built.⁷ They were per-

5 See M. Nazif Shahrani, "Kirghiz Pastoral Nomads of the Afghan Pamirs: A Study in Ecological and Intra-Cultural Adaptation", (Ph.D. diss., University of Washington, 1976); Shahrani, "Kirghiz Pastoralists of the Afghan Pamirs: An Ecological and Ethnographic Overview" *Folk*, 18 (1976): 129-143; Shahrani, "The Retention of Pastoralism Among the Kirghiz of the Afghan Pamirs" in *Himalayan Anthropology: The Indo-Tibetan Interface*, edited by J. F. Fisher, (Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1978), 233-250; Sharani, *The Kirghiz and Wakhi of Afghanistan: Adaptation to Closed Frontiers*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1979).

6 See M. Nazif Shahrani, *The Kirghiz and Wakhi of Afghanistan: Adaptation to Closed Frontiers and War*, (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2002); Shahrani, "Life and Career of Haji Rahmanqul Khan, 1913-1990", *Berlin Geographical Papers*, eds. Andrei Dorre, Hermann Kreutzmann and Stefan Schutte, (Center for Development Studies, Friei Universitat, Berlin, 2016).

7 See M. Nazif Shahrani, "The Kirghiz Odyssey" in *Odyssey: The Human Adventure*, edited by Jane E.

manently settled in the new village during 1988.

Upon arrival in Türkiye, Rahmankul and his family members had been assigned the family name of *Kutlu* (fortunate, lucky, endowed with power, etc.). Soon, he also assumed the Turkish titles of Ağa and Han.⁸ He had overseen the construction of the new village and the resettlement of his community before his death in 1990. Haji Rahmankul Han Kutlu is apotheosized by some. His Muslim leadership character continues to influence the new generations of Kirghiz in Türkiye even after his death and is likely to continue to do so due to his determination and dedication to safeguarding his Muslim community's spiritual integrity and preservation of their faith against the threat of Communism. He, without a doubt, is being slowly but surely turned into a hero among the Kirghiz, not only in Türkiye, but also in Kyrgyzstan.⁹

What Rahmankul Khan did to lead his people away from the impending danger was not unusual. Millions of other Central Asian Muslims and Afghans also followed the admonitions for *hijra* (to immigrate when faced with existential threats) in the Qur'an (16: 41-42).¹⁰ What was unusual was that the Khan and his tribesmen kept voting with their feet against Communism repeatedly, transnationally and across a continent. This clearly set them apart from most other Kirghiz and Kazakh nomadic herders in Central Asia who submitted to the Soviet rule.

The Afghan Kirghiz, like most other Kirghiz were also non-literate. Due to their nomadic lifestyle, they

had no mosques and with one exception, no traditionally madrasa trained Kirghiz scholars among them. Haji Rahmankul Khan's family had invested in Islam (his father and uncle had performed the Hajj in the early 1900s, and his father a judge). However, his Islamic education and knowledge was limited and based on a corpus of didactic Islamic religious, especially Sufi texts in the vernaculars of *Turki* (literary Uzbek/Chaghatai) and Farsi language texts primarily in poetry or rhythmic prose. For a small nomadic group living in one of the remotest places in Inner Asia to possess old Islamic text published in Qazan, in Bukhara and Lahore was both unusual and notable.

Rahmankul Khan was a keen listener of radio news programs and was a highly inquisitive host to outside visitors especially about world affairs with intense interest in his two giant Communist neighbors, Soviet Union and Peoples Republic of China. What was reported by radio news about the impact of the policies and practices of Soviet Russia and Communist China, in the Central Asian Muslim republics (Western Turkistan) and Sinkiang/Xinjiang (Eastern Turkistan), respectively, were discussed extensively with any visitor. Such discussions were constant reminders of colonial oppression of the atheist states against their own people -the Muslims of Turkestan or Central Asia. The threat of Communism remained imminent and real at all times for the Kirghiz Khan and to his community, and it required constant vigilance.

Such Kirghiz attentiveness was reinforced by other critically important matters. Haji Rahmankul Khan was an avid collector of vernacular Islamic books, and would read them or ask his older sons to read aloud. This practice compensated for the non-literacy of many who listened.¹¹ The most significant

Aaron, (Boston: Public Broadcasting Associates, 1981), 16-19; Shahrani, "The Kirghiz of Afghanistan Reach Turkey", *Cultural Survival Quarterly* 8, 1 (1984): 31-34.

8 See M. Nazif Shahrani, "Social Transformations in an Afghan Kirghiz Pastoral Nomadic Community Resettled in Turkey: A Brief Report", *The American Research Institute in Turkey (ARIT) Newsletter*, 7 (1988): 3-4.

9 See Shahrani, "Life and Career of Haji Rahmanqul Khan, 1913-1990".

10 Also see Shahrani, "Afghanistan's *Muhajirn* (Muslim 'refugee-warriors') in Pakistan".

11 For details of the significance of this phenomenon in the region in general, see M. Nazif Shahrani, "Local Knowledge of Islam and Social Discourse in Afghanistan and Turkistan in the Modern Period", in *Turko-Persia in Historical Perspective*, edited by Robert L. Canfield (A School of American Research Book), (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 161-188.

of such texts were *Tadhkirat al-Awliyā'*, *Safīnat al-Awliyā'*, *Qışaş al-Anbiyā'*, *Hikmat* of Ahmed Yasawi, *Dīwān* of Sufi Allahyar, and *Dīwān* of Shah Mashrab Awliya, as well as moral axioms from Sa'di's *Gulistān* and *Būstān* or verses of spiritual love from Hafiz Shirazi. It is important to note that the Afghan Kirghiz did not have organized Sufi *tariqa* as such. However, their world was enchanted by the spirits of awliya (saints) of Turkistan such as Yasawi, Naqshbandi, Ghijduvani as well as their own ancestral spirits, and stories of the *karamat* of the virtuous ones.

The Kirghiz resistance was further strengthened by "The foundational Kyrgyz epic *Manas* most commonly refer[ed] to [as] a trilogy about Manas, his son Semetey, and his grandson Seytek. Described as the 'Iliad of the steppes'".¹² Parts of this exceptionally long oral epic of over a half million recorded verses are recited by the Afghan Kirghiz Manaschilar/ Erchilar (bards) with their own Islamic embellishments, since each reciter has some degree of improvisation and augmentation in their own oral performances. Manas, the hero and his descendants, heroically fights the Kirghiz existential enemies, the Oirats and the Chinese *kafirs* (deniers of the truth, non-Muslims). Given their own struggles against modern Communists, Manas's heroic fights, and times strategic flights, remained inspirational for their own survival.

The Afghan Kirghiz' struggle to resolve their problems of meaning -i.e., the constant threats of Communist atheism- was responded to by holding fast on to their Islamic spiritual frame by making repeated *hijras* across Asia, eventually finding refuge in Muslim Türkiye. Millions of others in Afghanistan, who also tried to make *hijra* were not so lucky.

The remaining Kirghiz, still living in the remote Pamir mountains are described by their recent

observers as living in extremes of poverty and insecurity, as in the "stone age". The Afghan Kirghiz reaching Türkiye, on the other hand, have glided into the 21st century with their sense of community mostly intact. They are now almost all literate in modern Turkish and for the first time in their history they have their own village mosque led by one of their own youth who has completed the Imam Hatib school in Türkiye. Without the fear or threat of Communism in their new mountain refuge in the village of Ulupamir Köyü, they hold daily communal prayers and have scheduled Qur'an courses offered to both women and men. More than a dozen of their youth have earned MD and PhD degrees, both men and women, serving in major Turkish hospitals and teaching in universities subjects ranging from mathematics to psychology, to history, language and literature. Some are serving as pilots in the Turkish Air Force and yet others work in a wide array of other public and private services and occupations. They are indeed the fortunate ones amidst the oceans of a century-long chaos and anomie.

III

The Kirghiz passive but effective response to the chaos of pervasive and prolonged threats spanning generations in Afghanistan has been tried by many others, but they remain poorly studied, so far. What has been written about largely has been the armed resistance, *jihad*, in Afghanistan. The popular armed resistance of the 1980s, was led by multiple groups including the traditionally madrasa trained '*ulamā*', the newly university educated Muslim youth as well as some of the organized *tariqa* or Sufi groups.

The role of Sufis and Sufism in Afghan society, culture and history also remain seriously understudied.¹³ On Sufi beliefs and its practitioners, as

12 See Roberta Micallef, "Manas", in *Columbia University World Epics*, available at: <https://edblogs.columbia.edu/worldpics/project/manas/>. (Accessed May 11, 2023).

13 See Marian Brehmer, "Sufis in Afghanistan: The Forgotten Mystics of the Hindu Kush", in *Qantara*, available at: <https://en.qantara.de/content/sufis-in-afghanistan-the-forgotten-mystics-of-the-hindu-kush>, (Accessed May 18, 2023); Ken Lizzio, "Embodying

Annika Schmeding says,

the common shorthand of Sufism as ‘Islamic mysticism’ which suggests a united, overarching category, is misleading. Sufi communities [in Afghanistan and beyond] exist on a contested spectrum, from poor to rich, practice-oriented to erudite, quietist to oppositional or government-aligned.¹⁴

On the whole, “a proclivity toward mystical interpretations and [poetic spirituality] is a constant theme in popular and pious practice.”¹⁵ Sufis are found in the shape of individual ascetics around popular shrines, and self-effacing groups led by unassuming local *pirs/murshids* uninterested in power and politics avoiding government officials. Sufis in Afghanistan could also be found in the forms of well-established dynastic clans leading by the Naqshbandiyya and Qadiriyya orders aligned with the rulers of the country, except under the Taliban. During the initial massive popular jihadist uprising of the 1980s at least two major Sufi families, the Mujaddidi (Naqshbandi) and Gilani (Qadiri) orders, were occasionally in tension, but they were mostly partnering with the governments, led smaller resistance organizations.

History: a Naqshbandi Shaikh of Afghanistan Embodying History: a Naqshbandi Shaikh of Afghanistan”, in *Central Asian Survey*, 22 (2003): 163-185; Lizzio, *Embattled Saints: My Year with the Sufis of Afghanistan*, (Wheaton, Illinois and Chennai, India: Quest Books, 2014).

14 See Annika Schmeding, “The Problem of Multiplicity: Deconstructing ‘Sufism’ and ‘the Taliban’”, in *Islam, Politics, and the Future of Afghanistan*, Georgetown University Berkley Forum, Berkley Center for Religion, Peace & World Affairs, 2021, available at: <https://berkeleycenter.georgetown.edu/responses/the-problem-of-multiplicity-deconstructing-sufism-and-the-taliban>. (Accessed May 22, 2023).

15 Ahmad Rashid Salim, “The Taliban vs. Global Islam: Politics, Power, and the Public in Afghanistan”, in *Islam, Politics, and the Future of Afghanistan*, Georgetown University Berkley Forum, Berkley Center for Religion, Peace & World Affairs, 2021, available at: <https://berkeleycenter.georgetown.edu/responses/the-taliban-vs-global-islam-politics-power-and-the-public-in-afghanistan>. (Accessed May 22, 2023).

The 1980s witnessed the globalization of the concept of jihad in Afghanistan and the recognition of the Afghan Mujahiddeen as the “freedom fighters” against Communism and Soviet aggression in Afghanistan and beyond. However, despite the military triumph in 1992, the jihadists faltered politically and failed to form a functioning Islamic government they had promised and fought for. Indeed, during the 1990s, the jihadi groups (for varieties of reasons beyond the scope of this brief reflection), engaged in some of the bloodiest internecine/interethnic/sectarian warfare giving way into the proxy wars of the 1990s. This ultimately gave rise to the Taliban movement, the formation of Al Qaeda, the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington DC, ultimately inviting the US-NATO intervention toppling the Taliban regime. However, America’s longest war on global terror in Afghanistan appears to have been disastrous, especially for Afghanistan.

Historically, Islam in Afghanistan’s political culture is instrumentalized and manipulated by the rulers as well as by some clerics and government-aligned Sufi dignitaries. More recently, with resumption of power by the Taliban in mid-August 2021, instrumental abuses of Islam have been put on steroids. ‘Ulamā’ and government-aligned Sufi orders, with rare exception have been part and parcel of the politics of *zar*, *zoor* and *tazweer* (i.e., reliance on the uses of gold/money, reliance on force and deception). For the great majority of the educated youth, the credibility of the self-appointed gatekeepers of faith -the mowlawis, mullahs, talibs, imams, pirs, hazrats, naqeebs, etc.-has reached zilch.

Indeed, collaborating Sufi orders, have been responsible for what Ali Shari’ati aptly has described as *istihmari deeni* (making donkeys out of people via religious deception), especially among the least informed and non-literate vulnerable masses. Such a condition has arguably produced and to an extent still sustains the current Taliban regime in Afghanistan.

Much has been reported and written with anticipation whether the Taliban have changed

since their pre-2001 rule. However, so far major elements of the Taliban beliefs, policies and practices remain intact: disinterest in modern education or social welfare services, belief in “innate female inferiority”, implementation of their punitive forms of *sharī'a*, policing vice among their *ra'yat* (subjects), indifference to peoples' worldly needs and despite their claims to the contrary, historian Robert Crews asserts that, “the Taliban see Afghan society through an ethnic lens. Power is to be exercised exclusively by ideologically allied Pashtun men.”¹⁶ This reality has made the “country unlivable for millions of men, women, and children”.¹⁷ Lack of international support for armed resistance, and the inability of discredited, unpatriotic, corrupt politicians of the previous regime to coalesce and present an alternative to the Taliban rule has left the starving masses especially the large numbers of innocent educated youth in the country helpless, if not hopeless.

IV

In the remainder of this reflection, I wish to focus on the plight of the recently educated youth some of whom are actively participating in another form of passive resistance. Their method is *hijra* of searching the soul and spirit, seeking inner calm and resolve for future resistance against the Taliban oppression. This is achieved either by composing their own poetry or reading and circulating the poetry of the masters of vernacular Sufi literature via gathering of *shi'r/Mathnawi khawani* and social media, domestically and internationally. The poems recited and circulated are often from the sages such as Mowlana Jalaluddin Balkhi or Rumi, Khawja

Abdullah Ansari, Hafiz Sherazi, Sa'di Sherazi, Farid ud-Din Attar, Ahmed Jami and many others, as well as, resistance poetry composed by their own cohorts. Their aim is to question the validity of the imposition of a punitive *sharī'at* by the Taliban and its impact on Afghan society and on the image of Islam itself.

These young Afghans are keenly aware of their vulnerabilities but they are helpless to find a refuge and vote with their feet, as much as they want to. They are unable to escape the Taliban rule and unable to launch any type of open resistance against their harshly enforced security regime. Here I will try to offer a very few examples, hardly representative of the chorus of poetry recitation that hums within Afghanistan and in the Afghan social media (inside and diaspora) constantly in a form of peaceful resistance. When I was asked to consider this assignment, I was not certain as to what to write and reflect on. Though as clairvoyantly, I received a video clip from a young friend living in Kabul. It was the recording of his own performance, some weeks earlier at a *Mathnawi Khawani*, recitation of Rumi's and others' poetry session with his friends. The theme appeared to be on differing interpretations of the meaning and significance of the verse in the Qur'an regarding the story of Prophet Moses in the Sinai asking Rabbi *ariniy* (Show [Thyself] unto me) (A'raf:143).¹⁸ Allah responds to Moses's request by saying: *lan taraani*, (“Never canst thou

18 وَلَمَّا جَاءَ مُوسَىٰ لِمِيقَاتِنَا وَكَلَّمَهُ رَبُّهُ قَالَ رَبِّ أَرِنِي أَنْظُرْ إِلَيْكَ قَالَ لَنْ نَرَاكَ وَلَكِنْ نُنْظِرُكَ إِلَى الْجَبَلِ فَإِنْ اسْتَقَرَّ مَكَانَهُ فَسَوْفَ نَرَاكَ فَلَمَّا تَجَلَّىٰ رَبُّهُ لِلْجَبَلِ جَعَلَهُ دَكًّا وَخَرَّ مُوسَىٰ ضَعْفًا فَلَمَّا أَفَاقَ قَالَ سُبْحَانَكَ تُبْتُ إِلَيْكَ وَأَنَا أَوَّلُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ

And when Moses came [to Mount Sinai] at the time set by Us, and his Sustainer spoke unto him, he said: “O my Sustainer! Show [Thyself] unto me, so that I might behold Thee!” Said [God]: “Never canst thou see Me. However, behold this mountain: if it remains firm in its place, then -only then- wilt thou see Me. And as soon as his Sustainer revealed His glory to the mountain, He caused it to crumble to dust; and Moses fell down in a swoon. And when he came to himself, he said: “Limitless art Thou in Thy glory! Unto Thee do I turn in repentance; and I shall [always] be the first to believe in Thee!” (١٤٣: أعراف) (7: 143)

16 Robert Crews, “The Ephemeral Emirate? Dilemmas of a Taliban State”, *Georgetown University Berkley Forum*, Berkley Center for Religion, Peace & World Affairs, 2021, available at: <https://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/responses/the-ephemeral-emirate-dilemmas-of-a-taliban-state>. (Accessed May 22, 2023).

17 Ibid.

see Me”). The point of the discussion was to highlight how three spiritual masters of Persian poetry -Sa’di, Hafez and Rumi—have construed the implications of the same exchange between God and Moses very differently.

Sa’di has said:

When at Mount Sinai, don’t say: show me Thyself (taraani), just pass

Such a demand is undeserving, it calls for the response: “lan taraani”

Sa’di clearly questions the wisdom of Moses for asking such a question. Because, a demand such as this from God in his judgement is uncalled for. Hence, what could God’s response be, except to say: *Lan taraani*, (“Never canst thou see Me,” it is not possible!)

Hafez, however, has a significantly different view of the same Qur’anic episode. He says:

When you are at the Sinai, say tarani/[ariniy] [Show [Thyself] unto me, and keep going

The aim is to hear the voice of the Beloved, not the answer, “lan taraani”

For Hafez, the lover of God, what matter is hearing the voice of his Beloved, regardless of the response. The goal is just to hear the voice of the object of your love.

But Jalaluddin Balkhi Rumi, renders the importance of the encounter, yet differently from both. Rumi says:

Taraani/ariniy, says someone who has not seen You (God)

You are always with me, whether it is taraani or lan taraani

Stressing his own intimacy with God, Rumi feels no need for making such a request, because God is always with him (Rumi), whether He is seen or not.

From the perspective of the reciters of these poems, there is a subtle critique of the Taliban’s absolutist and often ignorant interpretive approach to Qur’an

and other Islamic foundational texts.

Hence here they demonstrate how Prophet Moses has questioned God, and how the interpreters of the Qur’anic event are also posing their own questions and infer different meaning and significance to it. For these youth in today’s world, it is deemed absolutely necessary to make use of the exceptional gift of human reason and to understand the Qur’an and other primary Islamic texts. The youth participating in these poetry reading sessions expect and demand such dialectical and hermeneutical approaches to understanding the Qur’an. But such approaches seem beyond possible under the Taliban rule in today’s Afghanistan.

This exchange alerted me to the fact that direct criticism of, and confrontation with rulers, politicians and dignitaries in the political cultures of this region (Central and Southwestern Asia), especially in Afghanistan is rare and is best avoided. Therefore, criticisms are mostly expressed indirectly, and the effective and efficient means of doing so are the timely use of poetry, especially from the old masters. This gives the reciter of the poem personal deniability against retribution of existing authorities. The safe alibi is reference to the classical poems of the well-regarded sages.

Hence, given the draconian policies and practices of the Taliban, I asked my young friend to tell me about how folks are coping. This is a bright, 27-year-old well-read and thoughtful graduate of Kabul University who used to work for the old regime but is now mostly unemployed and desperately impoverished. He is also quite worried about his sick father in the hospital. My question to him was: *how are the young men and women of his cohorts in Afghanistan coping under the Taliban regime?*¹⁹

In a series of conversations over several weeks via voice mail and text messages he finally shared with me the following:

After the collapse of the republican regime

¹⁹ Because of his personal safety, in consultation with him, I am withholding his name.

on August 15, 2021, the reactions of the youth in Afghanistan maybe categorized into three different spectrums: First, active young people who are alive in visual, audio and written media who disapprove of the performance of the Taliban. They express such disapproval via poetic sarcasm and acerbities, questioning the Taliban policies and practices. They express their subtle opposition to the Taliban governance, ignorance and backward thinking forcefully but delicately. Most of these young people live in hiding and are afraid of being caught by the Taliban.

Second, the silent youth in-waiting are mainly the non-Pashtun youth, who expect the situation to change and assume greater resources for resistance will become available soon. Only then, would they stand-up and fight against the false claims of the Taliban. This group of youth currently do not engage in any kind of special activities. They do not even express their opinions publicly but when in private conversations, they firmly believe that the conditions in Afghanistan must and will change. And, when the conditions change, this second group of youth will join the resistance and fulfill their responsibilities towards the nation by standing against the Taliban.

Third, there are the inactive helpless and hopeless youth who believe governments and regime changes in Afghanistan are controlled by the big powers. Therefore, armed struggle in this country has no positive outcome except to kill compatriots or die ourselves. Hence, it has no lasting positive results. They believe, the Great Powers, in order to protect their interests, deploy their intelligence services in backward nations using the people of these nations as tools, as proxies. The powerful foreign countries then choose which Afghan group to empower in the country, and those chosen will serve their foreign patron's interests, not the country.

After recognizing these three categories of youth responses to the Taliban, my young informant-friend then added that,

the recitation of poetry by well-known master poets and sharing them via social media is our indirect means of expressing opposition and resisting the present situation in the country, especially when poetry verses are filled with double entendre and multiple hidden meanings. Each selection of poems recited or relayed via social media relate to particular event(s) or situation(s). The reciter or sender expresses his/her own dissatisfaction with sarcasm, or forcefully demonstrates the negative outcome of Taliban policies on peoples' lives as well as their harm on the public image of our faith, Islam. We believe such civil resistance, even if done in secret, will slowly but surely swell our ranks and make us grow stronger and stronger. More importantly, these efforts bring us inner peace and make us feel better since our youth are unemployed and idle, having nothing much to fill their time. Hence, the spiritually powerful critical poems also induce a sense of inner relief and peace within ourselves. This relief helps mitigate our suffering and potentially decreases more our vulnerability to serious mental illness.

Based on my contacts with other youth in Kabul and outside of Kabul, especially in the north and northeast, most of them also believe the Taliban rule is temporary -such oppression and despotism in the name of Islam, they say, cannot last. That makes them search for spiritually informed poetic explications from the masters of Persian literature to not only comfort themselves but to challenge the Taliban's misinformed interpretations of the *sharī'at*.

Many of these Afghan contacts served as mid-ranked government officials with college or in some cases post graduate degrees, but did not qualify for overseas evacuation. They also lack the required means to leave the country on their own. This is

where gatherings of *Mathnawī Khawney*²⁰ (reciting/reading from Rumi's *Mathnawī*) come as the spiritual rescue. Traditionally widely indulged nationally, these *Mathnawī* gatherings are being curtailed in face to face meeting by self-censure in Kabul and other urban areas by young groups of women and men, but they also sometimes anonymously broadcast recitations of poetry.²¹ Other poems shared by my very helpful young friend are many, mostly from Rumi, and neither time nor space will allow me to recount them all. However, I will indulge you here with very few samples of what is being read and circulated in the social media among the not so silent masses under the Taliban rule.

This short poem, the author is not identified (but likely to be Rumi), pasted on top of a picture of a young girl salvaging something from a trash bin, circulated on Facebook. It speaks poignantly to the current situation of induced hunger and starvation of millions in Afghanistan under the Taliban rule:

Don't build the Ark, O Noha

The storm will not come

In the salt marshes of the hearts

The rain will not come

Because of my bitter poetry

You may disparage me, but

Where the table is empty

Faith (iman) will not come

Collective helplessness combined with a large dose of hopelessness is clearly expressed in this Facebook post. Particularly significant is cognizance of the outcome of Taliban policies -i.e., flight

20 It is important to mention that such sessions are by no means limited to reading from the *Mathnawī* only, rather there is a wide array of poetry from other Sufi masters as well as from young poets who are also read and discussed.

21 Lynzy Billing, "The Keeper of Afghanistan's Poetic Past", *Arts and Culture*, feature article, *Aljazeera*, 2021, available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2021/6/6/the-keeper-of-afghanistans-poetic-past>. (Accessed on May 15, 2023).

of/from *iman*, the true belief- among the starving children. Distressingly reference is made to the story of Noha building the Ark in the Qur'an for rescuing the true believers (alluding to themselves, the reciters of these verses, the youth of Afghanistan), from the impending deluge. That is, the torrent of the Taliban's heartless policies emanating from the salted marshlands of the Taliban heart, is unlikely to invite any hope of rain and relief. The poet (reciter) indicates, even if blamed for such poetic disparagement, it must be stated what the looming consequences of the Taliban induced mass hunger and deprivation policies are: "Where the table is empty -Faith (*iman*) will not come." The possible loss of faith in Islam among some young Afghans is openly discussed in this post. Traditionally, this could come as shocking, taboo, and profoundly threatening.

Another poem of Rumi, from the third *daftar*/book of *Mathnawī*, is deployed by the youth to directly challenge the Taliban pretension of being powerful:

O pharaoh, don't be dishonorable

You are a jackal, don't pretend to be
a peacock

If you were among peacocks

You couldn't display their grace, and face
humiliation

I will take pride in a banquet of love where

A beggar is sitting face to face with a king

The pride that Taliban take for having defeated the US and its NATO allies in the war is considered to be dishonorable and false. Because, the Taliban are still funded and maintained in power by the United States. The Taliban are indeed assumed to be a "rented regime" in the pay of their American masters. As such their claims of victory over *kuffar* (deniers of truth) is that of a jackal who pretends to be a peacock. Taliban's claim of protecting and safeguarding Islam is refuted, repeatedly by the leading international Muslim scholars and institu-

tions, including the Shaykh al-Azhar.²² Also, their claims of erudition in Islam's foundational texts is questioned and the shallowness of their education in Islam is considered by Afghans a source of humiliation. The Taliban performance based on their policies and practices lack grace to face the facts. The youth of Afghanistan's perception of Islam as Allah's mercy and love are inviting the Taliban, void of compassion and care for the people, to sit face to face with the Truth, the king.

In another fragment of one of Rumi's vivid verses from the *Mathnawī*, true faith is juxtaposed with the Taliban's uttered claims. It says,

*True faith is a blessing, like a tasty and filling meal
O' you who are satisfied with mouthing
the word faith (iman)
The faithful believer, whether in high or low tide
The unbeliever begrudges and yearn for his faith*

Rumi sees the essence of *iman* is a *ni'mat*, a blessing. Like a delicious and satisfying meal, when consumed, this blessing satiates all the basic human needs of individuals, both physical and spiritual. A person of such faith becomes virtuous, free of anger, jealousy, greed, ignorance and attains *taqwā* or becomes mindful of God -i.e, becomes a true Muslim, unlike the Taliban who simply utter the word of faith, but display nothing of its effect. A True believer, a *Muwahhid*, a Unitarian, whether in the best of times or the worst, is the envy of the unbelievers for his/her conduct. On the contrary, the Taliban, their policies and practices of abusing the rights of Afghan women, girls and the non-Taliban men, have brought nothing but contempt from the international community, so far. The Taliban have indeed given both Islam and Afghanistan a bad name, thus shaming and dishonor nation.

22 See Salim, "The Taliban vs. Global Islam: Politics, Power, and the Public in Afghanistan", <https://berkeleycenter.georgetown.edu/responses/the-taliban-vs-global-islam-politics-power-and-the-public-in-afghanistan>. (Accessed May 22, 2023).

In this poem from Rumi, the Taliban's lack of interest in providing the much-needed social services, employment and food for the starving, is targeted. Also, condemning their decrypt and misguided view of the *sharīat*:

*Pity, my beautiful nightingale
Pity, my bosom companion
Pity, my melodious singing bird
My joy, the garden of sweet basil
If you are not a palm tree, making sacrifices
Don't pile old upon old and store them away
The old, the rotten and the foul
You may gift to the ignorant
Those seen the modern, are not your customers
Hunters for the Truth, are not enamored by you*

When one is hungry and starving, the melodious songs of the nightingale, as lovely as they may sound, even if within a garden of sweet-smelling basil, they do little for the owner's physical comfort. What is needed is a palm tree making sacrifices of its fruits to fill the stomachs of the famished. Here the Taliban songs of victory over *kuffar* and the implementation of true Islam, even if true, do not relieve the people's hunger and remove their existential threats. The poem also refers to the Taliban dredging up and piling old promises of heaven one on top of the other. It reminds the Taliban that such gifts as virgins in paradise may work with the ignorant suicide bombers but among the educated youth of Afghanistan, the Taliban have nothing to peddle.

A twenty something year-old rising artist and poet, Naqshband Haidari, the son of a very well-known 'arif (Sufi) and poet, Haidari Wujudi chimes in his own poetic sentiments similar to those of Rumi just discussed.²³ The young Naqshband Haidari comes

23 For details of Mr. Wujudi's life and accomplishment, see Billing, "The Keeper of Afghanistan's Poetic Past", available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2021/6/6/the-keeper-of-afghanistans-poetic-past>. (Accessed on May 15, 2023).

from the Panjsher Valley, a bastion of resistance both against the Soviets and the Taliban, past and present. The inhabitants of Panjsher (meaning Five Lions) have been subjected to some of the most heinous crimes since the imposition of Taliban rule. Naqshband Haidari's poems are filled with helpless hidden emotions. He tells the Taliban:

*It's all bragging and exaggeration when
you speak!
Your mean spirit defines better who and
what you are!
Why are you speaking of the heavens in
vain?
What is your message to people, here on
earth?
You keep telling the same disappointing
tales
You have no new message,
Only the same old disturbing fiction!*

Here, young Haidari points to the habit of the Taliban exaggerated claims. He also tells them that their spirit of suspicion and hostility towards the people are the better indicators of who they truly are. Ponting to the false and empty heavenly promises to the Taliban to the suicide bombers and their other followers, Haidari asks the Taliban directly what message do they have for those living here on earth, in the country now? He charges the Taliban rulers of mouthing the same old disappointing tales time and again.

In another poem, Haidari meticulously describes the situation both he and millions of his cohorts find themselves under the Taliban rule. It is a condition of hopeless imprisonment in a cage, with no possibility of learning or possibility of growth in their youth (the spring of their lives), leaving the children and youth feeling like a thirsty burnt tree in the desert, denied the warmth of sunshine. Haidari says, he is trying his best to move ahead, but still hold the last place. Here, Haidari is referring to the rankings of the population by the Taliban based on tribal and ethnolinguistic or religious/sectarian identities and loyalties each may have

towards the Taliban in which the Panjsheris are at the lowest place.

Haidari concludes his poem saying: he does not fear dying, rather, he fears a meaningless life in his ancestral home (the Panjsher Valley). The Panjsher valley is where the Taliban have imposed the maximum pains of silence, but he, Haidari, is the thundering resonances of the Panjsher River.

*In this cage, what can I do? Have no
options
How can I speak of emancipation? I am
prisoner
I am denied my season of growth,
cannot sprout
Burnt tree, thirsty in the desert, I am
Away from the warmth of sun and life
You are telling me it is spring, I am
freezing
Busy with life's go-arounds and
wondering
Even if I am moving forward, I stand
last
Very exhausted, I am taking slow steps
Such a distressed traveler on the road,
I am
I feared a life of meaninglessness
Not meeting the angel of death or dying
Silence is sowing pain in the midst of
the Valley
I am the painful roar of the River of
the Five Lions²⁴*

I will end this section with Naqshband Haidari's lamentation of some of the losses by the peoples of Afghanistan, especially the educated youth under the Taliban rule. He describes:

*In this land of oppression, mirror of the
sun is gone
Here, with no light, the thought of hope
is gone
Dim are the nights, hidden from the
sight of stars*

24 Reference to his homeland, the Panjsher Valley under constant siege.

*The pool of moonlight, so visible, is now
gone
Who will water the thirsty land again?
Look, the cloud which brought the rain,
is gone*

V

The challenges facing the small community of Kirghiz in response to the Bolshevik Revolution was finding safety from the threat of atheism, *kuffr*. They were faced with existential threats repeatedly as were the first beleaguered Muslim community in the Meccan period. Given their size and their vulnerabilities, the options of early Muslims in Mecca, like the Kirghiz, were limited and clear -*hijra* (seeking safety by immigrating) from the oppression of the *kuffar* to Abyssinia and finally to Yathrib (Medina). No armed resistance was possible in Mecca and in the earliest years in Medina. Armed resistance, *jihad* was mandated when capabilities of the Muslim community improved.

Muslims' challenges in Medina and beyond, however, became more complicated and got worse as time passed, especially after the phenomenal Muslim victories went beyond the Arabian Peninsula. The reasons for such complications are offered in the anthropology of the Qur'an rather clearly. That is, in the beginning verses of the Qur'an (2: 1-20), people are categorized into three major types. It starts with the juxtaposition of a simple dichotomy of *Mu'minin* (believers in Truth, in verses 2: 1-5) and *Kafirin* (the deniers of Truth, verses 2: 6-7) and then extensively describes in the next thirteen verses the appearance of the third category, the *Munafiqin*, (the deceivers, the pretenders, the hypocrites, the dissemblers, in verses 2: 8-20). These early verses in the beginning of the Qur'an, detailing attributes of the *munafiqin* in such clarity is a clear warning of their potentially destructive role in Muslim societies. That fact indeed haunted Muslims of Medina during the Prophet's own life and subsequently tested the Muslim umma time and again.

Responding to existential threats from the *kuffar*

has been clearly mandated for Muslims by either resisting (when possible) or making *hijra*, moving away from the danger. Historically, these practices were held firm whether during the Islamic expansion periods, the Mongol terror, the Crusades or the early Western colonialist incursions into the Muslim lands. However, the most frustrating challenges to the Muslim Umma have been *fitnas* (seditions) within, whether it was the *Khawarij* (Kharijites or Seceders) leading to the first sectarian bifurcation of Muslims to Sunni and Shi'a sects or the later *fitnas* revolving around dynastic changes and successions to power and privileges historically.

The dynamics of responding to threats from both *kuffar* and *fitna* have however changed substantially with the emergence of new forms of colonial imperialism. That is, the shape shifting of the old empires of faith into the empires of commerce and then to the colonial empires of conquest have given way, since WWII, into the new and emergent forms of colonial empires. This new and emergent form is far more deceptive and effective since they work through a strategy of sowing *fitna* within and among Muslim nations.²⁵ Indeed, Afghanistan during the past almost half a century has been a major victim of this new form of imperialism -the empires by invitation.

The Soviets were invited to militarily intervene in support of their Afghan Communist clients in December of 1979. It resulted in immediate popular *jihad* resistance against Communism and the Soviet occupation. The Afghanistan jihad was quickly manipulated by the offer of weapons and cash to jihadi clients transforming Afghanistan's Islamic resistance into an instrument of the Cold War between Capitalist West and the Communist East. Thus, the *jihad* in Afghanistan was assured triumph against the Communists militarily, but was not allowed to succeed politically. The anti-Communist wars in Afghanistan also globalized the

25 See M. Nazif, Shahrani, "Why Muslim Sectarian Politics of Rage in the Age of 'Empire of Trust?'" *Journal of Islamic and Muslim Studies* 1, 1 (2016): 28-46.

concept of *jihad*. The jihadists begun to target both their presumed *far enemies* (in the East & the West) as well as the *near enemies* (the autocratic rulers within, propped up by both the West and the East). The demise of the Soviet Union and the apparent victory of Capitalism, soon augured the invasion of Iraq by the US and its coalition (1993). Subsequently, the US-Iraq war led to the formation of the Al Qaeda under the protection of the Taliban extremists in Afghanistan. Al Qaeda then allegedly organized and launched the attacks against targets inside America on September 11, 2001. That tragic event triggered the United States to militarily intervene in Afghanistan with the UN sanctions to topple the Taliban regime (r. 1996-2001). However, American war on terror in Afghanistan soon became America's global war *for terror*. American policy makers adopted a method of fighting terrorism and terrorists by forming or supporting competing extremist groups to fight each other for domination. Hence the rise of ISIS, ISISK, and Daesh in Afghanistan. Daesh is now presented as an existential threat to the Taliban rule in the country. Therefore, US while not willing to recognize the Taliban regime so far, is giving substantial financial support to the Taliban for fighting the Daesh, their common enemy. But the US and its allies are unwilling to support the National Resistance Forces led by Ahmed Massoud.

Losses incurred to the Afghan nation are massive and all segments of society are affected and forced to respond in some form. Taliban are the product of multiple seditious extremist's organization trained and controlled by foreign security agencies during the last three decades of wars in Afghanistan. They have proved themselves to be the most successful product of *fitna* in the country by the enemies of Islam and Muslim, both near and far. Their claims, their policies and practices, all in the name of undefined Islamic *sharī'at*, and the damage they are incurring to the fabric of Afghan society, especially the educated youth could be immeasurable. The challenges facing the educated Muslim youth as Ahmad Rashid Salim, an Afghan Ph.D. Candidate

at UC Berkeley, has simply put it, "is not whether I am Muslim or not, but rather what is the Islam of the Taliban?"²⁶ Claiming guardianship of Islam, they accuse anyone who disagrees with them of disbelief, moral corruption and westoxification. They have glorified families of their suicide bombers while denying women and girls their Qur'anic rights to education and work and forcing the non-Taliban member of the Hazara and Uzbek farmers off of their lands and villages and handing over their properties to the Taliban supporters.²⁷

The problems facing the peoples of Afghanistan in general, and the women, girls and large numbers of educated youth in particular are the result of a new post-modern form of *fitna* in which the enemies of Afghanistan and Islam, both near and far, have weaponized groups of extremist hypocrites (*munaḥiqin*) within the Muslim societies to destroy or weaken Muslims. The Taliban rule, in recent memory might be the most vicious challenge to the Afghan society at the dawn of twenty first century, may not be the last. With pervasiveness of the political economy of creating needs and dependencies by the great powers (i.e., empires of trust or by invitation), the likelihood of deploying *fitna* (sedition) to undermine the freedoms and liberties of others, especially Muslims, is likely to increase in the foreseeable future. Resorting to the poetics resistance for solace and temporary psychological relief by the educated youth in Afghanistan may offer them momentary resolution to their pressing problems of meaning, it does not solve the long-term solution to the tyranny brought upon them by the Taliban duplicity and oppression. But for those among them who call themselves "the silent youth in-waiting" to resist, their only hope is a maxim from Nizam al-Mulk's eleventh century *Siyāsāt-nāma* (The Book of Government) promising

26 See Salim, "The Taliban vs. Global Islam: Politics, Power, and the Public in Afghanistan", available at: <https://berkeleycenter.georgetown.edu/responses/the-taliban-vs-global-islam-politics-power-and-the-public-in-afghanistan>. (Accessed May 22, 2023).

27 Ibid.

“a state can last with *kufr* [unbelief/irreligion], but not with *zulm* [inequity/despotism].”²⁸

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28 Nizam al-Mulk, *The Siyar Al Muluk or Siyasat Nama* (The Book of Government or Rules For Kings), 2nd ed, translated by Herbert Darke from Persian, (New York: Routledge, 2002), page nr?.

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