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The Global Cold War on Campus

ZMO-Studien

Studien des Leibniz-Zentrum Moderner Orient

Herausgegeben von
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Band 45

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Student Activism at Kabul University, 1964–1992

DE GRUYTER

Von der Kultur-, Sozial- und Bildungswissenschaftlichen Fakultät der Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin zur Erlangung des Grades eines Doktors der Philosophie (Dr. phil.) genehmigte Veröffentlichung der Dissertation.

This publication was supported by the Leibniz Open Access Monograph Publishing Fund.

ISBN 978-3-11-113804-6
e-ISBN (PDF) 978-3-11-115054-3
e-ISBN (EPUB) 978-3-11-115145-8
DOI https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111150543

Library of Congress Control Number: 2023944776

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek
The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available on the internet at http://dnb.dnb.de.

Cover image: A group of students in Kabul (Julia Büchting).
Printing and binding: CPI books GmbH, Leck

www.degruyter.com

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1978–1992

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I am deeply grateful to my interlocutors who entrusted me with their memories and thereby facilitated this research. Similarly, I owe my gratitude to everybody who helped me to find former students of Kabul University in Germany, London, and Kabul.

I would like to express the deepest appreciation to the numerous people and institutions who supported me during the research process. My position as a research fellow at Leibniz-Zentrum Moderner Orient and member of the research group "Progress and its Discontent" facilitated this project. Advice and comments given by my supervisors Prof Dr Ingeborg Baldauf and PD Dr Stefan Kirmse have been a great help in developing my thesis. I thank Yahya Wardak (Afghanic e.V.) and Paul Bucherer-Dietschi (Bibliotheca Afghanica) for permission to use and guidance in their collections. My special thanks go to all the people who supported my research trip to Kabul. I am indebt to the Afghanistan Center at Kabul University (ACKU) for providing me with a base at Kabul University, amazing support in conducting my research and great company. My heartfelt appreciation goes to my wonderful and caring host family, Naser, Farzanah, Mesbah and Masih, and my research assistant Meena Sadr who significantly contributed to the success of the research trip with her dedication and attentiveness.

Also, I want to thank Jaimee Comstock-Skipp for her daily emails, my proofreaders for their insightful comments and suggestions, and Nino for setting me a deadline and constantly reminding me of it.

https://doi.org/10.1515/ 9783111150543-202

A Note on Transliteration

In this thesis, words in Dari are transcribed using the transliteration system for Persian words of the International Journal of Middle East Studies (IJMES). Consequently, diacritics are only used for technical terms and phrases but not for personal names, place names, names of political organizations, and titles of books and articles. Untranslated words, as well as titles of books and journals are written in italics while names of people, places, and organizations are not (resulting in the difference of Parcham – the political organization – and *Parcham* – the newspaper published by this group). I generally use the original plural (-ha and -an) for the plural of words in Dari, but deviate from this rule in the case of designations for members and sympathizers of political organizations (Khalqis, Parchamis, Shu'la-is) as this form is commonly used by my interlocutors in English and German. As recommended by IJMES I use the romanization tables provided by the Library of Congress for Pashtu and Russian for words in those languages.

https://doi.org/10.1515/ 9783111150543-203

Map of Afghanistan and Timeline

Credits for the empty map of Afghanistan with provincial borders to
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Fig. 1: The map shows the places mentioned in this book. It is based on the current position of provincial borders. Some of the borders have been altered since 1964 but in those cases my interlocutors usually referred to the current province.

https://doi.org/10.1515/ 9783111150543-204

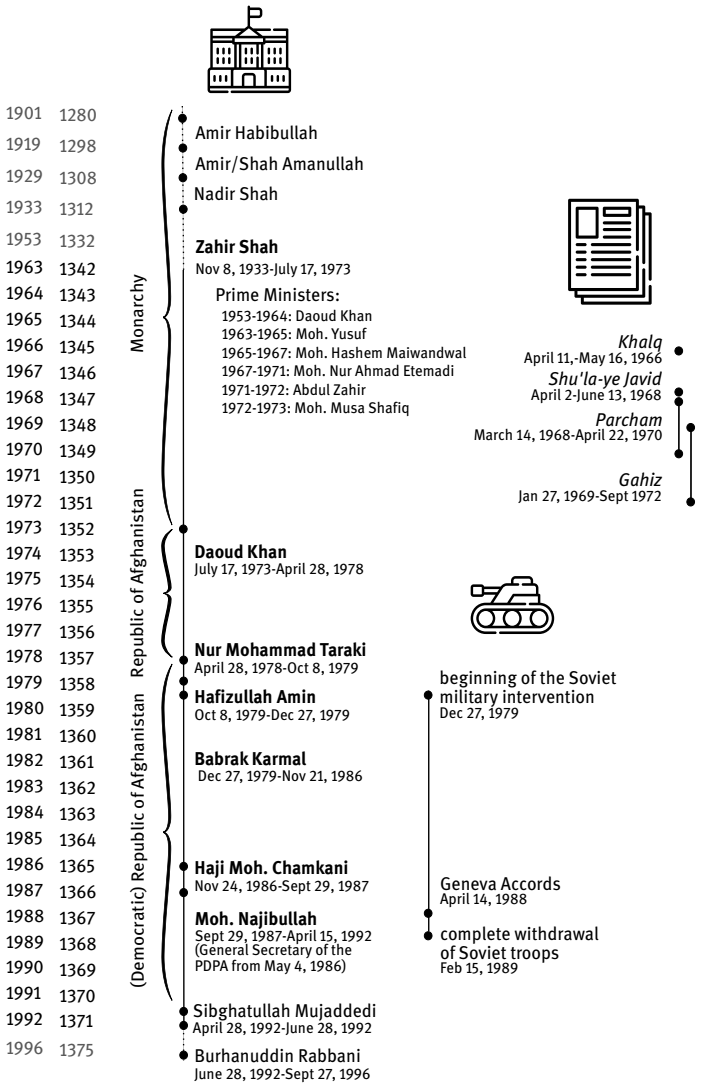

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Fig. 2: Timeline, 1901–1996, selected dates, people and events

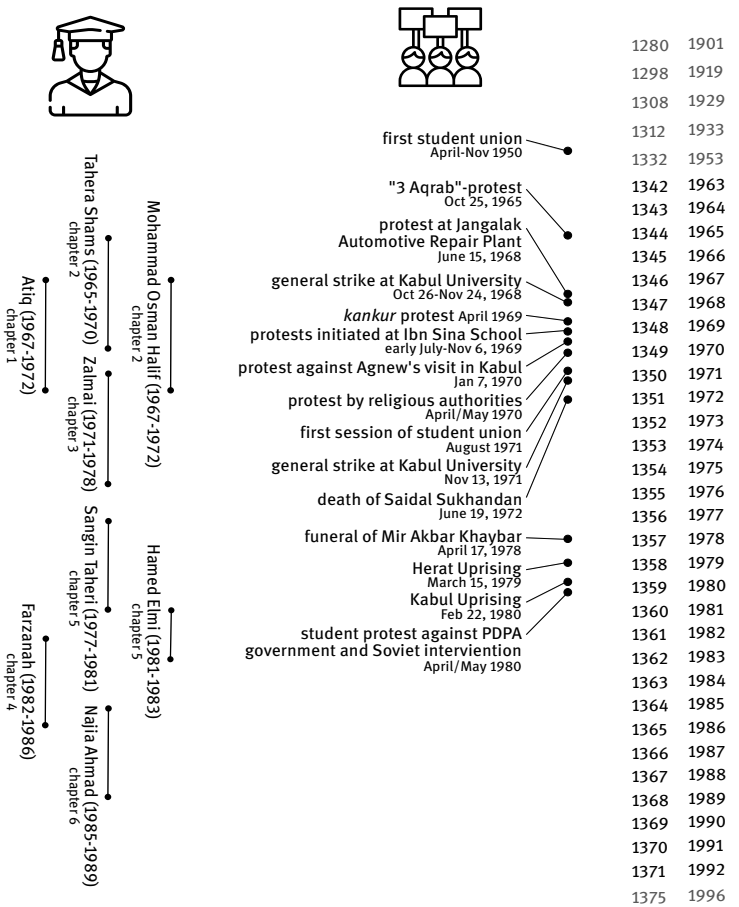

Fig. 3: Timeline, 1901–1996, selected dates, people and events

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https://doi.org/10.1515/ 9783111150543-205

1 Introduction

It is easy to find images online of students in Kabul from the 1960s to the 1980s. In posts and video compilations, people in and from Afghanistan continue to share pictures of young people in jeans and T-shirts, skirts, and blouses, walking along peaceful streets, sitting in classrooms, working in a laboratory, or singing at a concert. These photos and videos seem to express a nostalgia for a time in which women wore short skirts on the streets of Kabul and were not required to wear a hijab. This nostalgia is not only for the fashion and freedom of women, though. It is for a time in which a young, educated elite experienced the feeling that Afghanistan could leave its perceived backwardness behind and become a progressive country. During this time, students at Kabul University voiced their hope through political activism: they joined political parties and organized demonstrations against the government, went on strike when they wanted to change the education system, and wrote newspaper articles, poems, and theatre plays to express their opinion on society, economics, and politics. Not all students actively engaged with party politics, of course. Some only joined the demonstrations to skip classes and escaped to the cinema as soon as possible. And yet, almost everybody was involved in political discussions, even if only in a small circle of friends.

The fact that Kabul University was a centre of political activism in Afghanistan has been widely noted in academic literature. Political organizations in which students were active have, however, mainly been mentioned as the puppets of foreign interests. As a consequence, little attention has been paid to the motivation for and contents of students' discussions and demonstrations. What were the hopes and aspirations that drove students at Kabul University onto the streets between 1964 and 1992? Throughout this book, I discuss the reasons for the students' discontent and their visions for the future of Afghanistan. To approach this question, it is necessary to investigate the details of student activism and address questions such as: Who participated in the political activities? Which forms did the activism take? As the form and content of student activism changed over time, I examine how the apparent freedom and peacefulness of the 1960s related to students' protests and what the role of students was during the war in the 1980s. Answers to these questions challenge the suggested domination of students' political activities by international interests. At the same time, the political history of Afghanistan is deeply intertwined with geopolitics; the hopes and aspirations of students at Kabul University were not isolated from developments in the rest of the world. It is thus worth exploring the global context in which students acted. How did students relate their political activism to the global power

https://doi.org/10.1515/ 9783111150543-001

struggles of the Cold War? How did the global context of the dominant ideologies of the political activism in Kabul relate to the students' experiences?

Throughout the book, I argue that students were motivated to join political discussions and activism, or to refrain from doing so, for many different, oftentimes personal reasons. Overarching these individual motivations, however, is the galvanization by and disappointment with promises of progress. In the first part, I argue that students at Kabul University were disappointed by the government's failure to live up to its promises of progress. As a consequence, alternative ideas of progress galvanized students in Kabul just as they did many other young people around the world during that time. A range of ideologies prominent among students promised a better future and an independent Afghanistan. In the second part of the study, I discuss students' disappointment with these alternative visions. With violence dominating the political field, ideologies lost their appeal in the 1980s. By the end of the decade, few students at Kabul University were still willing to engage in politics. Furthermore, I argue that the dynamics of student political activism at Kabul University cannot be understood without the global context. International influences were mainly defined by the Cold War and contributed to the creation, and later the delegitimization, of ideas of progress. Much of the competition of the superpowers took place in the Third World in the form of development aid and wars. The ideological conflicts resulting from this Cold War competition, in combination with the longer process of decolonization, played a crucial role in the political unrest of the 1960s, globally and in Kabul. In the late 1980s, the changing dynamics of the Cold War led to a decreasing emphasis on ideology and contributed to disillusionment among the students and declining political activism. My bottom-up analysis of political activism at Kabul University reflects the deep intertwinement of Cold War promises of progress and local struggles for inclusion and independence. It thereby contributes to historiography on Afghanistan, the Global Cold War, and the Global 1960s.

1.1 Political Activism at Kabul University and Historiography on Afghanistan

The politicization of students at Kabul University is often associated with the constitution of 1964, with which the king, Zahir Shah, established a democratically elected parliament, encouraging political participation. In the following years – the so-called "Decade of Democracy" – political movements, which had previously taken the form of secret discussion circles, established the structures of parties and significantly increased their influence among high school and university students. The most prominent among these organizations were the Peoples'

Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) with its two wings Khalq (People) and Parcham (Flag), Shu'la-ye Javid (Eternal flame)[1] and Javanan-e Musulman (Muslim Youth). They all enjoyed broad support on campus in the late 1960s and early 1970s. During the government of Daoud Khan (1973–1978) and his policy of modernization from above, oppositional movements were suppressed and open demonstrations became impossible. Secretly, however, activities continued. The 1978 PDPA coup created new lines of conflict. On the one hand, the PDPA relied on student support and propagated ideas that had been discussed at the university in earlier years. On the other, the regime used brutal violence to suppress any potential opposition. Nevertheless, students at Kabul University continued to engage in political activities in the early 1980s: some stood behind the government and others secretly supported the armed opposition in its war against the government and the Soviet Union. By the late 1980s, Kabul University had lost its status as a centre of political thought as most of the students had either left the country or become disillusioned with politics. In 1992, the campus became a battleground of the civil war and classes were suspended.

In the context of the political and social history of Afghanistan, scholars frequently emphasize the relevance of Kabul University as a centre of political activism and debate. To give just a few examples: Anthony Arnold writes in his much-quoted book on the PDPA that "the university became the main political arena in Kabul" in the late 1960s.[2] Similarly, one of the standard works on the 20th-century history of Afghanistan, Rubin's *Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, includes a note that "a variety of radical ideologies and organizations" had broad influence among university students.[3] In a more recent historical overview of Afghanistan, Dorronsoro mentions that Kabul "was the center of political activity [... and at] the University of Kabul there were dozens of groups [...] generally concentrated on the publication of a periodical."[4] In a paragraph on Kabul University in his "Historical Dictionary of Afghanistan" Ludwig Adamec writes:

> In the 1960s, Kabul University became a center of political discourse and a training ground for cadres of the entire political spectrum. [...] The leadership of the Islamist, Marxist, and

1 Officially, this movement was called Dimukratik-e Navin but the title of its newspaper (*Shu'la-ye Javid*) became its colloquial and much more prominent name and will be used hereafter.

2 Arnold 1983, 33–34.

3 Rubin 1995, 76.

4 Dorronsoro 2005, 68. For further examples see Male 1982, 25–26; Majrooh 1989, 18–19; Plastun and Andrianov 1998, 22; Rasanayagam 2005, 24; Wahab and Youngerman 2007, 125.

> nationalist parties emerged from its campus, where they would hone their oratorical skills and engage in verbal abuse and often physical violence.[5]

With the exception of two short articles – one by Faridullah Bezhan and the other by Baqui Yousefzai – historians have not yet dealt in detail with the role of students in political developments in the country.[6] The aim of my study is to help fill this gap in the literature on student activism at Kabul University.

It is not only the gap in historical literature that makes student activism at Kabul University a valuable field of research. Analysing the political activism of students is an important addition to a field in which top-down approaches, methodological nationalism, and Cold War biases continue to dominate. Over the last decade, historians such as Nile Green and Nivi Manchanda have discussed these structural problems.[7] Others, such as David B. Edwards, have published nuanced bottom-up histories.[8] And yet, partly because this is a small field, and therefore slow to develop, the impact of these discussions has remained limited. Most of the literature I rely on either predates these discussions or has not considered them.

The bulk of historiography on the second half of the 20th century in Afghanistan consists of overview works[9] and studies describing one or several parties, their official programmes, and leaders.[10] As a consequence, the emergence and development of political currents take centre stage in historiography on the 1960s and 1970s. This body of literature focuses on the leadership of the PDPA, and sometimes on Javanan-e Musulman, mainly as predecessor of later parties organizing the armed opposition from Pakistan. As for developments from the late 1970s through the early 1990s, descriptions of events leading to the PDPA coup, conflicts within the party leadership, chronologies of reforms, and the formation of protest in rural areas are widespread.[11] Also, much attention has been paid to the international involvement in the war in Afghanistan.[12] Most literature on Afghanistan in the second half of the 1980s and the early 1990s concerns military and diplomatic history.[13] These topics, while relevant to the historical context of

5 Adamec 2012, 203–05.

6 Bezhan 2014; Yousefzai 1974.

7 Green 2013b; Nile Green 2015; Manchanda 2020.

8 Most prominently Edwards 2002.

9 For example, Barfield 2010; Akimbekov 2015; Tanin 2011.

10 For example, Arnold 1983; Shafai 1393 (2014).

11 See, for example, Dorronsoro 2005, 61–92; Payind 1989, 117–18; Rasanayagam 2005, 67–82.

12 See, for example, Brönner 1980; Coll 2005; Hyman 1994.

13 In literature published during this period, a central question is: what will happen with the PDPA government after the withdrawal of the Soviet army? Es'haq 1987; Rubin 1993. In texts

my research, do not contribute to a nuanced understanding of political activism at Kabul University.

Additionally, academic literature touching upon the reasons for political protest in the 1960s and early 1970s in Afghanistan tends to rely on written sources, mainly newspaper articles. This is especially – but not exclusively – a problem with literature produced in Soviet/Russian and Afghan academic contexts.[14] The state-run and strictly censored newspapers usually did not cover student protests. The few existing mentions, however, portray them as a criticism of issues related to the education system and do not mention any criticism of the government. On this basis, Korgun – a Russian historian with several publications on the political history of Afghanistan – argues that the students' demands "remained within the academic framework."[15] Witnesses of the events give a different account: criticism of the education system did play an important role in the protests, but many students understood these issues within the broader context of the social and political system they opposed.

Also, historiography on the second half of the 20th century in Afghanistan frequently emphasizes the role of international actors. For example, Barnett Rubin's book on the history of Afghanistan from a political economic perspective,[16] Robert Crews' book on Afghanistan and globalization,[17] or Timothy Nunan's contribution on development politics in Afghanistan[18] mainly deal with the role of international actors and their interactions with the government of Afghanistan. These contributions are important as the domestic political developments cannot be understood without their international contexts. The focus on international politics creates a bias in historiography on Afghanistan, though: Afghanistan is merely seen as the stage of great power politics and people in Afghanistan are excluded from their own history.[19]

Focusing on foreign interference, some historians assume that political organizations of the 1960s and 1970s were founded and funded by international

published after 1992 the central question is: how could the Najibullah government persist for three more years after the withdrawal of the Soviet troops? Cordovez and Harrison 1995; Eliot 1990; Fivecoat 2012; Grau 2007; Kalinovsky 2008; Khristoforov 2009; Mendelson 2014; Smith 2014; Williams 2014.

14 For literature in Russian see, for example, Lavrov 2008; Nuriddinov 2003, 80–102; for a discussion of the quality of Afghan historiography see Tarzi 2013, 129.

15 Korgun 1983, 156.

16 Rubin 1995.

17 Crews 2015.

18 Nunan 2016.

19 Manchanda 2020, 27–40, 43, 59; Green 2013b, 132.

actors – mainly the Soviet Union and China –, destabilized the monarchy, and proceeded to pull the country into chaos.[20] In his prominent book *Ghost Wars* Steve Coll, for example, describes the activism in the following way: "As the KGB-sponsored Marxists formed their cabals and recruited followers, equally militant Afghan Islamists rose up to oppose them. [...] The Egyptian texts carried to Kabul's universities were sharply focused on politics."[21] His description of student activism is short, but the emphasis on the foreign domination of that activism is clear. With this narrative, the historiography deprives the sympathizers, members, and leaders of political organizations of their agency and denies former political activists their responsibility for political developments. The questions of why people were discontent with the status quo and joined political organizations becomes irrelevant. The narratives of former students that this study is based on, in contrast, show that this question is crucial to understanding their political activism.

Scholars engaging with the question of the activists' motivations assume that students and recent graduates were prone to following simplistic ideologies as they lacked career perspectives and had nothing else to do than to join demonstrations.[22] Thomas Barfield, for example, describes the political activists of the 1960s as university graduates who did not find employment. As a result, he writes, "radical politics flourished in Kabul".[23] Similarly, Dorronsoro allocates an important role to frustrated graduates and points out that their "personal and collective ambitions nurtured during their school or student years collided with the reality of a society which had little tolerance for their ideas".[24] Neither Barfield nor Dorronsoro provide a source for this assumption. Listening to former students' accounts of their activism sheds an entirely different light on students' motivations: None of them struggled to find employment after graduating from university. They were involved in activism while studying at Kabul University and describe how they perceived the political status quo as unjust, that they demanded political participation and turned to political literature in search of alternatives.

Furthermore, most literature takes the domination of political activism by three ideological currents for granted: Marxism-Leninism (usually referred to as "communism"), Maoism, and Islamism. This assumption is not entirely wrong.

20 See, for example, Coll 2005, 39; Rasanayagam 2005, 59–66.
21 Coll 2005, 111–12.
22 Barfield 2010, 213; Dorronsoro 2005, 67; Magnus 1974, 60.
23 Barfield 2010, 213.
24 Dorronsoro 2005, 68.

Yet, focusing on the ideologies frequently leads to the assumption that students' ideas were removed from the actual situation in the country and that their activism was mainly an adventure, suggesting the protests were illegitimate or even irrelevant.[25] Listening to the memories of former Kabul University students drew my attention to topics and incidents that had galvanized the students. These moments show that their activism was related to their everyday experiences and that the ideologies served a practical function for the students.

Another central issue in the historiography on Afghanistan is the teleological perspective that prevails in much of the scholarly work. Historiography becomes an instrument in the search for culprits for the wars of more recent decades. The purpose of a volume edited by Micheline Centlivres-Demont, for example, is to provide an "overview of the evolution of the Afghan crisis and the re-evaluation of its nature and causes."[26] Other authors do not problematize their own position in the conflicts, which often has a strong influence on their research. Authors from Afghanistan who were or are sympathizers or members of political parties tend to use their historiography to legitimize their position.[27] These works are largely based on their authors' memoirs and thus take on the character of primary sources rather than secondary literature. Some of the authors from the USA and Western Europe, as well as Russia/the Soviet Union, previously worked in political positions in Afghanistan and thus have a perspective shaped by their governments' roles in Afghanistan and their respective ideologies and politics.[28] These experiences provide the authors with special insights, while also meaning that they tend to have a one-sided perspective and are emotionally involved.

In international historiography on Afghanistan, conflicts mainly conform to Cold War lines. As discussed above, historians tend to see political movements in Afghanistan mainly as agents of foreign powers, highlighting the negative impact of their respective opponent in the Cold War. Additionally, in the 1980s, scholars and journalists had limited access to the country. US-American and Western European researchers were usually based in Pakistan, entering Afghanistan only in the company of an armed opposition group.[29] Soviet or Eastern European researchers

25 Arnold 1983, 27–28; Yousefzai 1974, 178.

26 Centlivres-Demont 2015, xii.

27 Tanin, for example, was a member of the PDPA (Tanin 2011) and Pirzadeh Ghaznawi was a member of *Javanan-e Musulman* (Pirzadeh Ghaznavi 1393 (2014)).

28 For example, Anthony Arnold was an US-American intelligence officer specialized in Soviet affairs in Afghanistan before writing his book on the PDPA and one of the most famous Russian historians on Afghanistan participated in the war as a lieutenant general. Arnold 1983; Khristoforov 2009.

29 Girardet, for example, describes how difficult it was for him to enter Afghanistan and that his insights were limited, Girardet 1983, 84. Several other articles in the Central Asian Survey of

had access to the government-controlled major cities, but did not engage with the opposition.[30] The information gathered by each side is, of course, fundamentally different from the other. The resulting perspectives continue to be reproduced by historians relying on material produced by only one of the two sides. My consideration of literature in English, Russian, Dari, and German has drawn my attention to such biases in historiography. Additionally, from a post-Cold War and "War on Terror" perspective, for example, the events around 1978/79 in Afghanistan unfold very differently than they did for journalists and scholars writing in the 1980s. Using secondary literature written over the last few decades was helpful for my research; older texts mention events and figures that became irrelevant to explanations of the emergence of the Taliban or 9/11.[31]

Resulting from this teleological perspective, historiography on Afghanistan has become a "discursive battleground", as Nile Green argues. Within local historiography, he points out, no consensus has emerged on most historical events, making historiography a "fragmented mirror of modern Afghan history".[32] Looking at only one of these fragments – or even using it as a basis for more general assumptions – can be misleading. Amin Tarzi thus calls upon historians to embrace the diversity of narratives.[33] For my research, I talked to people who have fundamentally different takes on the political history due both to their political engagement when they were young and to later developments. By listening to their narrations and respecting their perspectives, I have included and even emphasized the diversity of histories of political activism at Kabul University in my study.

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the early 1980s analyse the situation in rural Afghanistan. Only one of them briefly mentions protests in Kabul: Lafont, 1983, 121. Gérard Chaliand, a French activist and journalist, describes the developments in Afghanistan between the takeover of the government by the PDPA in 1978 and 1981 in his book in detail, but demonstrations in Kabul appear only in the timeline on the last pages, without any further analysis. Chaliand 1982.

30 Mokrousov 1981.

31 Hyman's book on the social and political development in Afghanistan during the time of the PDPA regime was first published in 1982 and mentions the diversity of the opposition. The topic does not come up in later works focussing on the "rise of Islamism", Hyman 1992, 122.

32 Green 2015a, 1–3.

33 Tarzi 2013, 131.

1.2 Political Activism at Kabul University and the Global Cold War

My criticism of literature examining the history of Afghanistan through a Cold War lens notwithstanding, I locate my discussion of activism at Kabul University within the global context of the Cold War. Even before the Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan, the Cold War had a huge, varied impact on the daily lives of my interlocutors. It defined the environment at Kabul University and contributed to the students' galvanization by, and their later disillusionment with, the ideologies discussed on campus. Considering this broader historical context in the experiences of individuals contributes to a more nuanced historiography on Afghanistan. At the same time, a study of the diverse impacts of Cold War power struggles on Kabul University students can serve as a case study for historiography on the Global Cold War.

The challenge of placing the analysis of memories of former university students in Kabul into the context of the Cold War lies in creating a productive relationship between local and individual experiences and their global context. To do so, I use global history defined as an approach that questions the nation-state as the central category of historical research and acknowledges the constant transnational exchange and circulation of ideas, things, and people. A scholarly work can thus be considered global history when it places local developments and phenomena within a global (but not necessarily worldwide) context.[34] Starting from the local and putting it into a global context enables me to challenge prominent Euro- or Western-centric perspectives, while at the same time recognizing the impact of existing power structures – which is another central endeavour of global history.[35]

Global historians have emphasized the need not to forget the individuals who lived history and the agency with which they made history.[36] However, it is not only individual stories that give life to global history, but also global history which provides the context for understanding individual lives.[37] It is within this mutual relationship that the individual experiences of students at Kabul University and the global histories of the Cold War and the 1960s interact in this study. On the one hand, I place the narrations into a broader context to highlight how global developments directly or indirectly influenced individuals. On the other

34 Conrad 2013, 2.
35 Conrad and Eckert 2007, 31.
36 Andrade 2011, 574; Aslanian Chaplin, McGrath et al. 2013, 1445.
37 Struck, Ferris and Revel 2011, 579.

hand, I show how individual experience can give life to existing global histories or throw them into question.

The global context of political activism was shaped by the Global Cold War. Generally, the Cold War can be understood as a conflict of power and ideologies between the two superpowers that emerged after World War II.[38] Following the concept of the Global Cold War as formulated by Odd Arne Westad and Prasenjit Duara, I consider the multiple impacts and "uneven effects" of this hegemony.[39] The diversity of the impact of the Cold War in its political dynamics and their implications for the individual are central to this study. The environment students at Kabul University inhabited, I will argue in the first chapter, was shaped by Cold War competitions. These competitions were not defined by nuclear weapons but by development aid.

One of the consequences of the Cold War's hegemonic power structures is the emergence of the Third World, via which Afghanistan's position within these structures was defined. As with many other social and political developments of that time, the formation of the Third World should be understood in the context of the Cold War, although it was not exclusively defined by the two superpowers.[40] The concept cannot be detached from a longer history of North-South relations, and, more specifically, colonialism. The power structures resulting from this past contributed to the power structures that made the Third World the "hot battlefield of the Cold War", as Flavia Gasbarri argues.[41] The struggle with imperialism and the search for alternatives to the existing order thus became an element of the Cold War competition, but cannot be understood in simple Cold War binaries.[42] As I will discuss in the third chapter, this ambiguity is reflected in the way many students at Kabul University dealt with Afghanistan's position in the world at that time: they both acknowledged the existing order and formulated their aspirations within this framework while also being fundamentally opposed to the power structures resulting from the Cold War.

The Cold War's power structures were legitimized by two rivalling ideologies. According to Westad, these were built on different interpretations of European modernity. To prove their respective superiority, he argues, was the essence of the Global Cold War.[43] Both interpretations suggest gradual progress towards an

38 See, for example, Kramer's discussion of the role of power and ideology in defining the Cold War, Kramer 2005, 21.
39 Westad 2010, 3; Duara 2011, 458.
40 Kalinovsky and Radchenko 2011a, 3.
41 Gasbarri 2020, 1.
42 Bradley 2010, 465.
43 Westad 2010, 4.

imagined ideal society. As several authors discuss in detail and from different perspectives in the volume edited by Engerman, Gilman, Haefele, and Latham, the stages of progress were, in the Soviet case, outlined by Marxism-Leninism. As a counterweight, US-American intellectuals formulated modernization theory, following the same seemingly self-evident logic of linear progress. Marxism-Leninism set communism as the ultimate goal, while according to modernization theory, the "West" had already achieved modernity and the Third World would eventually follow.[44] Both superpowers legitimated their involvement in the Third World with their own revolutionary and anti-imperialist pasts. They sought to prove the validity of their respective model of progress by "liberating" the Third World while suggesting they were not an imperial power.[45] Hence, I consider the superpowers' investment in development aid in Afghanistan as part of this ideological competition centring on different ideas of linear progress.

As I will discuss in the first chapter, the promotion of progress by the superpowers particularly affected students at Kabul University because they went through an almost entirely foreign-sponsored education system. In his analysis of the Global Cold War, Westad describes the rise of education in Asia, Africa, and Latin America as an "education revolution". The promotion of formal education was a central element of the Cold War competition in the areas of development and the creation of modern nation states. For international donors, it was an opportunity to shape the minds of students as future leaders.[46] Universities around the world were built and expanded as part of the Cold War competition in developing the Third World.[47] Since universities were dominated by colonial, post-colonial, and Cold War power structures, many people in Third World countries perceived them as "foreign bodies".[48] At the same time, however, such education facilities provided agency: the impact of Cold War development aid created a new generation with a specific self-consciousness.[49] The education system defined by ideas of Western modernity, however, granted students access to the kind of knowledge upon which Western superiority was built, and thus promised respect.[50] In post-colonial contexts, graduates would be able to fill the positions previously held by the colonizers. Similarly, in Afghanistan the boost to

44 David C. Engerman et al. 2003. For a detailed analysis of the formulation of modernization theory in relation the Marxism-Leninism see Gilman 2003, 53.
45 Latham 2010, 267; Roberts 2010, 513–14.
46 Westad 2010, 93.
47 See, for example, Hanna 1975, 6–7; Suri 2003, 90; Tsvetkova 2008, 199.
48 Monaville 2013, 162.
49 Hanna 1975, 2.
50 Charton-Bigot 2010, 105.

the education system came with the promise that future governments would not depend on foreign university instructors, construction companies, and political advisors.[51] The education system, and particularly Kabul University, reflects the interrelatedness of domination and facilitation resulting from imperial and Cold War power structures.

Beyond this general framework of ideological competition and resulting power structures, the Cold War was not static; its dynamics changed over time. To students in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the Cold War had a different meaning than to students in the 1980s. Historiography on the "Global 1960s" deals with the accumulation of protest, upheavals, and resistance against national and international political structures throughout the world. During that period, ideas of progress galvanized young people, particularly students, be it in support of one of the dominant ideas or in search of an alternative. Political activism at Kabul University, I argue, should be understood in the context of the globally interconnected enthusiasm for new ideas and demands for change.

The case of political activism at Kabul University and at other educational institutions in Afghanistan has not yet been considered in the historiography on the Global 1960s. All movements (or sometimes governments) discussed in the context of the Global 1960s have a transnational or even global aspect, and yet their forms and claims differ in fundamental ways. Nevertheless, many lines can be drawn between students' demonstrations and strikes in countries around the world.[52] As Martin Klimke and Mary Nolan argue in their "Routledge Handbook of the Global Sixties," one of these lines is that all movements studied in the context of the Global 1960s expressed "dissatisfaction with the existing political, socioeconomic, and cultural status quo and a challenge to the domestic and international order as they saw it." The actors of the Global 1960s often used similar forms of protest and "a globally circulating arsenal of intellectual reference points."[53] The relevance of the local – and sometimes national – should not be underestimated and yet, the broad variety of protest movements of the time had common denominators.

The discussion has not focused on the relationship of the protests of the Global 1960s to the Cold War, though Jeremy Suri has raised the topic. He argues that the international and domestic orders that were the targets of protests in this period were defined by the Cold War. According to Suri, it is central that the Cold War order was built on a rhetoric of linear progress. Suri argues that the strong

51 Hodgkinson and Melchiorre 2019, S3; Schenck 2019, 150–51.
52 One exception is an essay by Ruttig 2018.
53 Klimke and Nolan 2018, 6.

ideological rhetoric of the early Cold War years had created expectations for a better future. The perceived stagnation of the 1960s caused discontent and protests against the existing order. His main focus here lies on the idea that the material improvement mainly experienced by people in the United States and Western Europe was not fulfilling and that protests were stirred by the disappointment with this form of progress.[54]

Research explicitly focusing on protests in the Third World has shown that some differentiation within the Global 1960s is necessary. In many countries, the socio-economic situation of the post-war years was different from that in the United States and Western Europe. Numerous countries gained independence from colonial rulers during the 1960s and experienced the accompanying political and economic challenges of this process. Other countries were still part of colonial or semi-colonial structures, many of them struggling for independence. In their edited volume "The Global 1960s in the Third World," Samantha Christiansen and Zachary A. Scarlett approach the 1960s from the perspective of these countries. The editors argue that young people in the First and Second Worlds expressed "a desire to completely remove oneself from society." They challenged societal rules and longed for alternative ways of life. Protests in the United States or West Germany resulted from this wish. Young people in the Third World, however, wanted to "drop *in* to society." Protest in the Third World thus expressed the wish of young and educated elites in countries with politics dominated by the First and Second Worlds (be it in a colonial, semi-colonial, or post-colonial context) to determine the future of their country and not to be treated as inferior.[55] In one of the volume's articles, Konrad Kuhn specifies what it meant for young people to express the wish to "drop in". Protesters during the 1960s, he writes, were looking for a new framework to solve the "issues regarding the inequitable relationships between the Third World and Europe", among other things. This search, he points out, "opened windows for agency and opportunity for actors from the Third World that had not existed before."[56]

Taken together, Suri's and Christiansen and Scarlett's arguments suggest that, while protesters in Europe and the USA expressed discontent with the predominant rhetoric of progress, protesters in the Third World wanted to fight

54 Suri 2009, 47; Suri 2003, 164. Suri has been criticized for his structural and rather superficial analysis of the topic which does not take the lived experiences of actors of the 1960s into account (Farber 2013, 1). Nevertheless, the general idea of Suri's argument is important: Great power politics and the related rhetoric of progress defined the global order – with different implications in different contexts.

55 Christiansen and Scarlett 2013a, 8–9.

56 Kuhn 2013, 70.

the perceived stagnation in their environment. In the case of Kabul University, I argue, students were actively engaging with the existing ideas of progress in their struggle for an independent and prosperous Afghanistan within or against the power structures of the Cold War.

The dynamics of the Cold War in the 1980s were significantly different from those in the 1960s. As this book focuses on the heights of student activism in the late 1960s/early 1970s and its development during the war in the 1980s, the 1970s as a historical period are of minor relevance to this study. The Global 1960s did not end in 1969 but reached well into the 1970s as many of the political actors (be they individuals, groups, parties, or governments) involved in challenging the political order continued their activities at different levels over the following years.[57] Analyses of the 1980s usually begin with the Iranian revolution in early 1979, leaving only a short gap between the Global 1960s and the 1980s.

The 1980s are oftentimes defined by a teleological perspective on the end of the Cold War.[58] The focus on the end of the Cold War leads to the question of what happened to the bipolarity of the world, its differing models of progress, and its global implications. Scholars tend to analyze the 1980s as the decade in which the multi-polarity of the global political system of later years has its roots. From the perspective of the superpowers, the 1980s were the opposite of the 1960s: grand visions of state-sponsored progress were replaced by a decline in ideological competition. While the Soviet military intervention marked the hottest phase of the Cold War in Afghanistan, the political discussions and summits accompanying the war illustrate the increasing wish for peace and cooperation, especially from the Soviet side. In this narrative, Reagan and Thatcher were, by and large, successful with their policies of economic liberalization. The period was not without social and political conflicts; as the gap between rich and poor widened, questions of social justice and discrimination raised in the 1960s were still being fought over, and activism concerning health and environmental issues increased. These conflicts did not question the hegemonic position of the United

57 Christiansen and Scarlett 2013a, 5; DeGroot 2016, 8; Suri 2009, 53; Suri 2003, 214–15. Hellema complicates this perspective in his take on the Global 1970s: political discussions did not cease to exist and struggles for a better future did not end entirely, but the galvanized political atmosphere characteristic for the Global 1960s was not dominant in the mid-1970s anymore, Hellema 2018.

58 The narrative of Jonathan Shaw Davis' contribution *The Global 1980s: People, Power and Profit* to the Routledge book series on decades in global history is defined by the political framework set by Raegan and Thatcher finally leading to what he describes as the victory of democracy, Davis 2019. Another example of a book discussing the "last decade of the Cold War" mainly in the context of US-American and Soviet politics is Njølstad 2004.

States, though. In the Soviet Union, new promises and hope for change came with President Gorbachev – a key figure of this period. At the same time, he is held culpable for disrupting the ideological bipolarity and thereby delegitimizing the Soviet Union's claims to power.[59]

The new configuration of the ideological competition had a significant impact on students at Kabul University beyond the military confrontation in Afghanistan. In their edited volume *The End of the Cold War and the Third World*, Kalinovsky and Radchenko argue that by the 1980s the governments of the United States and the Soviet Union had abandoned their ability to develop Third World countries according to their respective ideas of modernity.[60] Other scholars date the beginning of this development to earlier years,[61] but the consequences appeared in the superpowers' policies towards Third World countries in the 1980s. Scholars agree that, during this period, Third World countries became a mere stage of interventions against Soviet influence for Reagan's government, while the Soviet Union rather tried to disengage from its commitments around the globe.[62] The resulting US-American funding of armed groups fighting the Soviet Union and the Soviet reluctance to support socialist regimes stands in contrast to the earlier competition that used development aid and intellectual stimulation to convince people around the world of the superiority of one of the two models of progress.

In this narrative, the decline of ideological competition towards the end of the Cold War contributed to the development of a more multi-polar world. Westad argues that the concept of the Third World ceased to make sense, as it had previously been defined by and in contrast to the bi-polar system of the Cold War.[63] Scholars tend to mention the "rise of Islamism" to global relevance along with the dissolution of bi-polarity (with an accompanying Third World) as an example of how the world became more diverse. Islamism was not a new force, Saikal points out in an article on Islamism and the Cold War. Rather, he writes, Islamism gained strength in opposition to the strong US-American and Soviet influence in Iran and Afghanistan.[64] Hanhimäki, in contrast, argues in his volume on the end of the Cold War that the "rise of political Islam" had been covered up by Cold War binaries and came into view as these crumbled.[65] In his analysis of the

59 Davis 2019, 116, 180–81.
60 Kalinovsky and Radchenko 2011a, 5.
61 See, for example, Latham 2010, 260.
62 See, for example, Gasbarri 2020, 3; Kalinovsky and Radchenko 2011a, 1; Savranskaya 2011, 23; Westad 2010, 331–33, 364.
63 Westad 2010, 387.
64 Saikal 2010, 112.
65 Hanhimäki 2018, 2.

1980s, Davis discusses the 1979 revolution in Iran as one of the main events that began the changes of the 1980s.[66] He argues that the revolution "set in motion the start of a new challenge to western liberal democracy, ultimately replacing that of Soviet socialism."[67] Similarly, Westad sees the Iranian revolution as a turning point, changing "the pattern that revolutionary insurgencies against the established order came mainly from the Marxist-inspired left."[68] In another article, Westad points out that the increasing influence of Islamism was a result of a general disappointment with Cold War ideologies. Both Westad and Duara take the Iranian and Afghan cases as proof of the "rise of Islamism" when they argue that the US-American and Soviet support for the respective regimes had not brought any improvement in the lives of people and Islamism promised an alternative.[69]

My research on students' political activism at Kabul University questions the narrative of the "rise of Islamism" as a result of the end of the Cold War. I argue that, as an alternative to the US-American and Soviet models of progress, Islamism was neither new nor was it more successful in fascinating university students in the 1980s. While scholars such as Dorronsoro describe Islam as a uniting force,[70] in the fifth and sixth chapter I show that, at least among university students, Islamism was never dominant. My analysis suggests that the emphasis on the "rise of Islamism" towards the end of the Cold War in the existing literature is caused by the relevance attached to the topic today rather than by its actual relevance in the 1980s.

Generally, the argument of increasing multi-polarity should be taken with caution. Particularly in the Third World, the Cold War had never been bi-polar. Instead, as Bradley points out, pan-Islamic as well as pan-Asian and pan-African ideas predated the Cold War and played into political developments and ideas in many Third World countries.[71] These ideas contributed to the superpowers' disenchantment with the idea of modernizing the Third World.[72] The ideological competition had not been bi-polar since China joined the competition surrounding paths towards progress from the late 1960s at the latest.[73] The case of students at Kabul University illustrates – as the second and fifth chapter particularly show – that this

66 Davis 2019, 20.
67 Ibid., 9.
68 Westad 2010, 288.
69 Westad 2005, 75; Duara 2011, 478.
70 Dorronsoro 2005, 104–05.
71 Bradley 2010, 467–68.
72 Latham 2010, 268.
73 Lanza 2013, 149; Latham 2010; Kalinovsky and Radchenko 2011a, 3.

Chinese model was of vital importance to political movements in the Third World and cannot be subsumed under the label of socialism along with the Soviet Union. China's role as a propagator of an alternative idea of progress declined during the 1970s and 1980s, during a time when multi-polarity supposedly increased. With China's abandonment of Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought in economic policies, its rapprochement with the United States, and the end of the confrontation with the Soviet Union, China not only ceased to propagate an alternative, but also discouraged many leftist movements in the Third World in their wish to achieve socialism.[74] To question the idea of increasing multi-polarity does not mean supporting a postulated victory of the United States in the Cold War.[75] Rather, in the case of students at Kabul University, the 1980s did not bring about any new alternatives. Disappointed by all options they had discussed, many students lost their interest in politics.

My interest in Kabul University's role in political developments in Afghanistan was sparked by noticing the absence of students in the existing historiography on the topic. Therefore, the narrations of my interlocutors stand in the foreground of this study. The preceding review of literature on the history of Afghanistan and the Cold War gives rise to a twofold relevance of the analysis of students' memories. Firstly, investigating the students at Kabul University as actors within a global system of hegemonic power structures can serve as a corrective to the wide-spread focus on political elites and international geopolitics. I question the relevance of ideologies and foreign domination. My research shows that students engaged with ideologies promoted during the Cold War and discussed them in the context of their experiences of Afghanistan's social and political situation. In the end, none of the existing narratives of progress convinced the students, given that they legitimated violence and destruction instead of peace and prosperity. Secondly, this study emphasizes that the possibilities for the future seemed much more diverse to the students than they do in hindsight. Embracing my interlocutors' different and even contradicting perspectives on history allows for a nuanced historiography of the second half of the 20th century in Afghanistan in its global context.

74 Jian 2011, 101, 117–19; Westad 2010, 362.

75 Ikenberry, for example, claims that the post-Cold War order was defined by the US-American model of progress and alternatives only played a marginal role, Ikenberry 2010, 536–37.

1.3 Sources

Oral history interviews are the core element of this book. I turned to oral history both due to the lack of written sources suitable to answer my research questions and for the benefits of interviews as a source. Generally, few written sources are available on the political movements active at Kabul University in the 1960s to 1980s. Most of the documents circulating among politically interested students at that time were handwritten copies of (extracts from) books, speeches, or pamphlets. Few, perhaps none, of these documents have survived. The only official publications are some party programs (mainly of the PDPA) and some newspapers published by the movements or people related to them in the late 1960s. As I will discuss in the following, I do refer to these documents, but they hardly provide any insights into the actual dynamics of political activism at the university. Oral history interviews, in contrast, can shed light on these dynamics.

The main sources for this study are interviews with 52 interlocutors totaling almost 80 hours of recorded interviews, along with notes of four unrecorded interviews, all conducted between 2017 and 2020. 50 of the interlocutors were students at Kabul University between 1964 and 1992. Most of the interlocutors studied at Kabul University for four to five years, but some of them left earlier – either because they received a scholarship to go abroad or because they fled the country – and others remained there longer because of changes in faculties or interruptions caused by arrests, expulsions, or flight from political persecution. Two other interlocutors were recommended to me and explained that they had not studied at Kabul University only during the interview. Since they participated in the activism, one as a high school student and the other as an activist based in Germany, I used the interviews for this study. I conducted most interviews with individuals, but also used group interviews, for example when interlocutors brought friends along or I met a married couple at home. I met the majority of my interlocutors only once and an interview usually lasted between 45 minutes and two hours. Depending both on the possibility to meet an interlocutor again and on my expectation of how much he or she could further contribute to my research, I met some interlocutors twice or even three times, with some follow-up interviews taking place via phone.

I conducted approximately one third of the interviews in Kabul and the others in Germany and London. Due to security constraints, I could only stay in Kabul for three weeks. As many former students had left Afghanistan, sometimes in pursuit of a career abroad but in most cases fleeing persecution and/or the violence of war, I found many former students of Kabul University in Germany and the UK. The fact that I met a large share of my interlocutors in Europe leads to certain biases. Students who studied abroad are overrepresented in my sample.

Living in Europe, some interlocutors might have developed a different perspective on life in Kabul and the meaning of political activism during their time as students. However, comparing the interviews I conducted in Afghanistan to those I conducted in Europe, I could not find proof for this assumption. Similarly, I did not find any evidence for systematic divergence between interviews conducted in German, English, or Dari.

The sample of interlocutors was gathered by snowballing from a broad variety of entry points. Some of the former students had been active members or sympathizers of a political organization, while others had tried to remain neutral. The sample is diverse and yet, it does not represent the student body in its composition of different political and ethnic groups, in the faculties the students attended, or in terms of gender and socio-economic background. Rather than assembling a representative sample, it was my intention to create a sample with narratives that can highlight the exceptional as well as the ordinary.[76]

In addition to the oral sources, this study relies on written documents as primary sources. Daily newspapers, such as *Anis* and *Kabul Times*, underwent strict censorship and hardly mention any oppositional political activities. Newspaper articles mainly help to clarify chronologies and some other facts, such as the structure of the university. In some cases, they help to juxtapose the representation of a policy or an event by the government with the perspective of my interlocutors. Many issues of these newspapers have been digitalized by the Universities of Arizona and Nebraska.[77] In addition, I found German and Swiss newspaper articles in a collection of the Bibliotheca Afghanica in Switzerland. Kabul University publications are available at the Bibliotheca Afghanica and the Library of the Afghanistan Center at Kabul University. Private newspapers related to a specific party, namely *Khalq*, *Parcham, Shu'la-ye Javid,* and *Gahiz,* contribute to an understanding of what students at Kabul University read and which topics shaped their intellectual environment. I acquired some copies of *Khalq*, *Shu'la-ye Javid,* and *Gahiz* through the National Archive in Kabul and found digital versions of most issues of *Parcham* online.[78]

Another kind of written source occasionally used in this thesis are autobiographies and memoirs. Some former students of Kabul University, such as Rangin

76 Green 2011, 107; Dodd 2013, 39–40.

77 *Anis*, https://content.library.arizona.edu/digital/collection/p16127coll5/search/, last accessed December 8, 2020, and *Kabul Times*: https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/kabultimes/, last accessed December 8, 2020. As the digitalized version of *Kabul Times* is searchable I used this newspaper more often than *Anis*.

78 https://rahparcham1.org, last accessed December 8, 2020.

Dadfar Spanta and Sultan Ali Kishtmand, became renowned politicians and thus wrote their memoirs.[79] One autobiography is that of a former female student of Kabul University, who describes how she grew up in the political turmoil of the time.[80] Two of my interlocutors wrote novels, the plots of which take up their experiences as students involved in the political developments of the 1960s to 1980s. Being novels, these texts are fictional, but the interlocutors confirmed the authenticity of some of the scenes.

1.4 Oral History

Oral historians have come to appreciate the benefits of subjectivity, as it facilitates a nuanced and lively historiography. The overt subjectivity of oral history brings the meaning to the fore and shifts apparent facts to the background.[81] In its analysis of the interviews, this study follows a phenomenological approach, focusing on what my interlocutors told me, instead of a discursive approach, focusing on how they shared their memories with me.[82]

A legitimate critique of oral history is the difficulty separating multiple layers of the past and present in the memories. The process of selecting and connecting memories to each other continues over time.[83] The personal and political conditions in which my interlocutors remembered their time as students have changed multiple times over the intervening 30 to 50 years. My interlocutors had probably recounted parts of these stories numerous times, in different social and cultural contexts, each time attaching different significances to their memories. Some scholars argue that experiences tend to be better remembered over the long term if they are deemed relevant.[84] Seen from this perspective, the high relevance former students attach to their time as university students might have positively affected the accuracy of their memories.

Alessandro Portelli points out that changes in memory do not create false memories, but rather alter the way narrators present their memories. He argues that the kind of (il)legitimacy attached to a narration of the past in the present

79 Spanta 1396 (2017); Kishtmand 2002.
80 Baha 2013.
81 Portelli 2006, 36–37; Janesick 2014, 300.
82 Brinkmann 2014, 294.
83 Portelli 2006, 38; Ritchie 2011a, 12; Roseman 2006, 231; Thomson 2011, 90.
84 Thomson 2011, 84–85.

leads to omissions. The fact that interlocutors omit parts of a past development can be telling, Portelli concludes.[85]

Nostalgia, in particular, can lead interlocutors to adapt their narration by highlighting some aspects while omitting others.[86] As many of my interlocutors view their time at Kabul University as the best years of their lives, nostalgia was a major component of most interviews. One example is how several interlocutors talked about the walls around Kabul University. When the campus was opened in 1964, it did not have walls and students would enter and leave the ground not only via the streets but also through the park surrounding the faculties. This was the case until the early 1980s, when the campus was fenced off with barbed wire to facilitate security checks at the university's gates. During the time Ashraf Ghani was president of the university (2004 to 2008), walls were built around the campus, clearly separating it from the rest of the city.[87] The walls around the campus of Kabul University are symbolic for the change in how it is perceived; in interviews, interlocutors emphasize that back then, Kabul University was not as it is now. The walls also symbolize how difficult it is to reconstruct the past in a society that has changed so profoundly.

The nostalgia with which many of my interlocutors look back at their time at Kabul University, expressed in frequent comparisons with the social and political situation at the time of the interviews, emphasizes the positive aspects of student life while tending to suppress the negative ones. The student years carry positive connotations even for those of my interlocutors who studied during times of war, who spent several months in jail, or who experienced the loss of close family members during that period of their lives. Many of my interlocutors left Afghanistan while studying or shortly after graduation, fleeing political persecution and war. Even those who stayed in or returned to Kabul would not find the same city, as (civil) wars had changed it. Most of my interlocutors also expressed dissatisfaction with the situation in Afghanistan in the 2010s. In comparison, they remember their time as students as "golden times". This necessarily biases the data. Most importantly, however, my interlocutors were usually glad to talk about their memories and gave vivid accounts of how they lived back then and how times have since changed.

85 Portelli 2006, 38.

86 Helgren 2015, 52; Shircliffe 2001, 62.

87 For example, anonymous interview, Kabul, July 24, 2018; Musa Fariwar, in conversation with the author, Kabul, May 1, 2018; Wais, in conversation with the author, London, February 3, 2018. I did not find any precise information on when the walls were built, but my interlocutors attributed this change to Ashraf Ghani's presidency of the university.

Intentional omission of some memories in the interviews is an important aspect in the third chapter, where I discuss the role of ideology in political activism. Some of my interlocutors, who were followers of theories of Marx or Mao Zedong, are more sceptical of these ideas today and do not want to, for example, be accused of atheism. They might thus downplay their engagement with a certain political movement. While some interlocutors consciously choose to present their participation in an altered way, others might do so unconsciously as a reaction to trauma and feelings of guilt. This is an inevitable caveat, as it is not my role to detect supposed truths and lies in interviews. However, the large number of interviews I conducted enabled me to point out potential omissions, which I convey to the reader through my analysis. Beyond this, it is part of the agency and subjectivity that I want to highlight with this study that interlocutors think of some aspects as irrelevant and do not mention them in the interviews.

Another challenge in using oral history interviews as a source is the lack of chronological coherence in the accounts of my interlocutors. Interlocutors are only likely to remember the chronology of developments when it has a specific importance.[88] Reconstructing a timeline of political events at Kabul University is not the goal of my study, but sometimes chronology is important. In the second and fifth chapters, for example, I discuss how different political organizations were formed (and dissolved) over time. In these cases, I arrived at a much clearer understanding of my interlocutors' narratives when I used written sources such as newspaper articles and eyewitness accounts to reconstruct some chronology of the events mentioned in the interviews.

Finally, the agency of the interlocutors and the interviewer pose a challenge to historical analysis. Generally, as discussed earlier, the agency of interlocutors is one of the positive aspects of interviewing as it gives a voice to actors thus far lacking in historiography. This agency can become problematic, though, when used to promote a specific political position and to discredit others – a common concern of scholars interviewing (former) political activists.[89] Several of my interlocutors enjoyed talking about that period of their lives, but also used the interview to express their political opinion on the recent history of Afghanistan. Since the political activism of the 1960s and 1970s is commonly perceived as a prelude to the later violence, some of my interlocutors felt guilty for their respective earlier political views. At the same time, almost all of them voiced accusations towards others as well. Some narrators warned me not to rely on interviews with others since they would certainly lie to me. In contrast to this warning, it was beneficial

88 Thomson 2011, 84–85.
89 Rogers 2017, 187.

to speak with a large number of interlocutors with different political views. As a result, I could place the mutual accusations into a larger context.

My positionality is mainly defined by my relationship to Afghanistan and its history in general, and by my relationship to the interlocutors as individuals. I do not have any personal background defining a relationship to Afghanistan except for a genuine research interest. In comparison to researchers who grew up in the country or lived there for a longer period of time, I might lack some broader cultural knowledge that could help me to understand nuances in interviews. Also, my language skills are limited. While I did conduct some interviews and read sources in Dari, I could only get a general idea of sources written in Pashto and did not consider sources in any other local languages. However, the benefit of my purely academic relationship to Afghanistan is that I am not partial in the political conflicts discussed in this book. I assume that my interlocutors perceived me as a more neutral listener than most people with roots in Afghanistan, whose backgrounds the narrators would link to one side of a given conflict or another. Being a German citizen makes me a "Westerner", of course. And yet, as I discussed with many of my interlocutors, they did not associate me with one side of the Cold War because I grew up after the reunification of Germany. For my interlocutors, my positionality was thus mainly defined by North/South and not by East/West divides.

Hierarchies between me and my interlocutors resulting from age, gender and, in some cases, academic degree oftentimes limited my ability to lead the interview. In return, this hierarchy allowed my interlocutors to feel free to talk about what they wanted to tell me – sometimes starting their statements without even giving me a chance to ask a single question. Overall, most of my interlocutors expressed their appreciation for my efforts in engaging with the history of Afghanistan in general, and their memories, in particular. This usually led to a positive attitude towards my research and a willingness to contribute by answering my questions.

1.5 Navigating a Verbal Minefield

I already discussed my rhetoric concerning the global political context in the context of the literature review: although the Cold War caused many "hot" wars, I use the term "Cold War" understood as a historical period defined by specific hegemonic power structures. Consequently, I refer to the Third World as a political construct created within and against the hegemonic power structures of the Cold War. The ideas of linear "progress" and "modernity" are not specific to the Cold War and much discussion has evolved around the question of how to deal

with them in historical analysis. I follow Frederick Cooper's advice, who argues that scholars should "listen to what is being said in the world. If modernity is what they hear, they should ask how it is being used and why."[90] Consequently, whenever ideas of progress and modernity come up in my sources, I discuss the context and meaning the respective interlocutor or author might have attached to the word.

When writing on Afghanistan, challenges in the choice of words begin with the word Afghan. Much discussion evolves around the history and its implications in terms of ethnicity and power structures.[91] In most cases, I try to avoid the term by writing about people living in Afghanistan or people who come from Afghanistan. In some cases, however, this practice leads to complicated sentences, and I do use "Afghan" for the sake of readability. In these cases, the word is used as an adjective relating to the name of the country and does not imply an ethnic or linguistic dimension. Similarly, the words "Persian", "Farsi", and "Dari" are shaped by a long history of political struggles.[92] Due to the lack of a neutral word, I use the word "Dari" when not quoting an interlocutor who used another term.

So far, little attention has been paid to the ways in which scholars write about the political organizations active in Afghanistan during the second half of the 20th century. Scholars have noted the difficulty in defining political currents, movements, and political parties in this context.[93] This confusion partly stems from the lack of a legal framework for the foundation of political parties during the period relevant to this study. Nevertheless, many political organizations emerged that formally had the structures of parties but which called themselves organization (*sāzmān*), movement (*ḥarakat*), current (*jariyān*), or front (*mahāẓ*). Informally, however, most of them were referred to as parties (*hizb*). By writing "political party" I emphasize a group's formalized structures, whereas a "political movement" is less formalized. "Political organization" includes both forms.

The designation of the people active within these groups is directly related to the question of the verbal framing of political organization. Some scholars tend to subsume all people active in oppositional political activities under the term "radicals". In contrast, I write of "political activism" and "activists". I use "political activism" here for any engagement with politics in a very broad sense, ranging from participation in public political discussions, demonstrations, and strikes to being a leading figure in a political organization. "Political activists" can thus be

90 Cooper 2005, 115.

91 See, for example, Green 2015a, 5–8; Manchanda 2020, 12–13.

92 For a discussion of the history of these terms see Spooner 2012.

93 See, for example, Bezhan 2013, 925; Ruttig 2006, 1.

independent of political organizations and might join in political activities only occasionally. A nuanced understanding of the different forms of political activism – which were not necessarily radical – is vital to challenging a perspective that has overemphasized the role of political parties and ideologies.

To differentiate between the different political organizations, most scholars use the designations "communists", "Maoists", and "Islamists" (or even "Ikhwani", short for Ikhwan ul-Muslimin – Muslim Brothers). Some of my interlocutors used these terms, too, although not as a self-reference but to refer to somebody else, mostly with an implicit accusation. Since the Soviet-Afghan War at the latest, "communist" has been closely associated with atheism and domination by the Soviet Union. In Afghanistan, referring to somebody as a "communist" today implies an accusation of bearing responsibility for the Soviet military intervention. People might have described themselves as "communists" when they were students, but now mostly distance themselves from the word.

Followers of the political movement Shu'la-ye Javid are usually referred to as "Maoists". As discussed by Julia Lovell in her *Global History of Maoism*, the term "Maoism" is generally problematic, since it is mainly an etic term that bears negative connotations.[94] Thus, the "Shu'lais" never wanted to be called Maoist, one of my interlocutors told me. Even though he now uses the term himself, they did not want to be reduced to Mao at the time, rather seeing themselves in the broader tradition of Marxism-Leninism, as he said.

> Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin, and Mao Zedong. These five people. Mao was not a Maoist, but a Marxist-Leninist. And we relied on Marxism-Leninism. So we did not say: 'We are Maoists.' We became angry when the Khalqis said: 'You are Maoists.' We said: 'Maoism does not exist.'[95]

The term "Islamism" is in non-professional usage now strongly associated with terrorism. The usage of the term thus not only evokes a teleological perspective on a trajectory leading from the formation of Javanan-e Musulman to 9/11, but also exoticizes adherents of this group as violent warriors blinded by religion. In the academic context, Islamism refers to an ideology based on the agenda of creating a social and political system defined by Islam.[96] While I use the term in some cases, as it is the most precise description, I mostly avoid it because of the

94 Lovell 2019, 26.

95 Massum Faryar, in conversation with the author, Berlin, June 19, 2019.

96 This is, of course, a brief and insufficient definition of Islamism. A proper definition is subject to much academic discussion. For more elaborate definitions see, for example, Roxanne L. Euben and Muhammad Q. Zaman 2009, 4; Mozaffari 2007, 17–21.

above-mentioned associations. In general, instead of using the terms "communists", "Maoists", and "Islamists" I refer to members or sympathizers of a certain group or party or adherents of a certain ideology.

Most scholars refer to almost any form of opposition to the PDPA government and Soviet engagement in Afghanistan in the 1980s as "mujahidin". The term seems to be common sense and is used without any further explanation. It is not the only term used for the armed opposition, as in the early 1980s these groups were also referred to as "guerrillas" or "rebels".[97] The term "mujahidin" implies a religious motivation. The legitimacy it suggests has certainly been in the interests of those who funded the armed opposition. The term might be appropriate in some cases, but as discussed particularly in the fifth chapter it disguises the diversity of the armed opposition. I thus generally refer to "opposition".

The persistence of Cold War rhetoric is visible in many descriptions of political events. A good example is the beginning of the Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan in December 1979 which is, especially in US-American and Western European literature, most commonly referred to as the "Soviet invasion". Scholars agree that the Soviet military intervention was preceded by multiple requests for military aid by the government of Afghanistan.[98] While it probably seemed like an invasion to many local and international observers, formally, it was not one. The term "invasion" has a clear bias, and I thus chose to use the more neutral term "Soviet military intervention".

1.6 Plan of the Book

This book is chronologically divided into two parts. In the first part, I discuss political activism at Kabul University from 1964 to 1978. The first chapter explores the setting of Kabul University with its international environment and students' high ambitions to acquire knowledge. Atiq, a student at the Faculty of Sciences in the late 1960s and early 1970s, came from a village in Kandahar Province where few children had hitherto received even as much as a primary education. Facilitated by his father's belief in the benefits of education, Atiq attended a secondary boarding school in Kabul and was then accepted to Kabul University. He enjoyed his life as a student and the prestige and opportunities that came with it, and struggled to learn as much as possible while the campus became more and more

97 See, for example, Kayhan International Teheran 1981.

98 For analyses of the background of the Soviet military intervention see, for example, Barfield 2010, 232; Hartman 2002, 470.

dominated by strikes and demonstrations. With the support of his German teachers, Atiq received a scholarship to continue his education in Germany after graduating from Kabul University. Atiq's narration, I argue in the chapter, shows how students' lives became objects of the competition of ideas of progress and how this laid the basis for the widespread political activism at the university.

The second chapter presents the memories of two interlocutors, Tahera Shams and Mohammad Omar Halif. Both experienced injustice and understood political activism as an opportunity to fight for change in society. Both became students of the Faculty of Literature at Kabul University. Their ideas for political change strongly differed, however. Tahera Shams became a Shu'lai, helping to distribute literature written by Mao, while Mohammad Omar Halif joined Javanan-e Musulman to protect the role of Islam in Afghanistan's society from foreign influence. In an environment in which collective protest against the existing social and political order was increasingly replaced by violent conflicts between different political organizations, they fled the country in fear of persecution for their political beliefs in 1976 and 1978 respectively.

The third chapter follows the memories of Zalmai, who became a convinced member of the Khalq wing of the PDPA while he was a student at a vocational high school in Helmand Province. In 1970, he came to Kabul to study at the Faculty of Agriculture. Zalmai was a nationalist who believed that Afghanistan had to catch up with "the West" to become a strong and independent country. Disappointed by the government's unfulfilled promises of modernization, Zalmai came to trust in the Soviet idea of progress, which combined anti-imperialism and social justice with rapid industrialization and power. Zalmai's narration draws attention to the multiple dimensions of students' imaginations of progress and the role ideologies played in the galvanization of students at Kabul University.

The second part of this book deals with political activism at, and later its absence from, Kabul University in the 1980s. In the fourth chapter, Farzanah's memories show how she had set her hopes on the promises of the PDPA regime to improve the lives of women in Afghanistan, but became alienated from the party as she witnessed the violence used by the new government. Farzanah had grown up in many different cities in Afghanistan and hoped that the PDPA regime would at last bring about change and abolish inequality after a long period of stagnation under previous governments. She was grateful for being granted the opportunity to study in Kyiv and enrolled in the newly opened program of dentistry at Kabul University after her return. When her father was arrested for voicing an unwanted opinion and her brothers had to either flee the country or stay at home to avoid forced recruitment to the army, she disengaged from her participation in the university's section of the PDPA's women's organization.

The fifth chapter deals with the narrations of two former students who were opposed to the PDPA government and the Soviet engagement in Afghanistan. Sangin Taheri was loosely related to Shu'la-ye Javid through his family and joined one of the oppositional splinter groups active some months after the coup in 1978. To him, ideology was of minor importance in the struggle for independence from the Soviet Union. Hamed Elmi, in turn, did not have any relationship to a political organization before the Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan, but then engaged in organizing protests. He considered publicly practicing Islam as a means of showing resistance to the PDPA regime and the Soviet Union. When he was a university student, most public protests by students were violently suppressed by the government. Hamed Elmi, however, secretly supported the armed opposition through intelligence work. Both Hamed Elmi and Sangin Taheri left Afghanistan before graduating from university in fear of being arrested. Their narrations show how lines of conflicts that had emerged in the 1960s between political organizations persisted in students' opposition to the PDPA government, while at the same time the role of divergent ideologies declined in the face of the brutal repression exerted by the government.

The last chapter follows the narration of Najia Ahmad, who studied at Kabul University in the second half of the 1980s. Her narration shows that the joy of freedom and eagerness for knowledge of student life persisted, the war in the country notwithstanding. The chapter reflects on how the role of the university in society had changed while interest in politics declined until classes were at last factually suspended due to the civil war.

1964–1978

2 Kabul University in the 1960s

> Gradually people began to look with respect upon this young, serious man, who spoke about everything simply and boldly, and almost never laughed, who looked at everybody and listened to everybody with an attention which searched stubbornly into every circumstance, and always found a certain general and endless thread binding people together by a thousand tightly drawn knots.
> (*Maxim Gorky, Mother, p. 64*)

This chapter, which is inspired by Atiq's narration, analyzes what it means to him to have been a student in Afghanistan in the 1960s. As he grew up in a village with little access to education, his story can be understood as a classical narrative of modernization: a village boy transformed into a modern man by education. From Atiq's perspective, however, it is not only the story of how he was modernized but also of how he experienced the implications of Cold War politics in Kabul. The main objective of this chapter is to introduce the setting of Kabul University with its reputation for being the intellectual center of the country and outlining the omnipresence of political activism in the 1960s. I argue that Atiq's narrative reflects the special position of students in society. In this context, the university appears as an island of what international donors understood as modernity. Like many of his fellow students, Atiq embraced the idea of a modern, sophisticated intellectual. Students like him transformed the campus into a vibrant grounds for political discussions.

The specific atmosphere at the university was shaped by students' enthusiasm to study at Kabul University and to engage in political discussions. How was this specific atmosphere created? What did it mean to students to study at Kabul University? What was the role of the university and its students in society? In this chapter, I argue that the specific atmosphere at Kabul University was closely related to the Global Cold War. The massive influx of development aid defined the trajectories of students' lives: most students enjoyed their access to forms of knowledge closely associated with ideas of modernity and prosperity and students derived a strong self-consciousness from their position as future leaders.

Guided by Atiq's story, the chapter consists of three subchapters. In the first, I point to the specific position of students in society. In the second subchapter, I discuss how students became objects of the international pursuit of progress and experienced its benefits and limits. Finally, I analyze how the intellectual exercise of engagement with political ideas contributed to the galvanization of many students on campus and how this environment made it impossible to remain neutral.

https://doi.org/10.1515/ 9783111150543-002

Atiq, as he wants to be called in this book, lives in a city in western Germany and we met twice in cafes where elderly people enjoy their afternoon coffee. In contrast to most other interviews, the first interview with Atiq was guided by a questionnaire consisting of some general questions regarding his childhood and his time at university. Atiq had thought about the questions and came to the interview with some notes. Being a great storyteller, he gave me a detailed and lively account of his childhood, youth, and early adulthood, which I recorded. While the questions I had provided him with facilitated a smooth interview, they made it difficult to focus on the aspects of his story that were particularly interesting, as I had very limited information on him when preparing the questions. During a second interview with follow-up questions, Atiq asked me not to record but to take notes. All references to his story are based on these two interviews.[1]

Atiq was not a political activist. And yet, his perspective on student activism at Kabul University provides a vital introduction to the topic for two reasons. Firstly, when discussing political activism at the university, it is important to remember the many different shades of what this activism meant to students. In historical accounts, political activism is usually reduced to descriptions of the different parties active on campus, but by far not everybody was involved in party politics. All students were affected, though, when classes were cancelled because of strikes and demonstrations. Secondly, it is a challenge to navigate between the narrations of former students who accuse the respective others of being responsible for all the tragedies in the country and of not telling the truth. Atiq was not neutral, as it was impossible to remain neutral at Kabul University in the late 1960s, but his narration focuses on the activities of daily life rather than on the conflicts between the various political movements. This chapter thus gives some space to understanding the setting in which the activism emerged before exploring the conflicts in more detail in the following chapters.

2.1 The Pride of Being a Student

Asked for a particularly positive memory of his time at Kabul University, Atiq recounts:

> Although we were a rich family, we did not have much money. So, I had to teach while I was studying. Once [...] I was teaching in the neighbouring school. And then, suddenly, two or three weeks later, a new student came to my class. I scolded him: 'Where have you been

1 Atiq, in conversation with the author, Germany, November 2, 2017 and March 12, 2019.

> these two, three weeks, and suddenly you turn up here?' [...] And he went home [...] and told his father – the father was the president of the parliament: 'There is somebody coming from the university, teaching us math. I would like to have him as a private teacher.' [...] So I went there for the first time. He [the president of the parliament] sent his car for me to the student dormitory. That was a very bad thing, a very bad thing that I had contact with this kind of people! And I said: 'No, I prefer to come on my own, by bus.' [...] He [the boy] was so happy that I could help him with math and I could help the people, I really enjoyed it. [...] Once, the president invited me to a wedding at Kabul Hotel where people from the royal family were invited. The cousin of this president was getting married, so he invited me. I only had simple clothes and he knew that. The king and Marshal Wahid, Sharwali Khan, Sharwali's son, they were there. And my brother told me: 'It is a good thing, you should go. This contact is good, to have contact to these people.'

Atiq tells this story with pride. Being a student at Kabul University redefined Atiq's position in society. In an environment of anti-government protests, it was unpopular to be picked up by the president of the parliament's driver, but Atiq was proud that he was invited into these circles as a respected teacher. Had he been born a generation earlier, he would have become a landowning farmer, or possibly a merchant. He, however, was a private teacher of the president of the parliament's son, attending a wedding at which the royal family was present. Atiq's social status was defined as an intellectual through education, independently of his family background.

Atiq was born in the late 1940s in a village in Kandahar, not far from the capital of the province. His family earned a living mainly from agriculture, like most families in rural areas of Afghanistan. Some owned fields and others worked in the fields. Atiq's uncle, the eldest of three brothers, was a *khān* – a leading figure in the community. Besides farming, Atiq's father was a trader. At least once a year he travelled to Kunduz Province to meet a friend and business partner to whom he sold carpets in return for other goods. When traveling to northern Afghanistan, Atiq says, his father understood that the northern people's appreciation for education would bring them benefits in the future. In contrast to Atiq's uncles, his father thus decided to ensure the education of his sons. Atiq had three brothers and all of them went to the primary school close to their village and received a secondary education at different boarding schools.

The primary school was located somewhere between Atiq's village and the adjacent one. He attended school in the morning and took care of the family's cows in the afternoon. Most of his teachers were mullahs, Atiq says. None of them had any formal training as a teacher, only a few had graduated from high school. Atiq complains that the teachers always taught straight from the schoolbooks, as they did not know anything else. The school was a well-maintained building with six classrooms, one for each class, and two offices. Later, when more students attended classes, they were taught in two shifts – one in the morning and one in

the afternoon – but during his time, in the mid and late 1950s, not many people were interested in formal education. When he missed classes for a day or two, Atiq recalls, the teacher would lash his feet and hands with a thong. Sometimes, they would slap him in the face. This is how they wanted to force children to go to school, he explains. Also, teachers would visit the families to convince them to send their children to school. However, Atiq admits, this method was hardly successful as the parents bribed the teachers with fruits and vegetables to keep their children working in the fields.

In the 1950s and 1960s, the vast majority of the population of Afghanistan was illiterate. Although the constitution of 1964 made primary education compulsory where it was available, in many rural areas there was no school.[2] While the first state-run schools (in contrast to education facilities under religious authority) were opened in Kabul in the early 20th century, the web of educational institutions had not spread to the provinces and not even primary schools could be found in some areas.[3] Additionally, as Atiq describes, many families were reluctant to send their children to school. Thus, even children from influential rural families oftentimes did not attend school. When he completed primary school, Atiq's life had already taken a different turn from those of many other children in the country.

Out of Atiq's 20 classmates, he and one other student had the possibility to attend a secondary boarding school in Kabul. The secondary school closest to his village was a West German-funded technical school in Kandahar City. Although the city center was just a few kilometers away, it would have been too far for a daily commute, so Ibn Sina School in Kabul was a better option. All his other classmates from primary school, Atiq says, discontinued schooling and stayed in the village to help their families. High schools were only to be found in the major cities. Thus, for most students from rural areas the only chance for education beyond primary school was to be accepted into one of the boarding schools. With three boarding schools in Kabul, most possibilities were concentrated in the capital. One of my interlocutors graduated from a primary school in northern Afghanistan in the early 1960s. He explains that, every year, a delegation from the Ministry of Education came to select 30 students from all schools in the province to attend Ibn Sina School in Kabul. "Coincidentally," he says, "somebody came to my school in that year and they selected me. Otherwise, I would be a farmer in the village."[4] Systematic entrance examinations were only introduced for the

2 Government of Afghanistan 2005, 18; Samady 2001, 29.
3 Sayres 1974, 185.
4 Anonymous interview, Bonn, October 4, 2017.

boarding schools in Kabul in the mid-1960s.[5] And even then, due to the limited capacities, the families' connections and good luck could determine whether one became a farmer or a doctor.

"I was so small, I could ride the bus for free. Even in the front part, with the women," Atiq explains when remembering how he came to Kabul. But he was not alone there. One of his brothers studied pharmacology at the military academy and rented a room in the city. "He always went to different places in Afghanistan, but he spent a lot of time in Kabul. A minister at that time was from the same village as my mother, and with his help, my brother had some choice of where he would be deployed," Atiq continues. He visited his brother on weekends but lived in the dormitory of the boarding school. He enjoyed living there and spending time with the other students, who came from all different parts of Afghanistan, speaking different languages and dialects. As a Pashtun boy, he says, he was treated like a little brother by the other Pashtuns, even though he did not understand their dialect well. According to Atiq's descriptions, they studied hard, but they loved it and received high marks. Once in a while, they had to help in the kitchen or form a delegation to go shopping at the market. Life in Kabul was new for Atiq, and he describes it as fascinating.

The high school provided classes from grade seven to nine. Afterwards, Atiq and his classmates were distributed to vocational high schools and colleges. Nobody asked about Atiq's plans for the future, and he was allocated to the US-American-funded Teacher Training College. After graduating from college, most students were dispatched to schools all over the country as teachers. Only top students were admitted to university. Atiq explains that the best three of his cohort were allowed to choose their subject, while the next 15 percent of the graduates were allocated to one of the faculties after being successful in the *kānkūr*, the entrance exam. As the fourth student of his class, Atiq was allocated to the Faculty of Sciences, where he began to study in the spring of 1967.

In Atiq's generation the number of students was much higher than it had been just a few years earlier. With the influx of international development aid after World War II, opportunities multiplied in the 1950s to 1970s and consequently many students received a higher education whose fathers had not even attended primary school.[6] Kabul University had, since its foundation in the 1930s, been accessible only to a handful of young men and even fewer women whose fathers were members of the state apparatus or held other prestigious jobs and expected their children to follow in their footsteps. With the global rise of formal

5 "High Schools Require Entrance Tests." *Kabul Times*, May 4, 1965.
6 Rubin 1995, 70, 76; Sawitzki 1972, 53.

education, however, more children graduated from high schools and the university expanded its capacities. In 1966, the number of students at Kabul University was ten times higher than in 1956.[7] As a consequence, the environment at the university became more diverse. Compared to the entire population, however, students were still a small and privileged group.

The expansion of the education system during this period is not particular to Afghanistan. Secondary and higher education became available to broader parts of society at the same time in other countries. In their study of university campuses, Jill Pellew and Miles Taylor describe the 1960s as "a remarkable decade of public investment in higher education."[8] Certainly, this development was not uniform throughout the globe: in China, for example, higher education experienced a backlash during the Cultural Revolution.[9] And yet, education was one of the main columns of development aid for the United States as well as the Soviet Union as it was at educational institutions that the future elite was formed and future allegiances could be prepared.[10] The conditions in which student unrest erupted in Afghanistan were thus comparable to those in many other countries.

The advancement of higher education in Afghanistan was focused on Kabul University, as the only university in the country until the mid-1980s. Kabul University was thus the main intellectual center and many students embraced their designated role as members of the intellectual elite with enthusiasm. They were eager readers and were keen to acquire and exchange knowledge. Atiq had already been a diligent student at high school. He describes how he enjoyed learning back at the boarding school, the lack of a proper reading room notwithstanding: "Because of the fact that we were 20, so many people in one room, we could not study there," he says. "Thus, we would take our blanket and would go out on the street and under the street light, we had to study there. And this was really a good thing. We learned difficult things back then!" When Atiq came to Kabul University, he was happy to see that in this environment he had even more facilities and access to more knowledge. Most of my interlocutors emphasize their enthusiasm for their classes. One of my interlocutors who studied at the Faculty of Medicine in the 1970s points out that he was most excited about the lessons

7 On the global rise of higher education: Suri 2003, 92. For numbers of students at Kabul University see: Bulatov 1997, 80; Dupree, 1971, 29; Sawitzki 1972, 86; "Freshmen Attend University Orientation Week", *Kabul Times*, April 6, 1967.

8 Taylor and Pellew 2020, 1.

9 Ibid., 1–2.

10 Lorenzini 2020, 27, 35; Tsvetkova 2008, 199.

as they gave him new information "on how the body works, how a human being functions, psychologically and physically."[11]

Many of the students spent their free time reading whatever they could get their hands on. Atiq asked one of his brothers, who sometimes travelled to India, to bring him copies of US-American books available there. He wanted to improve his English, and it was a book on astrophysics that fascinated him most. Another interlocutor describes his thirst for knowledge in the following way:

> At that time, I dealt with Albert Camus, I can remember very well, and then Franz Kafka, [...] then Berthold Brecht, [which] I read in Afghanistan, in English though. Then, I dealt a little with Hölderlin, the German poet from Heidelberg, so that's what I dealt with, with Alan Poe. Those were the things young people tried to read besides the Islamic literature or the books we were required to read and would normally read at home. This means the mind was open, yes. Practically, we wanted to go beyond the borders [...], just more knowledge, to know how the others live.[12]

Not every student at Kabul University would read books on astrophysics or poems by Hölderlin, of course. And yet, as described by my interlocutors, this thirst for knowledge characterized the atmosphere at Kabul University.

In contrast to the de-centralized Islamic education, the education system run by the state was designed to prepare students for work in the state apparatus and in positions related to modernization projects, such as hospitals and infrastructure projects.[13] Scholars often argue that these positions were already filled when the students of the 1960s graduated from university. Hence, university graduates who saw themselves as the intellectual elite of the country were frustrated by a lack of career opportunities.[14] None of my interlocutors mentions any difficulties in finding a job. When Atiq graduated from Kabul University in 1972, for him job opportunities were plenty. As a graduate from the Teacher Training College, bearing a university degree in mathematics and physics, he was to become a teacher – but of a different kind to those who taught at his primary school. Those students who, unlike him, were free to choose a discipline followed their own dreams or the expectations of their families, who wanted their sons and daughters to obtain respected positions as lawyers, diplomats, or doctors. Most of the former students I spoke with either worked as an assistant to one of their teachers

11 Zaman, in conversation with the author, Bad Nauheim, March 3, 2018.

12 Noori, in conversation with the author, Berlin, July 3, 2017.

13 Sayres 1974, 185. For comparable conditions in other countries see for example Preckel 2015, 194.

14 Barfield 2010, 213; Dorronsoro 2005, 68.

at university for a while after graduation, or were allocated to a job at a school, a newspaper, a hospital, or one of the state-owned companies.

It was not unusual, though, for students to study abroad during their time as students at Kabul University or shortly afterwards. A large number of scholarships were offered by various countries, ranging from the United States, France, West Germany, the Soviet Union, and Poland, to Egypt and Turkey.[15] Atiq worked as an assistant to his West German professor for about a year, after graduating from the Faculty of Sciences. His professor then helped him to write an application for a scholarship from the West German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD). In the application form, he was supposed to specify his date of birth, which he did not know:

> And then, at that time, I went to see my mother in Kandahar, to say goodbye. [...] As a joke, I asked: 'Mum, when is my birthday?' She said: 'Why? Only God knows. How should I know?' So I told her, just as a joke, that I would not receive the scholarship without my correct date of birth. Then, on the one hand, she was happy that I would not get the scholarship because I would stay there. On the other hand, I told her that in West Germany, there is a lot of money. [...] And after studying in West Germany one would get a good job. So my mother said: 'Ok, I will think about it.' The next day, she told me: 'I know as much as this: When you were born it was the month of fasting, because on that day [...] I was not allowed to eat mulberries.'

Atiq won the scholarship and travelled to Bonn. He thought he would come back to Afghanistan with a German degree, maybe even a PhD, which would guarantee him a good job. While he was in West Germany, though, the PDPA took power in Afghanistan and the war began. Having no prospects in Afghanistan, Atiq stayed in Germany, where he still lives.

Atiq's dream of becoming a respected teacher or even professor in Afghanistan failed because of the political developments there. However, as a university student he already enjoyed his elevated social position, as he illustrates in his memory of the invitation to a royal wedding. Other students had similar experiences of social mobility. One student at Kabul University in the 1970s describes people's high opinions of teachers and students at the university. When he passed by, "they said: 'This boy is at the faculty!'" and he emphasizes how people would receive him with "a lot of respect."[16] Similarly, another interlocutor, who was originally from the city of Maymana in the north of Afghanistan, recalls how he was greeted whenever he came back home during holidays. As he studied

15 Ruttig 2006, 8; "Afghan Students Leave for Further Studies," 1966, 2; Spanta 1396 (2017), 61.
16 Anonymous interview, Kabul, April 22, 2018.

medicine, people would call out: "The doctor came! The doctor came!" And they would ask him medical questions.[17] In retrospect, many of the former students apologize for their opinions and actions when they were students. They were just students, they say today, young and naïve. They did not feel this way back then, though. They were not "simply" students: they were students at Kabul University.

2.2 An Island of Modernity

Living in the cosmopolitan environment of the university, Atiq developed a passion for international news – an interest which sometimes collided with the ideas of his family back in the village. In the summer of 1969, when the university was closed in an attempt by the government to restrict demonstrations, Atiq had to go back to his home village in Kandahar Province. He remembers that it was a hot summer night and he was sleeping outside in the courtyard with the rest of his family. Since his uncle disliked him listening to the radio, he hid under a blanket to listen to *BBC Farsi*. On that night, it was announced that an US-American astronaut had landed on the moon. Almost 50 years later, Atiq presents this moment as a central memory of his student days. It was symbolic of the unlimited opportunities science could bring to the world. However, he could not share his excitement with his family, especially his uncle. He knew that for them, this kind of technology was not compatible with their religious faith, and they would call him an unbeliever.[18] Atiq's description of how he listened to Neil Armstrong landing on the moon connects to the previously mentioned embrace of new ideas and knowledge. By listening to the news and reading international literature, students like Atiq followed the rapid changes and competitions worldwide. Kabul University, and with it its students, were objects of this competition of ideas of progress during the Cold War, and Atiq embraced the related pursuit of progress.

Afghanistan had never been a colony, but it was not isolated from imperial power structures.[19] Ideas of progress and backwardness were fundamentally shaped by this hegemony. According to Benjamin Hopkins, who investigated the

17 Dr. Ghulam Sakha, in conversation with the author, London, February 3, 2018.

18 In the interview, Atiq recalls this situation as having happened when he was younger – maybe in high school – and he said it was probably during winter holidays. At the same time, he said his family was sleeping in the courtyard, because it was summer and it was too hot inside the house. Neil Armstrong landed on the moon on July 21, 1969, when Atiq was a university student. At that time the university was closed down because of the demonstrations and students living in the dormitories had been sent home to their families.

19 Manchanda 2020, 6.

relationship of the Afghan state to British imperialism in South Asia in the 19th century, the idea of Afghanistan "lagging behind" and thus needing more progress evolved among politicians in interactions with and under the dominance of the British Empire.[20] The balancing of different foreign influences and related attempts at "modernization" became a reccurring theme from at least the early 20th century. Most famous in this context is King Amanullah (1919–1929). His reforms of the political and legal system, the army, and the education system aimed to create a modern nation-state.[21] For his reforms, Amanullah relied on inspiration and direct support from abroad, trying to balance between different actors to secure Afghanistan's independence. Sediq Farhang's seminal history of Afghanistan shows this with an overview of Amanullah's 1928 journey with the aim of extending Afghanistan's diplomatic relations. Throughout the journey, Amanullah "took interest in the symbols of modern civilization (*tamadone aṣrī*) and technology." In Germany he received a credit to buy German planes and other machinery. Plans were made with a German-French company for the construction of a railway. In the Soviet Union, Amanullah discussed trade relations with Stalin and was promised support for the construction of a highway from the northern border with the Soviet Central Asian republics to Kabul. In Turkey, Atatürk gave him advice on the modernization (*aṣrī sākhtan*) of Afghanistan and assured help in the improvement of the army. Only in London and Tehran, Farhang writes, was Amanullah less successful: in London, he wanted to discuss border issues and in Tehran Queen Soraya appeared without a hijab in public.[22] In many ways, Amanullah's reign can be compared to those of Atatürkin Turkey or Nasser in Egypt – rulers presenting themselves as leading their countries to become modern nation states. They are all known for propagating "Western" fashion, such as suits and hats, and for unveiling campaigns as signifiers of a modern lifestyle.[23] Amanullah ultimately failed to implement his reforms and was overthrown in 1929, but he remained a role model for many politicians and intellectuals. His ideas of a modern Afghan nation state still defined the commonly held understanding of progress and backwardness when Atiq was a university student.

One of Amanullah's major legacies was the advancement of a new education system. The government of Afghanistan had long tried to minimize foreign influence in the country, and the introduction of foreign-supported state-run

20 Hopkins 2012, 1.

21 Saikal 2012, 73.

22 Farhang 1394 (2012), 530–31. The obligation for women to wear a veil in public was highly contested in Iran at that time: Chehabi 1993, 212–15.

23 Cronin 2014, 2–3. See also: Crews 2015, 114–39; Magnus 1974, 53; Rubin 1995, 45–80.

education only began in the early 20th century. This education had the purpose of forming modern intellectuals who could run a modern nation-state.[24] Before Amanullah, Amir Habibullah (1901–1919) presented himself as a modernizer and introduced new school subjects, such as engineering, accounting, and Western languages.[25] He thus opened the first public school, the Habibia School (1904), with Afghan and Indian teachers.[26] The education system could not be expanded, however, since Afghanistan lacked both experts in the subjects to be taught in public schools and sufficient funding. As Habibullah's major aim was liberation from British domination, he was reluctant to rely on foreign resources and competencies to expand the education system. It was only Amanullah who invited foreign engagement in the education system after he had declared independence from British influence in Afghanistan in 1919. The schools founded by Amanullah were funded and organized by Western donors: the French Istiqlal School founded in 1922, the German Amani School founded in 1924 (called Nijat School from 1933 to 1974), and the British Ghazi School founded in 1927.[27] Graduates of these schools usually became respected political leaders and shaped the image of modern intellectuals in Afghanistan.

The international political order had changed since the reign of Amanullah, though. By the time Atiq went to school and later to university, the world was divided into the Cold War blocs and the rest. In the attempt of the Afghan government to remain neutral, US-American support offered a counterbalance to Soviet aid.[28] Competition for influence in the region continued and its extent and the ideological dimension connected to it gained momentum. In the 1920s, Amanullah had made an extensive journey to collect support for his modernization project. During the Cold War, however, the donor countries came to Afghanistan to compete in providing aid.

Due to the increasing interest of donors coming from both the Eastern and Western blocs, Afghanistan became even more dependent on development aid than before WWII. Analyzing the history of development aid in Afghanistan, Timothy Nunan argues that the Cold War transformed Afghanistan "into a hothouse of modernization."[29] Indeed, the amounts of money pumped into the country multiplied throughout the 1950s and 1960s and laid the basis for a broad

24 Matin-Asgari makes this argument in the Iranian context, Matin-Asgari 2002, 15.
25 Barfield 2010, 210; Rubin 1995, 45–80.
26 Rubin 1995, 53.
27 Male 1982, 23; Rubin 1995, 53–56.
28 Payind 1989, 108–09.
29 Nunan 2016, 46.

variety of projects in infrastructure, education, and the military.[30] This funding was urgently needed, as the local economy was so weak that it could not even supply the population with basic food.[31] At the same time, Nunan points out that the project of development failed and that "Afghans were surrounded by the hallmarks of foreign modernity, yet few saw any improvements in their own lives."[32] The selective and interest-driven aid and the lack of state influence brought about, as Dorronsoro puts it, "modernized enclaves."[33] The education system, and in particular Kabul University, was such an enclave.

Atiq belonged to those few whose lives changed with the development aid. He reports that he enjoyed the international environment at the university and praises the quality of the books used at schools and university because they came from European countries: "Some of the books were even directly translated from French school[books], one to one. For example, physics, biology, or chemistry. That means at a very high level." He also had a close relation to his West German teachers. While he admits that classes were oftentimes theoretical and lacked practical applicability, he found the teachers very knowledgeable and says that they were always ready to support their students.

The effect of the Cold War competition in Afghanistan was that there were no longer only four schools as in the first half of the 20th century, but hundreds of schools and several new faculties at the university. A USAID review of US-American assistance in Afghanistan in the 1950s to 1970s points out that the US put more effort into developing the education system of Afghanistan than of any other country.[34] Thus, by the mid-20th century, civil education, including all teachers' training, was clearly dominated by Western European and US-American funding. The Soviet Union spent more aid money on Afghanistan during this period, but they rather focused on infrastructure and military education. In the 1960s, the only Soviet-sponsored civil educational institution was the Polytechnic Institute.[35]

The impact of foreign money in Afghanistan during the Cold War was particularly visible at Kabul University. The campus was a microcosm of development aid in Afghanistan. The first two faculties – Medicine (1932) and Law and Political

30 Williams, Kean, Jenkins et al. 1988.

31 Bulatov 1997, 244.

32 Nunan 2016, 117.

33 Dorronsoro 2005, 64.

34 Williams, Kean, Jenkins et al. 1988.

35 For an analysis of the background of the foundation of the Polytechnic Institute see Beyer 2019, 613–18. Two technical colleges (in Kabul and Mazar-e Sharif) were established by the Soviet Union in 1973 and 1975: Robinson and Dixon 2010, 611.

Science (1938) – were founded in cooperation with French universities, which provided funding and teachers.[36] In 1942, the Faculty of Sciences (in cooperation with West German universities from 1962 onwards) opened,[37] and in 1944, the US-American-funded Faculty of Literature. These institutes existed independently until 1946 and were then merged as Kabul University. Most other faculties were sponsored by West Germany and the USA, too: the Faculty of Engineering (1956, USA), the Faculty of Agriculture (1956, USA), the Faculty of Economics (1957, West Germany), the Faculty of Pharmacy (1959, West Germany), and the Faculty of Education (1962, USA). Only the Faculty of Theology (1951) was founded with non-Western money as it was in cooperation with Al-Azhar University of Cairo.[38] The Soviet-sponsored Polytechnic Institute (first classes in 1967, officially opened in 1969) was not located on campus and later became an institution separate from Kabul University.[39] Apart from the necessary funding, the cooperation with international universities brought a significant number of international teachers to Kabul University. In 1968, out of 548 teachers at the university, 98 were internationals.[40] Additionally, many Afghan teachers had either graduated from foreign universities or received training at partner universities: about 200 teachers held degrees from US-American universities alone.[41] Thus, probably nowhere else in Afghanistan was the impact of international aid as evident as at Kabul University.

The new campus was inaugurated in 1964. It was funded by USAID and the Asia Foundation and built by the German Hochtief company.[42] The campus was a green island in the city, with faculty buildings, dormitories, as well as dining and sports facilities located in a large park. Male and female students had gone to separate schools, but at Kabul University they would sit together in lecture halls. In their free time, they could go for walks to show off the newest fashion or sit in the shade of one of the many trees on campus. They could join the football

36 *Puhantun-e Kabul*, 1345 (1966), 3.

37 Sharaf 1997; "Blieb von blühender Uni-Partnerschaft Bonn und Kabul nur ein Trümmerhaufen? Einheimische Dozenten fielen Verhaftungswelle zum Opfer – Mathematiker noch in Afghanistan," *Bonner Generalanzeiger*, January 14, 1980.

38 Rasanayagam 2005, 43; Sawitzki 1972, 68.

39 Beyer 2019, 613. The Polytechic Institute is usually spoken about as a separate institution. I could not find any information on when exactly it became officially independent. According to university publications it was treated as a faculty of Kabul University at least until 1973.

40 Dupree 1971, 29.

41 Tsvetkova 2017, 357. This report describes university teachers from Afghanistan receiving training at universities in Karlsruhe, Freiburg, and Reutlingen (West Germany) in 1976: "Experimentierwerkzeug aus Wäscheklammern und Dosen: Afghanische Dozenten studierten an Pädagogischer Hochschule," *Badische Neuste Nachrichten*, March 22, 1977.

42 Kabul University 1964.

or the basketball team, or at least go and watch them play. The library provided a seemingly endless number of books and students could gather to play music in the common rooms of the dormitory. All interlocutors loved the campus and the feeling of freedom they experienced while being there. In summary, one of them describes the atmosphere as "kind of European" reflecting the success of Kabul University as a project of development aid.[43]

In the context of the university, the rhetoric of progress was omnipresent. In a book presenting the new campus of 1964, the president of Kabul University, Prof Dr Mohammad Osman Anwari, writes: "In conclusion, Kabul University would like to thank His Majesty the beloved and progressive King of Afghanistan, whose only aims are to raise the living standards of his people, speed the education of Afghan children and accelerate the progress of the country."[44] In 1964, an article in the local English-language newspaper, *Kabul Times*, announced that "the college of science, Kabul University, has now reached from the view-point of personnel, laboratories, and programs, the level of similar institutions in more advanced countries." This is, the article continues, an example of the "great national projects launched by the government for the country's progress."[45] Almost ten years later, a booklet introducing the campus to new students gives a short overview of the history of Kabul University, setting it in the context of enlightenment and the industrial revolution in Europe.[46] It is in this global and local context that Atiq listened to the broadcast of Neil Armstrong landing on the moon: his life and the race to the moon were part of the global pursuit of progress not caused, but accelerated, by the Cold War.

The lives of Atiq's relatives, however, remained largely untouched by the development aid that funded Kabul University. This discrepancy between life as a student and life in rural areas came up again and again in the interviews. Like Atiq, most university students who originally came from rural areas were sons of the most influential families of their regions. In Afghanistan at that time, formal education was no indicator of a person or family's wealth or power. Wealthy merchants and landowners, as well as influential elders of large communities, might not have received any formal education. While many students who went to boarding schools and later to Kabul University were the first ones of their families to receive higher education, their families were not necessarily poor. And yet, when they came to the cities, they were perceived as "backward" in contrast to the

43 Mohammad Qabool, in conversation with the author, London, November 15, 2017.
44 Kabul University 1964, 7.
45 "College of Science Equal in Every Way to Similar Schools," *Kabul Times*, April 14, 1964.
46 Puhantun-e Kabul 1352 (1973), vi.

"modern" citizens of Kabul students from the rural areas. One student describes his arrival and the situation of his classmates when they arrived at the boarding schools Rahman Baba and Ibn Sina, where students mostly from the Pashtun areas received secondary education, in the following way:

> We would walk on the road, in *chādur*, in *shalvār kamīz*. That was unusual for Kabuli people. They saw us and said: 'Oh, a student of Ibn Sina, local students from Rahman Baba.' [...] After that we [...] joined the community. That was in the second or third year. I started reading books, novels, and some information. Then we became familiar.[47]

Similarly, Dr Spanta, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan from 2006 to 2010, who studied at Kabul University in the 1970s, describes in his memoirs how he arrived at a secondary school in Herat after growing up in a rural area. "In the year 1346 [1967], I became a student of the Maulana Nuruldin Abdulrahman Jami School. Compared to the boys from the city, we boys from the surroundings were backward (*aqab mānda*)," he writes. This stigma of backwardness was not related to the socio-economic situation of his family, though. His description continues:

> But some of the things we boys from the rural areas (*aṭrāfī*) did were really funny. The day I went to Herat from Karukh to continue my studies, my father had prepared expensive clothes for me; but it was obvious that they were from the village. Thus, I was wearing clothes that were neither traditional nor modern.[48]

After the first round of exams, a teacher tried to make him take private lessons because his father could afford it:

> I was a book-reading student and I was better than my classmates. I remember that in the three-month-exam in seventh grade I got 10 points in every lesson (at that time 10 was the highest grade) and only in geometry my teacher gave me 6 points. [...] When I asked the teacher why he gave so few points to me, he said: 'You are the son of a *Khān*, take me as a private teacher and in the six-month-exam you will get all points.'[49]

His wealthy background notwithstanding, or particularly for this reason, Dr Spanta became a political activist, accusing his father and other landowners of contributing to the social injustice in the country.[50]

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47 Mohammad Akbar Kargar, in conversation with the author, London, November 17, 2017.
48 Spanta 1396 (2017), 31.
49 Ibid., 32.
50 Sangin Taheri, in conversation with the author, Aachen, July 4, 2019.

Descriptions of poverty explain the perception of rural areas as backward. Some interlocutors mention insufficient food supplies but mostly they highlight the discrepancy in the infrastructure between Kabul and the villages. Atiq describes how in rural areas people did not have access to basic food supplies: they were so poor, he says, they would cook soup not from meat but from the dried skin of animals. They did not have enough flour to bake bread, so they had to eat animal feed instead. In almost all interviews, poverty came up as the most important reason for students' discontent with the situation in the country. One of my interlocutors shares the following memory to illustrate the situation in the rural area he came from:

> Most of the people were very deprived. There was no school, there was no education in my area. And I remember I was in the second grade of primary school when the prime minister came to my district. He passed the road to go to Kunar Province. One of the elders, the grandfather of my wife, he waited to welcome the prime minister. The prime minister was Maiwandwal. He grabbed Maiwandwal's tie: 'You see, I'm one of the elders of these people. The people are collecting mud or soil, for example, and put it on a stone. Then they put the seeds of wheat on it and when the wheat is grown, they cut it and they make bread. They are so poor. They don't have a barber. They cut their hair by axe.' That was an example. [...] The elder – I was a witness – he told the prime minister: 'Why don't you accept my middle school? Our children need a middle school in the village!' That was one of the examples of our poverty.[51]

Similarly, a student who grew up in Kabul says:

> My uncles from my mother's side, they came from a rural area. I saw their hardship. The best they could eat was, you know, during the harvest, when there were products. Otherwise, in the winter, the only thing they could eat was actually corn bread. [...] And there was no electricity.[52]

These descriptions stand in strong contrast to the descriptions of life at university, where students did not have to worry about food or health care.

Many students accuse the government and other authorities of being responsible for this stagnation. One of my interlocutors describes Zahir Shah as a "lazy person [...] who was in power 40 years doing nothing in Afghanistan."[53] Another recalls how he and his friends were dissatisfied with Zahir Shah's government and called it "a deprivation for everybody," which caused "aggression against the

51 Mohammad Akbar Kargar, in conversation with the author, London, November 17, 2017.
52 Bashir Sakhawarz, in conversation with the author, London, November 22, 2017.
53 Dr. Ghulam Sakha, in conversation with the author, London, February 3, 2018.

government."[54] Some of my interlocutors mention their discontent with the government's inactivity concerning the socio-economic situation in the rural areas as one of the main reasons why they became interested in political activities. One of them says: "We wanted to have streets which are paved [...] and schools where girls go to school."[55] And another interlocutor explains: "We wanted to achieve something, to have education for everybody and health care for everybody."[56]

2.3 On the Streets, Not in the Classrooms

Like many other former students, Atiq enjoys his memories of his student life. However, while others praised the high quality of the lessons, Atiq complains that quality dropped during his time at university. Atiq studied at the same time as such prominent figures as Najibullah, president from 1987 to 1992, and Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, the leader of one wing of Hizb-e Islami, who became known as the "butcher of Kabul" during the civil war. Both Najibullah and Hekmatyar became famous for their passionate speeches during their time at Kabul University. Atiq listened to them on campus or in Park-e Zarnegar, the "speakers' corner" of Kabul. After the first demonstration in 1965, activism was so omnipresent, Atiq says, that those students who preferred to go to their classes instead of joining demonstrations and strikes were threatened by their peers. This affected the quality of the lessons, Atiq complains. Classes were frequently suspended because of strikes and demonstrations. The government tried to appease the students and to control the situation on campus. It closed the university several times and sent students living in the dormitory home to their families in 1969. Consequently, while the normal program at the Faculty of Sciences took four years, Atiq's studies were prolonged to five years, so that he graduated in 1972. Later, when studying at a German university, he noticed that he had large knowledge gaps because classes in Kabul had not been held as scheduled. Atiq's complaints show to what extent Kabul University was dominated by political activism in the late 1960s. It was not just a few demonstrations; strikes and rallies completely interrupted daily life on campus. The environment at Kabul University and the concept of students it was based on created a framework in which political activism flourished. A student, this environment suggested, could contribute to change in the country's politics.

54 Mohammad Akbar Kargar, in conversation with the author, London, November 17, 2017.
55 Anonymous interview, Bonn, October 5, 2017.
56 Anonymous interview, Bonn, October 4, 2017.

Additionally, political discussions were an intellectual challenge many students enjoyed participating in.

According to a report in the *Kabul Times*, the university president Turialai Etemadi held a speech to open the orientation week for the new students on Atiq's first day. He encouraged the students to take on responsibility: "The university is not a place where a student can learn everything he will ever have to know. [...] It is a place to learn how to learn, how to acquire knowledge." Etemadi then advised the students to use the library and participate in activities outside the classroom to learn what they could not learn during their classes.[57] Some students apparently took this appeal more seriously than Etemadi might have wished. In that and the following year, political activism among students reached its peak. Strikes and demonstrations were organized with such frequency that students spent more time on the streets than in their classrooms.

Neither in Kabul nor in other countries was the participation of students in political activism new in the 1960s.[58] Rather, the concept of a student as a vanguard of progress, a future leader with his/her main task being engagement in intellectual discussions and usually having few other responsibilities, creates the perfect framework for political activism. As Kabul University was the intellectual center of the country, oppositional political organizations had been active there prior to the 1960s. Students had even formed a union in April 1950 to institutionalize their claim to political participation, but the union was dissolved in November of the same year. Several of the people who became leaders of political movements in the 1960s had been involved in these earlier activities. For example, Babrak Karmal, leader of the Parcham wing of the PDPA, was a member of the 1950 student union. Like many others, he was then arrested for illegally distributing political publications.[59] In the 1950s, the scale and impact of the activism remained limited, however. The extent of student activism in the late 1960s was unprecedented. The discourse around the constitution had promised democracy and a law allowing the formation of political parties. Although Afghanistan did not become a democracy and the law never came into effect, the founders of political movements used these promises as an opportunity to act more openly than in earlier discussion circles, attracting a larger number of sympathizers.

Apart from a political environment that encouraged political activism, the campus created a perfect framework for political discussions and the collective experience of strikes and demonstrations. Due to the expansion of the university

57 "Freshmen Attend University Orientation Week," *Kabul Times*, April 6, 1967.

58 Bradley 2010, 469; Giustozzi 2010, 2.

59 Bulatov 1997, 34–35, 60–62; Male 1982, 25–26; Nuriddinov 2003, 62; Baha 2013, 105–06.

in the late 1960s facilitated by increasing international funding, Kabul University had more than 4,000 students, compared to a few hundred students in the 1950s.[60] On the new campus, these students could spend their free time together, sitting in the shade and discussing recent newspaper articles. A large number of students lived in the new dormitory, where eight of them usually shared a room – and oftentimes political affiliation. Atiq lived in such a room "and out of these eight, seven were in the Party" he said, referring to the PDPA. "And they took part in trainings, they very actively participated in demonstrations, and I had to join. So, until today, when somebody sees me, he says, 'He belonged to this party. We know him.'"

Not all students at Kabul University actively participated in these political organizations. Atiq is an example of how his social environment limited the freedom many students – especially those living in the dormitory – had. Usually, only students who did not have relatives in Kabul were allowed to live in the dormitory. In Atiq's case, his brother lived in Kabul, but Atiq did not live with him. Atiq thus enjoyed many of the liberties of living in the dormitory while his brother kept an eye on him and "protected" him from joining political activities, as Atiq describes it now. Atiq's brother told him to keep as much distance as possible from the political organizations and took him out to restaurants and the cinema while his classmates went to party meetings. Other interlocutors who tried to remain neutral pointed to their responsibilities besides studying. One of them had married as a high school student, at the age of 19. One year later, he and his wife had their first child. Shortly afterwards, he moved to Kabul to continue his education at the university. His wife and child stayed in Farah Province with his parents. He said that being married and a father distinguished him from many other students, and he was more "serious about things in life" – including politics. Thus, while he had been very involved in politics as a high school student, he tried to distance himself from the activism at the university.[61] Another student's mother and siblings moved to Kabul while he was studying there because his father had married another woman. He did not have time to participate in political activities since he had to support his family. He bought chocolates and sweets at the market and resold them in the streets. Later, he rented a shop in which he invested all the time not spent in the classroom. He still enjoyed his time at university, where he was free to do and say what he wanted and was not controlled

60 Dupree 1971, 29; Sawitzki 1972, 86.

61 Mohammad Qabool, in conversation with the author, London, November 15, 2017.

by his family. And yet, he did not have time to use this freedom for political activism, as most other students did.[62]

Atiq tried to keep some distance between himself and the political activism, as his brother had told him to. And yet, he could not entirely avoid being drawn into the political turmoil. One day, he even almost joined the party involuntarily. A friend invited him to go for a walk and suddenly they were standing in front of the house of Nur Mohammad Taraki, the leader of the Khalq wing of the PDPA. His friend introduced Atiq to the party leader and said that Atiq wanted to become a member. The activists at Taraki's house took Atiq's *Taẓkera*, his ID card, wrote his name on the list of party members and introduced him to the leader of the university group of the party, with whom all further steps would be arranged. Confused and afraid to create a scandal, Atiq played his role in the game at Taraki's house but confronted his friend as soon as they had left. A few days later, he managed to cancel his membership by speaking to a member of the Central Committee who studied at the Faculty of Medicine.

The political activism of the late 1960s was not limited to the university, but in many ways the campus was its center. Only Javanan-e Musulman was founded by university students, and initiatives independent of the developments at the university existed throughout the country. Nevertheless, much of the activism at high schools and in the provinces was directly or indirectly related to the university. Interlocutors who had become activists as high school students outside of Kabul told me how students from Kabul University would come to visit their meetings or demonstrations and supply them with literature and hand-copied pamphlets. They appeared at demonstrations as role models and were admired for their rhetorical skills.[63] Similarly, literature analyzing the development of Javanan-e Musulman points out that the main group at the university sent "delegations" to the provinces to fight the spreading influence of Khalq, Parcham, and Shu'la-ye Javid and even sent people to take jobs in the provinces to recruit new members.[64] The galvanization was carried to the provinces from the campus in Kabul.

The entire education system was influenced by political discussions. Atiq already faced this problem at the Teacher Training College:

62 Ghulam Ahmad, in conversation with the author, London, November 15, 2017.

63 Zalmai, in conversation with the author, London, October 22, 2018; Massum Faryar, in conversation with the author, Berlin, June 19, 2019; Anwar Ghori, in conversation with the author, Kabul, April 21, 2018.

64 Sands and Qazizai 2019, 60.

> I could never get good grades because I was not politically active. For example, my Pashto teacher, he later became the vice minister for culture in the 80s. I tried everything, but I never got more than 60 percent. Those who were active, they never did a lot. They only wrote one or two ideological sentences and they got 100 points. With other teachers it was similar.

Teachers played an important role – not only through their own participation in demonstrations and activities of political movements but also because they had a huge impact on their students and would sometimes shape the political ideas of an entire class or even school. Political agitation at the Teacher Training College had an impact on schools in the provinces. One of my interlocutors describes how, at his boarding school in Chaghcharan, the capital of Ghor Province in Central Afghanistan, it was mainly the teachers from the Teacher Training College in Kabul who brought political ideas and ideologies to the school.[65] Another interlocutor remembers how one of his teachers influenced many students at his school in the following way:

> I was in grade 10 when I had a teacher of religious education. And he came into the classroom without a beard and with a hat and said: 'Are you not surprised? I don't have a beard and I am a teacher of religious education.' And he worked together with the newly founded party [the PDPA]. So, the political future of our entire class was influenced by him. And later the future of the entire school, with some exceptions.[66]

Motivated by his impression of the teacher, this interlocutor became a member of the Khalq wing of the PDPA as a high school student and continued his political activism while studying in Austria, where he went on a scholarship after a brief time studying medicine at Kabul University. Similarly, Massum Faryar described how, at his school in Herat, one particular teacher inspired him and many other students. In his novel inspired by autobiographical experiences, he describes this teacher, Haji Baba:

> In grade six, I discovered my interest in history through my teacher [...]. Our history teacher Haji Baba was a Pashtun but had lived in Herat since his childhood. He had big animal eyes, shining in lime-green, strong, silver-dark blond hair [...]. In his classes, he went beyond the frames of the allocated material and illuminated socio-political conditions and interrelations. Frequently, he described dramatic Buzkashi competitions on the stages of power and with the colors of his words, with the oscillation of his voice, he created pictures which even the most forgetful among us would remember.[67]

65 Anwar Ghori, in conversation with the author, Kabul, April 21, 2018.
66 Anonymous interview, Bonn, October 5, 2017.
67 Faryar 2015, 273–74.

Inspired by his teacher and other, older students, Massum Faryar frequently participated in demonstrations and discussions related to Shu'la-ye Javid as a high school student. He repeated his admiration for Haji Baba in the interview, saying that he is still proud of having been his student. This narrative of being inspired by a teacher is not limited to leftist movements, as I was told a similar story by a student from Kunar province. He had read an article by the Pakistani scholar Maududi on the struggle of Islam against communism in Indonesia, which moved him. Additionally, he said, he was motivated by his teacher:

> He was an Islamic scholar and had the same mentality. [...] He brought the newspaper Gahiz, that was a newspaper from Kabul, and it dealt with the same issues, communists and communism and socialism and Muslims and in this way we were motivated.[68]

He and his friends then became curious about the actors behind the paper and later joined Javanan-e Musulman.

As the political discussions permeated the education system, many of my interlocutors first encountered them as teenagers at secondary schools. One of them described how he directly received political literature from other students when he began to study there in grade seven. Students from that school would go to other schools to gather students before joining the crowds of university students.[69] In an article on his experiences as a German teacher at a vocational school in Kabul, Andreas Kramer describes the beginning of a student demonstration in the summer of 1969 in the following way:

> As opposed to regular days, the students were already at their seats when I entered the classroom. (Usually, they were still tussling with each other until we teachers came.) The Afghan colleague with whom I was supposed to teach had not appeared, either. As soon as I entered the room, the representative of the class took his karakul hat off and told me that the class could not take place. Then he shortly spoke to his classmates. They got up, without exception and left the classroom towards the yard. Other students joined them there. Within a very short time, more than 100 students had gathered. The representative of grade 9 was lifted on the shoulders of his classmates. He held a short speech. Then, the mass of the students went towards the gate of the school and turned into the street, where they met a large crowd of several thousand marching university students. They were carrying banners and came from the university, [...]. On the other side of the street a group of female students from a girls' school joined the demonstrators.[70]

68 Sabawoon Wahidullah, in conversation with the author, Kabul, May 3, 2018.

69 Noori, in conversation with the author, Berlin, July 3, 2017; Bashir Sakhawarz, in conversation with the author, London, November 22, 2017.

70 Kramer 1998, 40–41.

The strikes and demonstrations reached different levels of intensity between 1965 and 1973, but in the summer of 1969, at least, all the students of Kabul were on their feet.

The activism was not limited to Kabul. Massum Faryar, the admirer of the teacher Haji Baba, began to participate in demonstrations and discussions with sympathizers of Shu'la-ye Javid when he was in the seventh or eighth grade of Jami School in Herat.[71] Another interlocutor joined discussion circles and recruited new members for the PDPA as a high school student in the northern city of Maymana.[72] Others told me that while they did not belong to a specific political movement, it was impossible not to have a political opinion and to join political activities once in a while, for example at high schools in Farah and in a small town close to Kunduz City.[73] In the newspaper *Parcham*, the last page frequently features reports on demonstrations and strikes from all over the country, mostly similar to this one:

> According to our information, on the day of the 7 Saur, students of the Ibn Yamin School in the province Sheberghan demonstrated against the illegal dismissal of one of the students from the mentioned school. During several meetings, which took place during the demonstration, speakers criticized the arbitrariness of the responsible authorities for education and the activities against the law and against the democratic freedoms of the people from the side of the responsible authorities of the province.[74]

It was certainly in the interest of the publishers of the paper to highlight how widespread demonstrations against the government were, but my interlocutors confirm that there was hardly a school untouched by the political activism.

Another group involved in the protests were factory workers. Analysing their role in the political turmoil of that time would be a study on its own. Some reports and former students speak of large demonstrations by workers in different parts of the country protesting poor working conditions and the government. Reports on demonstrations feature prominently in *Khalq*, *Parcham*, and *Shu'la-ye Javid*. One interlocutor, whose story I will discuss in more detail in the third chapter, told me how he was dismissed from university and went to work on an irrigation project in Nangarhar Province. He could not work there for long, though, because

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71 Massum Faryar, in conversation with the author, Berlin, June 19, 2019.

72 Dr Ghulam Sakha, in conversation with the author, London, February 3, 2018.

73 Zaman, in conversation with the author, Bad Nauheim, March 3, 2018.

74 "*Tazahirat-e shagirdan-e Lisa-ye Ibn Yamin va shahrian-e Sheberghan* (Demonstration of Students of the Ibn Yamin School and the Citizens of Sheberghan)," *Parcham*, 23 Saur 1347 (May 13, 1968), 4.

he was dismissed for leading the workers in strikes and demonstrations.[75] Others claim that, while students talked a lot about the proletariat and the liberation of the working class, they actually never talked to somebody outside of the academic environment.[76] Concerning farmers, I came across some memories which do not suggest a close relationship between them and the students. Soraya Baha, for example, describes in her memoirs how she went on a trip to the countryside with Anahita Ratibzad, the leader of the women's organization of the PDPA, and that everyone just made fun of the farmers instead of talking to them.[77] Similarly, Massum Faryar. who joined Shu'la-ye Javid in Herat, describes how when he joined groups going to the villages to agitate among the farmers, they often ended up having a picnic amongst themselves in a beautiful garden discussing romantic ideas of a revolution starting from the rural areas.[78]

Even though the activism was not exclusive to Kabul University, the students' understanding of themselves as intellectuals shaped its form and content. The discussions and speeches were more central to this self-understanding than demonstrations and strikes. According to Atiq, many of his friends spent most weekends at party gatherings and seminars, where they discussed not only current political issues but also the literature they had read over the previous week. To students who were used to a rather dry format of classes, this format was new and exciting.[79] A member of Parcham described the meetings in the following way:

> For example, every week or every two weeks we had a meeting. [...] For example, during the weekend, we organized a meeting in my house or some other friend's house, just sitting, drinking tea or coffee or something. Coffee was not popular, but now it is. Mostly tea was around and we were sitting, organizing our meetings, one hour or less or more. And then, they were asking us to improve our knowledge. For example, we should understand the political situation in Afghanistan. We should read about the history of Afghanistan, so we would become political, you know, the personality.[80]

In such discussion circles and meetings, students had the opportunity to discuss ideas that went beyond the curricula. Also, one of my interlocutors, a member of the PDPA (Parcham) describes what it meant to him to be a student at the university in the following way:

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75 Anonymous interview, London, Feburary 4, 2018.
76 Korgun 1983, 156.
77 Baha 2013, 95–98.
78 Massum Faryar, in conversation with the author, Berlin, June 19, 2019.
79 Mohammad Akbar Kargar, in conversation with the author, London, November 17, 2017.
80 Dr Ghulam Sakha, in conversation with the author, London, February 3, 2018.

> I feel proud because I was a student at Kabul University. It was a very, very nice place at that time. Not only for studying, but for sharing information and in the political area as well. In the political ground, we had a lot of discussion. At that time, I remember, when I was in the hostel of the university, there was a meeting in the hall. Dr Najib came to the meeting. He was a really strong speaker of the Party. He started in both languages, Farsi and Pashto. [...] And also in the studying area: we were familiar with the new information, with literature, with history, with the ideas of professors or teachers who were not like high school teachers.[81]

Praise of the rhetorical skills of the leaders of different political organizations came up in many interviews, and Louis Dupree describes one demonstration in 1969 as a poetry contest.[82] Descriptions of these discussions, passionate speeches, and poetic slogans reflect the joy of the intellectual dimension of activism at Kabul University.

Newspapers and literature provided the basis for discussions among friends and at party meetings. They not only provided information about local political developments, but were also another window onto the broader, international context of the local political situation. Atiq had grown used to skimming through the daily newspapers *Anis*, *Islah*, and *Hivad* every day before breakfast during his time at the teaching college. He continued to do so as a university student, where the newspapers were delivered to the library for all students to access. The constitution of 1964 allowed private newspapers to be published "in accordance with the law, without submission in advance to the authorities of the State."[83] While censorship was officially abolished, the constitution prohibited criticism of the monarchy and the king, thus setting clear limits on freedom of expression. Newspapers publishers of the period tested those limits. Most papers were forbidden after a few issues, yet still significantly stirred the political discussion among intellectuals, including students.[84] In addition to his daily consumption of the state-owned newspapers, Atiq studied these private newspapers. An early and influential one was *Khalq*, published in April and May 1966.[85] It attracted major attention, partly because of its open opposition to the monarchy, and because it publicly announced the formation of a political movement – the PDPA – with a program. The program called for, among other things, the fight for a "democratic movement against imperialism and feudalism" and the "centralization of all state

81 Mohammad Akbar Kargar, in conversation with the author, London, November 17, 2017.
82 Dupree 1970, 8.
83 Government of Afghanistan 2005, 17.
84 Tanin 2011, 160–61.
85 Karimi argues that the provocative criticism of the government by this newspaper had an impact on the publishing culture in Afghanistan in the years to come: Karimi 1984, 19.

powers in the hands of the people."[86] The paper featured reports on societal problems that were not addressed in the state-owned papers. One article, for example, describes how several people died because their shack had not withstood a few days of rain and they were buried below the ceilings.[87] Atiq sympathized with the ideas he read in *Khalq*, which was published during his last year at the teacher training college. He liked the idea it promoted of creating a more just society, in which everybody had a better life, a home, and work.

Similar ideas of social injustice and oppression were central features of the literature circulating among students. As discussed in the first subchapter, many students at Kabul University extensively engaged with local and international literature and poetry. There was local literature, poetry, and prose which described the struggle against British domination or the hardship of poor people in rural areas. There were publications by the political figures of the time, such as the poems by the editor of another PDPA newspaper (*Parcham*) Sulaiman Layeq, or novels by the leader of the PDPA's Khalq wing, Nur Mohammad Taraki.[88] International literature was sold in bookshops and distributed among students, with Jack London and Leo Tolstoy among the authors frequently mentioned. The favorite of many was Maxim Gorky's *Mother*. It tells the story of a young man in a poor industrial town in Russia turning from drunken and ignorant factory worker into an intellectual revolutionary, mobilizing his kind but illiterate and apolitical mother to join the struggle.[89] These texts spoke to the experiences of students and stirred discussion of how change could be brought about.

When Anthony Arnold writes that the PDPA had an easy time recruiting students from the university because they joined out of curiosity, he implies that they should not be taken seriously in their political activism.[90] From the narrations I listened to, I agree that curiosity was an important aspect of their engagement with political ideas. However, this curiosity led to an intense engagement

86 "*Maram-e Dimukratik-e Khalq* (People's Democratic Program)," *Khalq*, 22 Hamal 1345 (April 11, 1966).

87 "*Qurbanian-e Viranaha* (Victims of the Ruins)," *Khalq*, 12 Saur 1345 (May 2, 1966).

88 One of Taraki's novels, *Sangsar*, describes the life of the son of a poor family in Kabul, a dramatic love story with vivid descriptions of the misery of poverty and insufficient infrastructure. It opens with a description of Kabul in early spring, when the ice on the unpaved streets begins to melt and everything is covered in mud. Taraki describes how the ice close to the toilets has a yellowish color. The protagonist of the story then sits on one of these streets and sells raisins and dried apricots soaked in water in the hope of being able to afford some dry bread and tea for lunch: Taraki, 1979.

89 Gorky, n.d.

90 Arnold 1983, 33–34.

with a broad range of literature, reaching from romantic, revolutionary novels to philosophical and political tracts. The format of meetings and the character of students' discussions certainly varied between the different movements and the different groups within the movements. Generally, however, these kinds of gatherings provided a framework for an intellectual exercise.

Due to their enthusiasm for learning, most students in Kabul were familiar with international political developments. They listened not only to reports on the moon landing but also to news concerning protests in other countries. In contrast to the strikes and demonstrations in Afghanistan, on which hardly any reports can be found in the official newspapers, demonstrations in Paris, New York, and West Berlin as well as discussions on the war in Vietnam are frequently covered. Much of the international literature, as well as some political and non-political magazines in Kabul, were translated and/or published in Iran or by Iranian students abroad, who were involved in political activism in Europe. Students in Kabul did not demonstrate because they heard about protest movements in other countries. They had their own reasons, as I will discuss in more detail in the following chapters. And yet, they were united with other students around the world in the experience of being a student and a symbol of progress. Being such a symbol was connected to many privileges, but also stimulated critical discussions of the meaning of progress.

For Atiq to go through the education system meant that he received a respect he would not have experienced without education. It also meant that new horizons of knowledge, possibilities, and interests opened to him: books and newspapers, learning about astrophysics and listening to reports on the moon landing, becoming a university teacher, and traveling abroad. While he was content with these opportunities, many of his fellow students complained about the limits of this progress: it was only accessible to a small number of people although it had been promised on a large scale.

It was the aim of this chapter to explore the setting of the political activism: Kabul University and its students. As a university student, Atiq had the social position of an intellectual. This position was created by the selective influx of the Cold War competition for influence through development aid in Afghanistan, especially visible at Kabul University. I argue that being a student at Kabul University came with an identification as intellectuals and vanguards of progress for the country. In the resulting atmosphere on campus, students were galvanized by the ideas they learned about in books, newspapers, and discussions and by the global experience of being a student at that time. It was a must to have an opinion on political topics even though not everybody became a political activist. It is no

coincidence that Maxim Gorky's *Mother* was one of the favorite novels among students at Kabul University: Students could identify with Pavel, the young man, who became the leader of a movement fighting for justice by reading books, discussing them with his friends, and explaining the world to those who did not have the knowledge he had.

Looking at student activism from this perspective provides an entry point to understand their activities at Kabul University as those of a new political force, and not merely as the first step of a tragedy. In the context of the global 1960s, Atiq's story has shown us how universities were places for social and intellectual mobility that provided the framework for the rise of different political movements at that time. At Kabul University, the politicized atmosphere was so intense that it was more common to participate in one of those movements than to try to remain neutral.

3 From Collective Protest to Violence on Campus

> It seemed as if the blare of a mighty brass trumpet were rousing men and stirring in some hearts the willingness to fight, in other hearts a vague joy, a premonition of something new, and a burning curiosity; in still others a confused tremor of hope and curiosity. The song was an outlet, too, for the stinging bitterness accumulated during years.
> (*Maxim Gorky, Mother, p. 174*)

When he looks back now, Mohammad Osman Halif says, he first began to think about injustice and justice when he was beaten at school in the late 1950s:

> The teachers, they were not so pleasant. Some of them were violent and they hit the students with a stick. I experienced that myself. It was summer, and in our classroom, we did not have windows. Yes, we had windows, but without glass. And then the sign for the break came and on the other side, there was the sports ground, a meadow or something like that, very dry. [...] And I jumped out of the window and the rector had seen it from somewhere. And he sent some people and they took me. [...] And then he told one of them: 'Hit him!' And he was one of my comrades, he could not do it. Then, again he [the rector] said: 'Hit him, I told you!' So he hit me a little bit harder. Then he [the rector] got up and went towards him and he hit him so hard that he flew against the desk and fell down. He said: 'This is how to do it.' And then he [the boy] was in pain, and he began to hit me so hard.

After a similar incident occurred sometime later, Mohammad Osman Halif's father told the teachers to stop hitting his son. Mohammad Osman Halif never again experienced violence, but his classmates did. Incidents like these encouraged him to think about injustice and possibilities for change, he explains.

Similarly, Tahera Shams describes her political awakening as related to experiences at school. For primary education, she went to the prestigious Malalai School, where most other girls came from rich and influential families. Tahera Shams, in contrast, was poor and Hazara – something other students and teachers kept her conscious of. Especially the Pashtun teachers, she says, never called her by name, rather referring to her using pejorative expressions for Hazaras. As she was a child, she did not understand that she was being discriminated against, but was ashamed. After grade six, she changed schools because she wanted to learn English instead of French. At Zarghuna School, she felt more comfortable because the students came from different parts of society. Growing up and reading more, she understood: it was not her own fault that she was bullied. Rather, social and political change was necessary. Both, Mohammad Osman Halif and Tahera Shams later studied at the Faculty of Letters and Humanities at Kabul University and both of them became political activists. Notwithstanding these similarities, the two of them were on opposing sides in the political activism on campus.

https://doi.org/10.1515/ 9783111150543-003

Interviews like those with Mohammad Osman Halif and Tahera Shams drew my attention to the fact that interlocutors from both sides of the political spectrum on campus talked about comparable situations when they described how they became interested in politics. For most of them, the perception of injustice was similar. And yet, they would not admit having had any commonalities with members or sympathizers of other political groups. This chapter addresses the question of how political activism at Kabul University turned from a common perception of injustice into violent conflicts between the various political groups. I argue that the protests were stirred by disappointed hopes for political change and the feeling of being deprived of rights, such as political participation and justice. This perception resulted from the discrepancy between the omnipresent rhetoric of progress and the limited changes in the students' environment. Over time, political activism increasingly turned into debates between political organizations on what exactly these rights meant and how they should be addressed. While students were still united in their opposition to the government, their ideological divisions were stronger than their commonalities, and conflicts between them turned violent over time.

Historiography on the recent political history of Afghanistan oftentimes takes the existence of political parties and their dominant role in political activism for granted. It ignores developments in political activism over time and overemphasizes the role of ideologies that suggest foreign domination. Analyzing the dynamics of political activism through the memories of individuals, instead, contributes to a better understanding of the global and local dimension in student protests and thereby of social and political conflicts in Afghanistan in general. Political activism at Kabul University was sparked by individual experiences and the possibility to address discontent in the environment of the university. It was only during this activism that different political organizations and, through them, international ideologies gained influence and finally dominated conflicts among students. This chapter shows that the argument frequently made in the literature on the Global 1960s holds true in the case of Afghanistan: most conflicts of this period were fought out on the local level and developed their own dynamics.[1] These local conflicts cannot, however, be entirely separated from the context of the Global Cold War, which created the political situation students stood up against and which provided the narratives of progress that were subject to local interpretations and contestations.

This chapter follows the narrations of two of my interlocutors, Tahera Shams and Mohammad Osman Halif. While the trajectories of their lives inspire and

1 Suri 2003, 166; Brown 2013, 8.

guide this chapter, I use newspaper articles and other written sources to reconstruct dates and chronologies of specific events more than in other chapters. Tahera Shams and Mohammad Osman Halif witnessed these events, but 50 years later it is almost impossible to remember dates accurately and similarly difficult to distinguish between specific demonstrations. A chronological approach adds to an understanding of my interlocutors' narratives and makes it possible to trace the dynamics of their activism. In the first subchapter, I discuss how early protests in Kabul reflected a common discontent among students with the existing social and political system not yet defined by divisions between political groups. In the second subchapter, I analyze how different political organizations came to dominate political activism on campus. During the period covered by the last subchapter, activism was defined by increasing and oftentimes violent clashes between several political organizations.

Mohammad Osman Halif lives in Germany, and we met for a long conversation. He asked me to send him further questions in written form, so we had a second interview via phone based on a questionnaire I had provided him with. All references to Mohammad Osman Halif's story are based on these two conversations.[2] I had heard about Tahera Shams several times from different people during my research, but it took me a long time to find her and talk to her. She used to live in Berlin, but was living in Kabul during the time of my research. I found out about her whereabouts only after my research trip to Kabul, but another interlocutor helped me to forward a questionnaire to her and I received written answers. I was able to then ask her some additional questions in a phone call. All references to her narration thus resulted from the combination of the written questionnaire and an unstructured phone conversation.[3]

In 1950, Mohammad Osman Halif was born in Khost Province where his father was posted as a military officer. Five years later, the family returned to their hometown, Gardez, where Mohammad Osman Halif went to school. He felt privileged to be able to attend school, while most other children had to help in the fields or work at the bazaar. After Mohammad Osman Halif graduated from secondary school in Gardez, there was no lyceum in the area, which he would need to attend to take the *kānkūr* exam for university. As it was not possible for him to attend a lyceum in Kabul, Mohammad Osman Halif went to Urgun in Paktika Province, where he worked as a teacher. He enjoyed taking care of the children, but the fol-

2 Mohammad Osman Halif, in conversation with the author, Düsseldorf, November 1, 2019 and phone interview, February 20, 2020.

3 Tahera Shams, written answers to questionnaire, August 2019 and phone interview, May 19, 2020.

lowing year a lyceum opened in Gardez, and he returned there for another three years of schooling. Then, as one of the few students from his area, he took the university entrance examination and went to Kabul to study engineering in 1967. A few months later, he decided to change his subject in favour of his real interests and became a student of the Faculty of Letters and Humanities.

Tahera Shams was born in Kabul in 1949, where she grew up with her five siblings. Her father was originally from the Hazarajat region in central Afghanistan and worked as a day laborer in Kabul, but fell ill while Tahera was a student. Her mother was born in Samarqand and had left the Soviet Union with her family in 1929, fleeing the Stalinist terror. She was illiterate but made some money as a tailor and sent all her children to school. After graduating from high school, Tahera Shams entered Kabul University in 1965. She would have liked to study medicine, but her father wanted her to study at the Faculty of Letters and Humanities so she could become a teacher. She finally agreed as she would otherwise have had to get married.

3.1 "Death to the Shah"

This subchapter discusses how Tahera Shams' and Mohammad Osman Halif's general perceptions of injustice evolved into political activism at university. An analysis of the protests between 1965 and 1969 shows how the activism gained momentum. As argued in the previous chapter, the campus of Kabul University was caught up in a general atmosphere of political galvanization. This subchapter investigates some of the details of the demonstrations and strikes to find out what sparked the protests. Both Mohammad Osman Halif and Tahera Shams no longer remember the causes of particular protests. This gap in memories results from their attaching more relevance to the overarching topic of the activism – injustice – than to particular demonstrations. A closer look at the narrations of different interlocutors and written sources suggests that the demonstrations were caused by specific incidents. These can be subsumed under the three closely interrelated topics of disappointed promises of political participation, discontent with the education system, and the struggle for women's rights. While the incidents were local, none of these topics is particular to the political activism of Afghanistan. They were central to strikes and demonstrations in many other countries at the same time.

Mohammad Osman Halif and Tahera Shams both explain that they first developed an interest in politics through novels and political literature. As a boy, Mohammad Osman Halif says, he heard about conflicts between Arabs and Israelis on the radio. He did not understand the news and asked his father for an

explanation. His father told him that the British, the French, and the US-Americans had helped the Israelis to create a new state and that they were fighting the Arabs. This left an impression on him, and he kept thinking about it. Then, in secondary school, he read a novel:

> And this novel is called *Pīghla*. In Pashto, *Pīghla* is a girl who is not married. And this novel is called *Pīghla* and it tells the story of a professor, and his name was – even though this was in my youth I can still remember his name – he was called Professor Niaz Ahmad Khan. He wanted to marry that girl and so on, a love story. [...] The book begins a fight with all these cultural issues. It says, it is not good when a woman wants to have a man and they want to marry, why don't they let them marry? It is all in this book and the way of the fighting of this professor had such an impact on me that I noticed what was happening. So I became dissatisfied with many people in my environment. And this, somehow, gave me the idea to fight but I didn't know how to fight.

At university Mohammad Osman Halif began to read about philosophy and religion. "The first book, I read," he says, "dealt with morals. The title was 'Morals', too. And this book had a huge impact on me, and I read it several times. [...] And in this book, it said, when you see something that is not okay, you should begin to fix it."

Tahera Shams enjoyed reading, too. She first read novels and Iranian women's magazines and later, in the last year or two at high school, developed an interest in texts by Maxim Gorky, which were widely available in Kabul. She then began to understand the injustice she had faced as a child and as a member of a deprived ethnic group, the Hazara, she says. When Tahera Shams and Mohammad Osman Halif began to join demonstrations and strikes, they were united by a general dissatisfaction with the social and political situation in the country and, motivated by their reading, a wish to contribute to change.

From the first days of her time at university, Tahera Shams says, she joined the demonstrations frequently. She cannot differentiate between particular demonstrations anymore but, according to her memories, all of them were against the government and the monarchy. "Death to the Shah" was not the only slogan the demonstrators called, but the only one she remembers. During those months, Tahera Shams went to campus every day. She did not care about fashion or anything else, she was only interested in politics. According to her, students would gather on campus in the morning to hold meetings with speeches and poems and then have long marches through the city. She was out and about all day long, shouting slogans against the monarchy, against the king. Most demonstrations ended at Park-e Zarnegar, a park nicknamed "Revolutionary Hill". From the beginning of the political activism in 1965, leaders of political movements and others who wanted their ideas and speeches to be heard used a little hill in the

middle of the park for public speeches.[4] Park-e Zarnegar was located near the Arg – the presidential palace – and directly in front of the Ministry of Education, making it a prominent spot to criticize the education system and to submit petitions to the ministry.[5] It was during these demonstrations and gatherings that Tahera Shams got to know the Shu'la-ye Javid movement and found her political home.

Mohammad Osman Halif describes how he, in contrast, felt uncomfortable with the atmosphere at the university. He wanted political change but did not agree with his classmates' leftist opinions. He did not know how to oppose them in discussions and felt helpless. When students organized strikes and demonstrations, he had no choice but to join, he says:

> When somebody didn't take part then he was insulted. *Murtaje* [reactionary] they were called. They were not good, they were puppets, and so on. And people didn't want to hear that. Also, there was nobody in the classroom, no teacher, no student. And you didn't want to hear that you're a puppet. So we were forced to join the demonstration and that had a huge impact on our education system.

One day of demonstrations starting from the university campus in 1969 is especially present in Mohammad Osman Halif's memories:

> At that time, the cousin of Zahir Shah had the military power, Sardar Wali was his name [...]. And he sent the armed police to the university and they attacked us, an attack with police horses. Somewhere, because of the many people who turned back and came towards me, I fell on the ground and a horse stepped on my foot. I did not notice much of it but there was a creek next to me, so I rolled in there, so the horse would not step on my heart and so on, on my head. Until the horses had gone. Then somebody – I don't know who that was, it is a long time ago and I did not even ask him – took me by the hand to the Faculty of Medicine. He accompanied me to the faculty and then he said: 'Stay here, I will get help.' Because there was blood everywhere and I could not walk. My cousin, [...] was in the area and he was somehow looking for me, so I wouldn't get hurt, but he could not find me.[6]

Finally, Mohammad Osman Halif's cousin found him in a hospital and sent him to his hometown to recover. A few days later, in an attempt to stop the daily pro-

4 Dupree 1971, 16–17; Kramer 1998, 41.

5 "Zarnegar Park Clocks Afghanistan's Heartbeat," *Kabul Times*, April 4, 1970; Kramer 1998, 41; Sands and Qazizai 2019, 48.

6 In our conversation, he connected this incident with the 3 Aqrab 1344, but later corrected himself that he had not yet been in Kabul in 1344 (1965) and did not clearly remember the context of the demonstration. Combining his narration with other sources, it seems most plausible that this incident was in May 1969, when the police stormed the university campus to prevent further demonstrations.

tests, the university administration closed the university and the dormitories, forcing all students living there to return to their families. Around that time, a new movement, Javanan-e Musulman, took shape and Mohammad Osman Halif found a cause worth fighting for.

To understand how and why Mohammad Osman Halif and Tahera Shams came to participate in political activities, a brief look at the political context in which the first large demonstration took place is necessary. In the following paragraphs, I argue that what is usually understood as a liberal time raised hopes for progress that were soon disappointed. In historiography on Afghanistan, the period between 1964 and 1973 is usually referred to as the "Decade of Democracy," the "New Democracy" (*novaia democratiia*),[7] or the "Constitutional Decade" (*Dahaye Qānūne Asāsī*).[8] The periodization begins with the endorsement of the new constitution in 1964 and ends with the coup d'état against Zahir Shah and the declaration of the Republic of Afghanistan by Daoud Khan in 1973. The constitution of 1964 lies at the heart of the interpretation of the "Decade of Democracy". The government promoted it as an important step for Afghanistan on its way to modernization. Zahir Shah's promotion of modernization is part of a longer history of the idea to modernize Afghanistan throughout the 20th century, which I discussed in the previous chapter. Additionally, the development of a new, "democratic" constitution should be understood in the global context of political changes in which democracy was propagated as an important part of progress. By passing this constitution, the government suggested that Afghanistan would not fall behind.

The constitution framed "social democracy" as one of its core values, introduced a new parliament with more powers, and declared equal rights for all citizens.[9] It was heavily discussed on state-owned radio and in newspapers, where it was announced as "providing all those freedoms essential for a democratic order"[10] and that it would "deliver the destinies of the people into their own hands."[11] Relying on published sources, scholars tend to adopt this rhetoric. However, caution is necessary when designating the constitution and the following years as democratic; the constitution defined the political system of the country as a hereditary constitutional monarchy.[12] While it granted freedom

7 See for example, Akimbekov 2015.

8 Tanin 2011.

9 Government of Afghanistan 2005, 1, 15.

10 "Constitution Is Signed," *Kabul Times*, October 3, 1964.

11 "Alkozai Talks to Balkh People on Constitution," *Kabul Times*, October 1, 1964; see also Wahab and Youngerman 2007, 124.

12 Government of Afghanistan 2005, 3, 7–8.

of speech, respect for the king, the monarchy, and Islam were not to be violated.[13] The parliament (Wolesi Jirga) was to be elected by the citizens but could be dissolved by the king, who also appointed the prime minister, judges, and other officials. The parliament could discuss laws, but ultimately, they were implemented only with the approval of the king, which he frequently withheld.[14] Thus, the power remained with the king and the democratic rights the constitution granted were limited.

The discrepancy between the propagation of the constitution and the limited change resulting from it caused disappointment among those who were expecting a democratic development in Afghanistan. The first demonstration Tahera Shams took part in – and in fact the first large demonstration in Kabul – is commonly called the 3 Aqrab. It took place on the third day of the month of Aqrab in 1344 according to the Afghan calendar, corresponding to October 25, 1965. So much importance was attached to this event that Mohammad Osman Halif described it to me as if he had been there, only later correcting himself that he was still in Gardez at that time, having arrived in Kabul one year later. The demonstration was triggered by disappointment in proceedings before the initial session of the first elected parliament. To ensure the transparency of the new system, sessions of the Wolesi Jirga were supposed to be open to the public. When the new cabinet was to be introduced about a year after the passing of the constitution, people – among them, many university and high school students – went to the parliament building. They expected to witness an important event in the history of Afghanistan. Since the number of listeners was larger than the number of the seats in the galleries, students began to take the seats of the MPs. In reaction, the government postponed the session to the next day.[15] On that day, 3 Aqrab 1344, the government announced that the session would be closed to the public.[16] This provoked the memorable demonstration, in which hundreds marched through the city.

One of my interlocutors was in his last year at Habibia High School when the demonstrators passed the school building on their way to the parliament. They shouted slogans for democracy and against the government. He and all his class-

13 Government of Afghanistan 2005, 8, 18–19.

14 Government of Afghanistan 2005, 7–8; Bulatov 1997, 253.

15 Yousefzai 1974, 172–73. Ibrahimi writes that supporters of the PDPA members of parliament went to see the discussion and Maoists disturbed the session by blocking the seats of the members. (Ibrahimi 2012, 8). I have not talked to anybody who entered parliament on that day but Yousefzai's account of an unorganized chaos is closer to the stories I have heard from members of different political groups. It is plausible, though, that different people went to the parliament with different intentions.

16 "Schools Closed for Weeks After Demonstrations," *Kabul Times*, October 26, 1965.

mates joined the crowd. While moving through the streets, more and more people joined them, and some gave spontaneous speeches. One of them, my interlocutor remembers, jumped on a "stage" – probably a wall or another elevated place – and declared, "I bow in front of you, because you are defending the rights of the people." In the evening, the crowd clashed with the police.[17] Official newspaper accounts claim that students threw stones "at cars and buildings" and the police had to stop them.[18] My interlocutors, in contrast, present the day as a furious but peaceful demonstration until the police interfered and killed three people: a student of the Educational Institute of the Ministry of Agriculture, a student of the Teacher Training College, and a tailor.[19] The next day, the government announced that schools and the university would be closed for a week – a reaction that would be repeated several times in the years to come. According to the *Kabul Times*, the government declared in its announcement

> that intelligent students should be aware that the changes and progress that have come about in the country as the result of the implementation of the constitution and the coming into being of a new parliament and legal government are not affected by acts in violation of law and public order.[20]

The mutual accusations about the other side threatening Afghanistan's democratic development became a core part of the political conflicts of those years.

A few days after the 3 Aqrab, Prime Minister Yusuf stepped down and the king appointed Mohammad Hashem Maiwandwal to the post. Initially, Maiwandwal managed to win the support of the students by surprisingly showing up on the campus of Kabul University two days after the parliament had approved his cabinet. The students had gathered to mourn for those who had died during the 3 Aqrab protests and, according to a newspaper article, Maiwandwal came to offer his condolences and promised to listen to the students' demands. The students celebrated Maiwandwal as their hero and carried him on their shoulders.[21] Their enthusiasm ended soon, though. Their main demand was that those who ordered the shooting of the demonstrators be held responsible. An unrealistic demand,

17 Anonymous phone interview, April 12, 2019.

18 "Schools Closed for Weeks After Demonstrations," *Kabul Times*, October 26, 1965.

19 Anonymous interview, London, November 21, 2017; anonymous interview, Bonn, October 5, 2017. The official number of students killed during the clashes with the police is three and this is what most of my interlocutors refer to. However, other sources claim that the number of casualties was higher. See, for example, Emadi 2001, 433.

20 "Schools Closed for Weeks After Demonstrations," *Kabul Times*, October 26, 1965.

21 "Premier Speaks to University Students," *Kabul Times*, November 6, 1965.

says one of my interlocutors, as the shooting was ordered by Sardar Abdul Wali, the king's cousin and son-in-law.[22] Indeed, no consequences followed, proving to the students that power was not in the hands of the people, as they demanded, but in the hands of the royal family.

The students' discontent with the political system was deeply entrenched with the global political situation at that time. The wish for political participation and opposition to the king's politics is comparable to similar upheavals then taking place in many other countries. Ross argues in the context of France that protests were a sign of "refusal of the roles or places predetermined by the social system."[23] Students in Afghanistan also refused to accept their roles as objects of the state. As Christiansen and Scarlett also point out in their study of the Global 1960s in the Third World, protests were directed against the "inefficiency and injustice of postcolonial society, the lingering presence of colonial institutions, mentalities, and influences".[24] While, as Jeremy Suri argues, the rhetoric of the Cold War and of decolonization promised progress towards material wealth and independent nation-states, in many countries the status quo did not change.[25] Afghanistan in the 1960s cannot be described as a postcolonial society as it had never been a colony, but the limbo of the government between the rhetoric of an independent nation-state and its reliance on international donors and the old elite bear similar characteristics. It is this limbo in which the shah declared a new and supposedly democratic constitution while maintaining a firm grip on power. As in many other countries, students demanded that more of the rhetoric become true and challenged the existing political system.

In many countries the discontent with the social and political structures was sparked by and/or fought out against the education system. As mentioned in the previous chapter, education had been boosted in large parts of the world and more and more young people received secondary and higher education. Educations systems, however, were often unprepared for this large influx of critical-minded students.[26] At the same time, the advancement of formal education had been a colonial project and became a central part of the Cold War competition for influence in the Third World.[27] It was especially in the Third World that

22 Anonymous phone interview, April 12, 2019.
23 Ross 2002, 79.
24 Christiansen and Scarlett 2013a, 4.
25 Suri 2003, 165.
26 Christiansen and Scarlett 2013a, 6.
27 Westad 2010, 93; Tsvetkova 2008, 199; Lorenzini 2020, 29.

students acquired a self-consciousness through education with which they criticized the education system and with it the global geopolitical order.[28]

Interlocutors name the lack of education facilities for broader parts of society as one of the main reasons they perceived Afghanistan as backward. For example, they illustrated the backwardness of the country by highlighting the low literacy rate. One of them, a university student in the mid-1970s and sympathizer of Parcham says, "Life was very primitive, like 500, 600 years ago and nobody could be happy with that. [...] Probably 10 or 15% were able to read and write, or I don't know, probably even less. It was difficult to accept that."[29] School students all over the country also protested because of the lack of facilities at their schools and the limited possibilities to continue their education. One interlocutor who went to school in Herat describes how students in the city united in support of the students of one madrasa that urgently needed to be renovated and did not have enough classrooms. Students accused the rector of mismanagement and demanded his resignation. When a commission from Kabul arrived in Herat to meet a delegation of the students, the situation had deteriorated and the students' demands had expanded: following clashes with the police, the student delegation demanded that the police chief and the governor of Herat resign. The commission from Kabul was willing to discuss the demands regarding the school, but further demands were not negotiable.[30]

According to articles in the PDPA's newspaper, *Parcham*, similar protests took place at schools all over the country. Several articles mention how students were dismissed from their schools and thus "deprived of the right to study [...] against article 34 of the constitution."[31] Most of these articles then go on to explain that students were protesting because their buildings urgently needed renovation and the tax money had instead been wasted by the local authorities.[32] In another

28 Charton-Bigot 2010, 85–86; Summers 2019, 128.

29 Zaman, in conversation with the author, Bad Nauheim, March 3, 2018.

30 Massum Faryar, in conversation with the author, Berlin, June 19, 2019.

31 "*Tazahirat-e shagirdan-e Lisa-ye Ibn Yamin va shahrian-e Sheberghan* (Demonstration of Students of the Ibn Yamin School and the Citizens of Sheberghan)," *Parcham*, 23 Saur 1347 (May 13, 1968), 4.

32 See, for example, "*I'tiraz-e shagirdan-e Shuvunzai-ye Rukha-ye Panjshir bar amal-e hukumat* (Critique by the Students of the School Rokha Panjshir of the Activities of the Government)," *Parcham*, 6 Jauza 1347 (May 27, 1968), 4; "*Ikhraj-e chand tan az shagirdan dar Vilayat-e Kunduz* (Dismissal of Some Students in Kunduz Province)," *Parcham*, 17 Saratan 1347 (July 8, 1968), 4; "*Tauqif-e khair-e qanuni-ye chahar tan az shagirdan-e Lisa-ye Abu Abid-e Vilayat-e Faryab* (Maymana) (Illegal Arrest of Four Students of the Abu Abid School of the Province Faryab [Maymana])," *Parcham*, 21 Asad 1347 (August 12, 1968), 4.

instance, students at a girls' school in Kabul went on strike with the demand that their middle school be transformed into a lyceum, thus adding three years of education and facilitating access to the university entrance exam. After several days of strikes and demonstrations, according to the article, the Ministry of Education agreed to make the school a lyceum and urged the students to return to their classes. As soon as they returned, the report says, the ministry betrayed its promise.[33] Incidents like these created an environment of mistrust in which minor issues could lead to demonstrations against the government.

Most of my interlocutors praise the high quality of education at the university in their times. This praise is based on a comparison with the development of the education system in Afghanistan since the 1990s. Beyond this praise, some interlocutors mention outdated curricula and an authoritarian style of teaching which gave rise to discussions and protests. One of the former students, who studied at Kabul University in the mid-1970s and was not related to any political movement, says:

> Of course, back then, we criticized the form of education, because we had to learn things, [...] which were not contemporary. [...] For many of us, I was one of them, this was one of the reasons why we wanted to leave to see other universities outside of Afghanistan. [...] Sometimes we criticized the teachers, the professors in their absence. The system should change, the curricula should be modernized, reformed. Meaning, more modernization, more know-how, more technology, more knowledge. It is not necessary to always learn what had been learned in the past. Knowledge must be updated, become contemporary.[34]

The impression they were being taught by teachers who were not up to date came up in the interview with Atiq, whose narration I discussed in the previous chapter. He complains that, even though the Faculty of Sciences was equipped with laboratories with new technologies provided by West German donors, nobody knew how to use them.[35]

Political publications contributed to the impression that curricula were outdated. For example, large parts of the PDPA's newspaper *Khalq* are dedicated to a series of articles entitled "New Science and Philosophy", which provides expla-

33 "*Dushizagan tahsilat-e ali mikhahand* (Young Women Want High Education)," *Parcham*, 18 Qaus 1348 (December 9, 1968), 4.

34 Noori, in conversation with the author, Berlin, July 3, 2017.

35 Atiq, in conversation with the author, Germany, November 2, 2017.

nations of terms like "philosophy", "metaphysics", and "dialectic". In its introduction, the author states:

> Today's wonderful progress of science came as a fire, which has been thrown onto ignorance, short sightedness, prejudice, and scepticism, which has opened the way to big discoveries [....]. Notwithstanding its increasing thirst for knowledge, the society of Afghanistan has been kept distant from new sciences and philosophy by foreign colonialism and internal reaction and oppression.[36]

Outdated curricula gave students the impression they were being deprived of this new knowledge.

The general discontent with the education system sparked some minor protests but larger demonstrations erupted when the government wanted to restrict political activism on campus. One of the peaks of the protests at Kabul University was one against a university reform. Ever since the different faculties had moved to the joint campus in 1964, the university was supposed to have a constitution. According to newspaper articles, the government had submitted a draft the same year, but the parliament did not get around to discussing it. Eventually, in late September 1968, while the parliament was in recess, the government issued a decree enforcing the university constitution immediately. The premise of the decree was that the constitution would be ratified within the first month of the parliamentary session.[37] The constitution divided responsibilities for the administration and the appointment of different positions within the leading bodies of the university. While it granted the right to form a student association, it created discontent among students for mainly two reasons: most high positons were to be appointed by the government, and the constitution prohibited all political activism by students and university staff.[38]

A few days later, on October 14, 1968, the newspaper *Parcham* published an article written by Babrak Karmal, the leader of the Parcham wing of the PDPA and a member of parliament. The text highlights the importance of students' movements and condemns the new law for its undemocratic structures, the "ridiculous" prohibition on political activism, which contradicted the constitution of

36 Duktur Sh, "*Ilm va filsufa-ye nau* (New Science and Philosophy)", *Khalq*, 12 Saur 1345 (May 2, 1966), 2–3.

37 "House Committee Rejects Decree Education Law," *Kabul Times*, November 14, 1968.

38 Articles describing the process of the implementation of the law and an English version of the law's text: "New Constitution for Universities Becomes Operative," *Kabul Times*, September 25, 1968; "Constitution of the University," *Kabul Times*, September 26, 1968; "Home Press at a Glance," *Kabul Times*, September 26, 1968; "Text of the Universities' Constitution," *Kabul Times*, September 28, 1968; "Text of the Universities' Constitution," *Kabul Times*, September 29, 1968.

Afghanistan, and for its use of the male Arabic plural form of the word "students" (*moḥaṣelīn*) instead of the gender-neutral Persian form (*moḥaṣelān*). On 4 Aqrab (October 26, 1968), a day after the third anniversary of the 3 Arqab demonstration of 1965, students at Kabul University went on a general strike. Five days later, they submitted a resolution to the government in which they demanded amendments to the university law. This resolution was printed in *Parcham*. It declares the university law as violating the constitution using similar arguments to those of Babrak Karmal. The parliament discussed the draft several times during the first two weeks of November, finally rejecting it on November 24, 1968.[39] Having reached their goal, the students returned to class until the end of the academic year in January.

The next academic year began with an orientation week from March 24, through April 4, 1969 and classes were supposed to start the following day. Instead, the term was greeted with a new wave of student protests. This time, students demanded the right to (higher) education, equal opportunities, and criticized the foreign domination of the education system. Graduates of lyceums all over the country had taken the *kānkūr* exam to enter Kabul University. As the number of these schools had multiplied over the preceding years and the bar to enter the university was high, many students failed. From April 2 onwards, the disappointed candidates and sympathetic university students occupied the campus, accusing the government of having set unfair regulations. According to an article in the Swiss newspaper *Neue Züricher Zeitung*, most of the students who had not been admitted to the university were graduates of Istiqlal School and Nijat School. These schools were organized along the French and German education system respectively and some of the classes were taught in the corresponding languages. Graduates of these schools, the article argues, were disadvantaged in comparison to graduates of Habibia High School, which was organized according to the US-American system, as was the *kānkūr* exam.[40] And it was not only students from those three schools wanted to enter Kabul University; graduates from schools in the provinces pointed out that the level of their schools was much lower in comparison to those in Kabul. For them, it was even more difficult to be admitted to the university.[41]

39 "House Committee Rejects Decree Education Law," *Kabul Times*, November 14, 1968; "Afghan Week in Review: Decree Education Law Rejected," *Kabul Times*, November 24, 1968.

40 "Politische Unrast in Afghanistan. Aufbegehren der studentischen Jugend (1969)," *Neue Züricher Zeitung*, July 18, 1969.

41 For example Farzanah, in conversation with the author, Germany, March 3, 2018.

Protesting students criticized the education system for its lack of consistent standards and for being driven by foreign donors' interests. The journal *Parcham* framed the protest in terms of class struggle and anti-imperialism and argued that the education system was "under the influence of cultural colonialism" and should be transformed into a "truly national, progressive and equal education system".[42] On April 15, 1969, the Wolesi Jirga discussed the students' demands and lowered necessary points in the *kānkūr* from 52 to 45.[43] This did not end the unrest, though. According to *Parcham*, throughout the week following the Wolesi Jirga's decision, students of the Nijat School, supported by "thousands of students", continued to protest shouting slogans such as "End to the colonial education system in Afghanistan! We want a national and progressive culture of education!"[44] The government claimed that it had settled the issue for the *kānkūr* in April 1970 by adapting the exam to the different conditions of the education system,[45] but this did not resolve the general discontent with the dependence on foreign aid – in the education system in particular, and in the country more generally.

Just a few days after the official settlement of the conflict surrounding the *kānkūr* in 1969, students at the Ibn Sina School began a strike. They pointed to corruption in the education system and to police violence against students. Both topics were not new to demonstrations and discussions. One of my interlocutors, for example, explains that he mainly participated in demonstrations because he felt the entire education system was corrupt:

> The king was corrupt. The government was corrupt and the king or his government only gave the best scholarships to the children of senior government officers. And they went to France, to Paris, or they went to Germany, and they came to London. The poor people: Moscow.[46]

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42 "*Mubarizat-e paigir va qanuni-ye davtaliban-e shumul ba puhantun ba piruzi rasid* (The Persistent and Legal Struggle of Candidates to Enter University has Reached Victory)," *Parcham*, 1 Saur 1348 (April 21, 1969), 1, 4.

43 "*Dar jalasa-ye umumi-ye diruz-e Vulusi Jirga faisila ba amal amad ta nambar-e imtihan-e kankur az 52 ba 45 pa'in avarda shava*d (In Yesterday's General Session of the Wolesi Jirga the Decision has Been Made that the Number of the *kānkūr* Exam Will be Decreased From 52 to 45)," *Anis*, April 16, 1969.

44 "*Dar sarasar-e hafta-ye guzashta hazaran shagird lisaha-ye markaz ba khatir-e pushtibani az khastha-ye senfi-ye shagirdan-e lisa-ye nijat dast ba tazahirat zadand* (Throughout the Last Week Thousands of Students of the Schools of the Capital have Demonstrated Because of the Support of the Demands of the Students of the Nijat School)," *Parcham*, 57, 1 Saur 1348 (April 21, 1969), 3.

45 "University Entrance Exams to Begin April 10," *Kabul Times*, April 2, 1970.

46 Bashir Sakhawarz, in conversation with the author, London, November 22, 2017.

Similarly, police violence had been a central issue at least since three people were killed during the protests of 3 Aqrab in 1965. Between 1966 and 1972, marches took place in memory of the victims of the demonstration on its anniversary each year.

Against the background of general distrust of the authorities, the incident that caused the protest at Ibn Sina School, in which Mohammad Osman Halif was hurt, was the appointment of a teacher. Students identified the new teacher as not qualified and as a relative of the school principal. In reaction, students went on strike. On the basis of student accounts, Louis Dupree describes the day in the following way in one of his American Universities Field Staff Reports:

> When Ibn Sina was surrounded by police, some students armed themselves with sticks, although few really expected an assault. After a short while to get set, the police stormed the school with violent suddenness. [...] The first onslaught came from the ghond-i-zarbah, a special unit of riot police, commanded by career officers, who have had West German training in that specialty. Several students, unaware of impending disaster, were bathing when the action began. None was spared as the falling clubs put every student into one of three groups: the dead; the injured and/or arrested; the escapees. It is probable that the only fatality was Asil Khan, a boarding school student from Paktya Province, although some students claim many other dead were secretly buried by the government. The government has produced a doctor who swears that he had treated Asil Khan for a heart condition over a period of three years and he died of natural causes.[47]

Dupree goes on to explain that the students perceived the harsh reaction of the government as being due to their mainly Pashtun and rural backgrounds. More students were arrested later when they tried to take Asil Khan's body to his family.

The protest at Ibn Sina School soon spread to other educational institutions. As corruption, discrimination, and especially police violence concerned everyone, students from other schools and the university soon planned a larger demonstration set to start at the university campus on May 19, 1969. Before they could begin, however, the campus was stormed by the police, leaving several people injured, among them Mohammad Osman Halif. In one of the rare articles on students' protests in state-owned newspapers, the *Kabul Times* denounced allegations of police violence:

> A spokesman for the Kabul Police Department rejected the allegations made by some private papers on the arrest of 200 students [...] 'The police are responsible for maintaining order and will lawfully act to preserve it', the source added. [...] 'The reports that a student was trampled by cavalry horses and the rumours that a girl was killed are absolutely base-

47 Dupree 1970, 1.

> less' the spokesman added. Meanwhile student demonstrations yesterday created inconvenience to public offices, pedestrians, shops, and traffic, especially in Jade Maiwand area where they held a meeting around Maiwand monument. Traffic came to a complete standstill in Jade Maiwand. [...] Some demonstrators while crossing roads and streets threw stones around them and shopkeepers in a panic closed their shops. [...] In clashes with the police, some policemen were injured because the unruly demonstrators used sticks and branches cut from the trees at the two sides of the roads.[48]

In contrast to this official description, university and high school students perceived the protest as peaceful until it was met with police violence and several of their leaders were arrested. They doubled down on the protest and began another strike. They demanded consequences for the police violence and the release of the arrested students. According to Louis Dupree, they shouted, "Death to the class-ridden Parliament, which serves only the Establishment," "Down with the cruel reactionary government, which is against the Afghan people," "Death to the police and gendarmes," "Death to the old and new worldwide imperialism," and "Death to local and foreign-inspired feudalism."[49]

On June 28, 1969, Prime Minister Mohammad Nur Ahmad Etemadi gave a speech on *Radio Afghanistan* condemning the students' protests, accusing private newspapers of misguiding them, and urging students to return to the classrooms to fulfil their responsibilities as students. "It will be a great sin indeed for us," Etemadi said, "to allow the upward trend in the life of the country to be hampered by events and personal designs and to turn back Afghanistan's caravan of progress."[50] On July 2, 1969, the *Kabul Times* announced that classes at the university could finally resume. However, only one week later the University Council, with approval by the Ministry of Education, closed Kabul University, including the dormitories, for an indefinite time.[51] After the university had been closed and the provincial students had returned to their families, the protests calmed down, with the exception of the annual commemoration of the 3 Aqrab on October 25,

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48 "Police Deny Charges from Private Press That They Arrested 200 Students," *Kabul Times*, May 22, 1969.

49 Dupree 1970, 4.

50 "Text of Premier Etemadi's Speech," *Kabul Times*, June 30, 1969.

51 "Education Minister Attends House's Committee Meeting," *Kabul Time*s, May 29, 1969; "Kabul University Courses Resume," *Kabul Times*, July 2, 1969; "Kabul University Closed Temporarily: Students Wanting to Study Are to Register Afresh Soon," *Kabul Times*, July 9, 1969; "*I'tsab-e shagirdan-e Shuvunzai-ye Ibn Sina* (Strike of the Students of the Ibn Sina School)," *Parcham*, 22 Saur 1348 (May 12, 1969); "*Javanan-e mubariz-e Jarian-e Dimukratik-e Khalq-e Afghanistan dar barabar-e idi'a-ye saranval dar Muhakema-ye Ibtida'i-ye Kabul az khud difa' minimayand* (Fighting Youth of the People's Democratic Movement of Afghanistan defend Themselves Against the Attorney of the Court of Kabul)," *Parcham*, 28 Mizan 1948 (October 20, 1969).

1969. After four months, on November 6, Kabul University reopened. Some protests continued, but most students returned to class.[52]

Another topic that stirred unrest at Kabul University – as in many other parts of the world – were women's rights. On the one hand, the government promoted the equality of men and women, and they were officially equal before the constitution. The government presented itself as advocate of women's rights and pointed to the female university students as symbols of the country's progress.[53] On the other hand, women's opportunities in the educational and especially in the political arena were significantly inferior to those of men. This discrepancy became apparent when some members of the Wolesi Jirga advanced a bill restricting the right of women to travel abroad for educational purposes. In reaction, according to *Parcham*, a crowd of women gathered to protest the bill, gave speeches, and wrote a resolution that demanded respect for the declaration of equal rights in the constitution, which they sent to the Wolesi Jirga and the government.[54] As I could not find any further reports on the topic, it seems like the parliament rejected the bill following the protests.

For Tahera Shams, it had not been easy to enter university. She would have liked to study medicine, but her father disagreed. As a compromise, she registered at the Faculty of Letters and Humanities so she could become a teacher after graduation. The number of women at the university was much smaller than that of men. At Kabul University, special institutes for women had opened in 1950 and co-education of male and female students began in 1960.[55] A large share of the male students came from the provinces, while for women it was not common to live apart from their families. Also, only women graduating from the few lyceums for girls could take the *kānkūr*. In 1967, for example, when Mohammad Osman Halif registered at Kabul University, out of a total of 4,264 students at the university, 733 students were female.[56] In 1970, the *Kabul Times* published an article on the first female student who graduated from the prestigious Faculty of Engineering. In the article she is quoted explaining that four other girls had been enrolled at the faculty in the same year, but all of them dropped out.[57] Like Tahera Shams,

52 Dupree 1970, 12.

53 See, for example, Knabe 1974, 155–57.

54 "*Zanan, muhasilat, va mut'alimat-e kishvar i'teraz mikunid!* (Women, Students, and Pupils of the Country Protest!)," *Parcham*, 8 Asad 1347 (July 29, 1968), 1.

55 Sawitzki 1972, 68; Ruttig 2020.

56 Dupree 1971, 29.

57 "Afghan Girl Becomes First Civil Engineer in Country," *Kabul Times*, October 5, 1970. I do not have numbers on how many students graduated from the Faculty of Engineering in that year in total, but in 1967, 344 new students registered at the faculty, so in 1965, when the five female

most of the female students at the university studied at the Faculty of Letters and Humanities, where, according to her, about 30 percent of the students were women.

Female students were not only less involved in political activism because they were fewer in number than male students, but also because their participation was less socially accepted. An article in *Parcham*, for example, describes a protest by students at a girls' school in Sheberghan and notes that several of the participants were beaten by their parents afterwards for participating in the demonstration.[58] A prominent example of a woman defying social stigma and participating in politics is Anahita Ratibzad. She was one of the first women to study at the Faculty of Medicine, in separate classes for female students beginning in 1957. After graduating from grade 8 of Malalai School, she got married and went to Chicago, where she trained as a nurse. Upon her return to Kabul, she taught at a nursing school before continuing her own education. Anahita Ratibzad was associated with the PDPA from the movements' early days and was elected to the Wolesi Jirga in 1965. In an interview in 2011, she said that her role in the party had been far from clear in the beginning, as not all founding members were fond of the idea of women being active in politics, despite gender equality being part of the official party program. According to her, it was only after the split of the PDPA into the two wings, Khalq and Parcham, in 1967 that she was granted full rights as a Parchami party member. Meanwhile, she had founded the Democratic Organization of the Women of Afghanistan (DOWA), the first members of which were mainly wives and relatives of the founders of the PDPA.[59] Over time, female university students joined the organization; it became an important institution in the 1980s, when the engagement of women in politics was propagated by the PDPA government. Back in the 1960s, however, it was remarkable that a group of women and girls took to the streets to stand up for rights they had been granted by the constitution but were denied by many social and political forces.

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students entered, they were five out of 200–300 hundred students. Director General of Education at Kabul University 1968, 54. Najimi writes that in the architecture classes at the Faculty of Engineering usually one, "but never more than three" of the students were female. Each year, eight to ten male and female students graduated in architecture at that time: Najimi 2012, 159.

58 "*Muzahira-ye muta'limat-e mutavasita-ye nusvan-e Sheberghan: Nukhustin tazahirat-e khiabani-ye dushizagan-e Afghanistan* (Demonstration of Students of Girls' Middle School in Sheberghan: First Street-Demonstration of Women in Afghanistan)," *Parcham*, 3 Saratan 1347 (June 24, 1968), 4.

59 Arif 2011, 1–22.

3.2 Political Organizations Take Shape

Tahera Shams and Mohammad Osman Halif became increasingly involved in political activism during the political unrest discussed in the previous subchapter. Finally, she became a Shu'lai, while he sympathized with Javanan-e Musulman. Most literature mentioning political activism on campus suggests that the political groups stirred unrest by agitating or misguiding students. My interlocutors' narrations, however, show that unrest came first, and that political organizations only came to dominate students' discussions and demonstrations over time. This subchapter follows shift in focus of political activism at the university from general opposition to the government to a competition for influence by the political groups active on campus.

Tahera Shams had participated in the 3 Aqrab demonstration in 1965 and joined other protests in the following years. Over time, these demonstrations became the platforms of different political movements. The first political organization to become prominent through its newspapers and speeches by politicians in parliament and at demonstrations was the PDPA. The party's call for a struggle within the framework of the constitution did not go far enough for Tahera Shams. She read all the political publications she could get her hands on. When she came across the first issue of the newspaper *Shu'la-ye Javid* in April 1968, which called for more radical change, she immediately knew that this was her movement. Tahera Shams met other people who understood themselves as Shu'lais and became part of the movement. She frequently joined meetings to discuss books and articles. She believed in a "revolution according to the Chinese model: against reformism, against parliamentarism, against the Soviet Union." Members of the PDPA, she says, only wanted to sit down and talk. They did not want to really fight for their rights.

Mohammad Osman Halif had a completely different perspective on the political discussions taking place around him. He complains about the leftist students' lack of respect for Islamic values, which he thought should guide politics in Afghanistan. There was neither a mosque nor prayer rooms on campus, Mohammad Osman Halif says. The class schedule was arranged in a way that those students who wanted to do their prayers could do so, but if classes ran long or other events took place, prayer times were usually not considered. When, in spring 1969, a group of students decided that it was time to act against the "atheist communists" dominating the political activism on campus, they founded Javanan-e Musulman. One of their first initiatives was to create a decent space for praying, reading the Qur'an, and religious discussions. The common room of the dormitory that they used is frequently referred to as a "mosque", but according to Mohammad Osman Halif it was just a room with simple carpets – not beautiful,

but always clean. He says it was a strange place, as sometimes, after their prayers, other students would come to the room to make music, a provocation to those who had just prayed. One day, Mohammad Osman Halif explains, somebody threw a Qur'an out of the window of the prayer room, and it was found with its pages all torn and scattered. After this provocation, many new people supported Javanan-e Musulman, Mohammad Osman Halif says, because they understood how dangerous the "communists" were.

Historiography usually mentions Javanan-e Musulman in the context of the emergence of Islamism or the history of the "Mujahidin". As Gulbuddin Hekmatyar is the only prominent figure of the movement who survived the wars of the last decades, much of this literature evolves around him. In this context, there is a well-known anecdote that comes up as a curiosity or even to delegitimize Hekmatyar's credentials as an Islamist by suggesting that he had formerly sympathized with "communism". One of the most recently published biographies tells the story in the following way:

> Hekmatyar recalled being in the tenth grade when an influx of new students arrived from Kabul [at his high school in Kunduz City]. They were a window into a different world, wearing the latest clothing, sporting fashionable haircuts and using terms like 'feudalism' that were alien to most school children in Kunduz. One of them, Asadullah, was the nephew of Hafizullah Amin, a prominent communist. Hekmatyar would remember how he spent an entire day arguing with Asadullah at school; they continued their debate on the way home, walking together to a house in town where Hekmatyar was renting a small room. As they parted company, Asadullah asked if it was possible to prove God's existence. Religious belief was taken for granted in Afghanistan and Hekmatyar was stunned that anyone could be so crass.[60]

Probably, most students who later joined Javanan-e Musulman had similar experiences: political discussions and demonstrations were omnipresent on campus from 1965 onwards, and everyone discussed Marxist ideas.

The first movement recruiting members from among the students was the PDPA, which was established in 1965. Later, the PDPA claimed to have organized the demonstration on 3 Aqrab 1344. Russian-language historiography especially portrays the demonstration as a protest organized by the PDPA, as "under the influence of leftist radicals," or as organized by the co-founder of the PDPA, Babrak Karmal, and/or by the student and later president Najibullah.[61] Babrak

60 Sands and Qazizai 2019, 42. Hekmatyar told the same story in an interview with the Arabic journal *Al Wasar* translated into German by Claudia Bach, see Bach 1997, 3. Another biography even claims that Hekmatyar was a member of Parcham for four years, see Ahmed 2004, 11.
61 See, for example, Bulatov 1997, 108; Korgun 2004, 332; Plastun and Andrianov 1998, 27.

Karmal, who was a member of parliament at the time, and Najibullah, who was a student at the Faculty of Medicine, might have played a role in agitating among the students. However, Tahera Shams emphasizes that she and many other students joined the demonstration without having any connection to a political movement. All my interlocutors agree that this was a spontaneous mass protest; it was not organized by one specific political party or group.

The PDPA could gain support among university students via the discrepancy between promises of progress and the actual social and political situation in the country. When the PDPA was founded, the party was a relatively small group of intellectuals who had previously met in discussion circles. Four members of the PDPA were elected to the Wolesi Jirga in 1965. As speeches in parliament were broadcast by *Radio Afghanistan*, the PDPA could use this platform for provocative speeches to reach the broadest possible audience. Some of the speeches were then printed in leaflets and distributed among students. One incident attracted major attention: during a discussion of the government's annual budget, Babrak Karmal held a speech strongly criticizing the social and political order of the country. In reaction, a physical fight began between PDPA members and other members of parliament. Babrak Karmal was injured and is said to have presented himself as a victim from the balcony of the hospital to the crowd of his supporters.[62]

The emergence of other political groups in opposition to the government was a prolonged process over the following years. First, the PDPA disintegrated into two wings, Khalq and Parcham, as a result of personal differences and power struggles. The political ideas these two groups propagated did not differ much, however. Both wings endorsed the constitution and referred to it to legitimize their demands. In the last issue of the *Khalq* newspaper before it was banned by the government, the publishers printed a transcript of a conversation between a "neutral landsman" and an "employee of the newspaper *Khalq*." They discuss questions regarding the legality of the texts published in the newspaper. The "employee of the newspaper *Khalq*" frequently refers to the constitution. For example, the following quote is the answer to whether it was illegal for the newspaper to write about political movements and publish a program like a party program, even though the formation of parties was not legally allowed:

> Article 32 of the Constitution of the Society announces the fundamental right of the people to establish political societies and form political parties (some general principles about this are fixed in the mentioned paragraph) and especially article 126, paragraph 2, anticipates

62 Bulatov 1997, 137–38; Arif 2011, 22.

> laws on political parties so why should a political newspaper not have the right to make steps and publish about the 'preparation of organizational steps' and the role of the peoples of the country in the revival of the spirit of formation and organization?[63]

The "employee of the newspaper *Khalq*" strongly criticizes the "ruling class" but refers directly to the king only once to highlight his responsibility in implementing the constitution. He refers to "article 7 of the constitution 'The King … is the protector of the constitution' and article 15 'The King … secures the constitution and … protects the rights of the people.' We still trust in these words of the constitution."[64] The debate reflects the movement's relationship to the constitution and the government. On the one hand, they legitimized their demands via the constitution while, on the other hand, accusing the government of violating constitutional democratic rights.

Even more than Khalq, Parcham emphasized that political struggle should take place within the constitutional system. Parcham was the only political organization prominent among students, some leaders of which were members of the parliaments elected in 1965 and 1969. Also, articles in the journal *Parcham*, which was launched two years later than *Khalq*, frequently refer to the constitution to explain and legitimize their demands. For example, in articles on demonstrations and strikes by school students, the paper argues that the dismissal of students from school is illegal as it contradicts the constitutional right to education.[65] Similarly, a report on a demonstration by girls and women protesting a draft law restricting their rights to travel mentions that the women wrote a resolution "with references to the freedoms authorized by the constitution, especially 16, article 1,

63 "*Khalq az khud difa' mikunad* (The People Defend Themselves)," *Khalq*, 26 Saur 1345 (May 16, 1966), 1–4, 1.

64 "*Khalq az khud difa' mikunad* (The People Defend Themselves)," *Khalq*, 26 Saur 1345 (May 16, 1966), 1–4, 1. The quotations of the constitution are slightly changed. Its original text in the official translation reads: "The King is the protector of the basic principles of the sacred religion of Islam, the guardian of Afghanistan's independence and territorial integrity, the custodian of its Constitution and the center of its national unity." Government of Afghanistan 2005.

65 For example, "*Tazahirat-e Shagirdan-e Lisa-ye Ibn Yamin va Sharian-e Sheberghan* (Demonstration of Students of the Ibn Yamin School and the Citizens of Sheberghan)," *Parcham*, 23 Saur 1347 (May 13, 1968), 4; "*Ikhraj-e Ghair-e Qanuni-ye Yak Tan az Muta'limat-e Lisa-ye Shahdakht-e Bilqis* (Illegal dismissal of one student of Shahdakht-e Bilqis School)," *Parcham*, 20 Jauza 1347 (June 10, 1968), 4.

21, 26, and 34."[66] *Parcham* frequently published protocols of discussions in the Wolesi Jirga and emphasized the right to political participation.[67]

Students also discussed the constitution. One of my interlocutors describes frequent debates with one of his teachers at the Faculty of Law:

> Well, for instance he [a lecturer at the Faculty of Law] was defending the monarchy. And we said: 'The monarchy it is not a constitutional monarchy.' [...] He used to say: 'Now we don't have an absolute monarchy, we have a constitutional monarchy.' And we said: 'No, it's wrong, because you see, look at the son in law of the king. He is controlling the parliament. He is controlling the government. What sort of constitutional monarchy is this?'[68]

The role of the PDPA in these discussions increased over time – partly because of their wide public outreach with the newspapers *Khalq* and *Parcham* and the broadcast of speeches by their members of parliament on the radio.

Tahera Shams was not convinced by the PDPA's agenda, but found her place with Shu'la-ye Javid. Corresponding to the conflict between the Soviet Union and the Chinese Communist Party, this movement positioned itself as an alternative to the more moderate PDPA. Articles in the newspaper *Shu'la-ye Javid* condemn the PDPA as "false friends of the people" promoting a "non-capitalist way of growth" based on compromises with imperialism and feudalism.[69] There is no official history of the movement, as it was never a structured group. Different authors provide different, and partly contradictory, accounts of the complicated relations between several sub-groups and leading figures of the movement.[70] At this early stage of the movement, factionalism seems to have concerned mainly the leading circles but did not play a major role in the accounts of my interlocutors.[71]

In Tahera Shams' case, as in many others, political activism and personal relationships soon became deeply intertwined. During the meetings of the

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66 "*Zanan, Muhasilat, va Mut'alimat-e Kishvar I'teraz Mikunid!* (Women, Students, and Pupils of the Country Protest!)," *Parcham*, 8 Asad 1347 (July 29, 1968), 1.

67 See, for example, articles on the first pages of the 30th, 40th, 41st, and 42nd issues of *Parcham*.

68 Anonymous interview, London, November 21, 2017.

69 Dr Hadi Mahmudi, "*Sima-ye rah-e rusht-e ghair-e sarmayadari dar kishvarha-ye arabi* (The Physiognomy of the Non-Capitalist Way of Growth in Arab Countries," *Shu'la-ye Javid*, 2 Jawza 1347 (May 23, 1968), 2–3; "*Hamzisti-ye musalimat amiz ya nafi mubarizat-e azadibakhsh-e khalqha alai-ye impirialism va isti'mar* (Peaceful Coexistence or the Negation of the Fight for Liberation of the People Against Imperialism and Colonialism)," *Shu'la-ye Javid*, 2 Jawza 1347 (May 23, 1968), 4.

70 The most detailed and yet short analysis of the movement: Ibrahimi 2012. Piovesana published a collection of narrations of former Shu'lais: Piovesana 2012. Other and partly contradicting descriptions are: Emadi 2001, 432–33; Nuriddinov 2003, 80; Bulatov 1997, 252.

71 For a discussion of the factionalism of later years, see chaper 5.

Shu'lais, Tahera Shams met her future husband who was as a teacher at the Faculty of Medicine. He was important in the development of her political ideas, as they read books together and he explained their meaning to her. They spent a lot of time together, mostly in the broader context of political activism, and he encouraged her to intensify her engagement with the movement. At the Faculty of Letters and Humanities, where Tahera studied, there were three Chinese students. She did not know them, but she greeted them occasionally. One day, she approached them and asked whether they could give her any books. They agreed and from then on she would go to the university very early in the morning and leave her bag in one of the classrooms. Later she would return and find books the Chinese students had placed in her bag, mostly texts by Mao. She then took the books to the Faculty of Medicine, where her future husband would hide them before she picked them up again to distribute at the university and girls' schools. She became even more committed to Shu'la-ye Javid after a demonstration on June 15, 1968 in which students supported a protest of workers at the Jangalak Automotive Maintenance Repair Plant. The demonstration turned violent, and the police arrested 13 of the demonstrators, among them Tahera Shams's future husband. He was only released from prison after Daoud Khan's coup five years later. After the incident, the government prohibited the publication of the newspaper *Shu'la-ye Javid*.

With the PDPA and Shu'la-ye Javid gaining prominence on campus, Mohammad Osman Halif was constantly confronted with their arguments and felt uncomfortable and helpless in discussions. At some point, he decided to go to the library:

> So I began going to the library, straight from class to the library. Directly, not first to the dormitory, but to the library. I began to study and the first book I read was a book by Jalaluldin-e Farsi. He is an Afghan, who was in Iran and he is one of the three people whom Khomeini instructed to Islamize the university in Tehran. He wrote that book. The title was *Hukumate Islami* [Islamic government]. I began to read that book and the argumentation was very good. I liked it. I read it again and learned even more.

Mohammad Osman Halif was not the only student engaging with literature in search of arguments to defend Islam in Afghanistan against the growing leftist influence. When Javanan-e Musulman emerged, Mohammad Osman Halif found a group of students with whom he felt comfortable in discussions. With their support, he could stand up against his leftist classmates.

Javanan-e Musulman had its own political agenda, and yet, its emergence was a reaction to the strong presence of leftist groups. I thus agree with David B. Edwards when he writes that leftist and Islamist groups in the late 1960s and early 1970s were closely related to each other. "Sworn enemies, they also needed

– and ultimately came to be mirror images of – one another, linked together by their tactics, their fears, their confrontations, and their self-righteousness,"[72] Edwards writes. In an earlier article, Edwards argues that the structure of Javanan-e Musulman as well as its revolutionary ideology were modelled in reaction to the leftist parties.[73]

Abuzar Pirzadeh Ghaznavi, a former member of Javanan-e Musulman and the author of one of the most thorough descriptions of the movement, points to two narratives surrounding its foundation. The first is that, according to Burhanuddin Rabbani, a professor at the Shari'a Faculty and later leader of one of the major opposition parties in Peshawar, Javanan-e Musulman was founded in 1336 (1957), when Rabbani was still a high school student. According to this narrative, he founded the movement with some students and teachers of the Shari'a Faculty at Kabul University as an initiative against the leftist movements. The second is Hekmatyar's narrative; he claims that no organized movement existed before 1969, but unorganized political activism had always taken place. According to Hekmatyar, Javanan-e Musulman emerged from discussions after prayers in the improvised mosque of Kabul University's dormitory. Students gathered there to discuss the negative impact of the activities of the "communists" and possible ways to restrict their influence. Following Hekmatyar's narrative, Pirzadeh Ghaznavi mentions 14 Hamal 1348 (April 3, 1969) as the date of the group's founding. The students met for a first official meeting in a room of the Faculty of Law and for a second one at the Faculty of Letters and Humanities, where they decided to distribute so-called *shabnāmahā* ("night letters": pamphlets/leaflets), which they signed with "*Javānān-e Musulmān* (Muslim Youth)".[74]

The Russian historian Nurridinov describes the official foundation of Javanan-e Musulman as the unification of two groups: the professors and intellectuals surrounding Burhanuddin Rabbani, and the student group.[75] Edwards argues that the professors were not directly involved in the political activism and only provided the students with theoretical knowledge and ideas.[76] Thus, apparently religious political discussion circles existed prior to the mid-1960s, but Javanan-e Musulman, which was mainly organized by university students in close contact with professors at the Shari'a Faculty, was founded in 1969. Even though, at least according to Pirzadeh Ghaznavi, the movement was founded early in the aca-

72 Edwards 2002, 221.
73 Edwards 1995, 172.
74 Pirzadeh Ghaznavi 1394 (2015), 32.
75 Nuriddinov 2003, 105.
76 Edwards 1995, 175.

demic year of 1969, it seems to have taken several months until it became a significant political force on campus. Javanan-e Musulman is rarely mentioned in descriptions of the protests of 1969, rather coming up in conflicts over the following years.[77] The movement did not have clear structures, but sympathizers gathered to discuss literature and ideas and to train each other for debates.[78]

Mohammad Osman Halif knew some of the founding members of Javanan-e Musulman, as they all lived together in the same dormitory, and he soon joined the group. There was no official way to become a member, but those standing in opposition to the "communists" clearly belonged to Javanan-e Musulman. In the interview, Mohammad Osman Halif explains that he never understood the idea of an Islamic government and that he thinks nobody else did. However, at the time, he believed that an Islamic government was the solution for Afghanistan. The "communists" and everybody else, Mohammad Osman Halif argues, just tried to copy ideas from abroad and implement them in Afghanistan without properly studying the society. According to Halif, these groups as well as Zahir Shah's government were threatening the religious values of the people of Afghanistan. The religious authorities did not interfere and thus tolerated the political developments in the capital.[79] Javanan-e Musulman demanded change: inspired by scholars related to the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, the students wanted a political system guided by Islam.

The growing opposition between political groups changed the character of activism in general. Prior to the emergence of Javanan-e Musulman, conflicts between and within political groups had largely remained peaceful. The groups were united in opposition to the government and conflict mainly evolved around the question of how to stand up against the monarchy. The conflicts between Javanan-e Musulman and the leftist groups on campus dealt with the role of religion in politics and society and were thus deeply emotional. For many students who opposed Javanan-e Musulman, its members were religious fundamentalists, while its supporterscalled the Khalqis, Parchamis, and Shu'lais "communists" to emphasize their atheism.

For students sympathizing with Khalq, Parcham, or Shu'la-ye Javid, the role of religion was more complex than the designation as atheist communists sug-

77 For example, Louis Dupree only mentions Gahiz, the journal in which Javanan-e Musulman published some of their articles, in the footnotes as one of the political publications, but mentions Khalq, Parcham, and Shu'la-ye Javid as political groups involved in the demonstrations, Dupree 1970, 8.

78 Sands and Qazizai 2019, 55.

79 For a discussion of the role of religious authorities in politics in Afghanistan, see, for example, Edwards 1986, 273–74; Majrooh 1985, 98–99.

gests. For some of my interlocutors, it was difficult to discuss this topic with me, as religion is a sensitive issue in Afghanistan today. Others told me explicitly that they were not religious when they were students. In general, the different accounts should be understood in the context of a broad diversity of the meaning of religion in society. In a decentralized country with a multi-ethnic society there was no uniform understanding of what it meant to be religious.[80] Additionally, interlocutors from both sides did not discuss their own faith, but rather how their social environment reacted to their observance of religious rules. The main measurement by which they explained the role religion played in their lives was whether they were forced or asked to observe prayers and fasting and, in some cases, whether they were allowed to drink alcohol.

One of my interlocutors, for example, mentions that when he gathered with his friends at home, they would sometimes drink alcohol. His father, he says, did not care much.

> He once asked me. He said, 'Do you want to pray?' I said, 'Well, this is my decision.' And he never mentioned it again. [...] Yes, we are Muslims, but I was not a practicing Muslim. Then, I was not keen to go this route. But I would have liked to bring some kind of progress." For him, progress did not go hand in hand with religion, something he illustrated by telling me the reason for his desire to study medicine. When he was a boy, he says, his little brother fell ill and nobody could help him, not even his uncle who was a doctor. When he asked his mother why his brother had to die, she answered: "He died because he was a nice boy [...] and God wanted to take him back."

For my interlocutor, this answer was "not acceptable."[81] He studied medicine to learn about sicknesses and how to prevent them.

Other interlocutors explained that they became less interested in religion when they started going to university and began reading the broad range of literature available in Kabul. One of them recalled that religion had been important to him as it made him part of the community back home. When studying philosophy and psychology, he came across Sigmund Freud and began to question his faith. He then "avoided praying, until now."[82] Another interlocutor, who was related to Shu'la-ye Javid, recalls the way religious authorities talked about education for girls. It infuriated him that the "uneducated mullahs" dared to scold his father. They threatened him with hell for sending his daughters to school. The interlocutor says that "although there was a lot of progress towards education,

80 Shalinsky 1990, 99–100.

81 Dr Ghulam Sakha, in conversation with the author, London, February 3, 2018.

82 Mohammad Akbar Kargar, in conversation with the author, London, November 17, 2017.

we also allowed these uneducated mullahs to actually rule our minds and rule our country." This interlocutor had regularly gone to mosque with his father, but stopped doing so when he went to university. As most religious authorities had little formal education, to him they seemed to be "uneducated". He preferred to engage with new ideas he learned about at university rather than listen to religious authorities.[83]

Most of my interlocutors describe the university as an environment in which religion did not play a major role. Not only those who were affiliated with leftist movements, but also those who describe themselves as neutral, emphasize that their fellow students did not pay attention to whether or not they observed prayers or fasted during Ramadan.[84] In his book, Pirzadeh Ghaznavi describes a situation in which he, as a university student, went to a friend's place around lunch time during Ramadan and people offered him food. They could not believe he was fasting as he was a university student.[85] Similarly, another interlocutor told me that he never saw a student pray in public. Doing so would have been astonishing, as it was generally assumed that students did not observe religious practices.[86]

At the same time, according to my interlocutors' accounts, students would criticize religious authorities or members of Javanan-e Musulman, but they would not openly speak out against religious faith. One of my interlocutors, who was not directly related to one of the political movements but described himself as a socialist supporting the Soviet Union, said he never turned against Islam. He frequently had arguments with his father about religious issues, but for him it was always a question of interpretation, and he would not deny the existence of God. In his point of view, this was a general rule, even for the members of political groups:

> They never said that 'We are communist. We are against religion. We do not believe in God. We do not believe in Islam.' Nobody has ever said that in Afghanistan. Of course, there was some literature coming from Iran or from China, in which these things were discussed. Especially when it was related to Marxist philosophy. But it was just behind the scene. And people, even those who didn't believe in Islam, never tried to do that [publicly].[87]

83 Bashir Sakhawarz, in conversation with the author, London, November 22, 2017.

84 For example Bashir Sakhawarz, in conversation with the author, London, November 22, 2017; Ali Sieah, in conversation with the author, Frankfurt, October 2, 2017; Noori, in conversation with the author, July 3, 2017, Berlin.

85 Pirzadeh Ghaznavi 1394 (2015), 97.

86 Haroon Amirzada, in conversation with the author, London, November 21, 2017.

87 Mohammad Qabool, in conversation with the author, London, November 15, 2017.

The role of religion for university students in the late 1960s and 1970s is not clear-cut. On the one hand, many of the students – not only those who engaged with leftist groups – did not observe religious practices, such as prayers and fasting, or rules, such as the prohibition of alcohol. On the other hand, students perceived the designation as "communists" as used by sympathizers of Javanan-e Musulman as derogatory because it was associated with atheism.

Mohammad Osman Halif felt that in the fundamental conflict regarding the position of religion in society, leftist groups were supported by the government while Javanan-e Musulman was restricted in its activities:

> They always spoke out against the faith of all the people in Afghanistan very freely. [...] And we could not change that. They had so many possibilities, and the government, for example during the Etemadi time [prime minister 1967–1971], they made demonstrations and had an impact on our education system and we had no possibility to stop that. I came from far away to Kabul to learn something and then every week there were demonstrations. [...] For example, we – I mean Javanan-e Musulman – did not have the possibility to speak freely, like the communists, with newspapers and magazines and so on. That was a problem. And the Russians, at that time the Soviet Union, would always help the communists, secretly. Javanan-e Musulman did not have any help, from no side. That was a problem, too, a financial problem.

In Mohammad Osman Halif's eyes, Javanan-e Musulman was opposed to a government unwilling or unable to restrict the foreign-dominated leftist movements.

Mohammad Osman Halif mentions two incidents illustrating how the government supported the "communists" instead of stopping their disrespectful behavior towards religion. The first is a cartoon of the Prophet Mohammad published in the state-owned newspaper *Ilsah*. Edwards briefly refers to this incident, writing that in 1969 *Islah* published a cartoon showing a man with nine veiled women in a hotel lobby, who is told that there is no room available for him and his nine wives.[88] For Mohammad Osman Halif, this was a clear sign that Prime Minister Etemadi and the editor of the newspaper had taken sides with the "communists" and had lost all respect for the religious feelings of the people.[89]

The second incident concerns the journal *Parcham*. On April 22, 1970, Lenin's birthday, *Parcham* published the following poem:

88 Edwards 2002, 208.
89 Pirzadeh Ghaznavi 1394 (2015), 99.

After centuries,
Centuries of slavery and of slavery and of slavery,
All of a sudden the old chain broke down
A new system, a new world and age was created.
The bugle of revolution and the roaring of the masses
Shook the foundations of the capitalist castle
and announced the government by the oppressed.

For this matchless achievement
We send Doroud [religious praise] to that pioneer party.
And to the heroic people.
We send Doroud to that great leader,
The Great Lenin.[90]

In protest of the use of religious praise to acclaim the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and Lenin, a crowd of "hundreds Muslim clerics, sufi pirs, and members of saintly families,"[91] many of whom had come to Kabul from the provinces, gathered at the Pul-e Khishti Mosque. Mohammad Osman Halif went there to see what was going on and to listen to the speeches. He and other students observing the protest did not join the clerics. Mohammad Osman Halif sympathized with the protestors in many ways, especially their rejection of the laissez-faire politics of the government towards the "communists", but he did not fully agree with their demands. According to Louis Dupree, next to the prohibition of *Parcham* and the persecution of the author of the poem, the protestors demanded compulsory veiling and the end of secular education for women.[92] Mohammad Osman Halif could not relate to these demands because he did not see any fault in studying with his female classmates. And yet, the government's reaction towards the protestors infuriated him. He says, "Nobody listened to them. They just put all the mullahs in a car and took them out of Kabul, not to their homes, but just anywhere. If I'm from Paktia, they brought me to Kandahar and the other is from Kandahar, he was brought to Paktia." This disrespectful behaviour towards the protestors stood in contrast to the tolerance of "communist" activities, Mohammad Osman Halif explains. According to him, even more young people joined Javanan-e Musulman after this incident.

The emergence of the political organizations in Kabul in the 1960s clearly reflects the intertwinement of the local and the global in the 1960s. On the one hand, political organizations emerged and became influential because they facil-

90 English translation published in Yousefzai 1974, 170.
91 Edwards 2002, 208.
92 Dupree 1971, 16–17.

itated students and other activists expressing and organizing their discontent with the political system in Afghanistan. On the other hand, the global dimension of the emergence, agendas, and conflicts of a pro-Soviet, a pro-Chinese, and an Islamist organization is self-evident. As international funding and the related influence had dominated politics in Afghanistan for decades, oppositional politics could not be thought without a global context.

3.3 Fists, Sticks, Stones, and Knives

During Mohammad Osman Halif's last year at university, on June 19, 1972, a student called Saidal Sukhandan died on campus in the park between the faculties. A group of Javanan-e Musulman had gathered below a mulberry tree and was listening to a speech by one of their leaders. A group of Shu'lais stood somewhere nearby and while Mohammad Osman Halif and his friends were listening to the speech, the Shu'lais began to make fun of them. Soon, they started fighting. In other accounts it was not the Shu'lais attacking a gathering of Javanan-e Musulman, but Javanan-e Musulman attacking a meeting of Shu'la-ye Javid.[93] Mohammad Osman Halif described a scuffle, with students using sticks and stones to hit each other. When they finally diverged, Saidal Sukhandan, one of the Shu'lais, was left dead. According to historiography, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar had stabbed Saidal Sokhandan and was arrested afterwards, along with another prominent figure from Javanan-e Musulman.[94] Mohammad Osman Halif claimed that Saidal Sukhandan had been hit by one of the sticks or stones and it was impossible to know the culprit. Tahera Shams took part in marches through the city, mourning the death of her comrade. The fact that a student was killed not by the police but by another student demonstrates that the front lines had shifted.

In the late 1960s, the daily life of students at Kabul University was dominated by political activism and the king did not know what to do, Mohammad Osman Halif says. In his perception, the king wanted the groups to fight each other so the government would not have to deal with them. In the beginning, Mohammad Osman Halif and his leftist classmates had debates. Mohammad Osman Halif would argue that most people in Afghanistan were Muslims and it would not be possible to implement the ideas of the PDPA or Shu'la-ye Javid. They would then

93 Arizu 1398 (2019).

94 Sands and Qazizai 2019, 68; Lavrov 2008, 36. According to Edwards this incident occurred "after a Western-trained professor at Kabul University reportedly denigrated the relevance of Islamic economic principles to contemporary problems," Edwards 1993, 617.

call him a "reactionary" who wanted Afghanistan to be just as it was 1,400 years earlier. According to Mohammad Osman Halif, they said that communism was a strong force all around the world and could stand up to US-American imperialism. He would then point out that communism was not strong at all, as in communist countries people had to stand in line just to buy a loaf of bread. After some time, such discussions were replaced by physical fights.

With the emergence of Javanan-e Musulman on the campus of Kabul University, a new relevance was attached to the question of women's rights. The topic became one of the reasons for violent conflicts. As dress codes for women in Afghanistan changed in the 1990s, the short skirts of young women in Kabul – many of them university students – symbolize the freedom and peace of those days to many of my interlocutors. Not all women in Kabul wore short skirts, however. Even among university students, those wearing miniskirts stood out. Most of the female students would wear longer skirts and blouses but no headscarf. Female students' choice of dress in the late 1960s and 1970s did not remain uncontested. According to one of my interlocutors, it became an issue of general attention, "It was an underdeveloped country and people who came from rural areas came and saw them and sometimes I noticed how those people looked at the women angrily."[95]

It was not only people from rural areas who felt provoked by the way some of the female students dressed. Javanan-e Musulman, and particularly Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, are frequently accused of having thrown acid on girls and women wearing short skirts. One of my interlocutors claimed that Hekmatyar threw acid on schoolgirls so their parents would stop sending girls to school altogether. However, he argues, "they did not succeed, because [...] people of Kabul, especially, are advanced people."[96] Bashir Sakhawarz, an interlocutor who sympathized with Shu'la-ye Javid, wrote a novel describing two brothers from different political sides – one was a member of the PDPA, and the other sympathized with Javanan-e Musulman. In one scene, he evokes the accusation of Javanan-e Musulman throwing acid at girls in the following way: Rahmat, the brother who was associated with Javanan-e Musulman, rides a motorcycle with one of his companions, holding bottles in their hands:

> As the girls passed the men, a liquid was thrown directly into the faces of the girls, who had no premonition of what was coming. They screamed violently as the liquid hit them, covering their faces and collapsing on the ground in agony. They rubbed their faces and tore their clothes off desperately trying to remove the liquid. Passing pedestrians were shocked,

95 Anonymous interview, Bonn, October 4, 2017.

96 Dr Ghulam Sakha, in conversation with the author, London, February 3, 2018.

> but before anyone could react the two young men simply disappeared into the crowd. After their get-away, once assured that they were not being followed, Rahmat's companion asked him 'Did you get a good aim? Did you get the acid in their faces? I think I got two of them!' 'Oh yes, I did. Sure, all of it, right in their faces,' Rahmat confidently replied. 'Good – they will never appear with those short skirts at schools again!' The younger man said triumphantly. Rahmat had lied. He was not convinced of the need for such an operation. [...] For him, it was the government that should be blamed, not the girls. It was the government that encouraged girls to wear those kinds of clothes.[97]

The accusations against members of Javanan-e Musulman have never been proven. Newspaper articles suggest that there were incidents of violence against women in public. According to one report, Farid, a high school student, used a spray gun to spray acid on two female students from the Rabia Balkhi School on April 26, 1970. The article does not indicate whether Farid was connected to Javanan-e Musulman. Apparently, this incident caused outrage among women in Kabul, who staged a large demonstration.[98] In another incident in October 1970, a man who, according to a newspaper report, failed in his ambitions to become a mullah in Kabul, shot at several girls and women as they were leaving school buildings.[99] In this case, there does not seem to be a direct connection to Javanan-e Musulman.

For Mohammad Osman Halif, gender was not a major issue. Later, he said, women's rights were one of the reasons for disagreements between him and other members of Hizb-e Islami. At that point, however, he was not interested in the topic. Similarly, Pirzadeh Ghaznavi said that Javanan-e Musulman was not much concerned with women, but that all this reporting on conflicts was leftist propaganda against the group. In his book, however, he complains at length about the "progressive" fashion in contrast to a decent hijab which, according to him, was unfortunately thought of as backward by many.[100] In the interview, Pirzadeh Ghaznavi stresses that the movement was not opposed to girls and women receiving formal education. He explains that, when he began to work, there was a female colleague who used to greet everybody else, but not him. At some point, he asked her for the reason, and she explained that she preferred not to talk to somebody who wanted to prevent women from studying and working. In response, he

97 Sakhawarz 2013.

98 "Home Press at a Glance: Paper Reports How Police Arrested School Boy Alleged to Have Sprayed Acid on Girls," *Kabul Times*, May 2, 1970. According to Louis Dupree, demonstrations followed this incident, during which even more girls and women became victims of acid attacks. I could not find any other reference to this event, though, Dupree, 1971, 17.

99 "On Women, Miniskirts and 'Miniwounds'," *Kabul Times*, October 10, 1970.

100 Pirzadeh Ghaznavi 1394 (2015), 97–98.

told her that she was wrong in her assumption and that his two sisters were studying. His colleague then changed her mind, Pirzadeh Ghaznavi says, and finally supported Javanan-e Musulman by typing *shabnāmahā* (pamphlets/leaflets) on the typewriter.[101]

Another interlocutor frames Javanan-e Musulman's position regarding women's rights in a different way. In his narrative, the group was not against women's rights, but the question of these rights was one of definition, "At that time, we wanted the Islamic hijab," he says,

> women were not properly covered (*bad hijāb būd*). The head was naked. They were wearing skirts that short and socks. [...] We said that there shouldn't be uncovered (*bad hijāb*) women. They should wear their hijab. They should work. They should study. They should do their PhD. At home, they should serve their children, they should serve their husband. The equality of men and women is a human right. We also stood for equality [...]. The husband is the husband and the wife is the wife, between them the rights are clear: one is the ruler and one is the deputy.[102]

In a similar way, the topic is presented in *Gahiz*, the newspaper closely related to Javanan-e Musulman. One issue features an article entitled "Our City and Naked Pictures" condemning advertisements with "pictures of half-naked women, which stimulate the youth and stain the morals of our people."[103] Probably as an illustration, another issue displays an advertisement for Aspirin usually found on the first page of the state-owned daily *Anis*, in which a liberally dressed, "half naked" woman presents pills.[104] In a letter to the editor in another issue, a woman called Mrs. Khatul points out that it is not only women who should be held responsible for "ungracious customs of the West and East" – wearing mini-skirts – but rather that fathers and husbands should take care of their daughters' and wives' dress codes.[105]

The question of women's rights became a topic emotionally debated on campus. In her memoirs, Soraya Baha – a former university student and member of Parcham – describes one incident illustrating the mutual provocations between the political groups:

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101 Abuzar Pirzadeh Ghaznawi, in conversation with the author, Kabul, May 1, 2018.

102 Wahidullah Sabawoon, in conversation with the author, Kabul, May 3, 2018.

103 "*Shahr-e ma va aks-e birihna* (Our City and Naked Pictures)," *Gahiz*, 27 Dalv 1347 (February 16, 1969), 3.

104 *Gahiz*, 20 Dalv 1347 (February 9, 1969), 4.

105 "*Silsila-ye iftirah: mini zhub va sarmaia-ye farangi gunah badush-e kist?* (Series of confession: Whose Fault are Mini Skirts and Western influence?)," *Gahiz*, 3 Hamal 1348 (March 23, 1969), 1–4.

> When we had meetings in the gym, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar [...] spoke representing the group 'Javanan-e Musulman'. After expressing his narrow-minded and fossilized ideas, he began to say slogans, one of which was 'Death to the rebel against God (*Ṭāghūt*).' The girls of the basketball team, who were smart and funny, began to mock him and asked: '*Āqā-ye* Gulbuddin! What does *Ṭāghūt* mean?' Gulbuddin answered: '*Ṭāghūt* means America, *Ṭāghūt* means imperialism; *Ṭāghūt* means the girls of the basketball team who jump around in short skirts and with uncovered head.' [...]
>
> More than a thousand students were inside and outside the gym. Everybody was under the impression of the ugly speech of this black-hearted, disgusting Islamist. They wanted me to get up in front of this monster. I took the microphone. It was the most passionate speech on this day, as I became the voice of hundreds of girl students. My voice was an explosion of the anger of thousands of women of my country.
>
> [...] At the end of the meeting, the girls of the basketball team took me on their shoulders and shouted 'Long live the fighting girls; death to *Ikhwān al-shayātīn*[106].' The Muslim Brothers, who had gathered outside of the gym surrounded me. [...] I said, 'You can put a curtain in front of your eyes.' He [Hekmatyar] said, 'Islam has prescribed the hijab for women.' I said, 'Because of your uncontrollable instincts Islam throws the hijab on women?' He said, '*Bī dīnī va lā maẓhab* [Atheist]! Be careful with your devilish words, otherwise somebody will hit you with a fist.' He lifted his hand to hit me in the face, but [... Emtiaz] took his hand firmly and said, 'Big devil! You raise your hands in front of a girl?' Emtiaz was skilful in boxing and stabbing. Suddenly he took a knife out of his boot and attacked Gulbuddin.[107] On that occasion, nobody was wounded.

In general, Mohammad Osman Halif complains that leftist students would not listen to his arguments, but just call him a reactionary. My interlocutors who supported one of the leftist movements felt the same. One interlocutor summarizes the situation by saying, "I didn't have any relationship with them [Javanan-e Musulman]. Because they didn't have the patience to listen to my words. And I also didn't have the patience to listen to their words."[108] One former Khalqi describes how he stopped talking to members of Javanan-e Musulman:

> One day, in the Faculty of Agriculture, I argued with one of the members of the Muslim Youth Organization. He was from Baghlan Province and he was studying in the faculty, and he told me: 'Why do you defend the lecturer of Botany?' I said that he is a good person. He told me: 'No, he is not a good person. He's infidel.' I said: 'Why is he infidel?' – 'Because he doesn't like the Muslim Youth Organization.' I said: 'If he doesn't like it, this is up to him, but he can give me a good lecture and he has a Master degree and he is fluent in English, [...]' So he said to me: 'No, he's your friend. He's your party fellow.' I said: 'Ok, if he's my

106 Brothers of the Devil, common pejorative denomination of Javanan-e Musulman referring to Ikhwan ul-Muslimin, the Muslim Brotherhood.

107 Baha 2013, 91–93.

108 Mohammad Akbar Kargar, in conversation with the author, London, November 17, 2017.

> party fellow, I'm proud. If I have a well-educated person in my party.' So he said to me: 'Now I will give you some real punishment.' He called another person and he said to him: 'Take his hands, I want to throw him out of the faculty building.' Yes, both of them tightened my hands and they threw me out of the building. And when the president of the faculty understood what they did, he called me to the office and said to me: 'Be careful! They are not like students, they are mad.'[109]

Such clashes were frequent on campus and over time, mutual insults and violence increased.

At the same, an inclusive student union was formed. Its first meeting took place in August 1971. Students had been demanding the establishment of such a union in their demonstrations, seeing in it the prospect of better political representation and a platform for discussions among the political groups.[110] For the government, the idea of a student union promised more control over the activism. According to Dupree, a first draft of a constitution of the union had been submitted by students to the university senate in March 1971 and official discussion of the document began on July 1 of the same year.[111] The purpose of the union was to fight for world peace and against imperialism, to support national liberation movements, and to stand up against any "imperialist cultural influences and regulations."[112] The union had a high council, an executive committee, and several other committees working on topics such as social issues, publications, and finances.[113] According to Soraya Baha, the former student who described the debate with Gulbuddin Hekmatyar in her memoirs, she was the only woman elected to the union. In total, she writes, 21 delegates were connected to Shu'la-ye Javid, ten to Parcham, nine to Javanan-e Musulman, five to Khalq, and another five students did not have an affiliation with any political organization.[114]

Opinions on the success of the student union diverge. Pirzadeh Ghaznavi admits that it was oftentimes difficult to find common ground, but he argues that the union was successful in making decisions and representing all university students before the government. According to him, the members of the student union stood up against censorship of state-owned and private media, protested international influences in local politics, and organized joint demonstrations. Some of these demonstrations took place on occasions such as *Rūz-e Āzādi* (Day

109 Zalmai, in conversation with the author, London, February 4, 2018.
110 Bezhan 2014; anonymous interview, Bonn, October 4, 2017.
111 Dupree 1971, 17.
112 Ibid., 35.
113 Korgun 1983, 159.
114 Baha 2013, 94.

of Freedom) and *Rūz-e Kārgar* (Labor Day). On other occasions, the student union organized demonstrations urging the government to help people in rural areas strongly affected by a famine.[115] Historiography describes the student union in a less positive light. Korgun, a Russian historian, points out that the union called for a general strike on November 13, 1971. While most students joined the strike, they had no common goal, and the political movements used the platform to promote their agendas.[116]

Meanwhile, mutual provocations and violence continued. At the Soviet-funded Polytechnic Institute, two Soviet films were shown, one called "*Bī Khudāīī*" (Godlessness) and the other "*Yusuf va Zulaikhā*" (Yusuf and Zulaikha). During the screening of "*Bī Khudāīī*," Pirzadeh Ghaznavi explains, some members of Javanan-e Musulman protested and as a consequence one of them was expelled from university.[117] Another clash was caused by students who asked the university cafeteria staff to prepare lunch for them during Ramadan. According to Pirzadeh Ghaznavi, 69 members of Javanan-e Musulman confronted the 500 "communists". The fight left several students injured.[118]

Conflicts between leftist and Islamist groups at the university outlasted the end of the monarchy. It was at the time of the university's mid-year exams on July 17, 1973 that Daoud Khan, the Shah's cousin and former prime minister, overthrew the government with the support of the military and established a "modernizing" regime under his presidency. He proclaimed martial law and thus prohibited all oppositional political activities, including meetings of political movements and the annual demonstrations on occasions like 3 Aqrab and May 1. Only Parcham's party meetings were tolerated as long as they did not criticize the government, since some members of Parcham held positions in Daoud's cabinet. Other movements continued some of their activities, too, but their members had to be careful not to be arrested.[119] Although Daoud's republic was not a democracy, many of my interlocutors said that they were generally satisfied because they had achieved what they wanted: the monarchy had been abolished and Daoud Khan promised to lead Afghanistan out of its stagnation.

In the first years after the coup by Daoud Khan, the PDPA continued most of its internal activities, such as party meetings. Shortly after the coup, the PDPA

115 Abuzar Pirzadeh Ghaznawi, in conversation with the author, Kabul, May 1, 2018.
116 Korgun 1983, 159.
117 Pirzadeh Ghaznavi 1394 (2015), 60–61.
118 Ibid., 66–67.
119 Bulatov 1997, 275–77.

had a privileged position and could even extend its influence.[120] Under these circumstances, several interlocutors argue, they supported Daoud:

> He [Daoud Khan] was friendly to the Soviet Union, which we, I and the people around me, supported. We thought that the Soviet Union was our friend. We supported socialism. We supported the Soviet Union. And he was friendly to the Soviet Union. That's why we supported him.[121]

> I was very happy that the monarchy collapsed and the presidential system came. And I remember those times. When we were in school, we heard the coup come and Daoud came to power and the king was gone. And we came from Habibia High School to the center. We brought a lot of flowers to the army and said, 'We congratulate you. We congratulate all the people because finally we got rid of the king and the monarchy and now we have a presidential system.'[122]

The positive perception of Daoud Khan's coup went beyond PDPA circles. Many of the students who were not directly aligned with one of the political movements recall how they had heard positive things about Daoud Khan's earlier premiership. Most of all, they celebrated the end of the monarchy, which they perceived as "an obstacle for the development of Afghanistan."[123] These students hoped that, with the declaration of a republic, the parliament would have more strength and that in the future the president would be elected by the people.[124] For a significant group of students, the main motivation for their political activism had ceased to exist.

The continuous broad-based protests ended with the coup, but the lines of conflict between the different political movements remained. One interlocutor remembers frequent debates with classmates who supported Hekmatyar. As an example, he describes a situation during a basketball match between the Faculty of Medicine and the Faculty of Engineering:

> When I went to the gymnasium, we were sitting like this: Faculty of Engineering on one side, Faculty of Medicine on another side. And it was the time of President Daoud and the national anthem started. And the flag was raised and everybody should stand. When I was standing I saw a few students didn't stand up. And I said to them: 'Stand! It's out of respect

120 Ahmad Zia Nikbin, in conversation with the author Kabul, April 30, 2018; Zalmai, in conversation with the author, London, October 22, 2018.
121 Mohammad Qabool, in conversation with the author, London, November 15, 2017.
122 Haroon Amirzada, in conversation with the author, London, November 21, 2017.
123 Zaman, in conversation with the author, Bad Nauheim, March 3, 2018.
124 Anwar Ghori, in conversation with the author, Kabul, April 21, 2018; Noori, in conversation with the author, Berlin, July 3, 2017.

> and we should follow the rules.' And they said: 'We don't believe in standing. That's against our religion.' And I said: 'Who are you?' And he said: 'We are members of the party of Hekmatyar.'[125]

With party meetings still taking place, some students tried to convince their friends and classmates to join their organisations. One of my interlocutors recalled a classmate who constantly tried to convince him to join the PDPA. He, however, did not see any reason to do so, as times were good and there was no reason to be discontent.[126] In general, the accounts of my interlocutors suggest that political discussions continued but in a more subtle way than the earlier demonstrations, strikes, and clashes.

As the previous quote describing the basketball match suggests, not everybody celebrated Daoud's coup. He cooperated with the PDPA and hence the PDPA's enemies were his enemies. After succeeding in his coup, Daoud released many of Zahir Shah's political prisoners, amongst them Tahera Shams' future husband.[127] They got married and had a daughter. By then, Tahera Shams had graduated from university and had worked in the PR Department of the Ministry of Public Health for a short time before becoming a teacher at the Aisa Durani School. For her and her husband, however, the political struggle had not ended. According to one of my interlocutors who was active with Shu'la-ye Javid as a high school student in Herat and came to Kabul University shortly after the coup by Daoud, the leading figures of the Shu'la-ye Javid movement had struggled with factionalism since 1970. The ban on public demonstrations and the lack of a clear aim – struggling against the monarchy – put an end to Shu'la-ye Javid as a broader movement.[128] Smaller groups continued some activities, though. With the conflicts between the PDPA and Shu'la-ye Javid persisting, Tahera Shams and her husband feared another arrest. One day, Tahera Shams and her husband heard rumors that he would be arrested. They left Kabul, went into hiding in Herat, and then left the country to Iran, from where they entered the Soviet Union. After staying in the Soviet Union for some time, they arrived in Germany in November 1976.

Even more than the Shu'lais, members of Javanan-e Musulman were alarmed. In some ways, one of my interlocutors says, they acknowledged that the Daoud regime was better than the monarchy, but that Daoud cooperated with the "communists" and was brutal in his persecution of his enemies. Javanan-e Musulman engaged in few activities at that time because of the danger of being arrested, but

125 Haroon Amirzada, in conversation with the author, London, November 21, 2017.
126 Nader S., in conversation with the author, Frankfurt, March 5, 2018.
127 Ibrahimi 2012, 7.
128 Massum Faryar, in conversation with the author, Berlin, July 10, 2019.

those followers remaining at the university still tried to recruit some of the new students. Both sides, the leftists and Javanan-e Musulman, my interlocutor says, tried to bring people onto their side by helping them in daily issues, guiding them in their first days on campus and in the dormitory, and then engaging them in discussion with suggestions of some political ideas and pamphlets.[129]

Mohammad Osman Halif had graduated from the Faculty of Letters and Humanities at Kabul University in 1972 and was then allocated to the newspaper *Anis* by the Ministry of Culture. He maintained his contacts with Javanan-e Musulman after the coup, even though the organization's center of activities was shifted to Pakistan. In late 1973, plans for a coup against the government had been revealed and several members, including Habib-ur-Rahman, one of the leaders, were arrested and later executed. Without Habib-ur-Rahman, Hekmatyar became the de-facto sole leader of Javanan-e Musulman but, fearing arrest, he fled to the rural areas close to the border with Pakistan and later to Peshawar. More arrests followed in 1974 and 1975, bringing Professor Ghulam Mohammad Niazi behind bars and causing Professor Rabbani's flight to Peshawar, thus taking two more prominent figures closely related to the movement away from Kabul University.[130]

In 1975, the leadership of Javanan-e Musulman attempted another coup. Several groups attacked rural government offices with the idea that an uprising would begin in Kabul as soon as insurrections in the provinces were under way. Meanwhile, Mohammad Osman Halif was waiting for a signal in Kabul:

> Do you know the Intercontinental in Kabul? Do you know where it is? When you go down towards the city, that's Karte Parwan. In this Karte Parwan, there is a big crossing and on one of its corners there is a *salmānī*, a barber. There was only one person in there, me and [... another student], and somebody else. We were three people, and [... the other student] had a gun and we didn't have anything. And down there, maybe 50 meters, there was a tank. And we were three and we were supposed to take this tank and the weapons of the people inside the tank. With one gun. It was crazy. It was impossible. Because, all over Kabul the people of Javanan-e Musulman were waiting and they were supposed to implement some tasks, like us. Yes, so the three of us, all of us crazy, were in this s*almānī*, and we were waiting that somebody would call us. And there was the tank, on top of it somebody with a rifle and around the tank four more of them. And we were three people and we didn't have anything, only one gun. [...] At some point, the call came and we were told: 'No, it is cancelled.' And we went home. [...] Thank God, it didn't work out and we didn't die in vain.[131]

129 Wahidullah Sabawoon, in conversation with the author, Kabul, May 3, 2018.

130 Pirzadeh Ghaznavi 1394 (2015), 113–17; Sands and Qazizai 2019, 79–80; Edwards 2002, 217, 235.

131 Mohammad Osman Halif did not tell me about the broader context of this incident, but according to his narration it seems most likely that the context was the failed coup attempt of 1975.

The attacks in the provinces had been stopped and no action was being taken in Kabul.[132] Even though the attempt to start an insurrection failed, the plan for the coup reflects that by then, Javanan-e Musulman had transformed from a students' movement into a militant organization.

Mohammad Osman Halif's involvement in the coup attempt had not been discovered and he was able to stay in Kabul. He was offered a post as editor-in-chief of another prominent daily, *Hivad*. This offer was under the condition that Mohammad Osman Halif join the National Revolutionary Party of Afghanistan (Hizb-e Inqilab-e Mili), which Daoud Khan had founded and declared as the only legal party under his new constitution of 1977.[133] Mohammad Osman Halif refused to join the party and some months later, shortly after the coup by the PDPA in 1978, he left Afghanistan for Pakistan. There, he worked for Hizb-e Islami's paper *Shahadat*. Later, he went to Iran and then to West Germany, where he continued to write articles for Hizb-e Islami's publications. With time, he disagreed more and more with the leadership and finally distanced himself from the party.

This chapter set out to discuss how student activism at Kabul University turned from collective opposition to the government into violence between political groups. I argue that activism at Kabul University was incited by the disappointment with the false promises of democracy raised by the new constitution of 1964. The demonstration of 3 Aqrab, in October 1965, was not dominated by a single political movement. The PDPA was the first party to recruit students and was thus particularly active on campus in the following months. With the split of the PDPA into two wings, Khalq and Parcham, and the formation of Shu'la-ye Javid as an alternative leftist movement, protests increasingly became platforms of competition between the political groups. Nevertheless, these protests were still mainly directed against the government until Javanan-e Musulman emerged in opposition to the leftist groups. Despite attempts to organize a student union, the activists lacked common ground for discussion and mutual provocations spiked in violence and sometimes even death. Although public demonstrations ended under the Daoud regime, animosities between the different groups active on campus persisted.

The political movements were central to student activism. They provided an ideological framework, a social network, a platform to organize demonstrations and strikes, and rhetoric for the speeches held during protests. However,

132 Edwards 2002, 235–41.
133 Farhang 1394 (2012), 826–27.

the movements evolved slowly and were formed with the agency of students who wanted to voice their discontent. Javanan-e Musulman was the only organization founded on campus while all other movements had other backgrounds. All organizations were popular on campus, though, and students took to the streets with them and turned small intellectual discussion circles into broad movements. The specific incidents that caused upheavals show that activism was not an intellectual experiment, or, as frequently described in historiography, remote from society, but rather that it was directly related to students' perceptions of injustice.

The formation of political movements on campus was not directly caused by global geopolitics, since, as I argue, most protests were provoked by local incidents and the competition between the different groups. Nevertheless, the very decision of the government to introduce a new constitution and to promote democracy even though the king was not willing to give up his power, reflects an attempt to take part in the global pursuit of progress. Similarly, students at Kabul University were not the only ones disappointed by their governments' promises, as they expected more, and in part different, progress. In this context, ideologies and relating enmities became relevant. They, again, were defined by the global context but embraced by local actors. The developments in Kabul are an example of how protest movements during the 1960s dealt mainly with local issues while still being deeply intertwined with global developments.

4 Competing Ideas of Progress

> Almost every evening after work one of Pavel's comrades came to his house, read with him, and copied something from the books. So greatly occupied were they that they hardly even took the time to wash. They ate their supper and drank tea with the books in their hands; and their talks became less and less intelligible to the mother.
> (*Maxim Gorky, Mother, p. 40*)

Zalmai, as I will call one of my interlocutors, believed that change could be achieved in the country with the ideas propagated by the PDPA:

> In the first days of my enrolment to the university [...] demonstrations started. And the main goal of these demonstrations was to show to the people that the kingdom cannot give good service to students and to the people of Afghanistan. And the kingdom banned our rights, our democratic rights, like, we can't speak, we can't go for demonstrations, and we don't have good food or anything. We thought: 'Yes, this is a slogan and maybe if we go by that, we can achieve lots of things.' [...] Because at the time, I was also a member of the PDPA, People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan.

Over the years, Zalmai has changed his mind and no longer believes in socialism. As a student, however, he thought that the ideas discussed by members and sympathizers of the PDPA could lead Afghanistan out of its backwardness.

In this chapter, I take a closer look at the role ideology played in the life of a student who was a convinced member of the PDPA. In chapter two, I argued that student protests began as a general reaction to the government's (false) promises of progress. The chapter mentioned the differences between the political organizations and their ideologies and showed that it was only over time that political organizations and their conflicts came to dominate activism on campus. In this chapter, the analysis does not focus on what the different groups stood for. Rather, the chapter asks why ideology became important to political activism. I argue that the role ideologies played for the political organizations reflects the interrelation between domination and facilitation by Cold War power structures that characterized the students' environment. As discussed in the introduction, the ideologies can be understood as a sign of foreign domination or dependence and as a framework for agency and opportunity at the same time.

The dichotomy of domination and agency is characteristic of the Global 1960s in the Third World. The promotion of different models of progress and the development aid that promoted them created opportunities, especially in the education system. At the same time, development aid created and reinforced dependencies. The ideologies that were prominent on the campus of Kabul University – and elsewhere around the globe – provided rhetoric to contest these power structures.

https://doi.org/10.1515/ 9783111150543-004

Activists challenged not only local political structures and decisions but also the hegemony of the Cold War superpowers and their claim about the universal applicability of one model of progress. Concurrently, these ideologies were transmitted via a product of the Cold War competition: the education system.

The relationship between domination and agency in the ideological dimension of the political activism did not only come up in the interview with Zalmai, but it was particularly present in my conversations with him. Zalmai was introduced to me by acquaintances in London where he has been living ever since he left Afghanistan in the early 1990s. We met there twice for long conversations about his student life and his activities as a member of the PDPA. All references to his narration are based on these two anonymized interviews.[1] Born in a village in Nangarhar Province, Zalmai attended several boarding schools before enrolling at Kabul University in 1971. He was excited about the opportunities offered by these mainly US-American-sponsored educational institutions. And yet, he became a member of the PDPA at the age of 17, condemned US-American imperialism, and came to believe in a national democratic revolution that would finally lead to socialism.

This chapter is divided into three sub-chapters, each addressing one aspect of my conversations with Zalmai. First, I discuss how the foreign-funded education system shaped Zalmai's ideas of progress, then how he longed for national independence, and finally why he became a dedicated member of the PDPA.

4.1 "Why Are Western Countries so Developed?"

It is at our first meeting and I am about to ask Zalmai about his memories regarding the PDPA's agenda on gender issues. I cannot complete my question because Zalmai interrupts me as soon as I mention the word "gender." He highlights that nowadays it is difficult for unrelated men and women to sit together and have a normal conversation in Afghanistan. Back when he was a student at Kabul University, this had not been the case. He says:

> We sat together. We had discussions. We gave opinions, transferred our opinions to each other. And we thought maybe we have a way of life, but that life never came out of university to the rest of the society. Yes, Kabul was very progressive for the time. People were living like this, without any hats, without any – what it's called? – *chādur*. Ladies were going everywhere on buses, on public transport. But we always had discussions about this: how can we create the same situation as the one we have in university for people to behave in Nangarhar

1 Zalmai, in conversation with the author, London, February 4, 2018 and October 22, 2018.

> or in any other part of Afghanistan? [...] I was always against the limitation of women. [...] And I always said to my friends in our meetings: 'Why are Western countries so developed? Because men and women are working together. But we divided society by men and women: men are working and women are inside the house. But if half of the society is working and half of it is only at home, that means that we are apart.'

Zalmai used the life of university students and "Western countries" to illustrate what progress would be for Afghanistan. This is remarkable because it stands in contrast to his abovementioned explanations of how Afghanistan should develop towards socialism, following the example of the Soviet Union.

The praise of US-American and Western European-funded schools is an essential part of Zalmai's description of his life as a student. After graduating from secondary school, he was sent to Helmand Province to a vocational agriculture school. The compound had previously belonged to the US-American company Morrison Knudsen.[2] The former employees' housing facilities had been turned into dormitories and classrooms for students. Zalmai explains that everything was "in American style, very luxurious buildings. Yes, [...] we had very good workshops, tractors, each and everything at that time, with 24 hours electricity."

In his descriptions of the campus of Kabul University where he enrolled after graduating from the vocational school, Zalmai is again full of praise for the facilities:

> The main building of the hostel, the Faculty of Agriculture, the main office, and also the Faculties of Engineering and of Education and Training, all these faculties' buildings were constructed by German companies. And at that time, it was one of the most luxurious buildings in the region. The library and the rest, like the Faculty of Literature, the Faculty of Economy, the Faculty of Shari'a, the Faculty of Medicine – all these faculties' buildings were constructed by Afghan companies. We had Eastern architecture and Western architecture. And at that time, when I came to the hostel of the university, the hostel was a very highly developed building with hot and cold water, with central heating. Each and everything like in Europe. Even in Pakistan, even in Iran, you couldn't see [...] facilities like I had when I enrolled in university. So, I had the privilege to enroll at that faculty.

My interlocutors praise the living standards in the dormitory at Kabul University. The dormitory was reserved for students from the provinces who did not have relatives to stay with in Kabul. They could live in the dormitory for free for the time of their studies and were provided with three meals a day and a small stipend. One of my interlocutors grew up in Kabul and lived with his family while studying at

2 Beyer 2017, 60.

the Faculty of Literature. He says that most students from Kabul would have loved to stay in the dormitory as well, because it "really was like a five star hotel."[3]

It was not only the infrastructure of educational facilities that Zalmai praised. When talking about the quality of Kabul University, he mentions how much he appreciated the education of his teachers. Zalmai highlights that most of them had studied abroad, at the American University of Beirut, at universities in Wyoming and Nebraska, or in London.

The general understanding of high-quality education as "Western" education was supported by positive experiences in interaction with the international and internationally educated teachers. In some interviews, I explicitly enquire about the relationships to foreign teachers, in other cases the interlocutors talk about them straightaway when asked about the overall atmosphere at the university. Thus, reacting to my request to generally describe his experience at the university, one interlocutor emphasizes how the international teachers lifted the level of classes:

> I can say that at that time we had the best lecturers. Some foreigners. For instance, I was in the Faculty of Law and Political Science and we had two French lecturers and they were really masters of their field. And I can say, the level of the teaching was very, very high. Not only the foreigners, like French or some others, but the Afghans themselves, they were all highly educated in very important and famous universities of Europe, like Sorbonne, like Oxford, like Harvard, and others. And those people were our teachers, our lecturers![4]

Another interlocutor says that teachers would usually give the students one specific book to read. One teacher, however, who had a masters' degree from the US, did not give them one book at the beginning of the term but a list of books and showed them how to find these books in the library. In this way, they could study several books and get a more nuanced idea of the topic.[5] Other interlocutors recount how their foreign teachers invited them home for get-togethers. This interlocutor studied English language in the mid-1970s:

> We had a very close relationship with our teachers. Our American teachers, at the end of the week, they invited us to their house [...]. For example, in my class we were ten men and about forty girls. And we were invited by our American teacher and we stayed there up to 2 o'clock, 3 o'clock. And they provided us with music, dancing, all these issues. Yes. And after

3 Ali Sieah, in conversation with the author, Frankfurt, March 4, 2018.
4 Anonymous interview, London, November 21, 2017.
5 Ahmad Zia Nikbin, in conversation with the author Kabul, April 30, 2018.

> finishing we went back to our home. That was very nice. That was very nice. Everything was friendly.[6]

Similarly, a former student of the Faculty of Sciences talks about his good relationship with his German teacher. The teacher would invite him and his friends to his house and they enjoyed the time together. He had such a positive memory of this teacher that when he had the opportunity to go to Germany more than 20 years later, he went there to look for the teacher who – as he then found out – had already passed away.[7] Not everybody approved of their foreign teachers. And yet, these descriptions suggest that, for Zalmai and other students, the standard for a good education was set by the USA and Western Europe.

The high appreciation of Western European and US-American education was also visible in many students' preferences to study abroad. As it was common for students at Kabul University to continue their education abroad, I asked Zalmai whether he had considered this option. He said that he did and would have liked to go to Germany, but he did not have the opportunity. Most former students I talked to wanted to go to the US, Great Britain, France, or West Germany. To them, opportunities in the Soviet Union or other countries of the Eastern Bloc were only a second choice, or not an option at all. According to Atiq, whose narration I discussed in the first chapter, students "obviously wanted to go to a NATO country" because these countries had "a lot of money."[8] This preference was, as far as I can tell from the interviews, not connected to political positions. Mohammad Osman Halif, for example, whose memories I discussed in the previous chapter and who was affiliated with Javanan-e Musulman, would have liked to continue his studies in Western Europe, similar to Zalmai.[9] Another interlocutor, a Shu'lai, said that scholarships for Western European universities were "real good scholarships" while those in the Soviet Union were for the "poor people".[10] For many of the students at Kabul University, the most obvious opportunity to receive a scholarship to continue their studies abroad was through the partnerships of their faculties. Several of my interlocutors came to West Germany on a scholarship of the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) because they were students at the West German-funded Faculty of Sciences. Others went to the US, Great Britain, Austria, France, or India.

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6 Najibullah Naseri, in conversation with the author, Kabul, April 17, 2018.

7 Anwar Ghori, in conversation with the author, Kabul, April 21, 2018.

8 Atiq, in conversation with the author, Germany, November 2, 2017.

9 Mohammad Osman Halif, in conversation with the author, phone interview, February 20, 2020.

10 Bashir Sakhawarz, in conversation with the author, London, November 22, 2017.

When talking about studying abroad, interlocutors clearly distinguish between the "West" – as in Western Europe and the US – and the Soviet Union. The term "the West" did not come up often in the interviews, however. Most of my interlocutors would usually mention Europe, America, or the Soviet Union. In the rare cases when "the West" was mentioned, it was usually done so in the context of Cold War divisions of the world. One of my interlocutors, who was a student at Kabul University in the mid-1970s, talked about what he learned as a member of the PDPA (Khalq), though he now thinks that this was mainly "Soviet propaganda." He explained, "Some things, now we know, were really wrong. For example, they told us that in the West, there is no peace. In the West, there is no freedom. In the West, they just want to benefit from war. Things like that."[11] In these contexts, "the West" is clearly meant in contrast to the Soviet bloc.

This line is not always so clear, however. Zalmai mentions "Western countries" when describing the discussion on the position of women in society, as quoted at the beginning of this subchapter. His argument was that in "Western countries" women were working like men, increasing productivity and thus progress. He was not referring to Cold War binaries in this case, instead contrasting "Western countries" with Afghanistan. It is thus plausible that Zalmai includes the Soviet Union in the "West" in his description of a role model for progress.

One of the reasons for most students' preference for Western Europe and the US is that they saw better career perspectives with a degree from those universities. According to my interlocutors, these degrees were generally more respected than Soviet ones. One of them says:

> In practice, they [the students returning from the Soviet Union] did not have a good position. In the administration they couldn't do anything. They could only be used in the technical field and even there they were not quite respected, the people who came with a training from Russia. To study there was not as popular as in Western countries. It has always been like this.[12]

This description relates to the longer history of education in Afghanistan. As discussed in the first chapter, the first state-run schools were French, German, and British. These schools were prestigious, and most politicians had been educated there. Many then went abroad to study in the UK, France, or West Germany before they were allocated to influential positions.

Some of my interlocutors were grateful for the opportunity to study in the Soviet Union, even though most of them agree that the prestige of studying in

11 Hasan Said, in conversation with the author, Bonn, October 5, 2017.
12 Atiq, in conversation with the author, Germany, November 2, 2017.

Western Europe or the US was greater. One interlocutor points out that he had studied in Minsk and came back to Kabul to become a teacher at Kabul University.[13] Another one praises the engagement of the Soviet Union in infrastructure projects, in contrast to several failures of similar US-American projects. Due to this positive Soviet influence in Afghanistan, he says, he was happy when he was offered a stipend to study in Moscow for six years to become a road engineer.[14] These varying perspectives on possibilities to study in the Soviet Union reflect different individual opinions. They also show, however, that while it was more prestigious to study in Western Europe or the US, a scholarship to study in the Soviet Union was still seen as an opportunity in contrast to staying in Afghanistan. Also, for Zalmai, the Western European and US-American influence in the education system contributed to the creation of a progressive environment. However, in his discussion of this progress, he did not draw a clear line between a Western and an Eastern bloc. Rather, he compared Afghanistan to countries in which women and men had – at least from his perspective – similar opportunities to participate in working life. These preferences reflect the intertwinement of the East-West and North-South divides and related narratives of progress.

4.2 A Struggle for Independence

A central element in Zalmai's political activism, and something he closely attributes to the PDPA, is anti-imperialism. From an early age, he says, he had learned about British and US-American imperialism:

> From my childhood [...] my father was reading a book called Malang Jan Poetry. Especially in long winter nights, he was reading and we were listening. And Malang Jan Poetry complained about the Durand Line, complained about English people, complained about the English government, about Pakistan and about the United States. From that time, I was thinking, 'Would I, one day, witness a unified Afghanistan or not?' So, from that day I was studying the Durand Line and I was against the Durand Line and maybe out of this kind of thinking I joined the PDPA. And when I joined the PDPA, it was always against the Durand Line. And in our manifesto, there was clearly written, 'We don't want the Durand Line and two sides of the Durand Line. This is one nation, the Afghan nation.' So, the policy of the PDPA was very clear. And we thought that Russia, the Soviet Union, also wanted an independent and unified Afghanistan, because they had some slogans about that.

13 Anwar Ghori, in conversation with the author, Kabul, April 21, 2018.
14 Hasan Said, in conversation with the author, Bonn, October 5, 2017.

Malang Jan was a Pashtun poet active in the 1940s and 50s who lived in Nangarhar Province and wrote about life in rural Afghanistan with a critical perspective on local and international power structures. In his poems, he argued that Pashtun people need education to advance their cause of national unification.[15]

Contemporaries and historians tend to argue that the PDPA only used nationalism in their program and publications to hide their real communist ambitions.[16] For Zalmai and other students at the university, anti-imperialism and their claim to be protecting the homeland was not a pretext, but a central aspect in the agendas of political movements. Anti-imperialism had been important in politics in Afghanistan for decades; its role was enhanced in the context of the Global 1960s when anti-imperialism was a pivotal topic in the Third World as well as in the US and Western Europe.

As mentioned in the introduction, the superpowers based their claim to bring a universal model of progress to the Third World on narratives of their own revolutionary and anti-imperial pasts. Consequently, both superpowers promoted national independence and sovereignty as part of progress. This self-presentation was not always convincing, though. In Afghanistan, amongst other countries, the superpowers were faced with accusations of acting as imperialist powers and exploiting Third World countries. The previously discussed positive perception of US-American support for the education system is only one side of the coin. Zalmai praises the US-American facilities but also participated in demonstrations during which students shouted "Death to America" while passing by the US-American embassy.

Many of my interlocutors complain about a lack of respect by US-Americans towards people in Afghanistan. Different stories circulated about the treatment of Afghanistan and Afghan politicians. A former member of the PDPA recalls, "People say that when Nixon came to Afghanistan from Pakistan, [...] he said that I will never give financial help to Afghanistan because that's a nation where people ride donkeys, but we will help a nation where people drive cars."[17] Similarly, another interlocutor points out that US-American aid in Afghanistan was not effective because the donors ignored the real needs and only acted in their own interest. In this way, this interlocutor argues, "Americans and Europeans left Afghanistan entirely to the Russians."[18]

15 Caron 2011, 173–76.

16 Arnold 1983, 25; Saikal 2012, 162.

17 Mohammad Akbar Kargar, in conversation with the author, London, November 17, 2017.

18 Hasan Said, in conversation with the author, Bonn, October 5, 2017. Other interlocutors made similar arguments, for example, Mohammad Akbar Kargar, in conversation with the author, London, November 17, 2017.

The anti-American sentiments often expressed at protests of the Global 1960s were part of the protests in Kabul, too. When the US-American Vice President Spiro Agnew visited Afghanistan on a tour through Asia in 1970, large demonstrations took place in Kabul. Demonstrators carried banners and shouted, "Agnew Go Home!", "Stop Killing Vietnamese!" and "Hands Off the Middle East!". According to a report by the *New York Times*, students threw bricks at Agnew's car and tore an US-American flag during the motorcade. Several students were arrested.[19] In comparison to complaints about the local government, descriptions of demonstrations with a decisively international background are rare in my interviews. Nevertheless, the account of a demonstration against the US-American vice president questions students' positive perception of the US-American role in Afghanistan described in the previous subchapter.

Indeed, the engagement of the US and Western Europe in the education system is not exclusively praised by former students. Several of my interlocutors complained about their foreign teachers' lack of interest in local conditions and consequently about inappropriate curricula. Atiq, who was not associated with any political movement, claims that while he himself had good relations with the German teachers at the faculty, other students threw their books into the air during a math lesson he assisted. They complained and asked why they should study such abstract lessons that would not serve them in any of their future professions.[20] In a short article on political activities at Kabul University at that time, Baqui Yousefzai writes that some students from the German-funded Faculty of Sciences staged a protest against German teachers in 1967, calling them "agents of imperialism."[21] Also, the previously discussed protests against the *kānkūr* system were closely related to the influence of foreign donors in the education system, as students complained about the difficulty of being successful on the university entrance exam without having attended an US-American school.

The Soviet Union was also accused of pursuing imperialist interests in Afghanistan. In hindsight, taking the war of the 1980s into account, this accusation is widespread. At that time, however, the Soviet Union did not yet have the mainly negative image it now does. To illustrate this point, one of my interlocutors tells me how he went to watch a football match at Ghazi Stadium in Kabul in 1975:

19 Anonymous interview, London, November 21, 2017; "Leftist Protest Marks Agnew's Arrival in Kabul," *New York Times*, January 7, 1970; Crews 2015, 208.
20 Atiq, in conversation with the author, Germany, March 12, 2019.
21 Yousefzai 1974, 173.

> In this match a Soviet and an Iranian team competed. [...] The match began and when the ball was in front of the feet of the Soviet team, the entire stadium applauded for them. [...] That means, every time the Soviets made a goal against the Iranians, the entire stadium was on their feet. They applauded for the Soviet team. Even Daoud Khan stood up and applauded. That means, when the ball was at the feet of the Iranians ... Because the Iranians ... At that time, everybody knew that the Americans were behind the Iranians.[22]

While being pro-Soviet has a deliberately negative connotation for people in Afghanistan today, this was not the case back then, this interlocutor – a member of the PDPA – argues. As discussed in the previous chapter, the PDPA's praise for the Soviet Union was one of the main reasons for the rift between the political movements. Shu'la-ye Javid and Javanan-e Musulman accused the Soviet Union of being an imperialist power. To them, the examples of China and the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, in contrast, suggested a liberation from both superpowers' domination.

For Zalmai, the project of the "national liberation" of Afghanistan had begun with Amir Habibullah (1901–1919) and was accomplished by Amir and King Amanullah (1919–1929). He explains:

> Amir Amanullah Khan was always on the mind of every member of the party. Everyone respected, everyone loved Amanullah Khan. Because in Afghanistan, if you categorize national liberation movements, they start from the father of Amanullah Khan, Habibullah Khan [...]. And the second phase, or the liberation moment, took momentum when Amanullah Khan was ruling the country, and it was a golden age. And the third step, or the third phase of the movement was the PDPA governance. So, for that reason Amanullah Khan always was in the heart of everyone. We were against kings, like King Zahir Shah, King Habibullah, King Amir Abdul Rahman Khan, but not against Amanullah.

When he learned about the PDPA as a student, Zalmai saw an opportunity to continue Amanullah's project of national liberation.

Afghanistan had never been a colony, and yet celebrating independence from the British Empire played a central role in the monarchy's construction of the Afghan nation-state. Afghanistan became a British protectorate, with British control over Afghanistan's foreign affairs, after the Second Anglo-Afghan War in 1880. With his declaration of independence from the British Empire in 1919, Amanullah presented himself as a hero of anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism and was internationally praised as such.[23] This narrative served the construction

22 Sherjan Hadafmand, in conversation with the author, Kabul, April 19, 2018.

23 For example, Saikal discusses how Amanullah was praised as an anti-colonial and anti-imperialist leader. Saikal 2012, 67. Similarly praised in an article by Mir Akbar Khaybar in *Parcham*: Mir Akbar Khaybar, "*Paikar-e Muqadas-e Ma Alaye Dushmanan-e Azadi va Istiqlal Idama Darad*

of the idea of a modern nation-state well, for Amanullah's and for Zahir Shah's government.[24] In the book "Ancient Land, Modern Ways" published by the government in the mid-1960s, the authors condemn imperialism for having "robbed us of the opportunity to keep in step with much of the progressive aspect of the social and industrial revolution of the 19th and 20th centuries."[25] The achievement of independence was celebrated each year on Independence Day in August, as one of my interlocutors, who lived in Maymana, remembers:

> We celebrated the Independence Day of Afghanistan. [...] We enjoyed going every day. There were some shops, there was tea, there was milk. Especially, I liked *Shūr Nukhud*[26]. [...] And then, there was music, also, local music, every day they were playing music. That was a good time. Then, when the occasion was coming up, for three days, there were soldiers, there was this *wali*, governor, these official people. They sat down in the street and then the army paraded, also students from different kinds of schools. Girls and boys were going with their special clothes, clean clothes, to celebrate these days.[27]

With these large festivities, the government suggested that independence had already been achieved.

Zalmai did not perceive Afghanistan as an independent country. To him, a major symbol of persisting foreign domination was the Durand Line, the border British authorities drew between Afghanistan and British India in 1893 through the area inhabited by Pashtuns. As Zalmai mentions in the quote at the beginning of this subchapter, he was inspired by poetry about the idea of a unified Pashtunistan. Zalmai's father was the elder of a small village in Nangarhar Province. Even though he had not received any formal education, he could read and was a great teacher for Zalmai when it came to poetry. Zalmai's father wanted his children to follow the example of his brother who was a teacher in Mazar-e Sharif, so he sent them to school. The school was located about half an hour walking distance from their home and Zalmai's village shared the school with three other villages. Even though it was a village school, Zalmai says that the "level of education at that time was very high." His teachers, Zalmai explains, were mostly "privately educated," two of them were brothers of Maulawi Mohammad Yunus Khales, who later became the leader of one of the wings of Hizb-e Islami. At that school,

(Our Holy Struggle Aginst The Enemies of Freedom and Independence Continues)," *Parcham*, 1 Sunbula 1347 (August 23, 1968), 1–2, 2.

24 Saikal 2012, 73.

25 Ministry of Planning of the Royal Government of Afghanistan, n. d. (mid 1960s), 181.

26 Stew with chickpeas.

27 Dr Ghulam Sakha, in conversation with the author, London, October 21, 2018.

he was taught "Pashto, some religious things and also history." Zalmai himself was one of the best students as he learned with enthusiasm. Malang Jan's poetry spoke to Zalmai's heart when as he was a young boy in Nangarhar enjoying the privileges of education.

Zalmai's village was located at the foot of Spinghar Mountain close to the border with Pakistan. Having grown up with the ideal of a Pashtun nation, Zalmai explains, he perceived the Durand Line as dividing "one nation" of "18 million people there and 3 to 4 million people here." With the creation of Pakistan, the Durand Line had become the border between the two countries without being recognized by Afghanistan. The topic had already been central in Afghanistan's politics prior to 1965, both for the government and for informal political groups, such as Vizh Zalmian.[28] Daoud Khan's aggressive policies towards Pakistan, at that time an ally of the US, during his premiership were one of the main reasons for Zahir Shah to exclude him from power.[29] Even though Zahir Shah did not recognize the border, in the ten years after Daoud Khan's premiership and before his presidency – the so-called "Decade of Democracy" (1964–1973) – politics towards Pakistan were guided by calls for de-escalation.[30] In Zalmai's eyes, the government's tacit acceptance of the border was a sign of submission to imperialist power structures.

Zalmai identified as a Pashtun, with the Pashtun "nation" extending across the border to Pakistan. He argues that, back then and today, he believes that as long as that border exists there won't be peace in the region. The Pashtunistan issue was one of the main reasons why he was attracted to the PDPA. Some of the leading figures of the movement were passionate supporters of Afghanistan's claims for Pashtunistan. Babrak Karmal, for example, publicly declared that Pakistan, as a member of the US-backed alliances CENTO and SEATO, was a threat to Afghanistan and especially to the Pashtuns in the border areas. He demanded that they should be protected by the government and given more autonomy so they could deal with their own issues.[31] One of my interlocutors, who, like Zalmai,

28 See, for example, Nuriddinov 2003, 58; Saikal 2012, 132; Tanin 2011, 95–106. Vizh Zalmian is the most prominent political organization active in Afghanistan prior to 1965. According to Bulatov, the organization should be understood as a group of intellectuals discussing literature and politics without a particular ideological inclination: Bulatov 1997, 23–33.

29 The constitution of 1964 did not allow members of the royal family to become prime ministers. Daoud Khan stepped down from his post as prime minister in 1963 – before the endorsement of the constitution.

30 Bezhan 2014, 198–99; Nunan 2016, 59; Schofield 2011, 40–43.

31 S. Kishtmand, "*Dimukratik-e Khalq va Mubaraza-ye Azadibakhsh-e Mili-e Pashtunistan* (The Democracy of the People and the National Liberation Struggle of Pashtunistan)," *Parcham*, 9 Sunbula 1347 (August 31, 1967), 3.

came from the rural Pashtun areas and studied at Kabul University in the 1970s, explains:

> I was interested in the kind of nationalism of Bacha Khan, Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan. Once, I was still a child, Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan came to our village. People gathered. He advised the people to avoid bad customs, to not follow the traditions, the negative traditions [...]. I was interested in that speech. When I came to Kabul, there was a group, which had close relations to Bacha Khan. That was Parcham. [...] Every year, when they celebrated Pashtunistan Day, on 9 of Sunbula [31 August ...] many people gathered on the Pashtunistan Square and Bacha Khan came. The Parchamis mostly supported Bacha Khan. They marched towards the stadium, Ghazi stadium. I was attracted to that party. After that I started working for the party as a young member. After that I was accepted as a member of the party.[32]

Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan (1890–1988) was a Pashtun philosopher, poet, and political figure famous for his non-violent activism against British colonialism and for the rights of Pashtuns, especially education, across the Durand Line.[33]

The Pashtunistan issue was mainly relevant to students with a personal connection to the topic. The two former students who most strongly emphasized the relevance of this topic for their political activism – Zalmai and one other interlocutor – came from villages in the border regions with Pakistan. Other students, especially non-Pashtuns, attached minor relevance to this topic. The demonstrations and meetings regarding Pashtunistan Day, which my interlocutor mentions, were organized by specific groups within both wings of the PDPA.[34]

For other students, national unity among the different ethnic groups of the country stood in the foreground. Some interlocutors describe ethnic discrimination they themselves or others experienced: they were not admitted to the prestigious faculties or expected not to have access to particular government positions after graduating.[35] All of my interlocutors, however, emphasized the positive experience of living in a diverse environment and the absence of ethnic discrimination among students. Many of the students at Kabul University had previously lived in several provinces of the country. Zalmai, for example, had passed his childhood in a Pashtun majority area in Nangarhar Province, but then moved to Mazar-e Sharif, where Pashtuns were a minority. His vocational school was

32 Mohammad Akbar Kargar, in conversation with the author, London, November 17, 2017.

33 Schofield 2011, 38.

34 Atiq, in conversation with the author, Germany, November 2, 2017.

35 Najia Ahmad, in conversation with the author, Stuttgart, October 15, 2017; Noori, in conversation with the author, July 3, 2017, Berlin; Ali Sieah, in conversation with the author, Frankfurt, March 4, 2018.

in Helmand – again, a mainly Pashtun province – but at boarding schools, as well as at Kabul University, students came together from all parts of the country. Zalmai and other students described the joy of meeting and befriending their classmates with different backgrounds and habits. They emphasized that as students they never cared about whether somebody was Pashtun, Tajik, Hazara, or Beluch or whether somebody was Shi'a or Sunni.[36] The emphasis on unity beyond different ethnicities is closely connected to the idea upon which such central and state-organized institutions as Kabul University were established: in contrast to the decentralized educational facilities in mosques and madrasas, the public education system was developed in an attempt to make Afghanistan a modern nation-state. The former students' emphasis on national unity reflects how they identified with this concept.

Zahir Shah's government not only organized large festivities on Independence Day, it also presented Afghanistan as a propagator of the rights of decolonized countries on the international stage at the UN and at conferences of the Non-Aligned Movement.[37] And yet, calling for independence on the stages of the Non-Aligned Movement did not necessarily correspond with independent politics. Many of the governments participating in the movement used anti-imperialist rhetoric to legitimize their power while maintaining close relations with the United States and/or the Soviet Union.[38] In the case of Afghanistan, the government's emphasis on a politics of impartiality, or as it is oftentimes called "*bī ṭarafī*", was based not on independence but on the economic dependence of Afghanistan on aid money and loans from both sides of the Iron Curtain. As discussed in the first chapter, this dependence was particularly noticeable in the education system, creating an experience of foreign domination comparable to that in post-colonial countries.

Articles in newspapers circulating among students at Kabul University placed the anti-imperialist struggle in Afghanistan within the broader context of protest against imperialist power structures in other countries. An article in the newspaper *Khalq* entitled "Stop the attack and bloodshed in Vietnam!", condemns the war, and lists concrete demands to end the conflict ("– Activities on the ground and in the air against the people of Vietnam should be ended without

36 Mohammad Akbar Kargar, in conversation with the author, London, November 17, 2017; Noori, in conversation with the author, July 3, 2017, Berlin; Atiq, in conversation with the author, Germany, November 2, 2017. In the interviews, the strong emphasis on an absence of ethnic conflicts is made in contrast to today's situation. Nevertheless, the experience of diversity on campus seems to have been a formative moment for many.

37 Simpson 2018, 428; Dinkel 2015, 117.

38 Lee 2018, 447–48.

conditions and completely. – All foreign forces should leave Vietnam."). The main section of the article is dedicated to a theoretical discussion of colonizers use of oppression and destruction to secure and expand their power. The last paragraph demands that the government of Afghanistan should play "its role as a truly free and neutral country in a more effective way" to liberate the people of Vietnam.[39] Several issues of *Parcham* feature articles expressing "solidarity with the people of Vietnam" and students could find an overview covering the events of the last week throughout the world – most of it related to national liberation struggles – on the last page of every issue.[40] Similarly, an article in *Shu'la-ye Javid* lists recent demonstrations abroad and expresses the solidarity of the "oppressed people of Afghanistan" with "conscious workers" struggling against oppression and imperialism around the world.[41] This topic is less present in the issues of *Gahiz* I could find, and yet, there is one article summarizing international news suggesting similarities between political struggles in Afghanistan and other countries. They include an attempt to gain independence from British rule of the Caribbean island of Anguilla, discussions of the mini-skirt in Greece and Congo ("even though their governments are not Muslim"), and the prohibition for tourists to enter Burma because of their negative impact on morality in the country.[42]

Most of my interlocutors say that they were mainly concerned with local issues, and yet, seen in the light of national liberation movements, lines were drawn between these "local issues" and similar struggles in other countries. Engagement with the international social and political situation of the time was part of the culture of debates at Kabul University. Some former students described how they paid attention to other protest movements, especially in Europe. Similarly, the political situation in Israel and Palestine receives much more attention in Afghanistan than in other countries in the region.[43] Zalmai says that party meetings of the PDPA included discussions of the international political situation:

39 "*Tajavuz va khunrizi Dar Vitnam* (Assault and Bloodshed in Vietnam)," *Khalq*, 5 Saur 1345 (April 25, 1966), 4.

40 For articles in *Parcham* related to Vietnam see, for example, issues no. 32 (first page), 34 (first page), 42 (third page).

41 "*Auj-e navin-e mubarizat-e zahmatkishan* (A New Wave of Protests by the Workers)," *Shu'la-ye Javid*, 2 Jawza 1347 (May 23, 1968), 1.

42 "*Ba'zi akhbar-e danestani* (Some Interesting News)," *Gahiz*, 18 Hamal 1348 (April 7, 1969), 2, 4.

43 For example, anonymous interview, London, November 21, 2017; Said T. Jawad, in conversation with the author, London, November 23, 2017; Sands and Qazizai 2019, 36; Bulatov 1997, 188.

> Every 15 days we had our organizational meeting: First international news with a short analysis. After that, national policies with a very short analysis and after that organizational matters and after that financial matters, like how to collect some money for activities. This was the program. Regarding international matters at that time, we were focusing on international, socialist, and democratic and progressive moments like at that time the war in Vietnam. It was a very, very hard point of discussion. And after that Zimbabwe, Guinea Bissau, and Mozambique, Palestine were very hot points, and Bangladesh was separated from Pakistan. Yes, we discussed all these of issues, and Pashtun and Beluch movements, all of this was on our agenda. [...] Yes, I wrote a lot about Palestine. I wrote about Mozambique, about Vietnam. It was our own ideas, we gave them to the newspapers. We distributed them among the students. On the Korean War, I prepared one lecture and gave it to the students. When the ambassador of North Korea came to my faculty, he had a lecture and I wrote down the lecture point by point. I distributed it to the students with my opinion. Oh, they clapped, [...], you did well.

The accounts of my interlocutors suggest that such discussions were not particular to the PDPA but were held in all political organizations.

The different political groups did not share a common understanding of the negative impact of imperialism on Afghanistan. Only the underlying idea of a struggle against foreign influence was similar: In the two newspapers published by members of the PDPA the topic frequently came up placing the situation of Afghanistan in the broader context of the national-liberation struggle of countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Several articles in *Parcham* claimed that Afghanistan was the first country in Asia and Africa to have achieved independence and that yet, especially along the border with Pakistan, in the regions of Pashtunistan and Beluchistan, the struggle against oppression continued.[44] Other articles held "reactionary forces and the agents of colonialism" as the main threat to progress in the country[45] and the imperialism of the "capitalist countries of the West" responsible for the backwardness of Third World countries.[46] Similarly, *Shu'la-ye Javid* points to colonialism as the main opponent. Following the condemnation of Soviet détente with the Western bloc by the Chinese Communist Party, articles in that paper declared that no "peaceful coexistence" would be

44 See, for example, the issue on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the independence of Afghanistan, *Parcham*, 24, 1 Sunbula 1347 (August 23, 1968).

45 "*Din-e Islam – Qanun-e asasi – shahi-ye mashruta* (Religion Islam – Constitution – Constitutional Monarchy)," *Khalq*, 19 Saur 1345 (May 9, 1966), 1, 3.

46 Mir Akbar Khaybar, "*Aqab mandagi-e kishvarha-ye kam rushd va ilal-e an* (The Backwardness of Countries With Little Growth and its Reason)," *Parcham*, 15 Mizan 1348 (October 8, 1968), 2–3. For similar articles see "*Maram-e Dimukratik-e Khalq* (The People's Democratic Program)," *Khalq*, 22 Hamal 1345 (April 11, 1966), 1–8; "*Khalq az khud defa' mikunad* (The People Defend Themselves)," *Khalq*, 26 Saur 1345 (May 16, 1966), 1–4.

accepted with imperialism and colonialism.[47] While these leftist publications generally focused on political and economic foreign domination, *Gahiz*, the paper in which Javanan-e Musulman frequently published articles, paid more attention to the social dimension of foreign influence in Afghanistan. Burhanuddin Rabbani, professor at the Shari'a Faculty at Kabul University and closely associated with Javanan-e Musulman, declares in one article that "the young Afghan has to fight decisively against the moral, economic and cultural colonialism of the West and the admirers of the West."[48] In this context, again, "the West" (*gharb*) includes the Soviet Union, as the "communists" – the admirers of the Soviet Union – were the main enemy of the movement. Thus, all political movements active on campus understood themselves as struggling for Afghanistan's independence.

4.3 The Promise of Revolutionary Change

Zalmai begins our first conversation by introducing himself and providing an overview of the social and political situation in Afghanistan at the time he was a student. Usually, these kinds of introductions resemble a general overview in a history book. They mainly differ in the attributes the interlocutors choose for political groups, depending on their own political opinions and affiliations. Zalmai's monologue is unique in how clearly he frames the idea of progress the PDPA propagated and that he as a member had believed in:

> The PDPA was a progressive party at that time because they wanted to accomplish a national and democratic revolution. National-democratic revolution means an accomplishment for the society, for workers, for farmers, for national and democratic forces to come to a higher position in society and to eradicate inequalities [...]. So, at that time, the national and democratic revolution was a way to go to socialism. And you know, this was only because of the Soviet Union's teaching, like Marxism-Leninism.

Most of my interlocutors who were members of the PDPA during their time as students, avoided terms such as "revolution" and "socialism". I took this as their way of avoiding accusations of being naïve radicals and atheists blindly following the Soviet Union. Zalmai, in contrast, used more explicit terminology than those other interlocutors. Zalmai's explicit confession of support for the Soviet

47 "*Hamzisti-ye musalimat amiz ya nafi mubarizat-e azadibakhsh-e khalqha alai-ye impirialism va isti'mar* (Peaceful Coexistence or the Negation of the Fight for Liberation of the People Against Imperialism and Colonialism)," *Shu'la-ye Javid*, 2 Jawza 1347 (May 23, 1968), 4.
48 Rabbani, "*Az ma ba javanan* (From Us to the Youth)," *Gahiz*, 3 Hamal 1347 (March 23, 1968), 2.

Union and Marxism-Leninism is all the more startling considering his positive description of US-American-funded educational facilities and the importance he attributed to anti-imperialism. A look at Zalmai's references to Marxism-Leninism suggests that in his interpretation this ideology united both ambitions. On the one hand, it called for progress, just as the US-American-funded education did. On the other, it promised self-determination and thus independence from imperialist powers such as the USA.

Zalmai is one of the most convinced and engaged former members of the PDPA I met. He first heard of the PDPA when he was a high school student in Mazar-e Sharif. Unlike most people in the city, he was a Pashto native speaker. One day, he said, somebody handed him the program of the PDPA in Pashto to translate it to Dari:

> When I was 13 or 14 years old, I was a student in Balkh, Mazar-e Sharif [...]. In that high school, I saw the manifesto of the PDPA for the first time. Somebody had given it to me and told me: 'Study it and tell me what it says.' Because it was in Pashto and he was not much ... He was a Dari speaker. So I studied it first and then I said something to him, but I didn't translate it completely, because some terms were written there, which I was not able to explain to him properly, like socialism, like democracy, like social equality, like this.

A few years later Zalmai graduated from high school and enrolled at the Agriculture Vocational School in Darvishan in Helmand Province. It was there that he became involved in politics, as he explained:

> My friends told me that one of your friends has come from Lashkargah, the capital of Helmand, and he wants to see you. [...] He said to me: 'Niamat gave me your name and he said that you have some political ideas about the PDPA. If you do, then you should start a party organization here.' I said yes. [...] And after that, [...] we started a party organization at the Agriculture High School for the first time. And I became the secretary of the party and I started [engaging in] politics. I think, at that time I was around 17 years old.

Zalmai and his friends then began to recruit new members for their party:

> Actually, every one month to three months, a person came to teach us, to bring us some documents. We had no useful books, we only had handwritten texts, some pamphlets. Some of them were created by Afghan politicians and some of them were translations from other sources. [...] But three things were very famous for party education: Political economy, socialism, and also philosophy. These three books were books for our education. Besides that we were studying the history of the Soviet Communist Party, the history of the Communist Party of Vietnam, the history of some other anti-capitalist organizations in the world. We also had some texts about the conditions of our society and how to struggle against the hardship. We had a kingdom at the time and the texts explained how it limited our democracy, why it limited our lives and how to struggle against these things.

Other activists, mainly from the Kabul University Faculty of Agriculture but also from Lashkargah, the capital of Helmand Province, visited the committee in Darvishan and provided them with readings and guidance on their activities. When Zalmai graduated two years later, there were about 50 PDPA members at the school, he explains.

When Zalmai registered at the Faculty of Agriculture at Kabul University in 1971, he continued his career in the party and soon became a member of the university committee of the PDPA, which coordinated students' activities with the central committee of the party. After about a year, Zalmai was dismissed from university along with 163 other students for having staged protests against the university administration. He was allocated to a job at an irrigation project in Nangarhar Province, where he engaged in political agitation among the workers. As a consequence, he lost his job after about a year. Unemployed as he was, he went to the Ministry of Agriculture to ask for a new opportunity:

> When I came back to the Ministry of Agriculture, I met my teacher [...]. And he told me, 'Where do you want to go?' I said, 'Look, teacher, they excluded me from university, and now they want to exclude me from [...] the Agriculture Department as well.' So he said to me, 'Now, do you want to go to some other place?' I said, 'No.' He told me, 'You have to go to Badakhshan.' And I didn't want to go there. It's far away from Kabul. So he asked me, 'Then what's your decision?' I decided that if there is any chance for re-enrolment at university, that's what I wanted to do. He told me, 'If you want to do that, then you have to pass another *kānkūr* examination.'

After succeeding in the *kānkūr* exam, Zalmai returned to his studies at Kabul University and to his engagement in students political activism.

One day in 1976, shortly before his last exams before graduation were due, the police came to his room in the dormitory on campus:

> They had some information about me, that I'm collecting some books and giving them to the students. And, once I went to buy a book and when I was coming to my hostel I dropped one of the books. And there was snow, very heavy snow on that night. I collected my book back. Somebody saw me as the book dropped and he was loyal to Daoud Khan. On that day I thought that maybe this person will give my name to the police or someone. [...] Then the police came into the room and they said, 'Do not move! Where is your cupboard?' I said, 'This.' They searched it. They searched everywhere. They found some written things and they collected them. And they said to me, 'Why are you distributing these materials? This is prohibited.' I said, 'There is no such law.' They couldn't show to me that law. But the court sentenced us to five years.

He only remained in prison for 18 months, though, as he was released after the PDPA took power in April 1978. He went on to pass his final exams at university and later was employed in several positions in state-owned agricultural companies.

All ideologies prominent on campus promised revolutionary change. As outlined in the quote above, Zalmai believed in a "national and democratic revolution." According to the PDPA's party program published in the newspaper *Khalq* in 1966, a "national-democratic government" would be formed of "a united public front of progressive, democratic, and patriotic forces" and it would fight for independence, social justice, and democracy.[49] This, in Zalmai's view, would finally lead to socialism.

The Soviet model of progress was based on the idea of national self-determination and the Marxist idea of liberation from the ruling class. In the Soviet Union, this model had been practiced in the form of support by "backward" peoples at the peripheries of the Soviet Union to catch up with central Russia.[50] After the end of the Second World War, this model grew increasingly attractive to leaders and political activists in the Third World.[51] Marxism-Leninism held a threefold appeal to oppositional movements. Firstly, it suggested organizational structures for protest, as it discussed how to mobilize people and how to seize power. Secondly, it combined protest against "both colonialism and underdevelopment" and thus provided a way to "'catch up' with the rest of the world" without colonial and post-colonial development aid. Thirdly, with its claim of being scientific, Marxism could be applied everywhere.[52]

Being a superpower, the Soviet Union seemed to be a strong role model for Zalmai. Another interlocutor, a Khalqi like Zalmai, explained:

> You know, at that time, we thought that all the misfortune we had was the result of colonialism, was the result of capitalism, imperialism. And the Soviet Union was against these things, at least on paper. At least in propaganda. [...] They were against capitalism. And we thought that if we were a socialist country, we could overcome all our backwardness. That's why we supported the Soviet Union.[53]

It is crucial to note that he said the PDPA supported the Soviet Union and not the Soviet Union the PDPA. On another occasion, Zalmai emphasized that as he had reached high levels within the party, he knew that the party leaders were not Soviet agents. "In my life I never saw that Nur Mohammad Taraki had a car [...]. If

49 "*Maram-e Dimukratik-e Khalq* (The People's Democratic Program)," *Khalq*, 22 Hamal 1345 (April 11, 1966), 1–8.,

50 For discussions of the Soviet nationalities policy and its relationship to Marxism see, for example, Gleason 1990; Slezkine 1994. For discussions of the role of socialism/Marxism-Leninism for national liberation movements see, for example, Katsakioris 2010, 86; Gilman 2003, 48.

51 Fowkes and Gökay 2009, 17.

52 Mahoney 2003, 186–88.

53 Mohammad Qabool, in conversation with the author, London, November 15, 2017.

he had received money from abroad, then where was he hiding this money if he had no car?" he argued. Instead, Zalmai explained the relationship of the PDPA to the Soviet Union in Cold War binaries and argued, "At that time, it was like a culture to depend on one another." For Zalmai, being pro-Soviet was the most natural form of opposition against an inactive government and imperialism in the Cold War context.

In historiography on the Cold War and the Global 1960s, the designation of movements challenging the existing and often Western-defined political order as being "communist" is a common means of delegitimization. Especially in US-American historiography, "communist" movements are often assumed to be Soviet puppets without further discussion.[54] In Afghanistan, the understanding of the PDPA as a Soviet puppet still prevails today as it fits well with narratives leading up to the Soviet military intervention and is difficult to contest due to the lack of sources besides newspaper articles and party programs. The narrative of foreign domination is especially strong for the PDPA, but also exists for Shu'la-ye Javid and Javanan-e Musulman. In the case of Shu'la-ye Javid, opponents argue that the Chinese embassy distributed political propaganda among students and provided financial support to the movement.[55] Javanan-e Musulman are commonly called "Ikhwani" by their opponents, suggesting their being a branch of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood.[56] Certainly, Soviet secret services did have their hands in PDPA activities, as did the Chinese embassy in the spread of Maoist ideas, and Javanan-e Musulman were inspired by the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. This influence, however, should not be mistaken for dominance. The US-American influence on campus is a case in point: all students experienced US-American influence at university, in the media, and in many other aspects of

54 Westad 2010, 3; Suri 2003, 138; Bruendel 2018, 80. Similar case in Iran, Matin-Asgari 2018, 146–47.

55 Bashir Sakhawarz, in conversation with the author, London, November 22, 2017. He complained that the movement was wrongly accused of being a foreign puppet. See, for example, "Politische Unrast in Afghanistan: Aufbegehren der studentischen Jugend," *Neue Züricher Zeitung*, July 18, 1969.

56 Many of my interlocutors did so, independent of their political position – except for those directly related to Javanan-e Musulman. For example, anonymous interview, Bonn, October 4, 2017; anonymous interview, Kabul, April 18, 2018; Sherjan Hadafmand, in conversation with the author, Kabul, April 19, 2018; Mohammad Akbar Kargar, in conversation with the author, London, November 17, 2017; Najibullah Naseri, in conversation with the author, Kabul, April 17, 2018; Noori, in conversation with the author, Berlin, July 3, 2017; Dr Ghulam Sakha, in conversation with the author, London, October 21, 2018. Those related to Javanan-e Musulman complained about this designation, for example Abuzar Pirzadeh Ghaznawi, in conversation with the author, Kabul, May 1, 2018. Example of term "Ikhwani" in historiography, Lavrov 2008, 35.

daily life and are not collectively accused of having been US-American agents. Hafizullah Amin, for example, studied in the US and did not become a convinced capitalist, but rather one of the leaders of the PDPA.[57] Leading figures of the political movements might have had particular relationships with other countries, secret services, and international political parties. Students such as Zalmai, however, were exposed to a broad variety of influences and they chose to follow one political group, believed in the respective ideology, and were thus motivated to participate in political activities. General assumptions of foreign dominance delegitimize students' activism and plays into the hands of their opponents.

Instead of being understood as a means of domination, the multiple international influences on academic and intellectual life in Kabul should be understood as a contribution to the vibrant political debates on campus. At Kabul University, students were exposed to a broad variety of political ideas that impacted how they perceived the political and social situation in Afghanistan and how they believed it could be changed.[58] Students frequently interacted with their international teachers – and in some cases, with international students – who did not necessarily represent the interests of the government of their country of origin. In early 1970, for example, when US Vice President Agnew visited Kabul, it was not only university students who protested US politics. US volunteers, who worked as teachers at schools all over the country, read out a statement in front of the US Embassy to voice their discontent with their government's policies.[59]

In addition to personal contacts, students had access to an extensive book market, where they could buy or rent a broad variety of books.[60] Most books available in Kabul in Farsi were translated and published in Iran. The Tudeh Party, which had a large network at European universities, and other political movements in Iran published and translated political articles and books. These were brought, legally or illegally, to Afghanistan. Some of these books were available in bookstores, whereas others were circulated among the students who copied parts by hand and then circulated these "notes". The circulation of such "notes" was the main way in which (extracts of) works by Marx, Engels, and Lenin reached students in Kabul. The range of books coming to Kabul from Iran was much

57 For a discussion of the ideological indoctrination of international students in the Soviet Union see Katsakioris 2010, 100.

58 Hanna makes this argument in the context of students' movements at universities in Africa, Hanna 1975, 4.

59 Peace Corps 1970.

60 Musa Fariwar told me how he made a business of renting books to university students who could not afford to buy them: Musa Fariwar, in conversation with the author, Kabul, April 23, 2018.

broader, however, and included authors such as Charles Dickens, Bertolt Brecht, Jean-Paul Sartre, Jack London, Maxim Gorky, Leo Tolstoy, and Ernest Hemingway.[61] Still other books were imported from Pakistan and India.[62] Some students learned foreign languages at school or university and used every opportunity to get books in English, German, or French from acquaintances who travelled abroad.[63] Many students listened to the *BBC*, *Voice of America*, *Radio Peking*, and other international broadcasts and several countries maintained cultural centers where language classes and cultural activities were offered.[64]

The search for alternatives to the narrative of progress propagated by the government and the spreading of ideologies on campus evolved dialectically. Ideologies became attractive due to a wish for change and the wish for change was reinforced and substantiated by the ideologies. Zalmai, for example, wanted change because he longed for a "unified Afghanistan," and the ideas of national liberation that the PDPA promoted suited him. His engagement with the ideas of the PDPA taught him about possibilities for change and gradual progress by means of a national-democratic revolution to socialism.

Based on Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought, Shu'la-ye Javid suggested "continued revolutionary action" in contrast to Soviet "revisionism."[65] With his rejection of détente and self-presentation as the "savior of the Third World", Mao provided an alternative to pro-Soviet anti-imperialism. His description of the global geopolitical situation did not divide the world along Cold War lines of East and West, but along North-South lines of colonizer and colonized.[66] Just as the Soviet Union built its legitimacy as an anti-imperialist superpower on its revolution and victory in World War II, China had a proof for the success of its own path of progress. China had moved from receiving large amounts of US-American development aid in the interwar years to being a recipient of Soviet aid and, finally, to independence and being able to provide aid to other countries in Asia and Africa.[67] Following the fundamental principles of Marxism, the notion of progress leading to an independent and communist society through revolutions, provided a clear vision of progress that would lead to respect and independence. For my interlocutors who sympathized with or joined Shu'la-ye

61 On translations to Farsi see Matin-Asgari 2018, 155–56.

62 Ibrahimi 2012, 4.

63 Atiq, in conversation with the author, Germany, November 2, 2017; Noori, in conversation with the author, Berlin, July 3, 2017.

64 Noori, in conversation with the author, Berlin, July 3, 2017.

65 Scarlett 2013, 42.

66 Ross 2002, 80; Scarlett 2013, 40.

67 Lorenzini 2020, 113–14.

Javid, the Chinese opposition to the Soviet Union was central, as for them the Soviet Union was not an anti-imperialist but an imperialist force. Articles in Shu'la-ye Javid condemn Soviet revisionism and argue that the PDPA's idea of a "non-capitalist way of growth" would lead to the rule of the middle class and not to revolutionary liberation from oppression.[68]

Javanan-e Musulman were and still are described as a "backward" or "conservative" movement by others, especially by their enemies, because of their emphasis on religious values and opposition to the progress propagated by the government and leftist movements. This seems to be appropriate at first glance, as they called for a "return" to the pure Islam of the times of the Prophet and to his strategies to extend the influence of Islam, following the ideas of Maududi and Sayyid Qutb.[69] However, the members of the movement did not seek the conservation of the status quo nor did they perceive Afghanistan as less backward than many of their classmates who were engaged with other political groups. David Edwards argues that for the students who joined Javanan-e Musulman the hand-copied notes of texts by Sayyid Qutb or Jamaluldin al-Afghani offered "for the first time the possibility of addressing social questions from an Islamic perspective."[70] Javanan-e Musulman called for a fundamental change in Afghanistan's social and political structures. As I argued in the previous chapter, the emergence of Javanan-e Musulman was mainly a reaction to the increasing influence of the leftist movements, but its defence of religious values relied on engagement with ideas on how to contest poverty, foreign domination, and authoritarian rule within a purely Islamic framework. Thus, from its beginning, Javanan-e Musulman called for an overthrow of the existing government to establish an Islamic system.[71]

In Afghanistan, Islamism had already been an anti-colonial force in the 19th century, but the ideological influences on students adhering to Javanan-e Musulman were different.[72] Just as Matin-Asgari discussed in the Iranian context, in Afghanistan, too, the existing religious structures did not provide a strong framework to stand up against leftist influences. Religious authorities were associated with the government and either tolerated its policies or were too weak to form

68 Dr Hadi Mahmudi, "*Sima-ye rah-e rushd-e ghair-e sarmayadari dar kishvarha-ye arabi* (The Physiognomy of the Non-Capitalist Way of Growth in Arabic Countries," *Shu'la-ye Javid*, 2 Jawza 1347 (May 23, 1968), 2–3.
69 Shepard 2003, 530.
70 Edwards 1995, 176.
71 Sands and Qazizai 2019, 57.
72 Lee 2018, 441.

an opposition.[73] Additionally, Javanan-e Musulman's approach towards political Islam changed the position of religion in politics in Afghanistan. Edwards argues that up to the 1960s, madrasas had been the centers for Islamic knowledge and discussion. The pamphlets distributed by Javanan-e Musulman, in contrast, addressed a broader audience. Summaries of the arguments of Islamic scholars such as Sayyid Qutb and Maududi in simple language reached people without a madrasa education.[74] To some students who felt threatened by the leftist groups and wanted to make their voice heard, such pamphlets provided the right arguments to oppose the leftists and to fight poverty, corruption, and foreign domination.

Even before Sayyid Qutb (1906–1966) became the main ideologue of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, he had criticized the social and political problems in Egypt similar to the issues raised by students at Kabul University in the 1960s. Put in a nutshell, Sayyid Qutb argued that Islam in itself was a perfect and complete system, which if followed adequately would solve all social and political problems not only on a structural level but also on a personal level as it would guide people out of immoral behavior. Consequently, he rejected political ideologies, as they were created by humans and not by God. Both capitalism and communism, he argued, created hierarchies and oppression among humans instead of universal submission to God. These thoughts, he pointed out, should not remain in theoretical discussions, but provide the framework for activism and the overthrow of Nasser's "un-Islamic" regime in Egypt.[75]

Javanan-e Musulman did not frame their ideas of societal change in a rhetoric of progress, and yet, the ideas of Sayyid Qutb and other Islamic scholars clearly provided an alternative to the progress propagated by the government. Notwithstanding the rhetoric of "returning" to the Prophet's life, scholars frequently discuss Qutb's ideas in the framework of modernity and progress. Nelly Lahoud, for example, summarizes one of Qutb's main arguments by writing that "moral and political progress may be achieved only through emulating a past when a Muslim community is believed to have scrupulously observed the teachings of the Qur'an."[76] In a similar perspective, Gopal and van Strick Linschoten describe Javanan-e Musulman in an essay on the Taliban's ideology as "modernist" in contrast to established Islamic authorities in Afghanistan at

73 Matin-Asgari 2018, 162.
74 Edwards 1995, 177.
75 McGregor 2003, 94; Munson 2001, 489–90; Shepard 2003, 524–26; Soage 2009, 189–95.
76 Lahoud 2005, 15.

that time.[77] However, Maududi, Hassan al-Banna, the founder of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, and Sayyid Qutb clearly distanced themselves from other scholars such as Jamaluldin al-Afghani, who had emphasized the compatibility of reason and Islam as a reaction to accusations about the incompatibility of Islam and modernity. Maududi, instead, pointed out that an approach towards Islam based on reason questions the absolute authority of the religious text.[78] Similarly, Hassan al-Banna and Sayyid Qutb argued that knowledge could only come from God and reason was human arrogance, because humans have a limited capacity to distinguish right from wrong.[79] Likewise, Javanan-e Musulman used the word "progress" (*pīshraft* and *taraqī*) mainly in a pejorative way when talking about the government or leftist political forces,[80] whereas articles in *Gahiz* on the concept of progress compare leftist ideas with alternative suggestions of Islam.[81]

All different ideas for a future Afghanistan provided their followers with visions on how to change the social and political conditions they disagreed with. They were similar in suggesting independence, whether the focus was on national sovereignty or the protection of Islamic values. In contrast to the government, these alternative narratives of progress promised students political participation. In this way, ideologies were central to the political activism at Kabul University. At the same time, it should not be forgotten that the contexts in which students became attached to a political organizations was not always related to its ideology. Zalmai, for example, became a member of the PDPA because a friend asked him to organize a branch of the party at his school. Another interlocutor told me that he joined Shu'la-ye Javid, and not Khalq or Parcham, because he was attracted by the personality of the leading Shu'lais.[82] As soon as they had joined one of the political organizations, students like Zalmai intensively engaged with the respective ideologies. Studying the books and pamphlets the party provided him gave him a framework for political activism, and thus the opportunity to stand up against the monarchy. This perspective on political activism at Kabul University suggests that the promotion of the Soviet model of progress galvanized students at Kabul University as it did in

77 Gopal and van Strick Linschoten 2017, 7. Similarly, Lafont describes Javanan-e Musulman as open to "progress", Lafont 1983, 119.

78 Aijaz 2018, 78–79.

79 Soage 2009, 192.

80 For example, Rabbani, "*Az ma ba ahl-e mu'arif* (From Us to the Educated)," *Gahiz*, 20 Dalv 1347 (February 9, 1969), 3.

81 For example, "*Va in ham susializm* (This is Socialism)," *Gahiz*, 3 Hamal 1348 (March 23, 1969), 2.

82 Bashir Sakhawarz, in conversation with the author, London, November 22, 2017.

many other countries. With different ideas, but in a very similar way, Shu'la-ye Javid and Javanan-e Musulman suggested alternatives for the future that fascinated students.

It was the aim of this chapter to investigate the role of ideologies in the political activism of students at Kabul University. On the one hand, Zalmai was fascinated with Europe and the USA, while on the other hand he repeatedly emphasized that his goal was independence from the foreign domination of Afghanistan. Finally, he was a convinced pro-Soviet socialist. I argue that Zalmai, like many other students, had internalized an idea of a progressive other, sometimes referred to as "the West" but rather defined by the North-South divide. The imagination of this progressive other created Zalmai's wish for Afghanistan to catch up. He did not challenge the general idea of progress and backwardness defined by colonial and post-colonial power structures. In contrast, he described Afghanistan as a "very backward country," which is "apart" from the "Western countries". His political activism thus did not challenge the hierarchies of global geopolitics, instead challenging the status of Afghanistan within this system. An important step towards becoming respected and included was to achieve independence from foreign domination. For Zalmai, the Soviet Union provided a solution to this dilemma: clear guidance to fast change legitimated by the idea that the Soviet Union had become a superpower via this path. For other students, the Soviet promises were no more trustworthy than those of the government or Western donors. For them, Mao's theories or Islamism suggested more convincing ways for Afghanistan to become independent and respected.

One of the major goals of this study was to question the superficial descriptions of political activists in Kabul as puppets of foreign interests. While some of the students at Kabul University certainly acted in the interest of other countries, throughout this chapter I have shown that for Zalmai and other students the political organizations they joined meant participation and not foreign domination. In a political environment far more complex than Cold War binaries suggest, students at Kabul University were confronted with a variety of ideologies that provided a rhetoric to voice their discontent with the status quo. They did so within the global languages of discontent that many different movements throughout the world shared. While Marxism-Leninism provided Zalmai with a guideline for progress and the Soviet Union was a role model for being able to stand up to the other superpower, his goal was neither for Afghanistan to become like the Soviet Union nor to become part of the Soviet Union. Instead, the guideline for progress the ideology provided him with suggested that Afghanistan would, at some point,

be independent and respected by the donor countries then treating Afghanistan as inferior.

In the introduction, I combined two arguments by scholars writing on the Global 1960s: Christiansen and Scarlett's argument of a central characteristic of the Global 1960s in the Third World being a wish to "drop in" and become a respected partner instead of an object to global power structures, and Suri's argument that the interruption of continuous progress as promised by Cold War ideologies sparked protest. This promise had reached Afghanistan through development projects, but their impacts remained limited. In the case of protests in the US, Suri pointed out that the rapid technological progress and relative affluence could not satisfy many people's expectations. The case of students at Kabul University is similar to the developments Suri describes and yet expresses the relevance of the wish for inclusion put forward by Christiansen and Scarlett. University students in Kabul experienced a technological and material progress similar to most people in Western Europe and the US. However, as discussed in the first and second chapter, students were not satisfied so long as promises of democracy, political participation, technological improvement, and social justice remained mere rhetoric. From this perspective, the project of developing Afghanistan had failed, and many students had the impression that real progress could only be achieved in an independent Afghanistan. The PDPA, Shu'la-ye Javid, and Javanan-e Musulman showed how Marxism, Mao Zedong Thought, and Islamism combined the ideas of progress and independence. As in many other colonized, semi-colonized, and de-colonized countries, these organizations' ideologies provided students with agency by solving the dilemma of how to be part of the global pursuit of progress without – at least in their perception – submitting to imperialist interests.

1978–1992

5 Hope and Disappointment in the Early 1980s

> They went away, and the mother remained standing at the window. With her hands folded over her breast, she gazed into vacancy without winking, her eyebrows raised. Her lips were compressed, her jaws so tightly set that her teeth began to pain her. The oil burned down in the lamp, the light flared up for a moment and then went out. She blew on it, and remained in the dark.
> (*Maxim Gorky, Mother, p. 187*)

Farzanah was a student at Kabul University in the early 1980s. As a child, she had lived in various parts of Afghanistan. Being the daughter of a public prosecutor, she went to school no matter which city her family moved to. In these schools, she became aware of injustices resulting from the education system. Thus, as a university student, she registered as a member of the university's branch of the Democratic Organization of the Women of Afghanistan (DOWA), the PDPA's women's organization. She hoped to contribute to the improvement of the situation of girls and women in the country. For some months, she participated in their activities. Then, her opinion changed, "I was active, in the middle of it," she says, "And then I saw the other side of this government and for this reason I thought, 'No, I cannot continue.' So I left."[1]

In April 1978, the PDPA overthrew President Daoud, declared Afghanistan a democratic republic, and established its own government. The party had been popular on campus for more than a decade and had always had broad support among students. After the coup, the PDPA promised all the changes students had fought for over the previous years. And yet the party's support on campus seems to have decreased with its takeover of power. This chapter thus asks why Kabul University did not become a center of support for the PDPA although it had been an important basis of the party in the 1960/70s? I argue that students were not involved in the coup of 1978 and that many of the students who saw the benefits of the new system were soon repulsed by the brutality and restrictiveness of the regime. Farzanah was one of the students who hoped for the realization of the PDPA's promises. She supported the reforms but turned her back on the party after witnessing the brutality of the new government.

Historiography has so far omitted the question of how people who were in favor of political change and had sympathized with or supported the PDPA before it came to power reacted to the establishment of a PDPA government. The general argument goes that the regime had little support because people, especially in

1 Farzanah, in conversation with the author, Germany, March 3, 2018.

https://doi.org/10.1515/ 9783111150543-005

the rural areas, were repulsed by the over-ambitious reforms and their rigorous implementation.[2] But, what happened to the people who had been waiting for and demanding reforms for several decades? Why did students who had fought for the extension of educational facilities, the restriction of landownership, and the abolition of child marriage cease to support the PDPA? To discuss this aspect, more attention must be payed to the political changes affecting the urban population. Olivier Roy briefly mentions that intellectuals, including students, became targets of purges by the PDPA government and were deterred by the government's brutality.[3] The general focus of research on arrests and executions in the first years of PDPA rule, however, lies on the purges within the party leadership.[4] This chapter provides an alternative perspective on the late 1970s and early 1980s by looking at how students at Kabul University navigated between hopes of political reforms and the extreme brutality of the first years of PDPA rule. In the case of Kabul University, hopes for progress were still present in the 1980s, but were overshadowed by purges against all potential political opponents.

The first subchapter discusses Farzanah's relationship to politics prior to 1978 and her experience of the coup. The rest of the chapter then discusses the hopes she had and the opportunities the new system brought, on the one hand, and the fear and insecurity she lived through, on the other. I chose to analyse Farzanah's narrative in greater detail as it was she who drew my attention to the dilemmas students faced who hoped to contribute to positive change under the new regime.

Farzanah was born in a village in Parwan Province, a mainly Tajik area, where she lived until she was five. In the following years, Farzanah lived in different towns throughout Afghanistan because her father was allocated to a new position every year or two. When she was in grade seven, she moved to Kabul with her family and graduated from high school. In 1980, Farzanah went to Kyiv on a scholarship, where she studied for a year. She returned to Kabul and studied dentistry at Kabul University from 1982 to 1986. She then worked as an assistant at the university until she and her husband left the country and moved to Germany in 1991. Since she wanted to remain anonymous, I chose to discuss her narrative under the pseudonym Farzanah. All references to her narrative are based on the conversation we had when I visited her at her home in March 2018.[5]

2 Rasanayagam 2005, 67–82; Payind 1989, 118–19; Halliday and Tanin 1998, 1360–61.

3 Roy briefly mentions the impact the violence had on the population of Kabul but does not provide a more detailed analysis, Roy 1990, 96.

4 A classic description of these purges can be found in Halliday and Tanin 1998, 1361–62.

5 Farzanah, in conversation with the author, Germany, March 3, 2018.

5.1 Bombs on the Palace

Living and going to school in different parts of the country during the late 1960s and 1970s shaped Farzanah's perception of Afghanistan's social and political situation. Farzanah says that she witnessed widespread poverty. While her family was well off

> for other people it was difficult. But they [the government] didn't do anything against it, even though there was a lot of poverty ... And Daoud Khan and Zahir Shah didn't really do anything for Afghanistan. Zahir Shah ruled with his family in Afghanistan for more than 50 years. [...] They ruled only for themselves, for the money, for the power ...

In our conversation, she emphasizes that politics from the center created injustice in rural areas. One aspect she mentions was the absence of the different native languages at schools, complaining that students did not have the chance to study in their own languages because nobody cared about their needs. Classes were held in Dari in all provinces she lived in. As a Dari native speaker, Farzanah could easily move from one school to another, while local students sometimes struggled to follow the lessons:

> When we were in Zabul, everybody was Pashtun but in school we only learned Persian. [...] And even the children from Zabul could not come to school because classes were in Persian. And we had a teacher, he did not speak Persian and we always made fun of him because he did not speak Persian. It was ignored that the people needed books in their language. Nobody cared. [...] My friend, she was Pashtun and she barely spoke Persian. [...] She came to our place to learn Persian, so she could attend school, at least. [...] And we were in Ghazni. In Ghazni there were many Hazara, but in the entire school there was only one Hazara girl. [...] And then we were in Maymana, they are Uzbeks. And what did we learn? Again Persian. And all the books, everything was in Persian. And in Kabul, too, of course.

Farzanah's family moved back to Kabul in the mid-1970s and she attended the last years of high school there; she then understood that schools in Kabul were much better than in the provinces. She had always been one of the best students, but now she had to put effort into following the lessons. Why were the conditions so different if everybody lived in the same country? Why was the Hazara girl in Ghazni bullied by other students? Her father told her that this was a political problem and that there should be no difference between all the people living in Afghanistan. As a teenager, like students who took to the streets and joined political movements in the late 1960s, Farzanah wished for political change.

Farzanah remembers the day when Daoud came to power in 1973. The new government promised to treat everybody equally, to not distinguish between rich

and poor. People around her were excited that the monarchy had been abolished and that change would finally come. Only Farzanah's father was less optimistic on the day of the coup. Looking back, Farzanah says she could not see any changes in the daily lives of people in the following years. She was in Zabul Province at that time and one day the governor came to visit the school. Her father prepared a speech for her to hold in front of the governor to tell him what the school's students needed. She presented the text and the governor took the letter but did nothing to improve the school's conditions.

Daoud's plans to improve the infrastructure in the country with huge projects constructing roads and hydroelectric dams gave him the image of a modernizer that still characterizes memories of his rule to this day.[6] Farzanah's narrative draws attention to the fact that many assessed the social and political situation in the country in the 1970s as not as good as it tends to be seen in hindsight. Indeed, most of Daoud's plans remained mere rhetoric. Daoud's efforts to acquire international funding resulted in new infrastructure and industrial projects but, as in the Shah's times, many of these projects were designed to benefit the donors more than the needs of people in Afghanistan. Daoud's attempts to continue a multi-lateral foreign policy to secure the influx of aid and strengthen Afghanistan's position in the Pashtunistan conflict with Pakistan complicated his modernization programs.[7] Daoud reformed the penal system to make Afghanistan a modern state. With the centralized penal code, he formally divested the justices of their authority to independently decide appropriate penalties. Attempts to centralize the economy strengthened the position of foreign advisors.[8] Daoud announced a land reform in 1975 and first steps were taken to implement it from 1976 onward – at least on paper. In reality, the consequences were insignificant right up until the end of his rule in 1978.[9] Daoud's authoritarian style of governance led to increas-

6 For example, Khalilzad 2016, 3; Misdaq 2006, 76; Pirzadeh Ghaznavi 1393 (2014), 134. In interviews (with a broad range of different political backgrounds): Zalmai, in conversation with the author, London, October 22, 2018; anonymous interview, Kabul, April 18, 2018; Anwar Ghori, in conversation with the author, Kabul, April 21, 2018; Sherjan Hadafmand, in conversation with the author, Kabul, April 19, 2018; Najibullah Naseri, in conversation with the author, Kabul, April 17, 2018; Wahidullah Sabawoon, in conversation with the author, Kabul, May 3, 2018; Mohammad Qabool, in conversation with the author, London, November 15, 2017; Noori, in conversation with the author, Berlin, July 3, 2017.

7 Chaffetz 1980, 18–19.

8 Sierakowska-Dyndo 1990, 89, 95.

9 Nunan analyzes Daoud's land reforms mainly on the basis of reports of Soviet advisers, who were sceptical of the design of the reforms and reported that their implementation largely failed, Nunan 2017, 105–06. Westad argues that Daoud failed in modernizing Afghanistan because it was „one of the world's poorest countries, with steep-sloped mountain ranges separating areas with

ing discontent among intellectuals and in the army, contributing to the destabilization of his government.[10]

The disappointed hopes in Daoud's government are the basis on which the PDPA tried to build its legitimacy as the new ruling party after the coup of 1978. In public speeches and interviews, PDPA leaders discredited Daoud by highlighting his failures and generally describing him as an incompetent figure of the old order. They accused him of abolishing freedom and democracy and ruining the economy of Afghanistan while hiding behind a rhetoric of progress. They blamed Daoud for contributing to the disintegration of and increasing corruption in the state administration instead of living up to his promises to implement a land reform and abolish exploitation. As a consequence, the PDPA's argument goes, the situation in the country deteriorated and "patriotic and progressive forces" who stood up for improvement were persecuted.[11] In a similar manner, a newspaper article in the *Kabul Times* from early May 1978 ridiculed Daoud by referring to him as "Prince Daoud", emphasizing his relationship to the monarchy and concluding that Daoud "displayed a rare talent in mismanagement, misappointments, and misdirection."[12]

Even though Farzanah had wanted political change during the Daoud years, she does not have positive memories of the day the PDPA overthrew him:

> I remember, it was a Friday. They chose Friday on purpose, so nobody would go to work. I heard that some noise was coming and we went on the roof and then we saw that there were some planes coming, jets. And then they threw bombs on the place where Daoud Khan was. They threw bombs all the time. And then, it was the first time I saw tanks. They came out onto the crossing where we were living, three tanks. I was so afraid because when you see these tanks, 'Now war is coming.' and I still have this feeling. So I said, 'My God, what is this?' And I had to sit down. I could not walk anymore.

Part of this negative connotation in her memories of the coup might stem from experiences under the PDPA regime in the following years. It is notable, though, that notwithstanding Farzanah's hope for change, she mainly associates the day of the coup with a state of shock. When thinking about social equality, ethnic inclusivity, and the improvement of the education system, she had not pictured it as being brought about by tanks and bombs.

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distinct ethnic or clan-oriented populations". Westad 2010, 299. Arguments like these should be handled with care as they can contribute to the exoticization of Afghanistan.

10 Farhang 1394 (2012), 836.

11 Schröder 1980a, 104; Schröder 1980b, 109.

12 "The Revolution and the People," *Kabul Times*, May 4, 1978.

The PDPA began their coup on Thursday, April 27, 1978 or 7 Saur 1357, according to the Afghan calendar, and ultimately took power the next day. What came to be called the "Saur Revolution" by the PDPA was a military coup implemented by army officials. The military then handed power over to a civil "revolutionary council".[13] Throughout the establishment of new political structures in the first weeks after the coup, power was mainly in the hands of the long-term party leaders: Nur Mohammad Taraki, Hafizullah Amin, and Babrak Karmal. In one of his first speeches, Taraki praised the takeover of power as preparing a "revolution":

> The armed uprising of the 27 April 1978 was implemented by patriotic officers and brave soldiers according to the will of the people of Afghanistan under the leadership of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan. It implies the beginning of a democratic people's revolution and opens up a new historical stage for our dear and glorious homeland Afghanistan.[14]

Over time, the coup itself became the revolution. An article in the state-owned magazine *Afghanistan Today* from 1988 describes April 27, 1978 as a day "when the might and the will of the Afghan people emerged victorious in their revolutionary uprising."[15]

A central element of the revolutionary narrative surrounding the coup is the funeral of Mir Akbar Khaybar, one of the leaders of the PDPA. He had been killed some days earlier under unknown circumstances and the party organized a large march on the occasion of his funeral on April 19, 1978.[16] One of my interlocutors who participated in the march describes his experience in the following way:

> Principally, before that [the "revolution"], one of the leaders of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan of the Parcham wing, called Mir Akbar Khaybar, [...] was killed. We brought the corpse of Mir Akbar Khaybar from the first or old Mikrorayon to [the cemetery of] the martyrs, walking, about ten thousand or fifteen thousand people were behind it. All the members of the PDPA and all the youth. At that time, it was very powerful. At that time, it was the most powerful party. And with slogans of 'long live' and 'death to' we took the corpse of Mir Akbar Khaybar to [the cemetery of] the righteous martyrs. We buried him.

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13 Roughly 600 soldiers of different ranks are said to have participated in the coup. Amstutz 1986, 37. For other descriptions of the coup see, for example, Rasanayagam 2005, 67–82; Dorronsoro 2005, 86; Tanin 2011, 216–23. Farhang foregrounds a potential Soviet involvement in his description, which has, however, been generally contested on the basis of Soviet archival sources, Farhang 1394 (2012), 865. Zahir Tanin denies any Soviet involvement, Tanin 2011, 226–27.

14 Schröder 1980a, 103.

15 "April Revolution" 1988, 2.

16 One of the generals involved in the coup describes the planning of the funeral in his memoirs, Jenral Omarzai 1995, 2–4.

> There, Babrak Karmal held a speech. He gave a speech and he repeated three times, 'This deadly political silence must be broken! This deadly political silence must be broken! This deadly political silence must be broken!'[17]

This interlocutor thus suggests that the PDPA had plans to overthrow the regime. Furthermore, by describing a march of ten or fifteen thousand, he creates a revolutionary atmosphere around the funeral. A book dedicated to investigating the circumstances of the conflict in Afghanistan published by a leftist West German publisher even mentioned 60,000 participants.[18] On that day, a large crowd gathered to commemorate Khaybar, with people coming to Kabul from other provinces to join. And yet, such a number seems to be exaggerated considering that demographers estimated the population of Kabul at roughly 750,000 at that time.[19] The descriptions of the large crowds at Khaybar's funeral compensate for the lack of support on the day of the coup, as they suggest that the PDPA was widely supported.

On the day of the coup, however, no "revolutionary masses" were involved. Rather, people observed the tanks and bombs from a distance, many of them probably as shocked as Farzanah. The coup had begun a day earlier than Farzanah remembers, and the planes could already be seen in the sky on Thursday, not on Friday as she says. One interlocutor describes how he came home after school around lunchtime, as usual on a Thursday. In the afternoon, he went to the city center to meet a friend who had a shop there. As soon as he arrived, the friend told him about the coup and my interlocutor was surprised. He did not even know what the word "coup d'état" meant. The two of them were curious and went closer to the Arg, the presidential palace, where they saw tanks and observed how the corpse of a palace guard was taken away in a car.[20] On the same day, another interlocutor was not, as usual, picked up by his father's driver because classes had ended early. The day was sunny and warm and my interlocutor thus decided to walk home from school. As he crossed Pashtunistan Square, which is located in front of the Arg, he noticed an armored vehicle, something he had only seen at parades before. He was fascinated and spent some time looking at the vehicle before he continued his walk. When he reached home, he suddenly became aware of planes over the city. He and his family were standing outside, watching the planes, when one of the planes fired on the neighbor's wall, probably by mistake. Only later, when they switched on the radio and heard march-

17 Ahmad Zia Nikbin, in conversation with the author, Kabul, April 30, 2018.
18 Brönner 1980, 50.
19 Lieberman 1980, 278.
20 Anonymous interview, Kabul, April 22, 2018.

ing music similar to that played during the 1973 coup, did they understand that another coup was going on.[21] Then the radio announcement came, "For the first time in the history of Afghanistan the last remnants of the monarchy, tyranny, despotism and power of the dynasty of the tyrant Nader Khan has ended and all powers of the state are in the hands of the people of Afghanistan."[22] Fighting had not yet ended and could be heard throughout the night.[23] The Democratic Republic of Afghanistan was declared three days later.[24]

Similarly, students who were members of the PDPA were surprised by the coup. They, too, remember the planes in the sky and the tanks in the streets. Instead of the sunny day that motivated the high school student to go for a walk, my interlocutor who had participated in the march on Khaybar's funeral remembers the Thursday as cloudy and rainy. Before he saw the planes and tanks, he heard their noise. He went up to the roof of his family's home and wondered what these planes would bring for the future. A few hours later, he heard the radio announcement and understood that the future of the country would be determined by the PDPA leaders Nur Mohammad Taraki, Babrak Karmal, and their "Revolutionary Council."[25] While in his accounts of Khaybar's funeral he emphasizes how the PDPA leaders had been prepared for the coup, no expectations are reflected in his description of the coup itself. Rather, like everyone else, he was surprised and heard the news on the radio.

My interlocutors' memories of the day of the coup have changed over time. Farzanah was convinced that she saw the planes on a Friday, while everybody else saw them on a Thursday afternoon.[26] One of my interlocutors emphasized the blue sky, while the other remembered clouds and rain. These differences notwithstanding, the atmosphere of the narrations was similar in all accounts. My interlocutors put themselves in the role of observers who neither expected nor understood what was happening. This stands in contrast to how interlocutors who had been students in the late 1960s and early 1970s described political events as vividly as if they had been part of them, whether or not they were present on scene.[27] While former students remember the 1960s and early 1970s as

21 Anonymous interview, Berlin, July 10, 2019. Similar descriptions of observing planes and watching from afar, for example, by Wais, in conversation with the author, London, February 2, 2018.

22 "First radio announcement," *Kabul Times*, May 4, 1978.

23 Haroon Amirzada, in conversation with the author, London, November 21, 2017.

24 Rubin 1995, 105.

25 Ahmad Zia Nikbin, in conversation with the author Kabul, April 30, 2018.

26 On a Friday no student would have been on their way back home from school.

27 See, for example, the discussion of the 3 Aqrab 1344 in the second chapter.

the "golden times" during which they enjoyed political activism as part of student life, the coup in 1978 marks the beginning of a time of uncertainty and fear.

In interviews and written sources, descriptions of the second day of the coup, the Friday, range from loud enthusiasm to indecisive silence. As soon as the *Kabul Times* had been taken over by the PDPA, it claimed that people "showered" the victorious soldiers with flowers on the day after the "revolution."[28] The above-mentioned German publication features the picture of a tank decorated with paper chains illustrating the "sympathy of the citizens with the revolutionary troops."[29] One of my interlocutors remembers how people came out onto the street to congratulate the soldiers on Friday morning, and another told me how she could hear the cheering of people calling for liberty and democracy in the streets.[30] Even though the extent of celebrations might have been exaggerated in PDPA publications, the successful coup was celebrated by the party's supporters.

Many people preferred to stay at home on that day, however. One of the generals involved in the coup noted in his memoirs that "ordinary people were not seen in the city."[31] A few days after the coup, a German journalist reporting on the situation in Kabul wrote that no change was felt among the population of Kabul who accepted the regime change with "stoic equanimity."[32] Rather than equanimity, Farzanah and other interlocutors describe insecurity. On the Saturday following the coup, Farzanah went to school as usual, even though nobody was quite sure of how to deal with the situation:

> My dad drove us, me and my sister, [to school]. And then he dropped us off in front of the school and he was looking around a bit, and there were few people in the school. And he was somewhat afraid, too, then. But he couldn't do anything, so he just said, 'You are brave. Just go!' Then we went to school and there were hardly any people. But slowly, slowly normal life came back.

Another interlocutor explains that those first days were ordinary because nobody knew what the political change would mean.[33] In its first weeks the new government was busy arresting and sometimes executing its predecessors, and then with purges within the party. At the time, there were few consequences for most

28 "Nation Welcomes Democratic Revolution," *Kabul Times*, May 4, 1978.

29 Brönner 1980, 58–59.

30 Haroon Amirzada, in conversation with the author, London, November 21, 2017; Najia Ahmad, in conversation with the author, Stuttgart, October 15, 2017.

31 Jenral Omarzai 1995, 46.

32 Gerd Rainer Neu, "Die Afghanen reagierten mit Gleichmut. Deutsche berichten nach dem Putsch linker Offiziere – Gefechte nur in Kabul," *SBZ*, May 14, 978.

33 Anonymous interview, Berlin, July 10, 2019.

students.[34] My interlocutor and his friends still discussed politics openly and only during the following months did fear of political persecution spread among broader parts of society. Then, he says, "we would wake up on the next day to realize that the neighbors, the entire family, were not there anymore."[35]

5.2 "A Beautiful Time for Women"

To some students the weeks after the coup were full of celebrations. One interlocutor, who had recently graduated and was a teacher at Kabul University at the time of the coup, describes how he and his friends celebrated the news of the coup and how people were happy as they thought that "the new thing is better than the old thing".[36] A former student of the Faculty of Sciences remembers how one of his German teachers entered the classroom in the week after the coup:

> He didn't say anything, so the students said to him: 'You didn't congratulate us! Our government has changed! The revolutionary government came!' He answered: 'Is this a good thing?' And we said: 'Yes!' He said: 'If it's a good thing, then I congratulate. Congratulations!'[37]

Another former student, a Parchami, praises how wonderful the weeks after the coup were, how he and his friends would join marches of young people through the city and how there was music and happiness in every park. He hoped that finally, Afghanistan would be "saved from illiteracy and ignorance."[38] Even a student who was a member of Shu'la-ye Javid, one of the political enemies of the PDPA, celebrated the coup and the new "progressive" government. He hoped, he says, "that all our dreams would come true."[39]

For most people in Kabul daily life continued, while in many other parts of the country the war between the Soviet-supported Afghan army and the armed opposition began in early 1980. "We did not experience much of the war," Farzanah says.

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34 Halliday and Tanin 1998, 1361–62.
35 Anonymous interview, Berlin, July 10, 2019.
36 Najibullah Naseri, in conversation with the author, Kabul, April 17, 2018.
37 Anwar Ghori, in conversation with the author, Kabul, April 21, 2018.
38 Ahmad Zia Nikbin, in conversation with the author Kabul, April 30, 2018.
39 Bashir Sakhawarz, in conversation with the author, London, November 22, 2017.

> Yes, once in a while a rocket hit the city, but that was daily life for the people. We didn't take much notice of it. Once, me and my sister, we went to the hairdresser to get a perm and then we took a cab back home and the cab was stopped and the people of the army, they always checked who was sitting in the car. So they looked and they saw that we just came from the hairdresser and they laughed, 'Who would do something like this during these days ...'

Apart from the checkpoints in the streets, for Farzanah "these days" were not so much different from her life before 1978. Rather than being concerned with the war, she hoped that the new regime would finally bring some change and "people would become a little bit rich and poverty would go away."

The political changes between the coup and the beginning of the war had a significant impact on the organization and atmosphere at Kabul University. The university was stripped of US-American and Western European influence and then re-organized according to Soviet standards. The purges by the government of Nur Mohammad Taraki and Hafizullah Amin were extended to the campus and students and teachers feared arrests. Some of them left the country. Most international teachers left because of the uncertain security situation and the end of international cooperation.[40] Some of the educational institutions funded by international donors did not accept new students and closed in the mid-1980s when the last cohort had graduated.[41] The international and local teachers with international degrees who had left or been arrested were replaced by recent graduates sympathetic to the government but lacking qualifications for the positions.[42] In other cases, teachers could not be replaced immediately and their former assistants had to fulfil their responsibilities.[43] Likewise, the deans of all twelve faculties were replaced with people loyal to the Khalq leadership.[44]

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40 For example, anonymous interview, Kabul, April 22, 2018; Nader S., in conversation with the author, Frankfurt, March 5, 2018. See also "Blieb von blühender Uni-Partnerschaft Bonn und Kabul nur ein Trümmerhaufen? Einheimische Dozenten fielen Verhaftungswelle zum Opfer – Mathematiker noch in Afghanistan," *Bonner General-Anzeiger*, January 14, 1980.

41 One interlocutor told me this was the case with the US-American-funded Afghan Institute for Technology, which he attended before applying at Kabul University, Bashir Ahmad, in conversation with the author, Kabul, April 18, 2018.

42 Wais, in conversation with the author, London, February 2, 2018. Giustozzi 2000, 12.

43 Anonymous interview, Berlin, July 10, 2019.

44 A report by Human Rights Watch claims that about 70 percent of Kabul University's staff were either arrested/executed or left the country between April 1978 and 1983. The report is largely based on interviews with people who had left Afghanistan and were staying in Pakistan. The numbers mentioned are thus not necessarily accurate. Also, it states that by 1983, 60 percent of the teachers at Kabul University came from "socialist countries," but few of my interlocutors said that they had foreign teachers at that time. Human Rights Watch 1984, 103–05.

With the beginning of the Soviet military intervention in December 1979, Soviet advisers took over the management of the education system and most other state institutions. Consequently, over time, cooperation with Western European and US-American universities was replaced by support from different countries in the Eastern bloc.[45] Roughly a third of Soviet non-military aid during the 1980s was invested in education.[46] In early 1980, the first 27 professors from the Soviet Union arrived at Kabul University, ready to take over teaching at different faculties, with numbers increasing in the following years.[47] By 1982, 84 "Soviet advisors" were active on campus and managed the daily proceedings at the university.[48] My interlocutors mention teachers from the Central Asian Soviet republics, the GDR, and from Poland, who all usually relied on interpreters from the Tajik SSR.[49] While the university remained an international institution, its character changed significantly.

Similarly, opportunities to study abroad changed. As discussed in the third chapter, a scholarship for a university in the United States or Western Europe was generally seen as more prestigious than one for a university in the Eastern bloc. As these prestigious scholarships became almost impossible to obtain, dreams of studying in Western Europe or the USA ended for most students. Opportunities to study in the Soviet Union, in contrast, became plentiful.[50] In early 1980, at the time Farzanah took the *kānkūr* exam, all students with good results on the exam were offered a place to study in the Soviet Union. Western European and US-American observers claim that in 1980 about 600 students from Afghanistan went to the Soviet Union; by 1982 and 1983 between 12,000 and 25,000 Afghan students were studying at different universities there.[51] These numbers are probably not accurate, as they serve to illustrate the "Sovietization of Afghanistan", but there seem to have been more students from Afghanistan in the Soviet Union than

45 In 1983, for example, the Ministry of Higher and Vocational Education of the GDR signed a corresponding treaty with the respective ministry in Afghanistan, "Engere Zusammenarbeit mit Afghanistan im Bildungswesen. Hochschulminister unterzeichnet Protokoll in Berlin," *Neues Deutschland*, May 5, 1983.

46 Westad 2010, 350.

47 Tsvetkova 2017, 353.

48 Amstutz 1986, 306.

49 For example, anonymous interview, Kabul, April 25, 2018.

50 Baiza 2013, 145.

51 Human Rights Watch 1984, 109; Broxup 1983, 100. According to Amstutz's analysis of the first years of PDPA rule, 4,500 students were studying "in the USSR and Eastern Europe" by the end of 1979 and 10,000 to 20,000 in 1983. Amstutz 1986, 38; 311.

at Kabul University.[52] Farzanah had always dreamed of studying medicine and her *kānkūr* result allowed her to enter the Faculty of Medicine. However, she was allocated a spot in Kyiv instead. Her father was opposed, because he would have liked her to go to Germany, not the Soviet Union. Additionally, it was still uncommon for women to study abroad.[53] She was finally able to convince her father and accepted the scholarship. To Farzanah, this seemed to be a good opportunity in contrast to studying in the turbulent political conditions of Afghanistan.

For other students, studying in the Soviet Union was not an option. One of my interlocutors explains how some of his classmates refused to go to the Soviet Union even though they were not accepted at Kabul University:

> The majority of those students, they rejected the offer and they said, 'We will study at Kabul University and we won't go to the Soviet Union.' And they rejected [the scholarship]. And I was lucky that they didn't choose me [for the scholarship]. And most of the other students [who rejected the scholarship] had the highest points in the *kānkūr* and they lost one year. They were unlucky because during that year they didn't want to go to the Soviet Union and they couldn't enroll in the faculties. [...] I was in the second year when my friends started their higher education.[54]

For Farzanah, studying in Kyiv was an opportunity and she enjoyed her time there. During the first year, she went to the "Podfak", the preparatory faculty, to learn Russian. She lived in a dormitory with male and female students – something that was new to her. "And everybody was eating together, had fun together. We went to university together," she remembers. On holidays or during vacations the students were taken to various places for sightseeing. Of course, Farzanah says, people had to be cautious and would not criticize the government, but nobody was forced to participate in political activities. After some months in Kyiv, she found out that she had not been told the truth: she had been sent to Kyiv on a program to be trained as a teacher, not as a doctor. Even though she was sad to leave her life in Kyiv behind, she was determined to study medicine and returned to Afghanistan.

52 In 1979, about 7,000 students were registered at the university with the numbers temporarily decreasing as students were arrested, recruited for the military, or left the country. Tsvetkova 2017, 354.

53 In the 1920s, as part of King Amanullah's efforts to modernize the country through education and changes to the role of women in society, 15 female students went to study in Turkey. This experiment ended with Amanullah being overthrown; thereafter, it was rather uncommon for girls to abroad. Alimajrooh 1989, 88.

54 Wais, in conversation with the author, London, February 2, 2018.

Back in Kabul, Farzanah registered for dentistry, a new program at Kabul University introduced under the influence of Soviet advisors and professors. In the early 1980s, new departments were founded, including the Worker-Peasant Department and the Military Department.[55] New programs were introduced at other faculties, such as the Faculty of Medicine, including dentistry. One interlocutor, who graduated from the Faculty of Medicine in 1980 and worked there as a teacher in the following years, argues that changes like these were important as the programs had finally been adapted to the needs of society instead of the mainly theoretical training of earlier years. Besides dentistry, pediatrics was introduced, he says, a subject no institution in Afghanistan had provided training in before 1980.[56]

Just as Farzanah had accepted going to the Soviet Union and was glad for the opportunity to study dentistry, she hoped that the PDPA government would help change the position of women in society. As discussed earlier, the "liberation" of women had always been an important topic for the PDPA – at least on paper. The rhetoric emphasizing the need for women to participate in the revolutionary changes of society continued after the coup, but few specific policies followed. On International Women's Day in 1980, for example, the entire issue of the *Kabul New Times* was dedicated to articles praising women and their role in the "revolution", but no clear aims or strategies were formulated.[57] Similarly, Nancy Hatch Dupree, who observed the political developments in Kabul at that time, complained that the PDPA's pledges to grant the same rights to women as to men were identical to the ones in the constitutions of Zahir Shah (1964) and Daoud Khan (1977) and, likewise, no action plan followed.[58]

The only person, Hatch Dupree argues, who put real efforts into supporting women was Anahita Ratibzad, who had founded the Women's Organization in the 1960s.[59] She had announced more kindergartens and literacy classes for women in 1978, but being a Parchami, was sent abroad under Taraki's Khalqi government after the coup.[60] Without her, during the Khalq period, much effort was put into presenting the participation of women in society in marches and newspaper

55 Tsvetkova 2017, 354–55.

56 Zaman, in conversation with the author, Bad Nauheim, March 3, 2018.

57 *Kabul New Times*, March 8, 1980.

58 Hatch Dupree 1981, 4–14.

59 Ibid.

60 The power struggles between the two wings of the PDPA, Khalq and Parcham, which accompanied the party's history from its foundation on, continued after the coup. Under Taraki and Amin – both Khalqis – many Parchamis were arrested, executed, or sent abroad as diplomats. For details see, for example, Halliday and Tanin 1998, 1361–62.

articles, but few reforms followed. The main reform regarding women was Decree 7, issued on October 17, 1978, which prohibited child marriage and regulated the dowry. This law is often referred to when explaining the negative attitude of many people in the country towards the PDPA[61] and Nancy Hatch Dupree argues it was short and superficial, having obviously been drafted without the necessary attention to detail. Even when Anahita Ratibzad returned in 1980, according to Hatch Dupree, nothing much changed because the Parchami government was mostly focused on discrediting its predecessors rather than supporting women and girls.[62] In contrast to the negative results of the 1978 reforms, the PDPA's policies towards women in the following decade receive almost no scholarly attention. The general encouragement to include women in formal education and work life continued, albeit with less eagerness (and brutality) than in 1978/79.[63]

Farzanah witnessed changes around her that contributed to her hope. While female university students had already been a symbol of emancipation in Afghanistan during the Zahir Shah era, women's opportunities to study, work, and lead a life outside of the family circle increased in the 1980s.[64] Women were encouraged to talk in front of larger crowds or even to dance or sing on television programs, Farzanah said. The party recruited women to work as "security [guards] with a weapon", she explained, including at the high school she attended in 1978. At the university, other interlocutors told me, female students felt increasingly confident seeing their male classmates as their peers, studying with them in the library, going to the cafeteria together, or spending time in the park.[65] Employment opportunities for female graduates increased, especially in public service.[66] While not all problems were solved, Farzanah says, "it was a beautiful, beautiful time for women."

61 Payind 1989, 118–19; Rasanayagam 2005, 67–82; Rubin 1995, 111–21.

62 Hatch Dupree 1981, 4–14.

63 By 1980, Anahita Ratibzad had already called the reforms of 1978 a mistake, Pourzand, 1999, 77. Nancy Hatch Dupree mentions (but does not discuss) that the 1980s did not bring improvement to the lives of women in Kabul, Hatch Dupree 1992, 34–35. Examples for the promotion of women working, going to school, and taking responsibility in family planning can be found in the state-owned magazine *Afghanistan Today*. See, for example, "Evolution of Women's Movement in Afghanistan," 1990, 10–12; "Family Guidance," 1988, 20–21.

64 One of my interlocutors pointed out that women had more rights in the PDPA era than during the Zahir Shah era: Haroon Amirzada, in conversation with the author, London, November 21, 2017.

65 Anonymous interview, Kabul, April 22, 2018; anonymous interview, Kabul, July 24, 2018.

66 Giustozzi 2000, 20.

Farzanah hoped that she and other women in the country would benefit from the new system. The new conditions concerned university students more than most other women in the country, to whom the government did not have a direct outreach. Farzanah would have liked to extend this outreach and so she registered as a member of Anahita Ratibzad's Democratic Organization of the Women of Afghanistan (Sazman-e Dimukratik-e Zanan-e Afghanistan, DOWA).[67] The organization, she says, helped women to overcome their oppression and defended women who reported discrimination or abuse. According to reports on their activities, they offered several opportunities for women, such as literacy courses and vocational training in Afghanistan as well as in the Soviet Union and other countries of the Eastern bloc.[68] The Women's Organization had a subgroup at the university that Farzanah joined. She estimates that about 100 female students were active in the organization at Kabul University.[69]

According to Farzanah, the women would sit together during meetings and ask: "'How can we go to the homes of [uneducated] women and bring women to school?' or, 'Which woman has a problem, where we can help?'" The women wanted to help each other, Farzanah says. They believed that women should not be beaten, oppressed, or forced to marry. The DOWA organized events, two of which Farzanah moderated. The women of the DOWA would try to motivate other women to join one of their courses or to send their daughters to school. Not far from the university, for example, there was an area where mainly Hazaras lived. "From there, not many people went to school. So we went to every house and we told them: 'Send your girls to school! Send your girls to school!'" Farzanah explains. Also, as Farzanah had lived in the Soviet Union for a year, she shared her experiences with other women:

> I was active in the women's organization back then. I told them [the other women], what I saw [in the Soviet Union]. They used to say that girls, when they leave Afghanistan, they are

67 The history of the organization prior to the coup of 1978 is discussed in the third chapter. During the purges of the Khalq wing against the Parcham wing, the organization was renamed People's Organization of the Women of Afghanistan and Khalqi women took over the leadership whereas most Parchami women in higher positions left the country. Under Karmal's government these changes were revoked. Later in the 1980s, the organization was renamed Afghan Women's Council. For details see Rasulova 1990, 113–20.

68 Hilmar König, "Afghanistans Frauen aktiv bei der Alphabetisierung. 860 Kurse mit 13500 Teilnehmerinnen im ganzen Lande," *Neues Deutschland*, December 27, 1984.

69 According to Khristoforov, in all of Afghanistan in 1984 21,800 women were members of the organization. He does not refer to any source here, though, and does not differentiate between women who were members on paper only, and women who participated in activities. Khristoforov 2009, 132.

> virgins and [...] that in Russia the women will be raped. Nobody came and raped us. Some women, they went themselves [to have sexual relations], then that is their problem. Nobody does that by force. And they used to say: 'No, that is not true.' Or they used to say: 'They don't have any food and nothing to drink.' [...] And then we discussed and they believed me.

Looking back now, Farzanah still believes in the work she did for the women's organization.

Unlike what literature on this period sometimes suggests, not everyone in Afghanistan either supported the armed opposition or was a henchman of the PDPA. Farzanah – and she was certainly not the only one – hoped that the new political system would open windows to improve some aspects of life in Afghanistan. In some ways, her hopes were fulfilled, "There was a movement for women's rights," she concluded. "But it didn't really change the situation, it didn't."

5.3 Purges and Fear

Farzanah was aware of politically motivated arrests while she was active with the women's organization, but she still believed in the organization's work. Indeed, her father was arrested twice during the arrests and executions ordered by Nur Mohammad Taraki and Hafizullah Amin. Her father had worked for the governments of Zahir Shah and Daoud Khan and was lucky, she says, because he was not executed, and his family members were not arrested either. The repression notwithstanding, most people discussed politics, Farzanah points out, "Even in the bakery, in the street, everywhere were these discussions." Not everybody was arrested for criticizing the government, but her father was too loud, she explains. Even when he was released from prison, he still "couldn't keep quiet." After the third time he was arrested, she could not bear being associated with the PDPA anymore. She began to understand the extent of the arrests and political repression when she visited her father in prison. "At that time," she says, "prisons were full. Full." At home, life became difficult with her father not present for an extended period. The family had lost their income and they had to rent out their home and move to a smaller place to cover costs. Financially, they made ends meet but the psychological impact of fear and insecurity was worse.

Farzanah's account of how she lost her trust in the PDPA government and distanced herself from politics is just one out of many similar descriptions I heard during my research. All former students quoted at the beginning of the previous subchapter added that celebrations turned into anxiety and fear in the weeks and months following the coup. Independent of my interlocutors' political backgrounds, their accounts of the first years of the PDPA government are dominated

by descriptions of how their classmates, teachers, family members, or they themselves were arrested or had to go into hiding.

The first months after the coup were relatively peaceful for most students. The purges had already begun, but were mainly directed against officials involved in the previous government. From September 1978 onwards, the purges were extended to higher ranks within the party and were directed mainly against Parchamis when Taraki and Amin sought to consolidate Khalqi power, but also against Khalqis suspected of not supporting the centralization of power. At first, people were excluded from significant political positions, then they were arrested, and finally systematically executed.[70] Over time, purges gradually extended to broader parts of society. The number of victims has never been researched in detail. Some scholars estimate the number of those arrested in the 20 months under Taraki and Amin (April 1978 to December 1979) at up to 45,000 with up to 17,000 executed.[71]

When the arrests and executions extended beyond party circles, they strongly affected daily life at the university. Even people who were not generally opposed to the PDPA government, like Farzanah, changed their mind in the environment of fear. Former students told me that they felt constantly observed and threatened. University students witnessed how their classmates and teachers were arrested in the classroom or the dormitory. Students fled the country, and their classmates would not know whether they had been arrested or had left. As a rule, interlocutors who studied at Kabul University at that time describe how many people in their classes or dormitory rooms survived this period. One, a student at the Faculty of Engineering, says, "We were twelve people [in the class], and at the end of the course [in 1980], two people remained, all the others were arrested or they escaped."[72] Another interlocutor told me that he heard people entering the dormitory at night and wondered who would be arrested this time. He lived in constant fear, even though he was not involved with any political organization.[73] Another told me that three students from his class were arrested directly in the classroom. He coincidentally met one of them a year later, on his way to the university. They went to a restaurant to have an inconspicuous conversation. The classmates' left hand was paralyzed, and he told my interlocutor about torture and sexual abuse in prison. My interlocutor never heard of the two other class-

70 Broxup 1983, 90–93.

71 Amstutz 1986, 237. In 2013, a list has been published with about 5,000 names of victims of the purges during the Taraki and Amin regime but probably the actual number of victims is much higher. For an analysis of the list see Clark. 2013.

72 Haroon Amirzada, in conversation with the author, London, November 21, 2017.

73 Ghulam Ahmad, in conversation with the author, London, November 15, 2017.

mates again. They might have ended up at the Polygon, the "slaughterhouse for people", as he called it, a place close to Pul-e Charkhi Prison, where mass graves were later found.[74]

Under Babrak Karmal, who was installed as the new president at the beginning of the Soviet military intervention in late December 1979, arrests were not as plentiful as under Taraki and Amin. Surveillance and arbitrary arrests continued, however. Anything could lead to a denunciation by members of the PDPA or the Democratic Youth Organization of Afghanistan (Sazman-e Dimukratik-e Javanan-e Afghanistan, DYOA). It could be a small joke, listening to the wrong radio station, or a letter to a relative abroad. My interlocutors describe the atmosphere of fear:

> We had a teacher, his name was Saraj. One day he said, they say, you know, in Persian he said, "*Shigūfa mīkunīm, shigūfa mīkunīm – sūkhte jūb sākhtand* [We (make everything) blossom, we (make everything) blossom – they made firewood]." Like, you know, the country will flourish, flourish, but actually they burn the tree. Then he was put in prison just for this, the poor guy. Fortunately, the reason that I laugh is that he survived. Many of our teachers, when they went to prison, they didn't come back.[75]

> Even some people for listening to *Deutsche Welle* or *BBC*, they went to prison or they were killed. [...] Especially my dad, my dad was one of the people educated outside Afghanistan. He got his master and PhD in Beirut and also in the United States and he wasn't able to listen to *BBC* because he was [being spied upon] by our neighbors. [...] Most people, they were in the same situation. They were trying to cover themselves with a blanket and listen to *BBC*. But sometimes when you put a cover and a blanket, you cannot hear because the quality of the signal is not good. [...] It was a really difficult, difficult time.[76]

> 'Your house is being watched,' they told me. 'We know these people. Sometimes a car comes and parks in front of the house, they make films and photos.' I said, 'Why? I'm not a member of anything. I don't do anything bad. I don't care.' Everyone knew the cars of the KhAD [secret service]. And then I noticed, there was this Wolga, it was always standing over there, with the number plate 26000 or 25000. [...] And at some point, at night, people entered our house, they came in and they searched the house. [...] They didn't find anything, just a few pictures my brother had sent from Germany, or letters. [...] 'Oh, that's an imperialist! All of

74 Anonymous interview, Berlin, July 10, 2019.

75 Bashir Sakhawarz, in conversation with the author, London, November 22, 2017.

76 Wais, in conversation with the author, London, February 2, 2018. Another student told me a similar story about her father being restricted in his habit of listening to the *BBC*, anonymous interview, Kabul, April 21, 2018. The *BBC* had already been popular before 1978. Afterwards, the radio service expanded its program and started a new broadcast in Pashto. The *BBC* was seen as a major threat by the PDPA government and their Soviet support, and employees of *Radio Afghanistan* had trainings in Moscow to oppose the influence of the *BBC*. Skuse 2002, 193, 271.

> you are imperialists!' [...] And then they took my nephew, he didn't have correct papers. And they took my brother-in-law, too. And they told me, 'Yes, you can come, too.' And they took the three of us during that night. [...] And we were in prison. They always made interviews with me. And in one interview which they made with me, I recognized my former neighbour. And I said, 'Amin, what are you doing?' 'Yes, I'm interviewing you.' And then he said, 'Where is your brother?' And I said, 'My brother is not here.' 'When are you leaving?' And I said, 'I'm staying. I'm an honest person, I'm loyal.' [...] They had taken pictures, everywhere. I was drinking Coca Cola. Only pictures like that. And I said, 'That's no proof,: I said. 'That's a nice family album for me.' Oh, that was bad and they hit me so much. [...] My nephew came out first and then I was released, but my brother-in-law had to stay. They put so much pressure on my brother-in-law, because he had been a diplomat [...] and his sickness began. And even after he was released from prison, he was sick.[77]

The list of descriptions of violence and arbitrary arrest could be long, as all my interlocutors witnessed and many directly experienced the purges on campus. One of my interlocutors points out that these experiences diminished support for the PDPA even among people who were in favour of the government's reforms:

> There were good things about the activities of the Democratic Party. [...] And it also had bad activities. Their first mistake was to pull the people out of their houses and kill them. [...] If they hadn't done that, if they had taken everybody into a warm embrace, maybe they would have lasted until today.[78]

In addition to the experiences of violence, Farzanah's narration highlights the impact of pressure exerted by the regime and the limitations on carefree student life resulting from it. It was not only freedom of speech that was limited. One of the major changes she witnessed when she was still a high school student directly after the coup was the introduction of a group of armed "security guards" consisting of students who had received a three-month training on how to use weapons. Their task was to "protect the school", but they also enforced control at the school. On specific holidays, such as the anniversary of the "revolution", demonstrations were organized, and all students had to participate. Students were pressured to join the PDPA or one of its organizations, especially during the first half of the 1980s. They were constantly asked to join the Democratic Youth Organization of Afghanistan (DYOA) and it was difficult to find an excuse to avoid participating.[79] At the same time, being a member of the DYOA or any other party

77 Nader S., in conversation with the author, Frankfurt, March 5, 2018.

78 Anonymous interview, Kabul, April 22, 2018.

79 Anonymous interview, Berlin, July 10, 2019. Centlivres-Demont suggests that it was obligatory to be a member of the DYOA as a high school or university student, Centlivres-Demont 1994, 349. According to my interlocutors this was not the case.

organization brought advantages. High schools graduates who were members of the DYOA were favored in the university entrance exam.[80] Additionally, university students were told that they would not be able to find a job without joining the party.[81] One of my interlocutors became a member after graduating because she was not allowed to work as a university teacher without a membership.[82] This pressure notwithstanding, recruitment to the party was rarely successful and only a minority of university students became members of a party organization.[83]

The pressure to conform and to obey dominated Farzanah's experience of the university. For example, she was forced to learn how to use a weapon, "The argument of the government was that it is war in Afghanistan and a doctor should be able to defend him/herself in this situation. So we had an extra subject: defence in the army. [...] I didn't want to learn how to shoot! But we had to attend the class." When she became an assistant teacher after graduating in 1986, she felt dependent on the Soviet advisors and teachers. There were two Soviet women in her department, she says, one of them was Russian, a professor, and the other one Tajik, an interpreter. No matter what the local teachers wanted to do, they had to ask for permission from the Soviet teachers, Farzanah says. She complains that she knew her students better than a professor from Leningrad, but there was no way around it. Another interlocutor summarized the relationship between local and Soviet teachers by saying, "When they said that milk is black, you said that yes, it is black."[84] While Kabul University was a place of liberty and excitement for students in the 1960s and early 1970s, according to Farzanah's and other interlocutors' memories, in the early and mid-1980s it had rather become a place of restrictions and pressure.

Farzanah had to learn how to shoot, but the pressure was much harder on her brothers, who tried to avoid recruitment to the army. She had three brothers, but none of them could help her to solve the family's problems while her father was in prison. Her elder brother had left Afghanistan for India, the second lived in Russia ,and the third could not leave the house. This was a common phenomenon in Afghanistan at that time. In 1981, the government introduced obligatory military service for young men, and in 1982 a law was introduced according to which all men had to serve in the army for three years before being admitted to Kabul University. As a reaction, many students went into hiding, joined opposi-

80 Amstutz 1986, 307.
81 Anonymous interview, Kabul, April 21, 2018.
82 Anonymous interview, Kabul, April 22, 2018.
83 Anonymous interview, Kabul, April 16, 2018. Giustozzi 2000, 13; Tsvetkova 2017, 361.
84 Anonymous interview, Kabul, April 25, 2018.

tion movements, or fled the country. The rules were revised several times in later years, but students were still obliged to join the army in case of a mobilization order, with few legal exemptions such as working for KhAD, the secret service, or studying in Russia.[85] One of my interlocutors, who became a student at Kabul University in 1981, abandoned his studies of pharmacology just a few months after he had begun because he feared forced recruitment. Instead, he found an acquaintance in a ministry who could help him obtain a scholarship to go to the Soviet Union.[86] Another interlocutor registered at Kabul University two years later, when the recruitment laws had been slightly mitigated. He told me that as a university student he held a card exempting him from military service. As patrols roamed the streets looking for men hiding from recruitment, he always had the card at hand to present it to the patrols.[87]

Farzanah's class consisted roughly of the same number of men and women when she began her studies before the introduction of the law of 1982. The next year, however, there were roughly five to ten men and 20 to 30 women, she says. Due to the forced recruitment, from one year to another, the majority of university students were female. Thus, statistics comparing male and female enrollment rates for this period mainly reflect the absence of men and should not be used to prove favourable conditions for women in the education system during the 1980s.[88] With her brothers having left the country or sitting at home afraid to leave the house, even the apparent achievement of increasing opportunities for women turned sour for Farzanah.

This chapter set out to investigate the perception of the PDPA government by students who had supported the Party's demands but turned their backs on it once it was in power. Kabul University had been a place that nourished hopes for political reform, as discussed in the first part of this book. Farzanah had hopes for the opportunities brought about by the new system, but violence and pressure came to dominate her perception of the regime.

Historiography frequently highlights that the PDPA was not successful in gaining support among the population because of the ignorance and brutality with which the party tried to implement reforms. On the one hand, this chapter

85 Halliday and Tanin 1998, 1364; Almqvist 1984, 41–42; Human Rights Watch 1984, 104; Girardet 1983, 95.

86 Anonymous interview, Kabul, April 26, 2018.

87 Anonymous interview, Kabul, April 25, 2018.

88 For such a statistic see, for example, Giustozzi 2000, 21.

supports this argument by showing how, in Farzanah's case, there was a potential to gain support had it not been for the purges, the forced recruitment to the army, and the party's attempt to control society. On the other hand, Farzanah's accounts challenge the overall perspective on the early PDPA years as a time of natural opposition by a Muslim society against a "communist" regime. Additionally, the accounts of my interlocutors suggest that more scholarly attention needs to be payed to the arrests and executions outside of the party, as they had a huge impact on the relationship of the population to the PDPA government.

In the historiography of the Global Cold War, Afghanistan becomes relevant to global politics in the early 1980s because the Cold War turned hot at that time. Farzanah's life reflects another dimension of the Global Cold War in Afghanistan in the 1980s: Kabul University was transformed from an educational institution designed to convince students of US-American and Western European superiority to an educational institution designed to convince them of Soviet superiority. It was not only the system that changed, but also the dynamics of the Cold War. As argued in the introduction, the superpowers' strategy of developing the Third World had declined by the 1980s and, at the same time, the use of force to control Third World countries increased. Farzanah engaged with ideas like those of the students who had staged demonstrations on campus a decade earlier. Her engagement, however, was not accompanied by the enthusiasm of the previous generation of students. Instead, she was disappointed as the Soviet Union did not live up to its image as a supporter of anti-imperialism, self-determination, and peace in Afghanistan, instead acting as an interventionist power backing a brutal regime.

6 Protest in Times of Purges

> The police rushed through the crowd toward the orator, who, closely surrounded on all sides, shouted, waving his hand: 'Long live liberty! We will live and die for it!'
> (*Maxim Gorky, Mother, p. 259*)

Sangin Taheri and Hamed Elmi did not perceive anything about the new regime as positive. They were both students at Kabul University in the early 1980s and were involved in a short but intensive wave of student protests against the PDPA and the Soviet Union. Sangin Taheri was a member of one of the organizations that had emerged from Shu'la-ye Javid. Hamed Elmi, in contrast, frames his political activism as a defence of the religious values of the people in Afghanistan against an invader.

This chapter looks at students' opposition to the PDPA government and its Soviet supporters at Kabul University and discusses the role and dynamics of different political organizations and ideologies in the student protests. Was the opposition at the university part of the globally increasing multi-polarity towards the end of the Cold War? I argue that the political structures and lines of conflict that had defined political activism in the late 1960s and early 1970s persisted in the early 1980s. Within this context, a variety of organizations emerged that were involved in organized as well as spontaneous protest of the government and its Soviet backers. However, at that time political activism was united by a common enemy and the goal of liberating Afghanistan from Soviet influence. Therefore, the ideological conflicts between political organizations played a minor role on campus. For a short time, the diversity of the political groups suggested an ideological development beyond Cold War binaries: different nuances of leftist, nationalist, and religious ideas stood united in opposition. After a few months, however, student activism was supressed and the brutality influenced by Cold War interventionism of this period enforced a clear ideological binary.

Historiography on Afghanistan and the Global Cold War emphasizes the rise of Islamism in the late 1970s and 1980s. While historiography on Afghanistan focuses on the "Mujahidin" and their "jihad" against the Soviet engagement in Afghanistan, literature on global development uses this example to illustrate the emergence of Islamism as an alternative force to capitalism and communism. In the political protests of the late 1960s and early 1970s, I have argued, Islamist groups were rather marginal. What was their role at the university in the early 1980s? What happened to other groups and ideologies that had opposed the PDPA in the earlier protests? The examples discussed in this chapter show that, among students, the situation was more complex than the narrative of the rise of

https://doi.org/10.1515/ 9783111150543-006

Islamism suggests. Islamism was not the only ideological framework for opposition against the PDPA regime and the Soviet Union, but rather one of many. Overall, ideology was not at the forefront of the political activism of that time, as students of different groups were united in opposition to the status quo.

The chapter discusses the narratives of Hamed Elmi and Sangin Taheri to provide a glimpse into the activities of (armed) opposition on campus. It first outlines how the two protagonists of this chapter experienced the changes at the university around the time of the PDPA coup and the beginning of the Soviet military intervention. It continues to discuss how they became involved in political activities and which forms of protest they and other students used in the early 1980s. Finally, this chapter points to the role ideologies played in these protests, specifically in relation to the ideological divides discussed in the first part of this book.

Born and raised in Kabul, Hamed Elmi graduated from Habibia High School, one of the most prominent schools in Afghanistan at that time. His father, educated in Europe and India, was a history professor at the Faculty of Social Sciences at Kabul University. Thus, Hamed Elmi not only grew up with a library at home, but was familiar with the campus of the university, where he would go to accompany his father or play football. In 1981, Hamed Elmi took the *kānkūr* exam and enrolled at the Faculty of Sciences to study mathematics. Two and a half years later, he and his family left Kabul for Pakistan, where they would stay for the next 10 years. In Pakistan, Hamed Elmi studied journalism and, several years after returning to Afghanistan, completed his degree in mathematics at Kabul University. After 2001, he held several government positions. This text is based on interviews I conducted with him in London and Kabul.[1]

Sangin Taheri grew up in a village east of Herat City. His family lived in what he called a "fort". His father was a farmer and the representative of the region to the parliament. Sangin Taheri was educated at the local school through grade nine and then moved to Herat City to attend high school. In 1977, he was accepted to the Faculty of Law and Political Science at Kabul University. He studied for roughly two years but could not complete his studies before he left the country for good. Today, he lives in Germany, where I met him for the interview this chapter is based on.[2]

1 Hamed Elmi, in conversation with the author, London, November 14, 2017, Kabul, April 17, 2018, and phone interview, September 29, 2020. All references to Hamed Elmi's story in this text are based on these interviews.

2 Sangin Taheri, in conversation with the author, Aachen, July 4, 2019. All references to Sangin Taheri's's story in this text are based on these interviews.

6.1 Leaflets on the Walls

Just like most other former students of Kabul University I spoke with, Sangin Taheri and Hamed Elmi describe how they experienced the disappearance of classmates and professors under PDPA rule. Hamed Elmi reports how one of his classmates was arrested for asking a question:

> I remember one of our students, [...] his name was Naim. He got up [in class] and he raised his hand and said, 'Professor, I have a question.' And the professor asked him, 'What is the question?' He said, 'If communism is good, why did people of Poland start the uprising by Lech Wałęsa in the port of Gdansk?' And I remember that the professor said, 'Who told you?' He said, 'I heard.' – 'Where did you hear?' Of course he didn't say, 'I heard it on the radio, Western radio. There was a full censorship on the media. And the student said, 'I heard the people, the laborers, the workers started some kind of uprising in the port of Gdansk and the leader is Lech Wałęsa and he was a communist and he stood up against the communists. What is the reason if communism is good?' And I remember that before the end of the class, two, three people came and said, 'We have a word with you.' And they took him. They put him in jail for five years. And I met him, this person, when he was released from jail. I was in Pakistan. I recognized him, I said, 'Aren't you Naim?' – 'Yes, I'm Naim.' – 'What happened to you?' – 'Yes, because of that question I was arrested and they said, 'You are a spy, a Western spy.' I don't know, I just asked a question.' That poor man, he was tortured in jail, in Pul-e Charkhi Jail.

The first opposition groups to the PDPA government formed during the rule of Taraki and Amin, but public protest was too dangerous at that time. As discussed in the previous chapter, for most students these months were first a period of hope and then of fear. The smallest hint of involvement in oppositional political activities could lead to arrests and executions. Several of my interlocutors emphasized that, even though they were opposed to the government, they were too afraid to voice their discontent. One of my interlocutors left the country not because of acute fear of arrests, but because he felt that he had no future in an environment in which he either had to accept everything or be arrested.[3] Along with Sangin Taheri, only one other interlocutor mentioned that he was involved in oppositional activities during the Taraki and Amin regime. That interlocutor had joined Parcham as a high school student and had begun his studies at Kabul University in spring 1979. Just a few weeks after his first day of classes, he stopped going to university because he was afraid of being arrested by the Khalq government, like so many other Parchamis. He went into hiding at home and met other Parchamis frequently. At night, he said, they went out to distribute

3 Noori, in conversation with the author, Berlin, July 3, 2017.

the *shabnāmahā* (leaflets/pamphlets) they had received from the Parcham leadership. The *shabnāmahā* were ment to remind people of the existence of Parcham and show them that the wing of the party was active and opposed to the brutality of the Khalq government.[4] Such activities were scarce, though.

The political system established after the coup in 1978 directly impacted Sangin Taheri's life. Not only was his father expropriated, but Sangin Taheri also felt increasingly surveilled on the university campus. During his first year at Kabul University, before the coup, he had enjoyed this new life and the political discussions he took part in. Because the number of university students had increased over the previous years, there was not enough space in the dormitory on campus and he lived in a building close to Habibia High School. In that dormitory, he and his friends would sit together and discuss sports and politics. They were in opposition to the government of Daoud Khan and discussed the faults of his policies and the miseries of society. The repression of political opponents during this period notwithstanding, students felt they could voice their opinions freely as long as they remained in the dormitory.

Everything changed with the PDPA coup. In his description of the coup, Sangin Taheri stressed the brutality of the troops loyal to the PDPA. On that day, Sangin Taheri and his roommates went to the public baths in the city center because there was no hot water in the dormitory. When they got on the bus to return to the dormitory, Sangin Taheri says, he saw tanks close to the presidential palace but everything else was quiet. The shooting and explosions first began later that night. While Sangin Taheri and his friends were standing at the windows of the dormitory, soldiers loyal to the president marched towards the city center from their barracks behind Dar-ul-Aman Palace. Right in front of the dormitory they collided with the tanks controlled by the PDPA. The entire night, Sangin Taheri explains, an unequal fight continued between the tanks and the poorly armed soldiers. In the morning, the soldiers surrendered and yet, Sangin Taheri says, the troops loyal to the PDPA shot them – just to demonstrate strength and to create fear.

The repression by the government reached the university in Sangin Taheri's second semester after the coup. Taraki declared all members of political groups other than Khalq as enemies. When Taraki was ousted from power in October 1979, the purges and arrests continued under Amin.[5] Previously, Sangin Taheri says, he had lived in his dormitory room with some of his friends, several of them from Herat Province. Then, the allocation of the rooms was re-arranged so friends

4 Ahmad Zia Nikbin, in conversation with the author, Kabul, April 30, 2018.
5 Halliday and Tanin 1998, 1360–62.

were separated and there was a "spy" in each room – somebody close to Khalq who would report on his roommates. One evening, Sangin Taheri says,

> we were sitting together, me and the spies, members of the party. They came from other rooms and there was a boy from the third year. We were in the second year of the faculty, and he was our friend from the third year. And then we were drinking tea together and there was a book which was supposedly written by Taraki. Back then it was not presented as written by Taraki, but as Nazarzadeh. Azim, the poet [one of Sangin Taheri's friends], took it and asked, 'Who is this Nazarzedeh?' and Gul Ahmad answered 'You don't know Nazarzadeh? You don't know him?' 'No.' 'It is the holy Taraki.' Of course everybody was afraid and Azim kept quiet. [...] But this friend of ours [from the third year], he said, 'Yes, now that's your reaction.' And he made fun of him [Azim], he laughed. [...] And on the next day, the next day ... In Kabul we always got lunch, dinner, and breakfast in the dormitory. [...] And he [the friend from the third year] came with the plate in the hand to pick up his food and that's when they took him ... until now [he disappeared]... just because he made some fun with his friends.

Classmates and teachers disappeared on a daily basis. Sangin Taheri was accompanied by constant fear even though he was not yet aware that his friends and cleassmates had not just been arrested: many of them had been executed and buried in mass graves.

The brutal and oftentimes arbitrary political persecution was central to Sangin Taheri's motivation to engage in political activities against the government. A decisive moment for him was the uprising in Herat City. On March 15, 1979 (24 Hut 1358), several thousand inhabitants of Herat and its surroundings protested the Khalq regime and their Soviet advisors. Many of these Soviet advisors fell victim to the outrage of the Heratis, but finally the protest was suppressed by the Afghan army and Soviet aircraft. Casualties are estimated at as many as 24,000 people.[6] Historians contextualise the uprising with the beginning of the struggle of the "Mujahidin" and the "Islamic Revolution" spilling over from Iran.[7] For Sangin Taheri, however, it was the resistance against the brutal suppression, arrests, and executions of the government's political enemies in a city that had been the stronghold of Shu'la-ye Javid.[8] Sangin Taheri argues that many people from Herat became victims of the purges because they were suspected of being

6 Emadi 1995, 6. Westad mentions 5,000 casualties of the protests in total, Westad 2010, 307.

7 See, for example, Broxup 1983, 93; Emadi 1995; Kepel 2002, 151–56; Westad 2010, 307.

8 In his detailed analysis of the event, Charlie Gammell comes to a similar conclusion and writes, "It was from this atmosphere of ruthless suppression of dissent that Herat, in a concerted rural-urban effort, rose up against the Khalqi government and its Soviet paymasters in March 1979." Gammell 2015, 56.

Maoists. It was around that time that Sangin Taheri found *shabnāmahā* calling for resistance to the regime and he no longer wished to remain silent.

Sangin Taheri carefully established contacts to the Gruh-e Inqilabiye Khalqha-ye Afghanistan (Revolutionary Group of the Peoples of Afghanistan) and distributed their *shabnāmahā* calling for resistance to the regime. The Gruh-e Inqilabi-ye was founded in 1972 by Faiz Ahmad, then a student of the Faculty of Medicine. Faiz Ahmad had been a student and follower of Akram Yari, the founder of what became the Shu'la-ye Javid movement. When Shu'la-ye Javid disintegrated in the early 1970s, Faiz Ahmad founded the new movement. Its strategy was to send members – many of them former university students – to take up positions as teachers and doctors in rural areas and to contribute to the political enlightenment of the peasants.[9] Sangin Taheri had known of the existence of this group before, but it only became relevant to him when he wanted to stand up against the PDPA regime.

Sangin Taheri and some close friends increasingly feared they would be next on the list for arrests. One day, he remembers, they went for a walk and discussed whether they should leave the country to avoid being arrested:

> And they said, 'We have to leave, we have no chance.' But I said, 'No, I won't leave. I'll stay. I have to study. I have to complete my studies. When they arrest me, they will let me go. I haven't done anything. They will let me go.' [...] I was always sitting in the back of the classroom [close to the doors] next to a girl, her name was Gulalai. And that day, they took many, 'This one, this one, this one.' Five or six. I was afraid. Then I saw somebody at the door, and he was doing like this [knocking], 'Quick, quick!' I knew what it was about. I left the classroom. It was Haidar, 'I was in the office of the party's youth organization. Most of you are on the list ... In ten minutes it is your turn.' So we left and we didn't take anything and we went to Herat and from Herat to Iran.

Sangin Taheri returned to Afghanistan when an amnesty was issued for many of the political prisoners of the Taraki and Amin time after the beginning of the Soviet military intervention.

In January 1980, Hamed Elmi was still a high school student. During the period of Taraki's and Amin's governments he observed the situation but was not involved in any political discussions or activities. Things changed after the beginning of the Soviet military intervention on December 27, 1979, with the appearance of soldiers in a foreign uniform on the streets of Kabul. One of my interlocutors describes the morning of December 28, 1979 in the following way:

9 Piovesana 2012.

> So I went to buy bread and then, when I went to the square in Karte Parvan, then I saw a soldier on a tank. But we already saw soldiers on tanks when the communists took over. The difference was here: the soldier did not look like an Afghan soldier. So, of course it was not smart to go close to the soldier to see who he was. But with my eyes that were quite good, I saw the soldier had blue eyes and he was on his tank with this Russian hat. Our soldiers don't have Russian hats. [...] When I went home, my father switched the radio on and then there was this stupid Babrak Karmal announcing that he is the new president.[10]

The newly installed president promised to bring an end to the brutality of the Khalq regime, but independent of Babrak Karmal's plans, a government installed by the Soviet army was unacceptable to Hamed Elmi.

Students perceived the developments of the following months in many ways. As discussed in the previous chapter, the political changes of this time meant hope for some students. For Hamed Elmi, in contrast, it meant the beginning of resistance. He emphasizes that as students, as the "educated people of the society," they were responsible for fighting the government and the Soviet Union. Descriptions of how many students shared this opinion and how many were in support of the new government vary significantly depending on the perspective of the interlocutor. Those who engaged in oppositional activities told me that the majority of the students were against the regime, particularly against the Soviet involvement in Afghanistan.[11] Those who were members of Parcham argued that while only five or six students in each class were party members, many others were neutral and everybody was friends with each other.[12] Throughout 1978 and 1979, students had learned that the smallest political discussion could cost their lives and only closest friends knew about the political opinions of the respective other.

Hamed Elmi's opposition to the government was first sparked by his opposition to foreign domination but was reinforced by the impact the political changes had on his daily life. Hamed Elmi took his *kānkūr* exam to enroll at Kabul University in early 1981. Well prepared for the highly competitive exam, his aim was to study at the Faculty of Engineering. His family wanted him to become a doctor, but even as a high school student he had wished to put his talent in mathematics into practice and become an engineer. As one of the university's oldest disciplines, the Faculty of Engineering was very prestigious. Because of its close cooperation with several institutions in the United States, the teaching language was English and the curricula were influenced by the US-American system. Additionally, upon

10 Bashir Sakhawarz, in conversation with the author, London, November 22, 2017.
11 For example Wais, in conversation with the author, London, February 2, 2018.
12 Ahmad Zia Nikbin, in conversation with the author, Kabul, April 30, 2018.

graduation, students were guaranteed a good job due to the increasing need for well-educated engineers in the context of the large-scale infrastructure programs of the 1970s. However, shortly before Hamed Elmi took the exam, the university administration announced that no more students would be allowed to enroll at the Faculty of Engineering. It was to be closed down as soon as the current cohorts had finished their studies. Highly disappointed, Hamed Elmi selected the Faculty of Sciences. Not enrolling at university was not an option, since only students were excused from the compulsory military service.

Many teachers had left the country or been arrested, and Hamed Elmi witnessed an urgent lack of qualified professors at a university renowned for its high academic standards. According to Elmi, Kabul University had lost the spirit of free and critical thinking that he had enjoyed when accompanying his father in earlier years. Hamed Elmi was frustrated by the new rules that shaped daily life at the university, "And the Soviet government wanted to control everything, from A to Z. And at that time Kabul University was like a prison, like a jail and we were in the jail." At around the same time as Hamed Elmi started his classes, the campus was fenced off with barbed wire to control students and staff entering and leaving.[13] The impression of being imprisoned at the university is the exact opposite of the liberty the university had been associated with before 1978.

The closure of the Faculty of Engineering symbolizes the new political environment at the university. One of the faculty's students points to two main reasons for the government's decision to close the faculty:

> To be honest, the whole faculty was against the government. [...] All teachers had graduated from the USA or some of them from United Kingdom and the government thought that this faculty is not in their favour. [...] And to be honest, the people in that faculty were more active, than at the other faculties. [...] And most of the people in that faculty were the rich people at the university. [...] And the government was against feudalism and materialism. They were the communist party, they were against it.[14]

Other reasons, according to brief mentions in historiography, could have been the difficulties in replacing teachers and material after many US-American and US-American-educated teachers left and funding was cut.[15] Lavrov explains the closure with the strong "Islamist" influence and Tsvetkova with a reluctance of the university president to allow the involvement of Soviet teachers and advi-

13 Amstutz 1986, 307.
14 Ghulam Ahmad, in conversation with the author, London, November 15, 2017.
15 Baiza 2013, 149.

sors at the faculty.[16] All of these explanations have in common that more control was being exerted over the faculties. The Faculty of Engineering was re-opened in 1989, probably as part of attempts by Najibullah's government to prove a decrease in Soviet influence.[17]

Hamed Elmi experienced both the lack of quality and of freedom most strongly in the newly introduced subjects that were meant to convey the ideology of the new political system. Ideology already impacted the curricula during the Taraki regime. One of my interlocutors who studied English Language and Literature remembers how she was supposed to read a complicated book on Marxist theories for her class and had neither the desire nor the ability to do so. However, Taraki was killed by Amin before the next class took place and the homework became obsolete.[18] Later, under the Karmal regime, an entire set of new subjects was introduced to all faculties: besides the subjects of their own discipline, all students were now required to attend courses on the "New History of Afghanistan" in their first year, sociology ("*jāmi'a shināsīe ilmī*") in the second year, and political economy in the third year – all of them based on the governments' (and its Soviet advisors') understanding of Marxism.[19]

In these classes, Hamed Elmi complains, students were not challenged intellectually:

16 Lavrov 2008, 62; Tsvetkova 2017, 354–55.

17 Students who attended the faculty between 1989 and the beginning of the civil war did not know anything about the reasons for the re-opening of the faculty. Students complained about the low quality of classes resulting from the absence of US-American funding and the foreign-educated teachers, Bashir Ahmad, in conversation with the author, Kabul, April 18, 2018; anonymous interview, Kabul, April 16, 2018. Najimi briefly mentions the re-opening of the faculty as part of Najibullah's reconciliation policy, Najimi 2012, 164. Some of the faculty staff established a program based on the curricula of the faculty in Peshawar: Keshawarz, Alnajjar, Richards et al. 2009, 2.

18 Anonymous interview, Kabul, April 22, 2018.

19 There were slight differences at some departments, but according to the catalogue of the university for 1983/4, this seems to have been the general rule in the early 1980s. (Puhantun-e Kabul, n.d.). One of my informants talked about subjects like "Historical Materialism" and "The History of the Party", which do not appear in the catalogue. These might also have been titles of books used in the classes. (Anonymous interview, Kabul, April 22, 2018). Contemporary reports by researchers and by Human Rights Watch mention that Russian had become a compulsory subject at the university, Almqvist 1984, 42; Girardet 1983, 96; Human Rights Watch 1984, 83. None of my interlocutors mentioned obligatory Russian classes, though, and only one of them mentioned that students were encouraged to choose Russian instead of English or French when they were required to learn a language, anonymous interview, Kabul, April 25, 2018. According to Tsvetkova, Russian language classes were available at each faculty but were met with rather limited interest on the part of the students, Tsvetkova 2017, 357.

> There was a funny story, because I was against the communists and some people in my class, they were communist, pro-communist. [...] And when the [sociology] exam came, because I was one of the top students from the faculty, I scored a higher number than the communists. I used to laugh at them and say, 'OK, look, you don't know your own ideology.'

Even worse, when the students tried to engage in a discussion with their teacher, they faced imprisonment, like the student who asked about the uprising in Gdansk. Sangin Taheri talked about these new subjects, too. In the beginning, he says, he was interested in the lessons because he could relate to the leftist ideas. Then, however, he asked a question regarding the teacher's division of the world into a socialist and a capitalist bloc. "How about Albania, China, and Yugoslavia?" he asked. But the teacher scolded him and told him to write down that China had a chauvinist regime and that Maoists were enemies of the people. From then on, Sangin Taheri hated these classes.

The additional subjects were highly unpopular among students. Based on reports by Soviet teachers and advisors at Kabul University, Tsvetkova writes that classes were regularly cancelled because students did not show up.[20] Even former students who had a rather positive relationship to the PDPA complain about the classes: a student at the Faculty of Medicine, who described the low quality of classes in the early 1980s as a "transition period" since he generally approved of many of the changes in the structure of the university, found those subjects annoying as they were not related to medicine.[21] Another interlocutor remembers how, in his third year at the Faculty of Engineering in 1981, one of those subjects sparked demonstrations among the students:

> They wanted to teach us Leninism from these red books: what is communism, what is imperialism. And we had a lecture hall and 300 people would fit in there. And then a person came, he was not from the faculty and this teacher was a member of the party, for sure. [...] But we didn't want that. And once, some people took some bricks and just built something out of them and left them somewhere. And they thought it was a bomb. [...] And this teacher did not come again, they sent another teacher. And then, I believe somebody from the mujahidin came or somebody else, he put not a big one but a small grenade somewhere and the teacher came in and ... And then we started a demonstration because the people did not want to do that anymore. And we were standing on the corridor and nobody would take part anymore. [...] And we went outside, it was a small demonstration and I think people from

20 Tsvetkova 2017, 357.

21 Zaman, in conversation with the author, Bad Nauheim, March 3, 2018. One of my interlocutors, who was a member of Parcham, claimed that there was no ideological indoctrination, as these were just classes on sociology and political economy. (Ahmad Zia Nikbin, in conversation with the author, Kabul, April 30, 2018.)

> the Faculty of Medicine and the Faculty of Agriculture joined us but then the police came. [...] Not everybody took part, though. They wanted to do their exam ...[22]

The subject was abolished as part of the general curriculum for all students soon after.[23]

Sangin Taheri and Hamed Elmi's examples suggest that students' opposition to the government was not necessarily sparked by ideological discussions or religious beliefs. Instead, two important aspects were the experience of brutal oppression of potential political opponents and the control of the university. Sangin Taheri and Hamed Elmi became committed opponents of the government facing restrictions on political discussions, the lack of liberty at the university, as well as the decline in the quality of classes.

6.2 "The Russians Have to Leave!"

The coup of 1978 had taken Sangin Taheri and many others by surprise and he complained that they were not ready to resist, "We were not prepared," he said. "The Maoists were not prepared. We were not organized. We were a movement, but the movement was not prepared. Not at the university and not outside of the university." Over the following months, however, structures of opposition took shape and finally, sparked by the Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan, Kabul University became a center for political activism again – at least for a short time. Based on reports by Soviet advisors at Kabul University, Tsvetkova points out that the university was "transformed into the center of Islamic resistance to the Soviet occupation" from 1986 to 1988.[24] The accounts of my interlocutors, in contrast, suggest that most protests ended in the early 1980s due to the severe oppression by the government. Students who did not accept or at least tolerate the political situation left the capital and joined the armed opposition movements in the rural areas or in exile, as Sangin Taheri and Hamed Elmi did. Due to repression, political organizations without a larger network including military structures and resources soon lost their influence on campus. The increasing domination of the political conflicts in Afghanistan by foreign interests was reflected in the dynamics of opposition at the university.

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22 Nader S., in conversation with the author, Frankfurt, March 5, 2018.

23 One of my interlocutors, who studied journalism, pointed out that it was not only the question of specific classes but that ideology had an impact on most subjects: Anonymous interview, Kabul, April 25, 2018.

24 Tsvetkova 2017, 362.

On January 1, 1980, four days after the beginning of the Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan, the PDPA celebrated its 15th anniversary. On this occasion, Babrak Karmal held a speech in which he announced an amnesty for political prisoners.[25] In the following days, hundreds of people who had been arrested during the Taraki and Amin period were released from prison. Observing these events from his refuge in Iran, Sangin Taheri realized that many of those classmates and professors who had been arrested in the classrooms were not alive anymore. The prison gates had opened, but they did not return to their homes. Most of them had been executed right after being arrested. At the same time, Karmal condemned the Amin government and promised change and an end to the brutality.[26] After the amnesty, Sangin Taheri had the impression that it was safe for him to return to Kabul to continue his studies and to stand up to the PDPA and its Soviet support.

With the beginning of the Soviet military intervention, the time of uncertainty and waiting ended. Writing on opposition to the PDPA government, Girardet mentions that people in Kabul "reacted with sullen disbelief" to the "Soviet invasion."[27] It might have been disbelief but, according to my interlocutors, the presence of foreign soldiers in Kabul broke a dam: people got together everywhere and discussed the political developments.[28] Observers argue that the power struggles within the party kept the new government occupied in its first months, providing space for open protest.[29]

In contrast to the armed opposition that formed in rural areas as well as in Pakistan and Iran, students mainly relied on peaceful methods of protest, such as strikes and demonstrations. Several of my interlocutors mentioned bombs that were discovered or exploded on campus. According to their accounts, however, these bombs were not placed there by students, but rather by university staff or external actors. One interlocutor describes how a bomb exploded in a class that he had with the dean of the faculty, leaving one student seriously hurt while

25 "Karmal Proclaims General Amnesty; PDPA 15th Anniversary Marked," *Kabul Times*, January 1, 1980.

26 "PDPA Leadership Continues Efforts to Form a Broad-Based National Fatherland Front," March 19, 1980; Dupree 1983, 133.

27 Girardet 1985, 17.

28 Anonymous interview, April 26, 2018, Kabul.

29 One of my interlocutors said, "But when Babrak took over, I must admit that we felt that there was a little bit more freedom. Because actually he promised that … These two guys, Hafizullah Amin and Taraki, they were really, really brutal. So when Babrak came we started not going to our classes." (Bashir Sakhawarz, in conversation with the author, London, November 22, 2017.)

others fled the lecture hall through a window.[30] Another interlocutor mentions a bomb at the university president's office and suspects that it was not placed there by students but by the government as the university president was a Khalqi and the Parchami government wanted to get rid of him.[31] Also, a collection of testimonies by fighters related to one of the opposition parties includes a report on how two bombs were placed on campus by a staff member of the payroll office.[32] Thus, in the following paragraphs I will mainly focus on the peaceful protests my interlocutors related to.

Former students talked about three types of protests: informal and spontaneous activities, strikes, and demonstrations. One of the informal ways to protest the system was to disturb classes. Asked about his relationship to the teachers from the Soviet Union, Hamed Elmi tells the following story about how he and his classmates disturbed the classes of a professor from the Tajik SSR:

> When we used to come to class, we clapped on the table like this. Hundreds of students were doing that. [...] We didn't know that he spoke Farsi, because he spoke to the Russian interpreter. He was not allowed to speak Farsi. [...] And one day, the interpreter was not in class. The teacher came, and we started knocking, disturbing him. Suddenly he started speaking Farsi. He said, *'Bachahāyam, shumā fekr mīkonīd kumūnīstam. Kumūnīst nīstam. Bacha-ye marā kumūnīsthā kushtand.'* [Guys, you think that I'm a communist. I'm not a communist. The communists killed my son.] [...] We said, 'Eh, shame on us! Why we did something for somebody who is not a communist?' I remember that I felt sorry.

Hamed Elmi remembers this specific incident because he felt sorry, but his account also reflects that it was common to disturb classes, especially those classes with teachers from the Soviet Union.

Sometimes students refused to enter the classrooms, either as a reaction to specific incidents or as a general sign of protest. One of my interlocutors, who studied at the Faculty of Law and Political Science, claimed that his faculty was the first to start a strike in reaction to the presence of Soviet tanks in the streets of Kabul and around the university. According to him, the strike began on 8 Jadi 1358 (December 29, 1979), just a day after Soviet forces had installed Babrak Karmal as the new president.[33] A former student of the Faculty of Literature talked about

30 Anonymous interview, Berlin, July 10, 2019.

31 Wais, in conversation with the author, London, February 2, 2018.

32 Jalali and Grau 1995, 368.

33 Musa Fariwar, in conversation with the author, Kabul, April 29, 2018. I could not find out when exactly the academic year ended in 1979/1980. According to a newspaper article on activities of international cultural institutes in Kabul during the beginning of the Soviet military intervention, winter holidays had already started at that time. However, my interlocutor talks

strikes in a more general way, saying that sometimes when she arrived at the university in the morning, her classmates were sitting outside and refused to enter the classroom. They appealed to each other not to go inside, "Don't go to the class! If you go I'll hit you!" She explains that only the *hizbī* students, the students who were affiliated with the PDPA, ignored the calls and went to the lectures.[34] Participating in a strike was dangerous. One interlocutor witnessed how, one day, busses arrived to arrest participating student who were on strike, "Everybody, men and women, who sat there [was arrested]. And many of them – we have not heard of them until today."[35] At the Faculty of Engineering, one interlocutor explains, the students maintained a strike "against the Russian army" and to "show our opinion about the government" for three months. This strike must have began in late March 1980, after the new academic year had begun. Some of the interlocutors' classmates were arrested during this time and were released only two or three years later. He said it was a "tough time and also a good time, as well, to be honest." It was a good time because of the solidarity among students against the PDPA regime.[36]

Both Sangin Taheri and Hamed Elmi told me that they were involved in organizing strikes and demonstrations by university and high school students. Disturbances and strikes were a common phenomenon in the early 1980s, but there was only a short and intense period of larger demonstrations. Regarding this period, one of my interlocutors says, "We were playing the mouse and cat game at the uni and every day, every single day there was a demonstration."[37] It is difficult to establish a timeline of the demonstrations: memories are inaccurate concerning dates, no official reports on the protests exist, and historiography provides contradicting accounts of what happened. Two events stand out in the interviews, though. One was a general demonstration by the people of Kabul on 3 Hut 1358 (February 22, 1980) and another was a series of student protests in late April of the same year.[38]

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about a direct reaction to the beginning of the war at the university. I thus assume that classes were still going on in late December 1979, "Afghanistan aufgeben? Schlangestehen, um Deutsch zu lernen – Das Goethe-Institut in Kabul," *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, March 28, 1980.

34 Anonymous interview, Kabul, April 22, 2018.

35 Anonymous interview, Berlin, July 10, 2019.

36 Ghulam Ahmad, in conversation with the author, London, November 15, 2017.

37 Wais, in conversation with the author, London, February 2, 2018.

38 Human Right Watch mentions a bloody crackdown on students in March 1980. I could not find any other information on major demonstrations and/or clashes with security forces in that month, though, Human Rights Watch 1984, 97.

The demonstration of 3 Hut took place during the winter break and was thus not a student protest but one many students participated in. Hasan Kakar was in Kabul at that time and wrote down his impression of the opposition movements in the early 1980s. He calls the 3 Hut the "Great Uprising of Kabul". It remains unclear which organization or organizations took the initiative for the demonstration, but days earlier *shabnāmahā* had been distributed in the city calling on the people to stand on the roofs of their houses at night and to come into the streets during the day to defend Afghanistan against Soviet occupation.[39] On 2 Hut (February 21), people urged shopkeepers at the market to close their shops and go on strike. According to Kakar's account, they were equally threatened by the activists to close the shop and by the supporters of the government to keep their shops open. Finally, most of the shopkeepers followed the call for a strike. In the evening, parallel to a "reception in the Soviet embassy commemorating the sixty-second anniversary of the foundation of the Soviet army," a large number of people went up to their rooftops shouting "*Allahu Akbar*," something that had previously happened in other cities in the country. On the morning of 3 Hut, people finally took to the streets in many parts of the city, Kakar writes, many of them following the "green flags of Islam". This symbol notwithstanding, the protests on this day seem to have been inclusive. Emadi argues that it was an "uprising by the Shiites in Kabul" inspired by the Iranian revolution.[40] Kakar more convincingly points out that followers of political groups such as Hekmatyar's Hizb-e Islami or the different groups that had emerged from Shu'la-ye Javid participated, as did many people without a direct affiliation. According to him, even some people who still supported Hafizullah Amin joined the protest.[41] "*Allahu Akbar*" was not the only slogan chanted during the demonstration, and young people particularly shouted slogans against "the Russians".[42]

Several of my interlocutors participated in this demonstration; what remains in their memories most strongly was the brutal crackdown on the demonstrators by the government. One of my interlocutors describes the day in the following way:

> On 3 Hut, I was marching. [...] I helped some wounded people, because everywhere they were shooting and I put some wounded people on a hand truck – two or three of them died – to bring them to the hospital. It was really bad, because they were shooting from the helicopters and from the ground. [...] And then the entire demonstration became a chaos. And

39 Pazhish 1395 (2016), 38.
40 Emadi 1995, 7.
41 Kakar 1997, 114–19; Ruttig 2015.
42 Anonymous interview, Kabul, April 26, 2018.

> then I fled, too, to the mountains. [...] And at some point, my brother had gone a different way, and I just went, through the shooting, a different way. And my brother was hit by a bullet in the hand. They arrested my brother on that day and I think he was in prison for two or two and a half months and then they let him go. [...] And then my brother fled. He was the first person of my family [to leave the country]. Even though he had a small child and had just married, [he said,] 'No, I cannot stay here.'[43]

Summarizing the events of the day, Kakar writes that more than 800 people died and more were executed after having been arrested.[44]

Sangin Taheri and Hamed Elmi were involved in the organization of student protest which took place a few weeks after the beginning of the new academic year on March 25, 1980 (5 Hamal 1359).[45] My interlocutors and literature provide different and sometimes contradicting descriptions of what exactly happened, when it happened, and who was involved. Apparently protests took place around the hoisting of a new flag on April 21, 1980 (1 Saur 1359)[46] and the second anniversary of the PDPA coup on April 27, 1980 (7 Saur 1359). Scholars mention various timelines, ranging from descriptions of protests on only one day to protests lasting for more than a month.[47] Sangin Taheri mentioned April 29, and May 3, 1980 (9 and 13 Saur 1359) as the two most important days of the protest.

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43 Zalmai, in conversation with the author, London, October 22, 2018.

44 Kakar, 1997, 114–19; Chaliand 1982. Three days later, the daily newspaper *Anis* reported on riots by "slaves of Pakistan, Great Britain, America, and China" on that day, which had been the reason for the looting of shops and a police intervention. ("*Hizb va Daulat-e Kh. D. Afghanistan: Vazayif-e inqilabi-ye khudra dar barabar-e mardum idama minimayand* [People's Democratic Party and State of Afghanistan Continue Their Revolutionary Tasks for the People])," *Anis*, 5 Hut 1358 (February 24, 1980).

45 The academic year began on this day, according to an article in the *Kabul Times*, "Academic Year Welcomed", March 26, 1980.

46 Taraki had introduced an entirely red flag in 1978, which was replaced by a flag consisting of the three colors (red, black and green) used before the PDPA coup.

47 Dorronsoro mentions demonstrations in which students were involved and which partly took place on campus. In his short description, however, the timeline is inconsistent. He mentions that the first demonstration took place on April 21 on the occasion of the "Day of the Flag: the anniversary of the replacement of the old red, black and green flag by the red flag of the revolution". He uses the date without a year, but the red flag was only used in 1978 and 1979 before it was replaced by a flag with three colors resembling the one used prior to the coup on April 21, 1980. Additionally, the red flag was introduced on October 19, 1978 and its first anniversary was thus celebrated with speeches, marches, and concerts on October 19, 1979 ("First Anniversary of Nat'l Flag Marked with Amin's Message," *Kabul Times*, October 20, 1979). It is not unlikely that protests took place in the context of these celebrations, but I could not find any hints to a larger event and my interlocutors generally emphasized that public protests by students took place mainly after the beginning of the Soviet military intervention. Dorronsoro also mentions

The combination of accounts in historiography and by interlocutors creates a picture of many different smaller and larger demonstrations. The demonstrations were reinforced by arrests and shootings of participants. Sangin Taheri, too, was arrested during the protest on 9 Saur and remained in prison for one month before he was released.[48] Apparently, on that day, students had moved towards Park-e Zarnegar, similar to the protests of the late 1960s and early 1970s. In 1980, however, students did not carry banners with slogans.[49] Rather, they shouted slogans. Sangin Taheri emphasizes that students were united in their slogans for liberty and independence and slogans of specific ideological inclinations could not be heard.

The death of a female high school student during one of these demonstrations became a symbol of student protest facing the brutality of the government. Hamed Elmi describes how he witnessed her death:

> And two or three of my classmates were killed by the communists. I still remember that demonstration. The police opened fire on the demonstration. A girl called Nahid, she was killed. A girl called Wajia, she was killed. These people … Two of them were killed in front

a students' demonstration on April 29 (again without a year, but in the context of the previously mentioned anniversary and the Bala Hissar uprising in 1979) and writes that on that day a student called Nahid was killed, which, according to my research, happened four days later during another demonstration in 1980, Dorronsoro 2005, 104–05. Emadi writes that the protests began on April 21, 1980 in the context of the introduction of the new flag, lasted for several days, and that Nahid was killed on April 26, 1980 causing new demonstrations the following days. This seems more plausible than Dorronsoro's timeline, but does not include the dates mentioned by several of my interlocutors, Emadi 2005, 186. Kakar writes that the demonstrations were related to the second anniversary of the PDPA coup on April 27, 1980, with several students already having been killed by armed Parchamis during protests on April 25, 1980 and Nahid having been shot during the large demonstration on April 29. According to him, protests at the university, especially at the Faculty of Engineering, continued until May 22, 1980 and lasted even longer at some high schools, Kakar 1997, 120–21. Hyman writes that the protests took place between April 22 and 28, and another demonstration attended mainly by girls was in mid-May 1980. According to him, around 200 students died during the protests and many more were arrested, Hyman 1992, 181. Chavis only describes the demonstration during which Nahid was killed and points out that demonstrations took place on the three following days as a reaction until "so many students were arrested and beaten that finally the demonstrations subsided," Chavis 2003, 88. Nancy Hatch Dupree writes that Nahid was among people watching a parade on the occasion of the second anniversary of the coup, when she "began calling anti-government, anti-Soviet slogans." The resulting riots were shot down and "some 70 lay dead, Nahed among them," Hatch Dupree 1981, 15.

48 Another interlocutor was arrested on 9 Saur: Musa Fariwar, in conversation with the author, Kabul, April 23, 2018.

49 Bashir Sakhawarz, in conversation with the author, London, November 22, 2017.

> of me. Just in front of me. One of them was my classmate. Not in the university, in the mathematic course. We used to have that mathematic tuition [...] and she was in that same class with me. She was killed in front of me. Just ... 25 yards away from me, 5 meters away from me. And then Wajia, she was killed about 50 yards away from me. And I was among the first people to take her body and to put it in a car to take her to the hospital. That time, she had not died. She had been hit by a bullet, but she was alive.

Nahid and Wajia were not the only students who were killed during the protest and many more were arrested. Nahid, however, became a symbol of the students' opposition and a range of different stories exist around her death. A 17 year old high school student, she is said to have died close to the gates of Kabul University – either during a general demonstration or during a demonstration mainly attended by female students.[50] One of my interlocutors told me that Nahid was marching holding a "mujahidin flag" when the police told her three times to stop and shot her as she did not follow their commands.[51] According to Emadi she was shot because she shouted "Liberty or Death" while trying to break a police blockade hindering the students in marching towards the city center.[52] Kakar writes that she was "holding a wounded fellow student in her arms" when she was "lost to the bullets of the Parchami youth" and Chavis describes how she "had climbed up on a Soviet tank" when "soldiers had taken aim and shot her dead."[53] These descriptions reflect how different attributes were attached to the student movements: the "mujahidin flag", the struggle for liberty, the solidarity amongst students, and the heroism required to climb onto a Soviet tank.

In a similar way, different narratives exist on the role of political organizations in the protests. Members of political groups acted secretly because they feared arrest. Both Sangin Taheri and Hamed Elmi claim that they were involved in the organization of protests – Sangin Taheri at the university and Hamed Elmi at high schools. Sangin Taheri's role in organizing demonstrations was to announce them with notes on blackboards and walls and by distributing *shabnāmahā*. After he had returned from Iran, he was convinced more than ever that resistance to the government was necessary. He had brought some markers that he used to scribble slogans against the government and announcements of protests on the walls of faculty buildings and the dormitory. He maintained his con-

50 Most sources say she was a student of the Rabia Balkhi School, but Chavis claims that Wajia was a student of Rabia Balkhi while Nahid attended Amina Fadawi High School, Chavis 2003, 88.
51 Farzanah, in conversation with the author, Germany, March 3, 2018. Other interlocutors, who mention the death of Nahid without a particular story: Nader S., in conversation with the author, Frankfurt, March 5, 2018; Wais, in conversation with the author, London, February 2, 2018.
52 Emadi 2005, 186.
53 Kakar 1997, 120–21; Chavis 2003, 88.

tacts to the organization founded by Faiz Ahmad, which had changed its name from Gruh-e Inqilabi (Revolutionary Group) to Sazman-e Rihai-ye Afghanistan (Afghanistan Liberation Organization, ALO). Sangin Taheri and others tried to organize a branch of the organization on campus and to coordinate their activities with other movements.[54]

During this short period of intense protests, leaflets, some handwritten and others typed, could be found everywhere on campus. Oftentimes they were glued to walls, especially in the restrooms. The *shabnāmahā* were usually small notes, just a quarter of a page, one of my interlocutors says. Some of them generally condemned the government and others were more precise. For example, they declared that students had been arrested, named them, and called for solidarity. Others announced general strikes or demonstrations.[55] Another sign of organized protest was that some students guided the crowd in shouting slogans such as "Death to the government".[56] It thus seems that although political groups did not appear with banners claiming a demonstration for themselves, they were involved in organizing the protests.

Hamed Elmi was involved in organizing demonstrations, too. In 1980, he was still a high school student. According to him, the protest was mainly incited by Ostad Nematullah Pazhwak, a teacher at the Faculty of Law and Political Science, who tried to unite different organizations in protest against the Soviet military intervention. Pazhwak, Elmi says, had been connected to the PDPA before the Soviet military intervention but did not want his country to be occupied. Pazhwak

54 As examples he mentioned SAMA and RAWA. I discuss more details of SAMA in the third part of this chapter. RAWA, the Revolutionary Association of Women of Afghanistan, was founded in the mid-1970s and was dedicated to the education of women and their resistance against the brutality of the governments (both Daoud and PDPA). Because RAWA's founder, Mina Kishvarkamal, was the wife of the leader of Gruh-e Inqilabi/Sazman-e Rihai, RAWA is oftentimes described as a "Maoist" movement (for example Emadi 2001, 440). Brodski, however, points out that by doing so, historians reduce Mina Kishvarkamal to being a wife instead of an independent thinker. Members of RAWA emphasize their independence and say that they were committed to freedom, democracy, and social justice, Brodsky 2003, 55–57. Chavis describes how a female high school student distributed leaflets for RAWA calling for students to demonstrate, and how the picture of Nahid was on the cover page of the first issue of RAWA's magazine *Payam-e Zan*, Chavis 2003, 87–88. A later issue of that magazine also claims responsibility for protests in 1980, "*Khahar-e Mina (Kishvarkamal) Ba Jaudanagi Paivast* (Sister Mina [Kishvarkamal] Became Immortal)," *Payam-e Zan*, October and November 1987, 3.

55 Ghulam Ahmad, in conversation with the author, London, November 15, 2017; Wais, in conversation with the author, London, February 2, 2018.

56 Wais, in conversation with the author, London, February 2, 2018.

thus guided students of his faculty in organizing protests. Elmi helped to organize high school students to support these protests at the university.

Another former student who had no connection to such an organization remembers the protests as spontaneous:

> There was a signal for starting protest. [...] We called it '*chisht*'. For example, a group of students, [...] one of the students said, '*chisht*' and then the other one said '*chisht*' and then it started, everybody said '*chisht, chisht, chisht*'. And it got to [a] hundred people saying '*chisht, chisht*'. The students who were [...] secretly working for the government, they tried to control the situation, but they couldn't. This '*chisht, chisht*' goes from one person to all those people. Then after 10 minutes or 15 minutes, you could hear this '*chisht, chisht*', and all the people said, 'Oh, there's a demonstration today as well.' Then they gathered in one place and they started moving from the uni to go towards the palace and the middle of the city. [...] Then the ordinary people would come and join the students as well.[57]

Another interlocutor points out that strikes were usually planned by a small group of people who could rely on each other and who motivated others to join. Demonstrations, however, were spontaneous, he says, "out of nothing," caused by "anger and despair."[58] Several interlocutors who emphasize that they were "not involved in politics" joined the spontaneous strikes and demonstrations to show their opposition to PDPA government and its Soviet support.[59] For Sangin Taheri and Hamed Elmi, it was extremely important that few people knew about their activities so that outsiders might perceive an organized demonstration as spontaneous. At the same time, a spontaneous protest could easily be claimed by any political group. Thus, from the outside it is impossible to discern between organized and spontaneous events.

The period of demonstrations remained brief, as the Karmal government was not more willing than Hafizullah Amin to listen to protest. The intelligence service responsible for most of the repression had been renamed several times under the different PDPA leaders without changing its strategy. The intelligence service established by the PDPA after the coup in April 1978 had been called ASGA (Afghanistan da Gatai Satanai Idara, Afghanistan Security Service Department) and was renamed KAM (Kargaranu Amniati Mu'asasa, Workers' Security Institution) by Amin in September 1979. Under Babrak Karmal, it became KhAD (Khid-

57 Wais, in conversation with the author, London, February 2, 2018.

58 Anonymous interview, Berlin, July 10, 2019.

59 Ghulam Ahmad, in conversation with the author, London, November 15, 2017; Nader S., in conversation with the author, Frankfurt, March 5, 2018; Noori, in conversation with the author, Berlin, July 3, 2017.

mate Itila'ate Daulati, State Information Service).[60] After each change of power, a new secret service leadership was installed and the atrocities of the previous months were declared to be the responsibility of the old regime.[61] The general structures, however, did not change. Based on a large net of informants, the secret service was responsible for the purges, arbitrary arrests, and executions. Especially after the beginning of the Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan the service worked in close cooperation with the KGB regarding its structure, advisors, trainings, and resources.[62] According to one source, the budget of the KhAD was provided directly by the Soviet Union and exceeded that of the military.[63] An article on the opposition in Afghanistan published in 1984 summarizes reports from people who arrived in Pakistan after fleeing Afghanistan:

> The blinding and mutilation of prisoners, torture by means of electrical rods, beatings, deprivation of sleep and forcing people to stand for long periods of time, the raping of arrested women, and mass executions of prisoners without trial are frequently reported by those lucky enough to get out of the prisons and detention centres all over Afghanistan.[64]

Sangin Taheri was one of these lucky ones as he was released one month after his arrest on 9 Saur 1358.

In this atmosphere, open opposition to the government was short-lived. According to Elmi, students discontinued their demonstrations after the brutal crackdown in spring 1980. The fact that they were met with gunfire and many students were arrested led Hamed Elmi and his friends to the decision to stop calling for open demonstrations so as to not risk more students' lives:

> And on the 9th of Saur [...] we realized that we should not do that [i. e. organize demonstrations] because we had huge casualties, huge! And probably hundreds of students had been arrested. Hundreds. Then, I remember, we sat together and I said, 'Is it necessary that we do that? Is it worth it? To do a demonstration? Because it is a cruel government and they open fire with their Kalashnikovs and kill all of us. [...]' I remember that we said, 'No, let's wait that the people come out from jail first. We can't afford to send 500 people, 1,000 people to

60 Sources name different dates for the establishment of KhAD (1980/81). See, for example, Human Rights Watch 1984, 85; Dupree 1983, 133.

61 Broxup 1983, 91.

62 Dupree 1984, 238; Halliday and Tanin 1998, 1366; Human Rights Watch 1984, 85–86; Tom Lansford, "State Information Service (KhAD) (Khidamat-I Ittilaat-I Dawlati)," in *Afghanistan at War: From the 18th-Century Durrani Dynasty to the 21st Century*, ed. Tom Lansford (Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO, 2017).

63 Human Rights Watch 1984, 84.

64 Almqvist 1984, 44.

> jail or to be killed, we can't afford it. [...] It is better to start some kind of underground activities, instead of going to demonstrations.' That was a strategic change.

A Human Rights Watch report mentions another "schoolgirl demonstration" in September 1981 and Louis Dupree reported that "several hundred government factory workers" briefly took to the streets in Kabul and shouted, "Down with the Russians!" and "Babrak, yes! Russians, no!" in October 1982.[65] These seem to have been minor events, though, as none of my interlocutors mentions any open demonstrations after April 1980. Generally, my interlocutors say that the environment at the university became quiet. "Either you agree with it [the government], or you should be killed," one of my interlocutors explains. And in the end, he argues, students are students and not soldiers. They did not want to be involved in military activities and peaceful opposition had ended.[66]

After his release from prison, Sangin Taheri left the country for Iran as he did not see a future for himself in the political environment of Kabul. In Iran, he worked as a day laborer, got married, and had a daughter. For some time, he continued to participate in the activities of Sazman-e Rihai, but then distanced himself from the organization, as he was disgusted by internal power struggles and related purges.[67] By 1983, Lafont describes the situation of the opposition in Afghanistan and points out that the "'progressive' left-wing parties [...] have actually lost their influence."[68] Sangin Taheri was not involved in any other political activities and left Iran for Germany, where he was granted asylum.

While open demonstrations at the university ended in 1980, some smaller and more secretive forms of protest persisted. Leaflets suddenly appeared and nobody knew where they came from, one interlocutor says.[69] Another interlocutor graduated from Kabul University in 1980 and then worked as a lecturer at the Faculty of Philosophy. He describes an incident of protest that he witnessed:

> I remember once, [...] there was a good singer, a boy. I was the manager of a concert at Kabul University. A lot of students were there. And I asked this person to sing for the students.

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65 Human Rights Watch 1984, 97; Dupree 1983, 134.

66 Wais, in conversation with the author, London, February 2, 2018.

67 Ibrahimi writes that during this time several leading figures of the movement were "allegedly assassinated by the Reha'i leadership" because of diverging opinions on the direction of the party, Ibrahimi 2012, 18. An article in the *Afghanistan Tribune*, a magazine published by the Föderation der Afghanen und afghanischen Studenten im Ausland (FASA, Federation of Afghans and Afghan Students Abroad) in Karlsruhe, mentions that the leadership of Sazman-e Rihai assassinated 14 members because they criticized the leaders, Roshan 1987, 35–36.

68 Lafont 1983, 119.

69 Anonymous interview, Kabul, April 22, 2018.

> [...] And when he came in front of people, he started shouting against the government and started supporting the mujahidin. The song he sang was one of the songs for the mujahidin. [...] And then, the only way I could prevent this, was that I went to switch off the electricity. He put the mic down and left and he went to Pakistan. A few years ago, I saw him [on TV]. He's in America. He's singing.[70]

Hamed Elmi was one of the few students who had neither left the country nor accepted that he should remain quiet. He and some of his friends began to read literature on guerrilla warfare, mainly by Che Guevara and Mao Zedong. Both wrote quite practical handbooks on the purpose and strategy of guerrilla warfare. In his book "On Guerrilla Warfare", Mao wrote about his experience of guerrilla warfare as a method of fighting against the invasion of an imperialist power (in his context, Japan) in an underdeveloped country (China). According to Mao, the purpose of the guerrilla war against Japan was the "complete emancipation of the Chinese people."[71] According to him, military strategy is crucial, but the political struggle is even more so . This is important, since Hamed Elmi and his friends were not soldiers but understood themselves as intellectuals and political activists. Like Mao, Guevara describes guerrilla warfare as the people's war for liberation.[72] In his conception, the main opponent is not an imperialist power but an oppressive government.[73] Both the struggle against the foreign invader and the fight for internal liberation spoke to Hamed Elmi's perception of the situation in Afghanistan.

To participate in the guerrilla war against the Soviet Union, Hamed Elmi established contacts to the rural opposition and began to do intelligence work for them in the capital. His elder brother had been involved with the militant opposition for some time, so Hamed Elmi received instructions from him. In contrast to the earlier protests against the PDPA and the Soviet Union at the university, these activities were linked to the political parties organizing the opposition from Pakistan. However, Hamed Elmi told me that they did not even know whom they were fighting with. To avoid group arrests, he only had one contact person whose real name he did not know, as they used several pseudonyms. Hamed Elmi's main tasks were distributing *shabnāmahā* and books and recruiting new supporters. According to Elmi, the main purpose of the *shabnāmahā* was to show the presence of the opposition in the city and to scare the government. Books that Hamed Elmi received from people who smuggled them across the border were distrib-

70 Haroon Amirzada, in conversation with the author, London, November 21, 2017.
71 Mao 1937.
72 Guevara 1960, 7.
73 Ibid., 1.

uted among students so they could educate themselves and others. Even though it was dangerous, they would contact professors and ask them for their support in smuggling people out of Kabul.

Hamed Elmi's activities did not last long, however. After two and a half years at Kabul University, Hamed Elmi left Kabul for Pakistan. His father had lost his job at the university and Hamed Elmi himself was afraid that he would be arrested or forcefully recruited for the army. Thus, continuing to support the opposition from Pakistan seemed to be the better option.

6.3 Beyond Ideologies

The discussions among students who trusted each other, Sangin Taheri explains, evolved around freedom and justice: "Whether the level of the discussions was high, I don't know, but the tendency was: secularism, freedom, justice." Hamed Elmi instead stresses how he and his friends took pride in reading books – many of them prohibited – and used the ideas in these books to discuss their opinions on political developments:

> If somebody had read five books, he was more important than a person who had read only two books. [...] Also, our professors, they advised us, 'Read that book. If you are against the government, you should equip yourself with the new thinking, with the new ideologies.'

At first glance, Hamed Elmi's narrative broadly fits into the general idea of a natural opposition of Muslims against the Soviet Union. "Once the communists took power, they started a campaign against religion. The people who were against communists naturally became Muslim," he explains. At the same time, he read Mao and Guevara for inspiration and his motivation was not the establishment of an Islamic state. Because his father worked at Kabul University, Hamed Elmi witnessed the changes in the atmosphere there in a different way than other students. Hamed Elmi's father, Prof S. M. Yusuf Elmi, published a pamphlet on the "Sovietization of Afghan Education" in 1987. He explains that the subjects he was teaching before 1978, History of Islamic Civilization and History of Islamic Art, had been abolished by the new administration. In 1982, he writes, he was interrogated by the KhAD, the secret police, and accused of being engaged in anti-government activities. Shortly afterwards, the dean of the faculty, a former student of Prof Elmi, told him that he should stick to Marxism-Leninism in his classes. In his text, Prof Elmi argues that this was impossible "for there had been no documen-

tations from Lenin and Stalin about the history of Islam."[74] Hamed Elmi's father was not what is usually understood as a conservative Islamist. To emphasize this, Hamed Elmi explains that while many people in rural areas wanted the classes of boys and girls at Kabul University to be separated, his father thought co-education was important for a well-working society. However, the abolition of classes on Islam at the university reinforced Hamed Elmi's impression that Islam was a central part of his culture that needed to be protected against the occupiers.

Hamed Elmi explains that as a student he was interested in discussing Marxist ideas. He generally accepted some degree of dependency of Afghanistan on the Soviet Union: Afghanistan was poor and needed the economic support of its neighbor. However, he refused the forceful and violent introduction of socialist ideas. Before 1978, religion had been a private issue for him,

> [...] but when the communists came to power, it was against the government: I prayed in front of other people. We used to pray, read the book, not because I'm a Muslim but just to show that we were against the Soviets.

Earlier, students at Kabul University had not prayed in public. After the beginning of the Soviet military intervention, as far as Hamed Elmi explains, some students would gather at a specific spot on campus for their prayers, even though they knew they were closely watched by students who worked for the secret service. When I met Hamed Elmi on the campus of Kabul University for the second interview, he showed me a place close to the gym, a small and slightly elevated meadow, where they used to gather. According to Hamed Elmi, the display of religious practices and signs was widespread on campus. Some girls who had preferred Western fashion before – a fact often emphasized in discussions on how progressive female students in Afghanistan were before 1978 – would change their way of dressing as a sign of protest.

After ousting Hafizullah Amin, the Karmal government made a point of working against the binary of "communism" and Islam and of emphasizing that the PDPA leadership was Muslim, too. The Taraki government had abolished the invocation of God at the beginning of speeches and radio broadcasts.[75] Karmal's speeches printed in the newspapers began instead with "In the Name of God, the Compassionate and the Merciful". A few days after Karmal was installed as the new president, he sent greetings to his "suffering Moslems, compatriots of Afghanistan" and talked about Hafizullah Amin as the "treacherous foe of God"

74 Elmi 1987, 2–5.
75 Hyman 1992, 113.

in a speech to the country published in the *Kabul New Times*.[76] Some madrasas and mosques operated with governments funding and the national flag, which had been altered to a red banner during the Taraki regime, was re-established.[77] For one of my interlocutors – a member of Parcham and a student at Kabul University in the early 1980s – Karmal's policy was convincing. The interlocutor said that he had always identified as a Muslim, as his father was a Muslim, and in his perspective the Parcham government never acted against Islam.[78]

Other former students say they were less convinced by Parcham's efforts to prove their Muslim identity. The violent persecution of the Islamic opposition by the government had made Islam political.[79] One of my interlocutors explains his opposition to the government by saying, "We are Muslims. Muslims are against communists. [...] Because we think communism stops us from our practice. They might not stop us today, but they will stop us tomorrow."[80] Another former student describes how he and other students discussed their opinion on the government, "We don't accept this government. It prevents us from praying, from fasting. It pulls us towards atheism."[81]

Except for Hamed Elmi, however, none of my interlocutors said that they had witnessed any public display of religiosity as a means of resistance on campus. This is probably connected to the fact that only a small minority of students actively engaged in organized oppositional activities. When I asked Sangin Taheri whether he had seen any students praying in public, he replied that this would have been impossible as that kind of open protest was far too dangerous. Sangin Taheri and Hamed Elmi's different narrations of the time reflect the diversity of how students experienced and remember the situation on campus.

Hamed Elmi did not have a political background before the beginning of the Soviet military intervention. He had been a student at Habibia High School during the Daoud government and, even though the school was famous for political activism, the years he spent there were rather quiet. Consequently, he never became attached to one of the movements and had known Javanan-e Musulman

76 "Babrak Karmal Greets Afghan Nation," *Kabul New Times*, January 1, 1980, and other articles on the same page.

77 Human Rights Watch 1984, 116; Amin 1984, 49. For further discussions of the relation of Karmal's government to religion see, for example, Lavrov 2008, 61; Lobato 1985.

78 Ahmad Zia Nikbin, in conversation with the author, Kabul, April 30, 2018.

79 A contemporary researcher maintains that generally people perceived Karmal's attempts to show his religiosity as hypocrisy and blasphemy as the Party had already been associated with atheism for too long, Broxup 1983, 101.

80 Ghulam Ahmad, in conversation with the author, London, November 15, 2017.

81 Anonymous interview, Kabul, April 22, 2018.

only by name. Only "when the Soviets invaded, of course, they became very strong." Javanan-e Musulman did not exist anymore by then – at least not as it had during the early 1970s. As discussed in the third chapter, Javanan-e Musulman had ceased to exist when its leaders were arrested or fled to Pakistan in the mid-1970s. By the early 1980s, the political environment around its successor, Hizb-e Islami, was factionalized but reorganized to receive international funding. There were organizations commonly referred to as "mujahidin parties" based in Peshawar and Teheran. Apart from the separation into Sunni and Shi'a parties through their respective international attachment, they differed in their interpretations of the role of religion in politics, their willingness to cooperate with leftist organizations, and personal conflicts between their leaders, which sometimes had an ethnic component. These organizations provided the financial channels for the many armed opposition groups active in Afghanistan. The number of these decentralized groups active in 1983 is estimated at between 150 and 200. Most of them were not defined by a specific ideology but rather by the claim of defending their territorial domain. Their relationship to the parties in Peshawar and Tehran was shaped mainly by the need for arms and funding.[82]

Some students who had been attached to Javanan-e Musulman for a longer time were still on campus and thus became propagators of Hizb-e Islami when political activism resurged. One of my interlocutors had lived close to the university as a child, observed the demonstrations on and around campus, and had made some money by selling and renting books to students. As a high school student, around 1973, he joined Javanan-e Musulman and remained associated with Hizb-e Islami throughout the 1980s. As a consequence, he was arrested while he was a university student in 1981 and was imprisoned for four years.[83] People like him represented the political divisions of earlier years on campus and thereby created the framework in which Hamed Elmi expressed his discontent with the political situation.

When Hamed Elmi was a university student and it had become increasingly difficult to organize open protest, he spent more time reading and thinking about resistance. Besides Mao and Guevara, another scholar who inspired Elmi at that time was Gérard Chaliand. Chaliand, a French scholar, did research on the opposition (mainly in Pakistan) in the early 1980s. His texts on the history of guerrilla warfare were, according to Elmi, available in Kabul at that time. Chaliand

82 Amstutz 1986, 89–92; Ghani Gaussy 1996, 60; Lafont 1983, 119; Westad 2010, 349. In his book on the war in Afghanistan, Edwards discusses the ideological and power struggles between the seven parties in Peshawar in detail, Edwards 2002, 225–78

83 Musa Fariwar, in conversation with the author, Kabul, April 23, 2018.

emphasized that guerrilla warfare can take very different forms and is not *a priori* connected to a specific ideology.[84] At the same time, Hamed Elmi found that guerrilla warfare was meant to be political and should thus be filled with an ideology. By that time, the opposition was dominated by the parties in Pakistan and Iran. Most of their activities took place in the rural areas, but some commanders led occasional "urban guerrilla" activities.[85] Through the "invisible presence" of the armed opposition in Kabul, Hamed Elmi received the advice to read books written by Islamic scholars to widen his knowledge: he had to be able to explain why Islam was a central element of society in Afghanistan and why the Soviet Union was doing wrong in trying to implement communism.

Students secretly passed around such Islamic books among their close friends, hidden in covers of books which were part of their syllabus. In this way, Hamed Elmi pointed out, even friends would not know what you were reading:

> And he [Hamed Elmi's friend] received a book, an Islamic book inside a communist book cover. And he took the book to his room. He was very busy with his book to finish it soon, to give it to somebody else. Then, two or three of his roommates noticed that he was reading a book. They thought he's reading a communisti book. And he was busy with reading and the students wanted to stop him. And then they started fighting. These three students came and beat him, this man. [...] But he couldn't say, 'No, this is not a communist book.' [...] And they beat him up a lot. After that, two or three nights later, one of these students who were beating my friend was caught in some [political] activities. [...] And they put him in jail. And my friend escaped from the dormitory. He left the university. And a few years later, when he was with one of the jihadi forces [...] and he was in a camp. [...] And people asked him, 'Where do you come from?' He said, 'I was in the university.' The person said, 'My cousin, he was in the university, in the same time as you were there. And my cousin started fighting with somebody who was a communist, who used to read communist books. And when he beat him, this communist person informed the government and the government took my cousin to jail and he's still in jail.' The man said, 'I'm looking to find that man, who used to read communist books in the dormitory. If I find him, I know what to do with him.' [...] 'Oh,' the [other] man said, 'oh, that was me.'

The books Hamed Elmi mentions include those of foreign Islamic scholars, such as Sayyid Qutb's "Milestones" and works by Maududi on Islam, nationalism, and jihad. Also, since many books available in Afghanistan were printed in Iran, Iranian scholars such as Shariati and Motahari were popular among oppositional students in Kabul. As discussed in the third chapter, mainly with a focus on Sayyid Qutb's work, the discussions these scholars stirred evolved around

84 Chaliand 1982a, 11.

85 Jalali and Grau 1995, 367–97; Girardet 1984; Foschini 2012.

the question of how a political and social system relying exclusively on Islam can solve problems such as social injustice and authoritarian rule. These ideas provided an argumentative basis to refute Soviet (backed) rule over Afghanistan. They condemned the ignorance of Islamic values, leaders' adoption of an authority that should belong to God alone, and the redundancy of foreign solutions for local, social, and political problems. Many of the opposition parties relied on these principles when formulating political aims.[86]

Hamed Elmi emphasizes his wish to defend Afghanistan and the related cultural and religious values. From the books he read, he says, he learned "why Islam is against communists" and "how to struggle." As he talks about his engagement in the opposition, he describes his conversations with his friends as being guided by questions such as, "Why were they [the Soviet Union] backing a cruel government? A government which was killing us and beating us, torturing us, putting us in jail. The Soviets supported this government. Are these communists real communists or not?" He saw "communism" as not fitting for Afghanistan, not only because "we were an Islamic country, we had our own tradition, we had our own culture," but also because of the incoherence of the ideology they were taught and the reality of Soviet policy:

> Economically we were not fit for communism. And we knew that. Of course, we started reading about the communists. We know the communists, the Marxists, should go to other countries with a big economy to bring the revolution. They said this is the fifth step of the society. And when imperialism or capitalism is getting old, when all the people are fed up with capitalism, then we were going to some kind of common economy that is communism, socialism, Marxism. [...] And then we asked, 'Why do the Soviets come with 120,000 soldiers to implement communism on us?' It's not fair. It's ridiculous. And most of the Afghan people are illiterate people. 'How,' we ask[ed] them, 'how should this society become a communist society?' They didn't know nothing about their own theory.

To Hamed Elmi, the introduction of "communism" in Afghanistan seemed arbitrary and abusive.

Sangin Taheri had a political background before 1978 that connected him to Gruh-e Inqilabi. He was still a young boy, attending primary school, when his elder brother was dismissed from school for engaging in political activism and for being associated with Shu'la-ye Javid. Sangin Taheri's brother, who was at that

86 Ahmed 2004, 14–15. Maududi based his ideas closely on Qutb's principle that all political rule outside of an Islamic framework was tyranny. The Iranian scholars followed similar principles, but in different nuances, including in their relation to ideas of "the West". For a more in-depth discussion see, for example, Toth 2013, 10–11; Aijaz 2018, 85; Byrd and Miri 2018a, 3; Muzaffar 2018, 172; Mirsepassi 2009, 84–85, 92.

time attending Jami School in Herat City, came home to live with his family in the village. Sangin Taheri witnessed the discussions between his brother and father. While his father urged his son to keep away from political activism, according to Sangin Taheri's narration, his brother answered, "No, I have to do this. I have to liberate the world. I have to create justice." These discussions, Sangin Taheri says, lasted days, and he listened attentively. His brother talked to the peasants working for the family. On one occasion, Sangin Taheri heard how his brother declared to one of the elder peasants, Amu Karim, that one day, the vineyards behind the fort would be distributed among the peasants. Amu Karim was not convinced, but Sangin Taheri was impressed by his brother's visions.

On some occasions, Sangin Taheri's brother read out letters from other political activists to his younger siblings who looked up to him. In the evening, Sangin Taheri says,

> he was always listening to *Radio Peking*, and we too, always. And *Radio Peking* said, 'Tonight Mao Zedong crossed the Yellow River swimming,' or the next day it said, 'Today, the entire population of China eats together with Mao Zedong and everybody, including Mao Zedong, eats spinach.'

Sangin Taheri was fascinated by the idea that the entire nation and even their leader would eat the same simple food. When Sangin Taheri came to Herat City in the early 1970s the period of open demonstrations had ended, but most of the teachers still sympathized with Shu'la-ye Javid's demands. Sangin Taheri and his friends tried to step into the footsteps of earlier activists when a minister decided to close a school. However, when they were about to organize a demonstration, Sangin Taheri said, the charismatic leader of the Shu'lai students in Herat and former student of Kabul University, Abdulillah Rastakhiz, told them that it was of no use, "Keep calm." He said, "Don't do this. We have done it and it didn't lead us anywhere. Study, study, study! I tell you: No demonstration, no strike. The most important thing the country needs is educated people." Sangin Taheri and his friends were disappointed but they refrained from organizing demonstrations without the support of the elder generation.

During the late 1960s and early 1970s, the vast majority of political activism (especially on the university campus) revolved around the PDPA, Shu'la-ye Javid, and Javanan-e Musulman. By the early 1980s, however, the two movements in opposition to the PDPA had evolved into many different movements – a process that also blurred the lines between the two political orientations. In the case of Shu'la-ye Javid, the first reason for the emergence of different factions was its structure as a broad movement and not as a party. The movement provided a space for political education, discussions, and the organization of demonstra-

tions and strikes, as well as for discussions on different ideas about strategy and leadership. In the early 1970s, the movement was divided into the "defenders" of the existing leadership and the "criticizers". In 1972, Faiz Ahmad belonged to the criticizers and thus founded his own, more structured movement, the Gruh-e Inqilabi (Revolutionary Group).[87] This was the organization that Sangin Taheri first came in contact with when he wanted to get involved with the opposition to the PDPA.

Other conflicts leading to factionalism within the Shu'la-ye Javid movement were related to the changes in Chinese politics during the 1970s. As discussed in the second chapter, China had been a role model for students in Afghanistan as it symbolized socialist revolution and national liberation without compromise, in contrast to Soviet "revisionism". During the 1970s, however, the idea of a united front against the Soviet Union became increasingly dominant in Chinese foreign policy. In April 1974, Deng Xiaoping, representing the Chinese government under Mao at the General Assembly of the United Nations, explained the "Three Worlds Theory" to his audience, according to which the US and the Soviet Union constituted the first world. The developed countries, including European countries and Japan formed the second world. The third world included the developing countries – mostly in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. According to this theory, it was the task of the Third World countries to motivate the Second World to join the struggle against domination by the First World. At the same time, the Chinese government felt increasingly threatened by Soviet expansionism and turned towards the United States in search of potential support and alliance. Both the "Three Worlds Theory" and the Chinese rapprochement with the United States challenged the binary ideological division of the world into a communist and capitalist sphere.[88]

When the PDPA took power, the different groups that had emerged from Shu'la-ye Javid evolved, dissolved, united, and split in the chaos of local power struggles and without any clear guidance or role model abroad. Faiz Ahmad, the leader of Gruh-e Inqilabi/Sazman-e Rihai-ye Afghanistan (ALO), was in favour of the Three Worlds Theory and cooperation with other political groups against the Soviet engagement in Afghanistan. Several other groups had emerged

87 This division was explained to me by Massum Faryar, in conversation with the author, Berlin, June 19, 2019 and July 10, 2019; anonymous interview, Berlin, July 10, 2019. See also Ibrahimi 2012, 10–11.

88 Partly due to the internal power struggles, China's foreign policy was far from cohesive during the 1970s. For a detailed analysis of Chinese foreign policy during this period in general, and the Three Worlds Theory, in particular. See, for example, Yee 1983; MacFarquhar 2011, 261–63; Keith 2018, 96; Davis 2019, 73; Jian 2011, 101.

around central figures from Shu'la-ye Javid in the 1970s, for example Sazman-e Rihaibakhsh-e Khalqha-ye Afghanistan (People's Liberation Organization of Afghanistan, Surkha, led by Akram and Sadiq Yari), Sazman-e Paikar bara-ye Rihaibakhsh-e Afghanistan (Organization of the Struggle for the Liberation of Afghanistan, Paikar, led by Rahim and Hadi Mahmudi), and Sazman-e Watanparastan-e Waqi'i (Organization of True Patriots, led by Bashir Bahman). These three organizations joined Sazman-e Azadibakhsh-e Mardum-e Afghanistan (People's Liberation Organization of Afghanistan[89], SAMA, led by Majid Kalekani) after the beginning of the Soviet military intervention. Similar as Sazman-e Rihai, SAMA established links to opposition movements which based their legitimacy on Islam. Another movement, Akhgar (the Spark) founded in 1977, positioned itself against the idea of a united front, sticking to the previous revolutionary theory and emphasizing the need for a communist party. This group's leader, Dr Akef, saw the Albanian leader Enver Hoxa as an appropriate role model for Afghanistan.[90]

When Sangin Taheri arrived in Iran after fleeing Kabul in 1979, he suddenly found himself in the middle of the conflicts among the opposition groups. It was during this time that he became politically "radicalized," as he calls it. Many students and intellectuals had left Afghanistan, and especially those who had been associated with Shu'la-ye Javid sought shelter in Iran rather than in Pakistan. The group that Sangin Taheri joined in Iran worked as day laborers and shared their meals and books. It was around the time of the revolution in Iran, and literature of all political orientations was plentiful. Another interlocutor who was in Iran at the same time, describes this period as the "bloom of a revolutionary era" with the streets full of young people and revolutionaries belonging to hundreds of different political groups.[91] Sangin Taheri describes his time in Iran as a time of liberty and political education. However, asked about the ideas he learned about when engaging with literature and in discussions, he says, "No, no, there were no ideas." He explains that the discussions were not theoretical. They did not discuss what would come later and where they wanted to go. From his point of view, discussions solely evolved around possibilities of how to oppose the regime in Kabul.

With people fleeing political persecution, the intellectual centers of the political organizations moved away from Kabul to Iran, Pakistan, and Europe. Accord-

89 Translated to English, Surkha and SAMA have the same names but in Dari they use different words for "liberation" and "people".

90 Piovesana 2012; Emadi 2001, 438–39.

91 Massum Faryar, in conversation with the author, Berlin, July 10, 2019.

ing to one of my interlocutors, the organizations abroad and those in Afghanistan maintained contact but were clearly separated. The organizations abroad sometimes united people who had been members of different organizations in Afghanistan.[92] A good example for the resulting ideological situation is GUAFS. GUAFS, the General Union of Afghan Students Abroad, based in West Germany, had been founded as a student union in the 1970s with the aim of representing the interests of students from Afghanistan in Germany and promoting Afghan culture. In the late 1970s, it became an opposition organization against the PDPA government and later against the Soviet presence in Afghanistan. To draw attention to the situation in Afghanistan, members tried to occupy the embassy of Afghanistan in Bonn in April 1979. At the same time, GUAFS tried to support the opposition in Afghanistan: one of the unions' leaders sent leaflets from Germany to Afghanistan hidden under the false bottom of a bus.[93] Articles published by GUAFS are diverse and reflect the positions of different movements active in Afghanistan, some of which were in favor of, and others opposed to cooperation with non-leftist movements.[94]

As a member of Sazman-e Rihai, Sangin Taheri was involved in one of the movements that sought cooperation with different opposition groups independent of their political background. Sazman-e Rihai did not have an explicit branch at Kabul University, as other organizations such as SAMA did. The contact between university students and the groups in exile and in rural areas of the country were scarce because communication was difficult and dangerous. As soon as Sangin Taheri returned to Kabul from Iran, he was cut off from the ideological discussions abroad. When he moved back into the dormitory after returning from Iran, the students with whom he shared a room were associated with different movements. Their room, he says, was similar to the room of a commander at war, where the next attacks were plotted. They were united in opposition to the regime and helped each other to spread their respective *shabnāmahā*. Along with the leaflets from Sazman-e Rihai, Sangin Taheri gave those of other groups to friends and classmates to distribute them all over the university and the city. He did not mind supporting other political groups as they had one common goal: liberating Afghanistan from the occupier.

92 Anonymous interview, Berlin, July 10, 2019.

93 Rahman Nadjafi, in conversation with the author, Hamburg, October 24, 2017. The embassy was occupied twice, once in April 1979 and once in January 1980: "Botschafter Mohammad zog die Pistole," *Hamburger Abendblatt*, April 8, 1979; K.-W. Reinhardt, "Studenten besetzen afghanische Botschaft in Bonn: Wir wollen nur diskutieren," *Die Welt*, January 3, 1980.

94 See, for example, the different positions reflected in articles in a booklet published by GUAFS: Achgar 1980, 43–44; Organisation zur Befreiung der Völker Afghanistans, 1980.

To facilitate the cooperation between different political groups on campus, Sangin Taheri explains, the "Independent Organization of Students and Teachers" was formed. This organization consisted of delegates from different movements, including SAMA, Sazman-e Rihai, and nationalist and religious groups, who met to discuss and coordinate their activities. According to another interlocutor, the organization coordinated the distribution of leaflets providing information on arrests and executions and generally agitating against the government. This interlocutor helped the organization to distribute the leaflets and said that he knew only one contact person responsible for handing him over the leaflets, and that none of his friends or family members knew about his activities.[95] According to Sangin Taheri, students and teachers involved agreed on simple and clear slogans: "Liberty!", "Democracy!", and "The Russians have to leave!"

The political groups disappeared from campus along with the demonstrations. Just like Sangin Taheri, many students left Afghanistan after they had been arrested in the context of one of the demonstrations or feared arrest for being associated with an opposition group. Additionally, many of the leftist movements' leaders were either killed by the government or in the conflict with other opposition parties. Faiz Ahmad, the leader of Sangin Taheri's group, left Afghanistan and continued his activities from Pakistan until he was assassinated by Hizb-e Islami (Hekmatyar) in 1986. Apart from the lack of leadership, the leftist opposition movements lacked the international support that strengthened the opposition parties claiming a religious motivation based in Peshawar and Tehran.[96]

As the memories of Sangin Taheri and Hamed Elmi show, ideologies did play a role in the formation of protests on campus following the coup by the PDPA and the Soviet military intervention. And yet, their role should not be overemphasized. Similar to the mid-1960s – the beginning of the large student demonstrations at Kabul University – few people were directly involved in political groups and the majority of the students participating in strikes and demonstrations did so because of a general perception of injustice. One of my interlocutors emphasized that he and most other students were not involved in any political movement, but still joined the protests because they wanted to liberate the country:

> The government put pressure on each student, on each teacher, on each person in Afghanistan that you should join the Party [PDPA]. By force. That you'll be a member of the party and follow what the party says. [...] You have to agree and to follow. In the Soviet Union, this

95 Anonymous interview, Berlin, July 10, 2019.

96 Brönner argues that China had encouraged the pro-Chinese movements to cooperate with the Peshawar-based opposition parties in early 1980, Brönner 1980, 85–86. Generally, China did little to support political groups abroad in the 1980s, Jian 2011, 113.

> was the way they ruled their people for decades. [...] And we didn't want that. We wanted Afghanistan, a free Afghanistan. We just wanted to have our own ideas, the way that we live, the way that we want our government, our land, our country to be.[97]

For this interlocutor, as for probably many other students, protest on campus and demonstrations on the streets of Kabul were not connected to ideas of a political system for Afghanistan's future. Even for Sangin Taheri and Hamed Elmi, who were part of larger networks of opposition, their protest was first and foremost defined by the wish for independence.

This chapter set out to investigate opposition at Kabul University to the PDPA government and its Soviet supporters. The narrations of Sangin Taheri and Hamed Elmi show how, on the one hand, their ideological backgrounds played a role and the political ideas of students could still be divided roughly into the three groups that had emerged during the 1960s. On the other hand, they reflect that, in the restrictive environment of the university, ideological lines between the different groups were secondary to the wish to fight against foreign domination and an authoritarian and repressive regime.

Historiography on the Global Cold War discusses the beginning of the war in Afghanistan as a sign of an increasing bipolarity of communism and Islamism replacingthe bipolarity of the Cold War. The structures of opposition at Kabul University in the early 1980s complicate this picture. Whereas, in the 1960s and early 1970s, the lines between the different groups had become increasingly clear, in the 1980s these lines were blurred: oppositional leftist groups joined forces with religious groups, Khalqis joined protests against Parchamis and Parchamis against Khalqis. As the conflict went on, only those groups survived which could rely on international financial and armament support. This international support was based on the geopolitical logic of the Cold War: The Soviet Union supported the leftist government, and thus the USA and Western European countries supported the opposition. As Islamism had evolved as an oppositional force to leftist movements in the previous decades, it was used in a Cold War confrontation. Leftist oppositional groups did not receive any international support and could thus not establish an influential position. Instead of a new multi-polarity, Cold War binaries still dominated the political environment at Kabul University. These binaries no longer provided galvanizing ideas for independence and rapid economic development, but became mainly associated with armed conflict.

97 Wais, in conversation with the author, London, February 2, 2018.

7 "It Was a Good Time and a Very Sad Time, Back Then"

> The floor under her feet began to shake, giving way. Her legs bent, her body trembled, burned with pain, grew heavy, and staggered powerless. But her eyes were not extinguished, and they saw many other eyes which flashed and gleamed with the bold sharp fire known to her, with the fire dear to her heart.
>
> (*Maxim Gorky, Mother, p. 382*)

Najia Ahmad does not need time for consideration to describe a positive memory of her time at Kabul University:

> At our university – this is a great story – just before everybody went home, the boys came, those who were a little bit rich, with their nice cars. And they accelerated, *rrng rrng, rrng*, one time, two times, and so on. We always wished, that once in our lives we would have a car and that we could go over the campus *rrng, rrng, rrng*, accelerating. And then there was the 50th anniversary of the Faculty of Law. And after the celebration, everybody was there and we were going to take a taxi because at that time there were no student busses, minibusses, or anything. So, we had a taxi driver and we were, I don't know, 12 or 13 in this taxi, a large taxi. In the front, next to the taxi driver, three or four were sitting. On one seat. And then in the back ... And the taxi driver was really funny. And we said, 'You know what, *kākā*, uncle, we have a dream.' And he said, 'What?' 'We would like to once ...!' And he said, 'Yes, why not? Let's do it.' And we said we will give five Afghani for every round. And then that's what he did and all the boys and girls were standing there, watching. And we, once, twice ... And at the end, we thought, we don't have any money left, now it's enough. And he said, 'No, no, I don't care, three times are on me.' And then he took us another round for free and it was great. It was so wonderful. We were all screaming in the car. And everybody could see that it was overcrowded, the car. And we fulfilled our dream. We did these things. My point is, despite everything, we had fun ...

The war in Afghanistan continued in the second half of the 1980s and yet, as Najia Ahmad vividly describes, Kabul University was still a place where young people could experience the freedom of student life. However, my question about a positive memory was part of a conversation in which Najia Ahmad shed more than one tear while remembering how she had to say farewell to her friends and, finally, to her life in Kabul.

Shortly after taking power in the Soviet Union, President Gorbachev announced his intention to withdraw Soviet troops as soon as possible and installed a new leader in Kabul. It was President Najibullah's task to form a government and implement policies that would outlast the Soviet retreat from Afghanistan. In the second half of the 1980s, the future of the country was constantly in

https://doi.org/10.1515/ 9783111150543-007

question. How long would the regime be able to maintain power? Would the king return as a compromise between the different parties of conflict? Or would the opposition form a new government and create an Islamic state? The changes in the government's policies towards the civilian population, which began with the installation of Najibullah as secretary general of the PDPA in 1986, receive only minor attention in historiography. The impact these changes had on daily life in government-controlled cities has been discussed even less. This chapter deals with the question of what happened to Kabul University and its students during this period. How did the students imagine the future, during a time in which everything and nothing seemed possible? In the second half of the 1980s, the government tried to gain trust among the population and was successful in creating a comfortable life for some people in Kabul, including many university students. These efforts were not enough to broaden the government's support among students, however. At the same time, the armed opposition did not offer an attractive alternative to most of my interlocutors. The late 1980s did not provide students at Kabul University with visions for the future, and most students were disillusioned with politics. In the end, when the Najibullah government resigned, the civil war destroyed the unique environment at Kabul University.

This chapter is inspired and guided by the memories of Najia Ahmad. In the first part of the chapter, I discuss how, despite the war, descriptions of the atmosphere at the university in the second half of the 1980s resemble those of the 1960s: they are dominated by the joy of living a students' life, with all its opportunities and liberties. The second part of the chapter analyses how the university's status as an important intellectual center of the country decreased as a result of the political environment. Finally, the chapter shows how all hopes for the future were disappointed when the campus became a battleground of the civil war.

I met Najia Ahmad at her home in the south of Germany, and we went for a long walk for our conversation. All references to her memories are based on this interview.[1] Her narration impressed me because of its ambiguity of joy and sadness. On the one hand, her memories are, in many ways, similar to those of students who studied at Kabul University in the 1960s: full of energy and ideas, ambitions and hope. On the other hand, hers was a story about the end of this joy when she talked about her friends leaving and finally about her own departure. Najia Ahmad left Afghanistan in 1989. This chapter, however, goes on to analyse the narrations of other former students about the years up to 1992, as these developments explain why Najia Ahmad could not return to Kabul University to complete her studies.

1 Najia Ahmad, in conversation with the author, Stuttgart, October 15, 2017.

Najia Ahmad was born in the Panjshir valley in her grandfather's home while her father was studying in the Soviet Union. When Najia Ahmad's father returned, the family moved to Kabul, where her father worked for the army before he was forced to retire early. Najia Ahmad graduated from Malalai School in 1984. She then enrolled at the Faculty of Law and Political Science. After four years, she went on an exchange to Japan and had planned to return to Kabul to complete her degree. When she wanted to return, however, the campus of Kabul University had become a battlefield and her family left Kabul for Pakistan, India, and Germany.

7.1 Living a Student Life

In retrospect, for Najia Ahmad, her years at Kabul University were the best time of her life. She enjoyed her classes, she enjoyed being young, and she enjoyed being free. The Faculty of Law and Political Science was founded in 1938, thus the 50th anniversary celebration after which Najia and her friends took the taxi ride was celebrated in 1988. By then, much had changed since the turbulent years after the coup and the beginning of the war. Things had calmed down on campus: there were no demonstrations, and generally my interlocutors suggest that politics played only a minor role among students. In contrast to earlier political divisions within the student body, members of the PDPA would now sit with students who made no secret of regularly going to the mosque for prayers. Freedom of speech was limited, but students had the impression of being free in many other ways.[2]

The Soviet troops had already begun their withdrawal from Afghanistan when Najia Ahmad and her friends were enjoying the taxi ride. At the same time, the PDPA government increased its efforts to stabilize the political system by fostering support among the population. The initiative for change had started from the Soviet side. When President Gorbachev came to power, one of his main aims was to end the costly war in Afghanistan. As an increase in troops had shown no prospect of winning the war, Gorbachev put ideology aside: he attempted to create conditions in which a peace deal would be feasible. Karmal was replaced by Najibullah, who was instructed to abandon radical ideological positions, to try to increase the population's support of the government, and to make deals with the opposition. Najibullah presented himself as a nationalist, used religious rhetoric, reduced taxes, and released political prisoners. To support him, the Soviet government increased aid money, providing not only military equipment and fuel

2 Anonymous interview, Kabul, April 22, 2018; Ghulam Ahmad, in conversation with the author, London, November 15, 2017.

but also regular convoys of food supplies for Kabul. Najibullah implemented a new constitution and officially permitted the foundation of opposition parties – at least when corresponding with the PDPA's ideas of being patriotic – and the participation of members of the opposition in parliament and government. The elections of April 1988, however, did not comply with any democratic standards. Historiography unanimously assumes that Najibullah wanted to appease the opposition without giving up his power.[3] By and large, Najibullah's strategy failed. And yet, the narrations of former students suggest that the political changes had a positive impact on the atmosphere on campus.

Najia Ahmad is not the only former student with positive memories of that time. My interlocutors mainly emphasize the ordinariness of daily life. Some of them talk about sports events. Najia Ahmad played badminton; her team had competitions with other schools in Kabul, and her entire class came to cheer for her. Once, at a competition at the Polytechnic Institute, she won first prize. Usually, she asked somebody else to receive her trophy, as her father allowed her to play badminton but did not want pictures of her being published in newspapers or on TV. That day her cousin, who was watching, encouraged her, "Go! Why are you afraid? [...] Go, take your cup yourself!" She went to the front and, "*Bing*, two pictures. Two men and, you know, between them a woman." In the evening, Najia Ahmad secretly switched off the electricity at her house simulating a blackout so her father could not watch the news. Another interlocutor liked to play football. He did not play on a team, but after class he and his friends would meet at the sportsgrounds to play for an hour or two before they went home.[4] Others enjoyed watching the matches of the university's sports teams or attending the many concerts by local and international musicians at the university.[5] Male and female students could join theatre groups and organize festivals to present their plays.[6] Students living in the dormitory had access to a TV room where one of my female interlocutors loved to watch international football matches.[7] According to one of my interlocutors, the daily TV program lasted from 6 pm to midnight and consisted of Indian, Russian, US-American, Iranian, Arabic, and European

3 Fivecoat 2012, 44, 47; Khristoforov 2009, 102, 112; Rubin 1993, 479–80; Rubin 1995, 146–75; Ruttig 2006, 13–14; Smith 2014; Westad 2010, 351.

4 Anonymous interview, Kabul, April 26, 2018.

5 For example Ghulam Ahmad, in conversation with the author, London, November 15, 2017; Farzanah, in conversation with the author, Germany, March 3, 2018; Fahima, in conversation with the author, Kabul, April 20, 2018.

6 Anonymous interview, Kabul, April 24, 2018.

7 Fahima, in conversation with the author, Kabul, April 20, 2018.

movies and serials.[8] For other movies, students could go to one of the cinemas in the city.[9] To make it short: students at Kabul University at that time seemed to live a student life just as one would imagine it to be during times of peace.

Comparing their life as students to the situation in Kabul at the time of the interviews, my interlocutors praise life in Kabul in the 1980s: the electricity and the postal system were working, the state administration did its job without corruption. Prices for public transport – "only one Afghani" to take the bus to the university – and housing were low, and women could move around safely, wearing whatever they wanted. Fridges and TVs were affordable and, thanks to the supplies from the Soviet Union, food was inexpensive – a lunch at the university cafeteria was "only 5 Afghani".[10] Students received free health care.[11]

The positive experience of life in Kabul at that time was related to the status as students. The shortages in teachers, books, and equipment that had taken its toll on the quality of lessons in the early 1980s, had largely been solved and students praise the level of classes and facilities. Najia Ahmad and other students say that, even though many of their teachers had studied in the Soviet Union, they were lucky to also have teachers who had studied in Germany, France, or the United States.[12] The Faculties of Islamic Law and of Engineering re-opened.[13] One of my interlocutors studied Spanish at the Faculty of Literature and praised her teachers from Cuba, who invited them over for get-togethers in the evening

8 Anonymous interview, Kabul, April 20, 2018.

9 Anonymous interview, London, October 21, 2018.

10 Bashir Ahmad, in conversation with the author, Kabul, April 18, 2018; Sayed Shabir Aber interview, Kabul, April 20, 2018; Anonymous interview, London, October 21, 2018; Ghulam Ahmad, in conversation with the author, London, November 15, 2017. I could not find any data on the value of Afghani in second half of the 1980s, but the main point of my interlocutors here was to emphasize that prices were very low.

11 Fahima, in conversation with the author, Kabul, April 20, 2018.

12 Sayed Shabir Aber, in conversation with the author, Kabul, April 20, 2018.

13 Unfortunately, I could not find any sources or literature on Najibullah's policies regarding Kabul University. In an informal conversation, a former student who did not give me an interview mentioned that she studied Islamic Law in the late 1980s and that students were encouraged to study the subject at that time. The only mention of changes in that direction I found is Khristoforov mentioning that Najibullah announced the opening of an 'Islamic University' on March 13, 1988, Khristoforov 2009, 147. A similar case is the Faculty of Engineering. Two of my interlocutors studied at the Faculty of Engineering from 1989 onwards and told me that they were the first cohort after the faculty's closure under Karmal. They did not have any explanation for this re-opening, though, and I could not find any literature or sources indicating more details such as, for example, the faculty's relationship to the universities in the United States to which it had been closely connected historically, Bashir Ahmad, in conversation with the author, Kabul, April 18, 2018; anonymous interview, Kabul, April 16, 2018.

similar to the parties with Western European and US-American teachers in the 1960s.[14] In the early 1980s, students were annoyed by the compulsory classes in history or sociology and other aspects in their daily lives that showed the power of the regime and the Soviet influence upon the education system. Most of these rules had been abolished by the time Najia Ahmad registered at Kabul University in 1985. It was common to choose English language classes instead of Russian.[15] Former students praise that female and male students were free to spend time together, something that was not generally accepted in society, not even in Kabul.[16]

The university provided many facilities which contributed to the positive perception of the general social and political situation in the country. As discussed in the first chapter, students appreciated the possibility to live in the dormitory and to receive three free meals every day.[17] Some of my interlocutors praise that everybody had a chance to study at the university during that time because of the increase in education facilities and the absence of corruption. Everybody was polite and respected the others, some interlocutors claim.[18]

Another aspect life on campus corresponded to the self-presentation of the Najibullah government: ethnicity. Similar to students in the 1960s/70s, those who studied at the university in the second half of the 1980s emphasize that ethnicity and confessional belonging did not play any role on campus. On campus, Najia Ahmad emphasizes, nobody would even ask for last names, which could indicate a regional or tribal affiliation such as Badakhshi or Ahmadzai. This was only the case at university, one interlocutor says. As soon as students began to work, they would have to rely on ethnic or regional networks of support: a Pashtun boss would only support Pashtun employees.[19] Another former student attributes the irrelevance of ethnicity in the education system to the attention the government paid to avoiding ethnic discrimination.[20] It had always been important for many students at Kabul University not to reproduce ethnic discrimination and the conflicts they witnessed in other parts of society. During the

14 Anonymous interview, Kabul, April 21, 2018.

15 Anonymous interview, London, October 21, 2018.

16 Ghulam Ahmad, in conversation with the author, London, November 15, 2017.

17 Anonymous interview, London, October 21, 2018; Bashir Ahmad, in conversation with the author, Kabul, April 18, 2018.

18 For example Bashir Ahmad, in conversation with the author, Kabul, April 18, 2018; Sayed Shabir Aber interview, Kabul, April 20, 2018; Anonymous interview, London, October 21, 2018.

19 Anonymous interview, Kabul, April 16, 2018.

20 Bashir Ahmad, in conversation with the author, Kabul, April 18, 2018. Similar, Sayed Shabir Aber interview, Kabul, April 20, 2018.

1980s, this topic had become increasingly politicized. Many of the opposition parties were organized along ethnic and confessional lines. The government, in contrast, emphasized its inclusiveness with a representation of the ethnic minorities within the party and the army.[21] Both the self-presentation of the government and the way the students saw themselves result from the idea of a modern nation-state, in contrast to the "backwardness" of ethnic, regional, or religious identity and conflicts.

7.2 The Changing Character of Kabul University

Najia Ahmad wanted to study literature but marked the Faculty of Law and Political Science as her first choice on the *kānkūr*. To her this was a mere formality, as she did not expect to be accepted to this prestigious faculty. She had graduated from Malalai School, a good girls' high school that had lost much of its prestige since being abandoned by its French supporters after the PDPA's takeover of power. She thus did not assume she would be among the students scoring the best results on the exam. Her second choice was the Faculty of Languages and Literature, which she expected to enter, and her third choice was sports, as she played on the national badminton team. When the results of the exam were published, she was surprised: she had been accepted at the Faculty of Law and Political Science. And not only her, almost her entire high school class had been accepted. In earlier years, it would have been hard to imagine that an entire school class was accepted at the Faculty of Law and Political Science. Only the best graduates of each school were admitted to university, and the Faculty of Law and Political Science was one of the most difficult to be accepted to. As Najia Ahmad's experience suggests, this had changed in the 1980s. Over the course of the 1980s, the university lost its meaning as the intellectual and political center of Afghanistan.

The education system was one of the PDPA's primary targets of reform. This had a double effect. On the one hand, an increasing number of schools facilitated access to education for most children in the cities. On the other hand, educational institutions, even more than in earlier years, were transformed into political spaces. For example, in 1978, 17 technical and vocational schools existed in the entire country. In 1990, the number had increased to 72. Most of these schools

21 For a discussion of the ethnic conflicts between the opposition groups see Fänge 1995. For a discussion of the role of ethnicity in Najibullah's politics see Akimbekov 2015, 354.

were located in Kabul and some in the other major cities.[22] In that period, the number of students accepted at Kabul University increased and several new universities were founded: Balkh University with five faculties in 1986, Herat University with a Faculty of Persian Literature in 1988, and Kandahar University with a Faculty of Agriculture in 1991.[23] With the number of institutions of higher education increasing, the opportunity to enter a university was no longer as exclusive as it was in the 1960s and 70s. At the same time, the PDPA used classes and textbooks for ideological indoctrination. Primary school students were encouraged to join the junior organization, the Pioneers (*pīshāhangān*), and were taken on marches through the city.[24] This policy led to education having a negative connotation for much of the population and affected the position of students in society. Also, the change in the role of education in society increased the chances of being accepted to Kabul University: fewer students were interested in studying there, the capacity had increased, and the chances for graduates from girls' schools to be accepted rose as many young men left the country to avoid military service or to join one of the opposition groups.

In contrast to interlocutors who studied at Kabul University in the 1960s and 1970s and who emphasize how honored they felt to be accepted, several of the students who registered at Kabul University in the mid and late-1980s were less eager to study, or were even disappointed when they were accepted at the university. One of my female interlocutors told me that she did not want to go to university: none of her relatives had a higher education, and she did not have a role model to follow in this direction. She had graduated from a vocational school, planning to work as a secretary to support her family financially. Her father, however, was a member of the PDPA and had made a career during the early 1980s so he could now afford to send his daughter to university. Reluctantly, she took the *kānkūr* in 1985, but as she had not prepared for it, she did not know the answers to many of the questions, choosing A, B, C, or D at random. A few days later, her classmates dropped by at her home, compassionate because she had not passed the exam. She was happy and ready to look for a job instead. Her father, however, told her to go to the university herself to check the results and there it was: her classmates

22 The war was mainly fought in the rural areas and consequently schools there had to close down. The government did not have the ability to open new schools, Baiza 2013, 145. The PDPA's focus on education notwithstanding, there is little literature on the topic, especially literature going beyond numbers of education facilities.

23 Samady 2001a, 598. Information on the founding of these universities vary. According to Abdulbaqi Balkh University was founded in 1987 and Kandahar University in 1990, Abdulbaqi, 2009, 100–01.

24 Baiza 2013, 147–48.

had been mistaken and she had been accepted at the Faculty of Languages and Literature. During the first weeks, she would ask her mother to accompany her to university and to sit outside the faculty building until classes were over because she felt uncomfortable in the new environment. It took some time until she grew accustomed to it and, after graduating, she even became a lecturer at the same faculty.[25]

Another interlocutor tells a similar story, saying she had planned to find a job to support her family after graduating from high school in 1987. As she was one of the best students of her cohort, her teacher encouraged her to take the *kānkūr*. Reluctantly she agreed but was uncertain about what to study. She finally chose English Language and Literature but was accepted for Spanish and Arabic only. She was not interested in those languages and thus dropped the idea of studying at university. Only two weeks later, as she had not come up with an alternative plan, she decided to give the Spanish classes a try. Over time, she said, she came to enjoy her classes and graduated with the best grades.[26] These examples of the two women becoming university students without any ambitions to do so suggest that Najia Ahmad's story was not an exception but the result of changes in the system of admission at the university. Some students view the increasing capabilities of the government as an achievement, saying that in the late 1980s everybody had access to university education, not only the children of the elite.[27]

At the same time, support for the government among students seems to have been marginal. Najia Ahmad does not talk much about politics when remembering her time at university. Instead, to illustrate how she enjoyed her student days, she describes how bold she was back then:

> I was a very sassy student, a terrible one! There were certainly 150, 200 students in the classroom where the lecture took place and I just went to the front and I wrote in huge letters, '*Māīm javānān, az pūsht-e khar ravān, īn ast rūz-e mān, ai mardume jahān*. [We are the youth/ following the donkey [i.e. the leaders]/ these are our times/ oh, people of the world!]' I loved poems and then I just wrote something. And then an assistant or a teacher came. And he really was a Khadist. Khadists were those who worked for the secret service. And then he looked for the culprit but nobody told him who it was. That was really dangerous. And I went to … How do you call the desk, where the professors are during the lecture? I sat there and I made some fun, some imitation. I spoke like a Khadist or a Khalqi, Parchami or whatever. I always imitated them. […] It was a good time. And a very sad time, back then.

25 Anonymous interview, Kabul, April 24, 2018.

26 Anonymous interview, Kabul, April 21, 2018.

27 Anonymous interview, Kabul, April 21, 2018; Fahima, in conversation with the author, Kabul, April 20, 2018.

Najia Ahmad shares this memory because she wants to make a point about the atmosphere, about how she was the class clown, and how it felt good to be part of a big group that protected her. At the same time, it is remarkable that she does not frame this story as one of opposition to the government after telling me how happy she was in Kabul. Instead, her opposition to the government was a mere side note.

Najia Ahmad's sassiness does not imply that she was not afraid of persecution by the government. Although the new government under Najibullah promoted inclusiveness and efforts for peace and reconciliation, to many people he was just another Soviet puppet, as he had been installed by the Soviet Union.[28] Additionally, Najibullah's past as the head of the secret service KhAD impacted his policies and the budget; the power of the KhAD increased significantly in 1986.[29] Few of the female students worked for KhAD, Najia Ahmad says, but among the male students she was sure that there were some agents. There was no room for discussion, and it seemed impossible to criticize Soviet politics in Afghanistan. "*Sāzmānī būdand*. [They were of the Party organization]," they said and believed that those students wrote down names of others, whom they accused of being "*ashrār* [villains]", that is supporters of the opposition. With each name they wrote down, Najia Ahmad suspects, they would improve their position within the party or the secret service. Thus, discussions of the political situation would only take place within the closest circles of friends.[30] Seen in this context, Najia Ahmad's slogans on the blackboard were exceptional: whether it was courage or naivety – or, most likely, a combination of both – she publicly criticized the government despite the very tense political environment.

Overall, most students tried to avoid politics during this time. One of my interlocutors explicitly says that he was not interested in political discussions because he was young and just wanted to have fun.[31] While student life in the second half of the 1980s and in the late 1960s had many similarities, this was a fundamental difference. Politics had been serious during the time of students protests in the late 1960s and early 1970s. At the same time, they had been attractive to many students because of the joy and excitement that discussions and demonstrations provided. In contrast, Najia Ahmad joked in front of her classmates because being provocative was fun, not discussing politics.

28 Es'haq 1987, 128; Dorronsoro 2005, 173–207.

29 Fivecoat 2012, 44–45.

30 Similar descriptions by Sayed Shabir Aber and anonymous interlocutor, in conversation with the author, Kabul, April 20, 2018; anonymous interview, Kabul, April 21, 2018.

31 Bashir Ahmad, in conversation with the author, Kabul, April 18, 2018.

Students at Kabul University in the second half of the 1980s had been too young to actively participate in the moments of outrage in 1980. They grew up with the fact that the country was at war. They did not grow up without a political opinion, however. Najia Ahmad's father, for example, had studied in the Soviet Union prior to the PDPA coup. He worked as an electrical engineer for the air force in the early 1980s but fell sick and had to stay in hospital for some time. Many relatives, friends, and colleagues came to visit and, in some conversations with them, Najia Ahmad's father expressed a negative opinion about the political situation in the country. He was lucky not to have been arrested immediately, Najia Ahmad points out. Instead, he was asked to retire. Even though he was fluent in Russian, he never spoke a word in that language at home, as he despised the Soviet activities in Afghanistan. Najia Ahmad thus grew up with a silent opposition to the government.

During the years of intense political activism at Kabul University in the late 1960s and early 1970s, books had inspired students to think about and discuss political alternatives. Political literature thus played a central role in inspiring and galvanizing students. According to Najia Ahmad and other interlocutors, many of the students of the late 1980s were eager readers, too. The list of her favourite books was similar to those prominent on campus in the 1960s and ranged from Dostoyevsky and Victor Hugo to Goethe and Persian poets such as Ferdausi and Maulana. One of her favourite books was Maxim Gorky's *Mother*. To Najia Ahmad, however, these books were not the basis for political discussions, and she was always careful in her choice of books. Her father had tight control over his family. He checked on every book she read and even searched her bags for books she might not show him voluntarily. Books were not cheap, and students exchanged rather than bought them. Najia Ahmad's father thus assumed that somebody had given books to her, and suspected a political motivation, "He asked a thousand times: 'Who gave this book to you? Nobody should attract you to a political party. Who gave this to you? Which idiot?'"

Some books, especially those by Islamist authors such as Sayyid Qutb and Ali Shariati, were prohibited and possessing them was dangerous. One of my interlocutors was given some of these forbidden books by his friends. He recalls having read a book by the Iranian scholar and political activist Ali Shariati and another one by the Afghan poet and political reformist Sayyid Ismail Balkhi. Once, he was caught up in a traffic control while carrying one of the books with him. He argued with the policeman, but when he remembered that he was carry-

ing the book in his bag, he endured being punched rather than defending himself and left as quickly as possible.[32]

Many students of the second half of the 1980s did have a political opinion that they developed in the context of their family background, by reading books, and in secretive discussions with their friends. And yet, there was no joy in these discussions and no vision for the future. All my interlocutors who studied at Kabul University at that time say that few among them supported either the government or the armed opposition.[33] As Najia Ahmad says, "There were so many political opinions around, but we just wanted freedom."

7.3 Civil War on Campus

Memories of how friends and classmates left the country one after another are omnipresent in my conversation with Najia Ahmad. She says there were some changes at schools and universities introduced after the coup in 1978, such as the picture of the president or the anthem the students had to sing before the classes began. What really dominated her experience as a schoolgirl and university student, though, was the departure and disappearance of her friends. Sometimes, close friends had the chance to say goodbye before leaving. One day, her best friend asked her to come to her house. She was about to leave for Pakistan and wanted to give some of her clothes to her friend and entrusted her diary to Najia Ahmad. She is still close to tears when remembering this day. She kept her friend's diary in safety until they met again in Europe. At other times, students stopped coming to classes without saying goodbye. People would then say, "*Farār kardand!* [They have run away]!" The way Najia Ahmad describes this situation, the expression had a negative connotation: sometimes, one would not know whether students had left the country or had been arrested, but the saying "*Farār kardand!*" made it sound like they had betrayed the homeland.

In 1989, Najia Ahmad left Kabul. She did not flee the war, but had the opportunity to study in Japan. Her uncle had worked as an ambassador to Japan and when three scholarships were offered to students of the Faculty of Law and Political Science, she took the chance. She studied in Japan for a year and a half and mainly took classes in Japanese language and culture. Japan had participated in

32 Sayed Shabir Aber, in conversation with the author, Kabul, April 20, 2018.
33 Bashir Ahmad, in conversation with the author, Kabul, April 18, 2018.

some aid projects in Afghanistan and had trade interests in the country.[34] When Najia Ahmad arrived in Japan, she was excited to see that people there were interested in Afghan products, such as saffron and sweet melons. The program she took part in was supposed to prepare students to contribute to the improvement of Japanese-Afghan relations. There were plans for more Japanese-funded development projects in Afghanistan and an increase in trade between the countries. But Najia Ahmad never got to play this role. After completing the program in Japan, she could not return to Kabul to graduate from Kabul University and become a lawyer. By then, the war had reached the city and the campus had become a battleground.

During the 1980s, daily life at Kabul University had only sporadically been interrupted by the war. A former student who lived in the dormitory says they had to run out of the dormitory a few times because a rocket was approaching. Some students were injured on these occasions, she says, but goes on to explain that it was "really a great time."[35] Another interlocutor explains how surprised he was when the war suddenly became part of his life: He graduated in the mid-1980s and received a letter according to which he had been allocated a job by the Ministry of Construction. Together with about ten other recent graduates, he went to the ministry. The graduates handed the letters to an official, who told them to wait in one of the offices. While sitting there, another civil servant came and asked them to follow him. He took them to another room, opened a cupboard and handed a Kalashnikov to each of them. The graduates were surprised and asked what they were supposed to do with the guns. It turned out that the civil servant had thought they had come to sign up for the army.[36]

In 1992, when the civil war arrived in Kabul, a frontline between areas occupied by different commanders went right across the campus. Mainly based on the Soviet wish to end their military engagement in Afghanistan, the Geneva Accords had been signed on April 14, 1988, and the withdrawal was completed on February 15, 1989. Based on the financial and indirect military support of the Soviet Union, President Najibullah was able to maintain his rule for three more years. On January 1, 1992, however, international donors officially halted deliveries of weapons to both sides as agreed on in September 1991. The armed opposition was not weakened, however, as the militias were not short of weapons and mili-

34 There is no scholarly literature on Japanese-Afghan relations. This report provides a brief overview of the history of Japanese aid in Afghanistan, JICA-RI Afghanistan Project Team 2012, 16–21.

35 Anonymous interview, London, October 21, 2018.

36 Ghulam Ahmad, in conversation with the author, London, November 15, 2017.

tias formerly co-opted by the government now changed sides. On March 18, 1992, Najibullah announced that he would resign as soon as an interim government had been formed, but before a peaceful transition could take place, the armed opposition invaded the capital. On April 15, Najibullah resigned and sought refuge in the UN compound. As agreed upon by several opposition parties in the Peshawar Accord, an interim government was established.

The common enemy had been defeated, and the opposition parties and militias began their fight for control of Kabul. The interim government did not have universal authority and armed groups aligned with the major opposition parties divided control of the city among themselves. While the fighting came to a halt in other parts of the country, Kabul became the new battleground. The lack of a common goal led to frequent shifts of allegiances. The resulting combat is often interpreted as an "ethnic war," but was at least equally motivated by individual enmities and power ambitions. Between 1992 and 1996, casualties among Kabul's inhabitants are estimated at up to 25,000 (out of roughly 1.6 million), and a large share of the population fled the city. The people remaining in Kabul had to accept new rules that were sometimes violently implemented, such as the exclusion of women from some parts of public life and obligatory regular prayers. As food supplies did not reach the city or were confiscated, prices for rice and flour increased significantly and electricity and running water were not available in most parts of the city.[37]

The option to install a government formed by or at least including the opposition parties had been discussed since the Soviet announcement to withdraw their troops from Afghanistan. With Najibullah's government struggling to maintain power, the security situation deteriorating, and food supplies limited while the militias approached Kabul, their takeover of the city did not come as a surprise. One of my interlocutors said that she had already prepared tights to wear, allong with a longer skirt and a scarf to cover her hair before militias arrived in Kabul. She was afraid of being deemed a "communist" if she did not dress more conservatively than she did in the 1980s.[38] Despite such preparations, students in Kabul were uncertain of what the future would bring and how much their lifestyle established during the second half of the 1980s would be restricted.

37 For an analysis of this period see, for example, Sharma 2016, 130–31, 135; Dorronsoro "Kabul at War (1992–1996): State, Ethnicity and Social Classes," S*outh Asia Multidisciplinary Academic Journal*, 2007, §3–4, 10, 17, 47; Baiza 2013, 163–65; Rubin 1993, 486; Smith 2014, 312, 329–30; Fivecoat 2012, 46; Tarzi 1993, 172–74.

38 Anonymous interview, London, October 21, 2018.

Students most urgently wished for an end to the war and, some of them, that peace would finally bring the conditions necessary for progress. As the fighters arrived in the city, even students who had previously supported the PDPA were ready to accept some restrictions as a price for peace.[39] One of the former students explains:

> Almost 80 percent or even more than 80 percent of the Afghan people, didn't support the Najib government because they were Moslems and the Mujahidin were Moslem and they said, 'We will bring you a good government based on Islamic principles.' So the people were Moslems and they were hopeful that the Mujahidin would come and establish a government on Islamic principles. So, they were hopeful and indirectly or directly, they supported the Mujahedin. [...] When the Mujahidin came, the people were hopeful because the Mujahidin were supported by Western countries, so they thought that the government's relations with Western countries would be better and of course Afghanistan would get progress, every day, day by day.[40]

This interlocutor describes his hopes for progress in a similar way as the students of the late 1960s and early 1970s: he describes progress as defined by "Western" standards to which Afghanistan had to catch up, "day by day." It is notable that this hope emerged with the arrival of the opposition parties that had partly emerged from Javanan-e Musulman – the determined opponents of any "Westernization" of Afghanistan. This student's hopes are reminiscent of similar hopes related to the constitution of 1964, the end of the monarchy in 1973, and the PDPA coup in 1978. Each time, students had hopes for progress via political change.

As in 1964, 1973, and 1978 hopes for progress were soon disappointed when the war arrived on campus. Classes at Kabul University were interrupted. Nobody officially announced a closure of the university but, as one of my interlocutors commented, "How can you concentrate on your classes when everything is in chaos?"[41] With the city divided into different areas, each controlled by a different *ṭanẓīm* (faction), the way to the university and back home became increasingly dangerous. Anybody could be stopped at any time and accused of supporting another *ṭanẓīm*.[42] One of my interlocutors was on his way home when he was threatened with a gun to not return to that area. Out of fear, he went to live in another part of the city and only returned to the family's home years later.[43] Many

39 Bashir Ahmad, in conversation with the author, Kabul, April 18, 2018; Sayed Shabir Aber, in conversation with the author, Kabul, April 20, 2018.
40 Anonymous interview, Kabul, April 16, 2018.
41 Anonymous interview, Kabul, April 16, 2018.
42 Bashir Ahmad, in conversation with the author, Kabul, April 18, 2018.
43 Anonymous interview, Kabul, April 26, 2018.

people generally avoided leaving their homes. Another interlocutor had just graduated from the Faculty of Medicine and had started her first job at a hospital a few days before the civil war took hold of Kabul. For two weeks, she says, she could not leave the hospital to go home because it was too dangerous to go out in the streets.[44]

By then, rockets frequently destroyed buildings on campus. According to one of my interlocutors, mines were laid out between the faculties.[45] It thus became too dangerous to hold classes on campus. Many students and teachers found ways to leave the city, or went into hiding in their homes.[46] It was especially students who had studied abroad, one of my interlocutors says, who left for Europe or the United States.[47] One of the former students graduated from the Faculty of Languages and Literature in 1989 and was then employed as a teacher there. When the civil war began, she no longer went to campus because it was too dangerous. Two months later, she wanted to pick up some of her belongings from her office, but she was stopped and told that as a woman she was not allowed to enter the university anymore. Some months later, she returned only to find most of her books had been burned. Nothing was left of the facilities at the faculty except for books in Arabic.[48] When some teachers and students returned to the campus two years later, Kabul University was not the place it had been before the war. Experts had marked safe pathways between the mines with stones so that those students who were able and allowed to return to campus could reach their classrooms safely.[49]

Despite the destruction of the university campus, some teachers tried to continue their classes. Students of the Faculty of Medicine, for example, used rooms at the Ministry of Public Health for some time.[50] Teachers from the Faculty of Engineering found some rooms in Khair Khana, a north-western district of the city, which was relatively safe as it was located the furthest away from Hekmatyar's base in the south-east of Kabul.[51] A teacher from the Faculty of Languages and Literature says she held classes in the building of the Polytechnic Institute for a while. She could not stay there for long, however, but did not want to give up. Her last attempt was to teach while sitting in the remains of burned-out vehi-

44 Anonymous interview, London, October 21, 2018.
45 Bashir Ahmad, in conversation with the author, Kabul, April 18, 2018.
46 Anonymous interview, Kabul, April 25, 2018.
47 Bashir Ahmad, in conversation with the author, Kabul, April 18, 2018.
48 Anonymous interview, Kabul, April 24, 2018.
49 Bashir Ahmad, in conversation with the author, Kabul, April 18, 2018.
50 Fahima and Sayed Shabir Aber, in conversation with the author, Kabul, April 20, 2018.
51 Anonymous interview, Kabul, April 16, 2018.

cles standing in the street.[52] Without a functioning government, teachers did not receive their wages, and due to the security situation and the lack of infrastructure, classes were frequently interrupted and only resumed weeks or months later. Oftentimes the classes became mere meetings to check attendance before students were sent home again.[53]

Instead of an end to the war and prospects of freedom, justice, and progress, the takeover of Kabul by the armed opposition brought power struggles and a war that they legitimized via Islam.[54] Instead of stability, the civil war brought uncertainty. "Nobody," one of my interlocutors says, "knew what would happen in the future." What kind of regime would they work for? What would a degree in law be worth under that regime? Would it be better to leave the country now, before it might be too late?[55] Students died during rocket attacks and teachers were generally susected of having supported the "communists" and feared for their lives.[56] Female students might have been ready to wear tights and scarfs but had not been prepared to be banned from attending classes or going to work altogether.[57]

Najia Ahmad went to Germany instead of returning to Kabul. She did not become a lawyer or a diplomat, but a vendor at a delicatessen, selling pork and wine, which she loathed. Like many other students who left Kabul, she did not have any proof of her education. In the 1980s, diplomas were not handed out to graduates in an attempt to prevent them from leaving the country.[58] Najia Ahmad still meets her former classmates, most of whom now live in Europe, to remember the best times of her life, when she was a student at Kabul University and had hopes for the future.

It was the purpose of this chapter to analyse the experience of students at Kabul University during the political changes of the second half of the 1980s and early 1990s. Based on the historical literature on this period, I had assumed that in an atmosphere of uncertainty – and potential change – students at Kabul Univer-

52 Anonymous interview, Kabul, April 21, 2018.

53 Anonymous interview, Kabul, April 25, 2018; Bashir Ahmad, in conversation with the author, Kabul, April 18, 2018; Fahima and Sayed Shabir Aber, in conversation with the author, Kabul, April 20, 2018; Anonymous interview, Kabul, April 20, 2018.

54 Anonymous interview, Kabul, April 21, 2018.

55 Anonymous interview, Kabul, April 20, 2018.

56 Bashir Ahmad, in conversation with the author, Kabul, April 18, 2018.

57 Fahima, in conversation with the author, Kabul, April 20, 2018.

58 Similary Noori, in conversation with the author, Berlin, July 3, 2017; Nader S., in conversation with the author, Frankfurt, March 5, 2018.

sity would again have visions for a new Afghanistan. However, the example of Najia Ahmad, student of the Faculty of Law and Political Science, suggests that students enjoyed the privileges of those years and refrained from engaging in politics, partly because of the dangers related to it. While many of the narratives of students from the second half of the 1980s resemble those of the students of the late 1960s in their enthusiasm for student life, in the late 1980s, Kabul University had largely lost its role as a center of political activism in Afghanistan. In the end, the civil war destroyed even the last hopes for progress among students. Thus, in the case of Kabul University, the dynamics of the end of the Cold War did not bring new ideas, but rather disillusionment and the depoliticization of the students.

8 Conclusion

Gorky's *Mother* inspired many students at Kabul University in their political activism. My interlocutors did not mention any other book as often and without thinking twice about author and title. With its accounts of Pavel and his mother's activism against an oppressive political system, the novel conveys an atmosphere of hope for and belief in the possibility of change. Gorky describes discussions of literature, conspiratorial meetings, and distributions of leaflets, books, and newspapers. His story evolves around the emotions of the mother, the fear and insecurity, the hope and pride she experiences while becoming part of a political network defined by solidarity, courage, and love. Towards the end of the novel, Pavel is sentenced to exile in Siberia and his mother is arrested while trying to distribute leaflets with her son's speech. This end does not symbolize the failure of their struggles. Instead, it conveys hope despite oppression and hardship: the people who witness the mother's arrest are eager to read her leaflets and she can be certain that the struggle continues.

This study set out to investigate the hopes and aspirations motivating political activists at Kabul University between 1964 and 1992. The narratives of former students, I argue, show how activism evolved around promises of and hope for progress that would eventually lead to social justice, technological advancement, political participation, and thereby to a sovereign and respected Afghanistan. Progress had different meanings to students as they discussed their hopes within ideological frameworks influenced by the global context and which evolved together and in contrast to each other on campus. Promises of progress were not new to politics in Afghanistan, but were clearly enhanced by the Global Cold War. International donors, the local government, and political organizations promised progress and thus shaped the intellectual environment of the university students. They suggested ways to leave perceived backwardness behind and to become part of the progressive and rapidly changing world of an imagined "West".

Various governments of Afghanistan failed to pave the way to the progressive developments that many students embraced with such enthusiasm. These alternatives were promoted by political movements and organizations. They were part of the global galvanization around ideas of social justice, national self-determination, and the deconstruction of local and international power structures during the 1960s and early 1970s. In the long term, however, none of these organizations provided a framework for a peaceful struggle or successfully implementated their ideas. The Cold War turn towards interventionism, the war in Afghanistan, and the brutality of the government and the armed opposition de-romanticized political activism and ideas of progress for students at Kabul University. The Soviet military intervention caused a short wave of open protest in 1980. The repression

https://doi.org/10.1515/ 9783111150543-008

by the government did not leave room for enthusiastic discussions and the creation of positive visions for the future.

In the context of historiography on Afghanistan, this study provides a new perspective on political activism at the university and thereby sheds light on local political and social conflicts. The dynamics of activism among students at Kabul University have only been addressed superficially in other works. My research confirms statements by historians such as Rubin, Dorronsoro, and Arnold, who briefly mention the relevance of political activism at Kabul University.[1] By investigating the activism in more detail, however, I have shown how much more there is to learn from the dynamics of political activities on campus. There was more to student activism than the narrative of naïve students embarking on an intellectual adventure suggests. Theoretical readings and discussions were a central aspect of the activism, and they enabled students to point to political and societal problems and motivated them to take their criticism to the streets.

Relying mainly on written sources, historiography on this period of the history of Afghanistan often focuses on governments and the leaders of political organizations who became relevant in hindsight. From this perspective, student activism seems to be an irrelevant intellectual exercise or a destruction of the attempts by different governments to modernize the country. It is difficult to respect the beliefs of people in the past that have since been proven wrong. And yet, to do so is crucial to understand both past and present societal conflicts. With the combination of a bottom-up perspective and an analysis of the local and global entanglement of power structures and ideas, my research is a contribution to a historiography as advocated by Nile Green and Nivi Manchanda. It questions narratives of foreign domination and the othering of Afghanistan and instead highlights individual agency and the diversity of local perspectives.[2] In the following paragraphs, I will thus summarize how this bottom-up perspective sheds new light on political developments in Afghanistan and helps researchers to understand conflicts between the government and society as well as within society.

Firstly, my discussion of political activism sheds light on conflicts between governments and society. A closer look at the beginning of the open demonstrations of the mid-1960s calls into question the common perception of the Zahir Shah era as a democratic period. Narratives of students who observed and participated in these protests show that the demonstrations were not an expression of democracy but rather a demand for political participation and other rights offi-

1 Arnold 1983, 33–34; Dorronsoro 2005, 68; Rubin 1995, 76.

2 As discussed in introduction. See, for example, Green 2015; Manchanda, 2020.

cially granted by the constitution. Zahir Shah's government did not engage in a dialogue with the protesters, but instead ordered or at least tolerated frequent police violence against students. Similarly, attention to the brutal persecution of (political) enemies by the PDPA in the early 1980s is essential to understand the lack of support for the PDPA government among students: hopes were disappointed not only on an ideological level, but also by violence.

Secondly, the analysis of political activism at Kabul University improves our understanding of conflicts within society. To this end, it is crucial to acknowledge the relevance of the individuals and their agency instead of reproducing conflicts. I discuss the narratives of former students with different and even opposing positions in the activism at Kabul University: Atiq felt that the political activism, while partly justified, damaged the precious education system. Tahera Shams and Zalmai dedicated their student life to the struggle against Zahir Shah's government. Mohammad Osman Halif, in turn, saw their activism as dangerous for Afghanistan and joined Javanan-e Musulman to oppose them. After the coup of 1978, Farzanah hoped to make use of opportunities and change, whereas Hamed Elmi and Sangin Taheri risked their lives for political activism against the PDPA. Najia Ahmad was disillusioned by politics and tried to enjoy her life as a student which was, in the end, destroyed by the war. Together, these memories shed light on the dynamics of political activism at Kabul University. It began with a common perception of injustice creating political awareness and activism, which then became increasingly dominated by enmities between the different groups. After a short period of convergence of the opposition in the early 1980s, activism was suppressed and ended in general disappointment. The question of how a better future for Afghanistan could look remains open, however, and is still relevant for most of my interlocutors.

Throughout the chapters, I have discussed the different motivations and ambitions with which students engaged in political activism. Despite there having been potential interactions by individuals in one of the political organizations' leaderships with international secret services, my interlocutors emphasize their independence from any foreign interference. This study highlights the intensive engagement of students with different narratives of progress in the 1960s and 70s and the ideological basis for opposition to the PDPA regime in the 1980s. These ideological discussions shaped the students' perception of their environments, such as the education system and the socio-economic situation, and its position within a global context.

Intense political discussions and struggles between political movements shaped more than one generation of students at Kabul University. This study gives an impression of debates among students, topics of protests, the organization of demonstrations and strikes, party structures and their role in demon-

strations, and students' perceptions of different governments' reactions to protests. Kabul University was not the only place for political debates, and students were not a driving force in such major political changes as the coups of 1973 and 1978. However, in their large numbers and with their great enthusiasm, students took their demands to the streets and significantly contributed to the spread of political discussions that had previously been confined to relatively small circles of intellectuals. While considering the broad scope of these protests, this thesis' approach provides the space to accept incoherence: each individual negotiated various political ideas and social and societal pressures and thus did not necessarily stick to one ideological line. Despite this incoherence, over time, deep lines of conflict emerged between political organizations. Central discussions included the role of religion in society and politics and the relationship of Afghanistan to different international actors. The analysis of former students' memories of their time at Kabul University during the Global Cold War thus contributes to an understanding of the societal conflicts resulting from a search for an appropriate future for the country.

The trajectories of students' lives and therefore their experiences were strongly influenced by global power structures. As the education system was funded by international donors, students at Kabul University were objects of the geopolitical and ideological competition for influence in Afghanistan. Given the heavy dependency of the different governments on international support, protest against the government was always closely related to criticism of foreign influence in Afghanistan. Additionally, ideologies spread via literature, newspaper, and radio reports, and the influence of students and teachers returning to Afghanistan from stays abroad. Students at Kabul University thus addressed their visions of the future within a framework of global power structures and globally circulating ideas and ideologies. In this way, protests in Kabul were part of the global unrest of the 1960s and its decline in the 1970s and 1980s: in many other countries throughout the world, people challenged the local status quo within the same system of global power structures and with similar access to diverse ideologies.

This study draws on a complex understanding of the Cold War to analyze political activism at Kabul University and at the same time provides an example of the relevance of the Cold War to student activism during this period in general. In the context of historiography on Afghanistan, the narrative of simple East-West binaries continues to dominate. As global historians often rely on existing research in different local contexts, these binaries are reproduced again and again when Afghanistan comes up as a case study for the Cold War. To challenge this approach, I follow Duara's and Westad's understandings of the Cold War as a period of hegemonic power structures dominated by the United States and

the Soviet Union. These power structures were characterized by the competition between two models of progress whose global impact went far beyond the intentions of these superpowers.[3]

Students at Kabul University were galvanized by the promises of progress expressed mainly through development aid. Many of these promises were disappointed, though. Students thus embarked on a search for alternatives. They negotiated the broad range of understandings of Afghanistan's positon in the world and visions for the country's future. These ideas were influenced by persisting imperialism, Cold War binaries, and the solutions suggested by various ideologies. My analysis of political activism in Kabul thus provides a case study of the effects of the Global Cold War, particularly the constitution of the Third World within and in contrast to the superpowers' hegemony.[4]

At the same time, the political activism of students at Kabul University provides a case study for the historiography of the Global 1960s as it reflects the relationship of Cold War promises of progress to the longer history of struggle against imperialism. This study connects two arguments made by scholars in the context of discussions on the Global 1960s. The first is Suri's argument of how promises of progress made in the competition of the superpowers during the Cold War stirred political unrest during the 1960s. Suri made this point mainly in the context of the lack of satisfaction derived from material progress in the US and Western Europe. In the perception of students at Kabul University, I argue, the donors' and governments' promises of progress were not fulfilled in Afghanistan – a development that caused dissatisfaction. This point relates to the second argument, which Christiansen and Scarlett put forward. In the Third World, they point out, the protests of the 1960s were stirred by a wish for inclusion and for the deconstruction of imperial power structures.[5] The combination of these two arguments, the case of students at Kabul University shows, allows for a better understanding of the global dimension of the protests of the 1960s. The discussion of alternative paths towards progress reflects the close relationship between the Cold War's narratives of progress in the Global 1960s, the role of which has been discussed by Suri, and the wish for inclusion by protesters in Third World countries, which Christiansen and Scarlett have emphasized.

Additionally, this book acknowledges the changing dynamics of the Cold War over time. The frequent focus on the ideological binaries of the Cold War suggests a static situation from the beginning of the competition between the USA

3 Duara 2011, 458; Westad 2010, 3.

4 Bradley 2010, 465; Gasbarri 2020, 1; Kalinovsky and Radchenko 2011a, 3.

5 Suri 2009, 47; Suri 2003, 164; Christiansen and Scarlett 2013a, 8–9.

and the Soviet Union until its end around 1990. From this perspective, students acted within the same global ideological framework throughout the almost 30 years considered in this research. With a closer look at student activism in Kabul, however, the changing dynamics of the Cold War become palpable: student activism peaked with the superpowers' attempts to prove the superiority of one of the models of progress and declined with the superpowers' interventionism and disengagement. The intense political discussions and in some cases the violence of ideological conflicts were part of a global development. They were not the result of the inability of people in Afghanistan to have a reasonable discussion, as some of my interlocutors claim, but the consequence of a combination of rapid global developments and local political stagnation. The decline in political activism at Kabul University in the 1980s calls into question the narratives of increasing ideological diversity or the victory of one idea of progress.[6] It highlights how the interventionism of that time suppressed locals' engagement with their own future. These dynamics stress the relevance of the diverse effects of the Global Cold War to local protests.

Overall, my research reflects the importance for historiography to respect different visions for the future, independent of the present and the researchers' own political opinion. The interpretation of Marxist ideas as being principally unsuitable for Afghanistan, for example, is essentializing, as is the general condemnation of Islamism as backwards, or the "rise of Islamism" as a natural reaction to Marxist ideas in a Muslim-majority country. Marxism (in its different interpretations) and Islamism provided ways for some students at Kabul University to formulate their visions for how Afghanistan could become a progressive and respected country.

Despite this inclusiveness, it is certainly not the purpose of this book to legitimate violence. As I have mentioned in many different instances throughout this book, political activists at Kabul University were victims of as well as protagonists in violent conflicts. In several cases, my interlocutors were overwhelmed by the pain caused by recalling the brutality they experienced or witnessed. It should be noted that students who hit or even stabbed their classmates, politicians and policemen who ordered the shooting of peaceful demonstrations, intelligence services and their informants who contributed to the arrests, torture, and execution of political activists, international governments who supplied weapons, and opposition fighters who killed thousands in their power struggles are responsible for the violence they used and for the disillusionment and hopelessness of those who wanted to contribute to a better future for the country.

6 Davis 2019; Ikenberry 2010, 536–37.

Condemning crimes, however, is not the same as generally condemning political activism. It is easy to find fault in the political activism of students at Kabul University. A more productive approach to understand the past is to see the idealistic discussions and possible mistakes of political activists as part of the development of positive visions and hope. This dimension cannot be understood by reducing activism to political organizations or ideologies. The individual memories discussed in this book provide a lively and human account of political activism at Kabul University. They reflect the emotions related to the activism, the hope and disappointment, enthusiasm and fear. It is through these emotions, more so than the political ideas, that students at Kabul University were attracted to Gorky's descriptions of Pavel and his mother's political activism. Such emotions motivated and restrained students at Kabul University in their struggle for a better future for Afghanistan.

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https://doi.org/10.1515/ 9783111150543-010

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