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[THE ETHNO-PHOBIA AND ENDURING VIOLENT CONFLICT IN AFGHANISTAN]

Contents

Summary

❖ The political history of contemporary Afghanistan is mainly characterized by intractable inter and intra- ethnic conflict.

❖ As a multiethnic country, Afghanistan has been governed by one ethnic group almost for its entire history, particularly since 1747 till 1989, [1]

❖ Ethno-phobia in Afghanistan, as an irrational fear, leads not only to dissemination, resentment, hatred, and mistrust but it also fueled long-lasting ethnic conflict,

❖ Ethno-Phobia in Afghanistan stems not only from the current government superficial and inappropriate policy, but it also carries the past ethnocentric legacy of former kings and Amirs,

❖ The past ethnocentric policy entailed to extensive ethnic fragmentation, fear and phobia in Afghanistan.

❖ The Inter-ethnic conflict expanded to various layers of Afghanistan society which it has also fueled ethnic fear and phobia among Afghan people,

❖ As a deeply war-torn and conflict-affected society, ethno-phobia makes Afghanistan potentially vulnerable to at the least another cycle of endless violent conflict, or at worst, possibly Rwandan-style genocide.

❖ The political expedience of Afghan politicians and the passivity of human rights organizations, civil society's institutions and media about ethnic issues will exacerbate the situation,

❖ Afghan media mislead public opinions and strengthen ethnic division. Similar to the Rwandan experience, some of Afghan media incite publics and intentionally manipulate certain ethnic groups, particularly traditional ethnic and tribal communities.

❖ Some of Afghanistan television's broadcasting programs disseminate propaganda publically and frequently, and ignite ethnic resentment and violence,

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[1] Afghanistan is a vexed political unit in its almost entire history. Though as political territory founded in 1880s, but it is commonly said that Ahmad shah Abadali established it in 1747 with having approval of tribal council consisting of most Pashtun tribes.

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- ❖ Given the Pashtun ethno-centric policies in Afghanistan's political history against non-Pashtun ethnic groups, numerous other Pashtuns' rebellion raised from south and eastern parts of Afghanistan have been related to Pashtun-phobia as a recent pervasive side effect,
- ❖ Taliban's barbarian acts like beheading, suicide attacks, hangings and so forth embedded this phobia in various layers of Afghan society,
- ❖ With no clear prospect for peace negotiations, the Afghanistan people fear that the country will drown in another enthno-political and civil war in the near future.

Introduction:

Violent conflicts, particularly ethnic conflicts, have resulted in many millions of people losing their lives in many societies in just the twentieth century. In addition to the loss of life, countless others have lost their limbs, homes, livelihoods or loved ones. Ethnic conflict, among other types is undoubtedly one of the most notable and extremely murderous (David Goetze, 2001).

Afghanistan, with nearly four decades of deadly warfare, is a very concrete example for ethnic conflict which has been labeled globally the forefront of the Cold War, and currently, the war against terror. Particularly in the context of 'the great game': since colonial times, Afghanistan was the battlefield for many players and experienced atrocious ethnic oppression and suppression by internal colonizers, amirs and kings. (Pashtun kings were catalysts and acted as internal colonizers during 'the great game' in the region between Great Britain and Tsarist Russia),

As Afghan scholar, Mr.Nazif Shahrani, asserted in his studies, British India and tsarist Russia made a Pashtun-dominated buffer state: its tribal policies gradually transformed ethnic and cultural differences among peoples of Afghanistan into articulated forms of social fragmentation (Shahrani M. N., 2009). This long-lasting ethnic fear and phobia has affected the entire period of Afghanistan's contemporary history. Thus, the ethno-phobia in Afghanistan's context - like many other societies - is principally an irrational fear that leads to the hatred of another human being or social and ethnic groups based solely on differences (J, 2013). Applying this approach in Afghanistan's context, it is true that the legacy of ethnocentric policy has left extensive fragmentation, fear, phobia and destruction.

At first glance, Afghanistan's ethnic division might seem to have begun with the communist coup in 1978, which ignited the war that continued for 24 years. That was, however, only one part of a big reality, which mainly extends back to the creation of the first modern state under the name of "Afghanistan" more than a century ago (Shahrani N. M., 2002).

In the period preceding the Durrani-Pashtun ascendancy in 1747, the ethnonyms of 'Afghan' and 'Afghanistan' denoted a particular ethnic groups, the predominantly nomadic Pashtuns

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and the particular locality where they resided, the western frontier mountains of the Subcontinent, the Suleiman range (Saikal, 2004). Despite the claims of some Afghan historians, there is no concrete proof to track Afghanistan's political identity as such earlier than the 1880s. Prior to this, of course, Afghanistan did not have any national cohesion or a political identity. Many of its dozens of ethnic groups have long histories of conflict and enmity with one another. Many tribes had more in common up to the recent past with their fellow ethnics across international borders than with their fellow Afghans across the country—or across the street in the major cities (Wahab, 2007).

Hence, the beginning of Afghanistan as a newly established state was also the outset of very intractable intra-ethnic conflict. The new aspect of conflict was mostly political-oriented, continued between various Pashtun tribes, such as the Barakzai, Sadozai, Nurzai and Alizai. Hatred and resentment amongst these various tribes led them to kill, blind, and even make their opponents eunuch, without hesitation. These atrocities happened even between brothers, nephews and the same tribe in very large degree. This is the reason that few kings died by natural death. The whole 19th century included barbarous conflict between the same tribes and opponents of the same ethnic groups. The continuation of this intra-ethnic violent conflict and prevailing hatred lasted to beginning of twenty-first century.

The emergence of Abdul Rrahman Khan was the first and foremost step for internalizing ethnophobia among Afghanistan's multiethnic society. He not only suppressed the Ghalzais tribes' disobedience, but he also silenced the Uzbeks in northern Afghanistan and crushed the Hazaras in central Afghanistan with countless destruction and atrocious mass killings. This was the period in which Pashtunization under the name of state-building and unification was for the first time founded and institutionalized. It was the outset of the current ethnic divisions and genesis of numerous problems within the social and ethnic structure of Afghanistan. The phenomena of ethnic suppression and coercion eventually internalized deep and extensive hatred between the different groups that make up Afghanistan's multiethnic society, which has now become a normal and accepted attitude in the eyes of many Afghan scholars. Dr. Hasan Kakar, one of Afghan's historians, saw the unprecedented atrocities of Abdul Rahman Khan against the Ghalzais, Hazaras, Uzbeks, Shanwaris, Nuristanis and many more ethnic and tribal

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groups as pacification. Moreover, he noted that all the events that happened in nineteenth century made the reign of Abdal-Rahman Khan the most formative period in the history of modern Afghanistan (Kakar M. H., 2006). Dr. Kakar's fabrication of a very concrete and clear reality of Afghanistan's history is not acceptable for the new generation. He is not only unable to see Abdal-Rahman Khan's barbarian policy as the main source of ethno- phobia and mistrust, but he also considers such destructive deeds as formative period in Afghanistan's history.

The integration of Abdal-Rahman Khan's ethnocentric policies was the beginning of violent ethnocentric politics and legitimizing internal colonization amongst Afghanistan's various ethnic groups. The victims of this policy were all Afghans, particularly non-Pashtuns. It institutionalized hatred amongst different ethnic groups and legitimized violence in Afghanistan's politics and power.

The violent integration and ethnocentric politics even intensified under Abdal-Rahman Khan successors, particularly in times of Nader Shah and more recently by Dawood khan. In addition to Abdul-Rahman Khan's significant legacies for building a centralized, ethno-centric nation-state structure in multiethnic Afghanistan, its attendant disasters and for suffering people, have been a number of political practices that form the most significant features of Afghanistan's contemporary political culture. This include personalized and sovereignty-based dynastic rule from Kabul, dominated by the Barakzai clans of the Durrani, allegedly on behalf of all Pashtun tribes. Expressed in the mantra of national unity, a conservative, even reactionary, interpretation of Islam in turn supports the legitimacy of this form of government (Shahrani M. N., 2009).

However, the most prominent legacy of Abdal-Rahman Khan was continued by his successors. Among the heirs, Amanullah Khan seems to be the most acceptable, but he had many notable hidden aspects. One of the disreputable legacies of Amanullah Khan is Naqileen decree which resulted to internal displacement of non-Pashtuns in northern Afghanistan, and confiscation of their lands, belongings and replacement with Pashtuns tribesmen. A massive and systematic resettlement of Pashtun tribesmen to Afghan Turkestan from the southern frontier areas began in the 1930s and continued well into the 1970s. In this process, government officials forcibly

confiscated hundreds of thousands of hectares of fertile, cultivated, and prime pasture lands from the local Uzbeks and Tajiks and distributed them among the Pashtun settlers called *Naqelin* (Shahrani M. N., 2009). Besides deepening social gaps and ethnic fragmentation, this period was the beginning of the authoritative politicization of ethnic identity and hegemonized non-Pashtun ethnic groups through overt state policy. It not only expanded tribalism in northern parts of Afghanistan, but paved the way for primordial ethnic contention in almost all Northern provinces.

The significance of the communist regime era in Afghanistan (1978-1992) and its official policy towards ethnic issues needs little elaboration. An overview of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) can provide an understanding of modern Afghanistan's political history. The PDPA not only administered structural transformation in Afghanistan's society and politics, it also facilitated the invasion of Soviet forces to Afghanistan. Despite the chaos of the 1990s and paving the way for the Taliban's emergence, the PDPA's ethnic policy was praised by many suppressed ethnic and tribal groups. The PDPA's most interesting part was the multiethnic composition . After great shifting in ethnic policy, the Khalqi era of Pashtun-Ghilzai domination, evident in leadership and party as a whole, ended. The Khalqis had not only tried to develop a new ethnic policy, but had tried to replace the Persian language with Pashtu. In contrast to all previous Afghan leaders, Noor Mohammad Taraki as Chairman of the revolutionary council and president of Afghanistan in PDPA's period made all his speeches in Pashtu. After Babrak Karmal rose to the top, the regime moved back to the previous status quo ante. Though Pashtun members continued to have a significant presence in the new coalition, the regime's top figures now included Persian-speaking Kabulis. In an unprecedented initiative Sultan Ali Kishtmand, a Hazara, was appointed as Prime Minister. The party leadership continued to have strong Pashtun-Ghilzai representation, but the Pashtun membership of the party in comparison to Tajiks was a bit lower (Tanin, 1998). At first glance, the whole period and its various transformations indicate that the ethnic factors were a significant in both the failure of PDPA and all consequences thereafter.

The 1990s was full of dreadful events in Afghanistan: the Mujahedeen's triumph, PDPA's fall, the Soviet Union's failure and the appearance of the Taliban all happened in this decade. In this period, all suppression, coercion and misery of Afghanistan's history was repeated once again. It was the period which deepened the embedded ethnophobia, not just between Pashtun and non-Pashtuns, but resentment of Hazara against Tajik and vice-versa, Tajik against Pashtun, Pashtun against Hazara and all against all. It was the period that ethnocentric and totalitarian entity of Afghan politics expanded and proved the very true nature of totalitarianism in throughout Afghan political history. The new coalition of Pashtun-Hazara and Uzbek-Pashtun, regular attacks of Shura-e-Nezar against Hezb-e-Wahdat and the consequent massacre of Hazaras instilled once again the predominant ethnophobia in Afghanistan's society.

In the end, the rise of the Taliban and its barbarian acts was the peak of prevailed hatred and resentment in multiethnic Afghanistan. By killing Hazaras, Uzbeks and Tajiks, the Taliban followed the ethnic cleansing policy in many parts of Afghanistan. The Taliban destroyed and burned most of the Shomali plains, orchards, vineyards and even the irrigation systems. Beside these atrocious acts, the Taliban massacred thousands of mostly Hazara civilians and Uzbeks in 1998 alone (Elizabeth Stites, 2009).

Evolution of ethnophobia

"Ethnophobia" is a newly coined term which has not been common in the public sphere. The term emanates from similar contexts where terms like "xenophobia", "anti-Semitism" and "Islam-phobia" were created and used. Ethnophobia conceptually overlaps xenophobia and similar terms.

Xenophobia is an irrational hatred, resentment and discrimination against others who are perceived as foreigners, outsiders and strangers, or more often those who are in effect part of one's own society but are perceived as incommensurably different from the rest. As it has been historically recorded, the most obvious and widely documented case of xenophobia is that of anti-Semitism, which culminated in the mass killing of around six million European Jews and countless others during World War II. Many form of xenophobia, such as ethnophobia, have been grown during the late twentieth century and early twenty-first century. For instance, migrant Muslim communities, with or without citizenship, are typically the targets of Islam-phobia (William A. Darity Jr., 2008, p. 158) . Ethnophobia is mostly common within multiethnic countries where ethnocentrism or totalitarianism is the main feature of the political system. By definition, ethnophobia is the fear that leads to the hatred of another human being based solely on differences perceived by their exterior appearance (urbandictionary, 201).

Afghanistan as a recognizable political unit has existed since the 1880s, while Abdal Rahman Khan squashed the Hazaras, Uzbeks, Nuristanis and even Pashtun tribes like the Ghalzais under the guise of unification (Saikal, 2004, pp. 10-12). Throughout his reign, Abdul Rahman Khan's goal was to crush the more than 40 tribal resistances in order to institute one nation under one rule. Furthering his so-called newly established regime - and earning him the title of "The Iron Amir" - he forced the relocation of 10,000 Ghalzais families. Moreover, he restricted the movement of migrating tribes so that they could not relocate without the approval of the Afghan government. While implementing his policies for ethnic cleansing and the relocation of ethnic tribes, there was little money left in the vaults of the treasury, so he ordered tax collectors to collect the revenues from across Afghanistan. These tax payments were difficult for the disenfranchised relocated tribes, and those who revolted against the payment of taxes were brutally punished (Runion, 2007, pp. 81-83).

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In historical perspective, Abdul Rahman Khan's so-called unification campaign was the apex of ethnic tensions. It expanded and internalized ethnophobia among many ethnic groups in Afghanistan. For instance, Dr. Kakar said that in 1891, the independent Hazaras of the central highland, the Hazarajat (the place of Hazaras) agreed to the stationing of government officials in their territory. Shortly afterward, government officials and troops were stationed in parts of it, but they oppressed the local population so much the locals (Hazaras) resisted that lasted for three years (Kakar M. H., 2006). It obviously was not the true reason for Abdul Rahman Khan and Hazara's conflict, rather the Amir wanted to suppress the Hazara and expand the power of the newly established Pashtun-centric government. Surprisingly Dr. Kakar noted another reason for the Pashtun-Hazara contention, not as emanating from socio-political and historical construct but an ordinary reason:

> "*Since the Hazara elders had supported the British in the Second Anglo- Afghan war, and since, as Shi'i Muslims, they had been on bad terms with their Sunni neighbors, they were vulnerable, despite their highland terrain. This enabled the Amir to dispatch a large number of troops and militias against them. Ultimately, the Hazaras were overcome; some Durranays and Ghilzays were settled in parts of their land, while their pastures were given to nomads*. (Kakar M. H., 2006)"

Abdul Rahman khan's war against Hazaras, which is named "Pacification of Hazaras", was not only a conventional conflict; but it was also an ethnocide with unprecedented catastrophe, leaving nearly 65% of whole population either killed or fled the country.[2] Killing major part of an ethnic group or forcing them to flee the country with leaving properties or lands were not exceptional case, as seen it has been the dominant pattern in Afghanistan's ethnic politics. Before the great geographical and demographic transformation caused by Abdul Rahman Khan's three years of conflict, provinces like Uruzgan, Zabul, most parts of Qandahar and some others belonged to the Hazaras. As it seems, there is still resistance to investigate the truth about the tragic events that happened during the Amir's campaign, not only against the Hazaras, but against some Pashtun tribes as well as non-Pashtuns. For instance, Dr. Kakar noted in his work that: "*In Uruzgan, of 10,000 Afghan troops, some made 11 fortified villages for*

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[2] I heard this fact in an interview with Ostad Qasim Akghar, an Afghan intellectual who passed away recently.

themselves alone and turned away the inhabitants, while others scattered in different fortified villages and lived with Hazaras. Some soldiers married Hazara women, while others raped women and girls whom they found attractive (Kakar H. , 1971, p. 171). "

The aforementioned atrocities were not the only cases happened during the Amir's campaign; the trend of ethnocentric unification lasted for nearly 90 years. The most obvious example was ethnic cleansing and land confiscations in the early twentieth century by Abdul Rahman Khan's successors. As Shahrani noted in his work, non-Pashtun ethnic groups, like Uzbek, Turkmen, and Tajik populations, were confronted by an official policy of suspicion and contempt, and politics of oppression and internal colonialism, by successive Afghan governments. He adds that:

> *"A massive and systematic resettlement of Pashtun tribesmen to Afghan Turkestan from the southern frontier areas began in the 1930s and continued well into the 1970s. In this process, government officials forcibly confiscated hundreds of thousands of hectares of fertile, cultivated, and prime pasture lands from the local Uzbeks and Tajiks and distributed them among the Pashtun settlers* (Amin Tarzi, 2008)"

Moreover, as Shahrani noted in many works, local informants and recent print media have revealed that land confiscation, appropriations and demographic aggression were accompanied by extensive destruction of cultural artifacts. A well-known ultra-Pashtun nationalist governor, General Wazir Muhammad Gul Khan Muhmand, was responsible for implementation of the Naqelin project, which destroyed architectural, archaeological, toponymic, and literary texts, especially rare manuscripts in Persian, Turki or Chaghatai (literary Uzbek) written by locals. The continued alienation policy conducted by Wazir Muhammad Gul Khan Muhmand was the renaming of countless Uzbek and Tajik places throughout Afghan Turkestan (Amin Tarzi, 2008). The direct consequences of the historical ethnic contention mentioned above have mad covert fear and resentment between and among many ethnic groups. The prominent examples of this phobia are the events of pre- and post-Taliban era in Afghanistan. During the Taliban regime, nearly all Pashtuns supported the Taliban. After falling, those who supported Taliban in the

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northern provinces were faced with unexpected problems after 2001. The most significant problem was the ethnic resentment between the new Pashtun who settled in the northern provinces and the indigenous non-Pashtun who lost their lands and properties in those areas. The central government tried to transform ethnic conflict among indigenous Uzbeks, Turkmens and Tajik on the one hand and Pashtuns on the other, but such efforts not only failed but the fear and phobia was also internalized. Remarkable events happened after 2001, when large numbers of Pashtuns in the north were displaced and waves of ethnically targeted violence began. At the first glance, the Pashtun and non-Pashtun conflict in the northern parts seems to be politically-oriented tension. Deep investigation reveals inter-ethnic land disputes and socio-political contention that date back even further, emanating from the Durrani state's settlement of Pashtuns in the north from the late nineteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries (ICG, 2003).

Ethnic wars in the early 1990s which resulted in emergence of the Taliban are also worth reflecting on. Although the 1990s ethnic war began apparently after Ahmad Shah Masud's refusal to share power with Jihadi parties which took part in Jihad (holy war) against the Soviet Union and its backed regime, but it was not the whole picture. Rather than mental and military context had already been paved the way for such harsh ethnic contention and its ultimate destruction and causalities. Among series of events in this period was the massacre of Hazaras by Masud and Sayaaf's forces in Afshar Kabul (HRW, 2005). When the Taliban emerged, they intensified ethnic contention more widely, specifically by mass killing of Uzbeks and Hazaras in 1998 (Fowler, 2007, pp. 238-240).

Methodology

I have used a qualitative approach in this paper to investigate various sources that foster ethnophobia among different ethnic groups in Afghanistan. Reviewing numerous existing literatures about conflict in Afghanistan, interviewing dozens of Afghan scholar and students, and tracing the role of ethnic factor on Afghan ongoing conflict during the last three years was the sources of my findings and analysis. Prior to writing this paper, I was working on another research study titled: "Youth's radicalization in Afghanistan", focusing on students of universities.

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Along with conducting filed work for the project of youth's radicalization in Afghanistan; I did personal interviews, attitude survey, focus groups discussion and observation to gather data for this paper as well. I also interview dozens of Afghan scholars in order to investigate the issue from different angle.

This type of research topic required a qualitative study. Ethnicity and ethnophobia is not a subject that can be easily measured using quantitative methods, so studying it in a multi-dimensional way necessitated a qualitative method. Therefore, beside the aforementioned tools, library study and a review of various sources were part of the activities for this research.

Despite ethnic sensitivity in Afghanistan, most of interviewees and those scholars I talked with shared their views very openly. Some ideas and insights were really interesting and novel. Although the paper did not follow conventional research methods, the process of inquiry and data collection, and its final findings are significant both for the ordinary reader and for peace workers.

Socio-political fear and fragmentation

As explained in the previous sections, ethnic issues characterize the socio-political relations and institutions between multiethnic Afghan society. The very harsh policy of ethnocentrism and integration held in late 19th and 20th Centuries overshadowed the entire history of contemporary Afghanistan. As Thomas Barfield, the American anthropologist precisely noted, the outstanding social feature of life in Afghanistan is its local tribal or ethnic divisions. People's primary loyalty is to their own kin, village, tribe or ethnic group, generally termed *Qawm*. Afghanistan's population is divided into a myriad of these groups at the local level (Barfield, 2010). Thomas Barfield added an example that systematic and structural ethnocentric policy divided the multiethnic Afghanistan and put some groups in a much victimized condition:

> *As historic victims of prejudice on religious and racial grounds, the Hazaras found social mobility difficult. They ranked at the bottom of Afghanistan's ethnic hierarchy, and were systematically excluded from almost all government positions and educational*

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opportunities by the Pashtun dominated governments. They were particular targets of persecution by the Taliban, but most recently achieved parity with other groups under the constitution of 2004. (Barfield, 2010).

Thus, some western experts have newly noted that regionalization resulted in the ethnic component of Afghan conflict only in 1990s. According to these commentators, it was only in 1990s that each political party was beginning to recruit from a constituency which increasingly comprised a single ethnicity. In 1990s, the political composition on the ground largely reflected that of the major ethnic groups. For instance, Hezb-i Wahdat, unified from eight small parties, was entirely Hazara; Jonbesh was predominantly Uzbek; Jamiyat-i Islami was for the most part Tajik; and the Taliban drew its membership essentially from the Pashtuns (King, 2005).

Moreover, the recent variation of ethnophobia is extremely important and worth reflecting on. After the fall of the Taliban in 2001 and the international community's intervention in Afghanistan, unprecedented opportunity provided for inter- and intra-ethnic interactions. Likewise, social media, internet, schools and universities strengthened social, religious and ethnic interaction among various groups. Afghan legislation and the presence of the global community paved the way for countless local civil society's organizations, political parties and even human rights institutions which questioned the conventional social and ethnic relations. Changes in this realm have been twofold: people first awakened to be aware of their rights, and second, provided fertile ground for opportunist actors to misuse human rights and civil society's values in favor of their ethnic or ideological interest.

Rapid growth and expansion of social media, internet and public media in the last 12 years was another asset for grassroots awareness, which some misused. Changing the foundation of ethnic tensions is one of the side effects which were not predictable at the outset. Students and Afghan scholars I interviewed told me that the positive effects of social media have been undeniable, but those misusing it have deepened ethnic and social division among Afghanistan's people. They all emphasized that social media's usage partially resulting in rising waves of ethnic resentment and fear among educated people.

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The Taliban's access to internet and social media was the eminent dimension of the following terroristic, socio-political oriented and resentment expansion among Afghan ethnic groups during human rights discourse. Internet was a good tool for the Taliban to expand outreach to their affiliated groups and allowed them to communicate with wider audiences across the country. They effectively mobilized most of Pashtun grassroots by instigating them through ideological promises and revival of ethnic superiority once again in Afghanistan. To misrepresent facts and figures is the most effective means for dividing the people. Neither former Afghan governments, nor the Taliban itself urges for taking a national census to show the superiority of certain ethnic group as it is politically sensitive. The main reason for this is concern it would challenge the existing claims for which groups are the majority and which are the minority. Although the national census discloses the reality, in the same time it can also intensify competition among the various ethnic groups to show the largest population. As one observer noted, the lack of prewar data, the inherent problems of undertaking research in a war-zone country like Afghanistan, and the low priority accorded to this country before September 11, 2001, have all contributed to the difficulties of research and of completing a census (Riphenburg, 2004). Having correct and statistical data at least helps to find a clear picture of Afghanistan's population, and it can also clarify the exact proportion of each ethnic group in the country.

Most interviewees nonetheless asserted that the mainstream attitudes in the eastern and southern parts of Afghanistan regarding to non-Pashtun people are not positive. This attitude particularly deepened after intervention of United States and North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) countries in 2001. Considering the prevalent negative attitudes among Pashtuns in aforementioned parts of Afghanistan, it is undeniable that they think of non-Pashtuns as foreign supporters who seek to dismantle Pashtun superiority. The Taliban's fall by United States and anti-Taliban forces (mostly from northern alliance forces) is one of proves which grassroots and pro-Taliban circles have frequently resorted on. Regardless of the events of September 11, 2001, in which the Taliban was directly responsible, most people of the southern and eastern parts of Afghanistan neither condemned Taliban's activities, not heeded

justification for Taliban's cooperation with perpetrators. This different outlook based on ethnic and political expediency uncovered the deepest gap between ethnic groups in Afghanistan. Furthermore, Hekmatyar's declaration, published statements, and recent messages revealed his hatred towards non-Pashtuns, particularly Hazaras. In one of the recent declarations, Hekmatyar warned Hazaras for the price of their supporting the government and its international allies. He said that:

> *"The time will come when the oppressed people of Afghanistan will stand for taking their usurped rights and then the [Hazaras] will have no safe havens in any corner of the country* (outlookafghanistan, 2013)*"*

Likewise, measurable indicators of the level and intensity of ethnophobia and resentment are televised debates or even conventional programs. Most of private TV's programs clearly exhibit their covert objectives which not only violates free and fairness of professional journalism, but also deepens ethnic mistrust and contention. A famous Afghan general dehumanized non-Pashtuns and insulted them publicly while talked as a commentator on a private television program recently (Gen.Taqat, 2013) .

Fragile Ethno-nationalism

In more recent cases of nation-state, a national identity already exists, and political actors are trying to shape it, rather than create it (Norman, 2006). Unlike, in Afghanistan, the internal colonialism, particularly Pashtun tribalism, as much as foreign colonialism, was the major feature of the development of nationalism. Thus, Afghan nationalism developed in tandem with state power and state control over the multiethnic country. As noted earlier the first innovation of centralism and ethnocentric nationalism began in Abdal-Rahman Khan's time in the 1880s. Military pressure, internal colonialism, harsh suppression and coercion were the main tools for integration of various ethnic groups (Hyman, 2011). The term "Afghan" gradually became the name of every citizen living in Afghanistan, while in daily communication it remained synonymous with Pashto-speakers.   Non-Pashtun inhabitants of Afghanistan commonly used their respective identifying labels of race and language, such as Uzbek, Hazara, Tajik, and Farsiwan or of region as Badakhshi, Herati, Panjsheri and Ghaznichi (Hyman, 2011). In

the period of this socio-political and historical process, the lack of ethnic and even linguistic homogeneity of the country was reflected in the state's policy and national building projects. The deliberate forging of identities in the course of Afghanistan's nation-building neither reinforced the dominant ethnic superiority, nor made stronger the so-called national identity. Rather this failed project left numerous unintended consequences, including continued fragility, instability and enduring ethnic contention.

Widespread discrimination and hatred

Pervasive intergroup conflict continues to make national and international headlines, and acts of ethnic discrimination are not restricted by gender or age. Discrimination is chiefly a behavioral process; the actions, not the mind, make discriminations. In spite of one's intellectual knowledge that similar-appearing people can be quite different, it is hard to get rid of aversive feelings upon facing a new person similar in appearance or mannerisms to another individual with whom one had a frightening experience (Chin, 2004).

Discriminating against other ethnic groups and favoring one's own ethnicity is not a new issue in Afghanistan; rather it is one of the most challenging and enduring obstacles to drafting and enacting laws, regulations and policies. The dominant opinion says that favoring members of one's own ethnic group was developed along with formation of the country. Unquestionable evidence for proving this common belief is Afghanistan's history from 1747 till 1979, when it was governed only by one ethnic group (M.F.Moonzajer, 2012). Discrimination in current Afghanistan, like many societies, continues and is usually justified on the pretext of national interest, unity or various other reasons. It is said that "*good patriotism and bad nationalism are not so simply distinguished*" (Wright, 2008). There are many such ultra-ethnic patriots at the top level of government, even at the policy making level in Afghanistan who hate others only for belonging to a different ethnic group. They quite often consider the rest as strangers or newcomers. Despite repeated instances on having no biased treatment or discrimination at the policy level in Afghanistan, there are countless cases of discriminatory behavior at the socio-political and economic levels. The discriminatory side of Afghanistan when one is applying for a

job, or trying to address administrative issues in governmental departments. Belonging to a specific ethnic group or being from a certain places provides firm guaranty of finding a job or appropriate position in governmental organizations. Preferences for certain ethnic groups and being from particular provinces are clear without extra elaboration. Preferential fiscal policies and designation of annual budgets for every province is a clear example of embedded discrimination in Afghanistan politics. Allocations for development budgets for different provinces demonstrate the institutional discrimination among even top level of Afghan elites. Discriminatory beliefs and behaviors are not limited to certain parts of Afghan society and political system; it is extremely pervasive and extensive everywhere. Among all, the significance of ethnic identity in discriminatory social interaction is worth reflecting on. While there has not been any national census or any rational justification, even Afghanistan's national army structured based on ethnic preferences, such as ethnic quotas for officers: 40-45 percent Pashtun, 30-35 percent Tajik, 10-12 percent Hazara and 8-10 percent Uzbek and other groups (CBSNEWS, 2010). Structural inequalities may also be addressed through policies that ensure that reparations be made for past and continuing injustices (Chin, 2004). Regardless of the ability, commitment and interest of individual soldiers, it is a big question if Afghan national army could shape and improve professionally. It is not only the Finance Ministry which designates annual budget unequally, the Defense Ministry, and even the Ministry of the Interior also neglects professionalism and having nation-wide army and police.

Conclusion

Over a period of only one hundred days, nearly one million people lost their lives in the genocide and war in Rwanda, making it one of the most atrocious waves of killing in recorded history. The genocide in Rwanda represents one of the clearest cases of genocide that ever has been experienced. Chronologically, from early April 1994 through mid-July 1994, members of majority Hutu ethnic group systematically slaughtered members of the Tutsi ethnic minority. Fearing the loss of power in the face of a democracy movement and a civil war, the extremist Hutu regime sought to eliminate all the moderate Hutu as well as all Tutsi it perceived as

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threats to its authority. After Tutsi rebel army's occupying the country and droving the genocidal regime into exile, the genocide ended (Dinah L. Shelton, 2005).

Afghanistan, as a deeply war-torn and conflict-affected society, is potentially vulnerable, if not for a Rwandan-style genocide, at least for another cycle of endless violent conflict. Ethnic, sectarian, tribal and local interest and preferences are the most crucial factors to deescalating Afghan conflicts. Ethnic tensions are a top factor driving social and ethnic contention in Afghanistan. Neither Afghan politicians, nor newly established organization like human rights and civil society's institutions and media effectively work to avoid occurrence of such events. As explained in details earlier, instead of taking preventive measures, some of the Afghan media mislead public opinions and strengthen ethnic division.   In Rwanda, public radio was used to incite and intentionally manipulate the closed society. The same is going in some of Afghanistan's television broadcasting, which frequently disseminates propaganda and encourages stereotypes, and ignites ethnic resentment and violence.

Given the Pashtun ethnocentric policy against non-Pashtun groups, the most recent pervasive side effect has been Pashtuno-phobia among Afghan people. Taliban's barbarian acts like beheading, suicide attacks, hangings and so forth embedded this phobia in various layers of Afghan society. The reemergence of Taliban after the United States and NATO's intervention renewed fear of the Taliban's triumph and taking over Afghan again. Pashtuno-phobia rose, as explained before is undoubtedly an irrational hatred and resentment which stereotypes Pashtun as violent, dangerous and gristly people. Perceiving the Pashtuns as ghastly ethnic groups not only emanates from the Taliban's experience and harsh ethnocentric policy, but it also comes from the propagandas of social and public media.

Historically the problematic claim of Pashtun superiority over the rest has turned into a virtual demand by their elites. The justifications offered for this demand have been twofold: first, that Pashtun rulers were the founders of the modern state of Afghanistan, and second, that they constitute a demographic majority, though a census has never been taken. The eminent right of sovereignty, other than how violently rulers have dealt with their political opponents (real or imagined), is the right to appoint, promote, demote and dismiss all government officials, from cabinet ministers to the lowest local administrators, within a centralized system of rule

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(Shahrani.M.N, 2009). In practice, this pervasive ethnocentric approach strongly frightened non-Pashtuns for what they call Pashtun's violence and endless avarice.

Contemporary Afghanistan carries the horrifying shadows of past legacies, as ethnic cleansing, land confiscation and massive relocation happened extensively in early twentieth century. Non-Pashtun's confronting by an official policy of suspicion and contempt, and an ethnic politics of oppression and internal colonialism, taken by former Afghan governments are not forgotten in collective memory. Among them, one of thousands of examples is the massive and systematic resettlement of Pashtun tribesmen to northern parts of Afghanistan, which happened only some decades ago. Confiscation of hundreds of thousands of hectacres of fertile and cultivated land, and prime pasture areas taken from local Uzbeks, Hazaras and Tajiks are the examples of unforgettable ethnic cleansing and conflict.

Moreover, like embedded memory, the role of media in current dissemination of ethnic resentment among various groups has been crucial. Since 2001, the rapid growth of social media, and public media and expansion of internet was an asset for grassroots awareness. However, the misuse of media resulted in shifting the ground of ethnic tensions. Most of the Afghan scholars and students I talked to identified the positive effects of social media, but at the same time they said that misusing of media for resentment expansion is undeniable. As recent talks and debates in some ultra-ethnic affiliated media show, the consequences have partially entailed the rising of new waves of ethnic resentment and fear, not among educated people, but the grassroots as well.

The Taliban's access to internet and social media is the most effective tool of hatred and phobia among Afghans, as the use it to expand fear and resentment. Furthermore, the Taliban appeals to Pashtun's grassroots through ideological promises and a revival of notions of ethnic superiority. This in turn keeps alive ethnic contention. To reject facts and figures, the Taliban has been very successful in hunting people based on ethnic interests.

At the end, the interrelation of ethnophobia and violence in Afghanistan is a topic that must be deeply investigated. Further investigation on how resentment between various ethnic groups is fostered and disseminated, and its direct impact on long-lasting violent conflict in Afghanistan, can undoubtedly help peace-workers and policy makers to find appropriate and functional

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resolutions. I have chosen the interconnection of ethnic issues with Afghan conflict in the hope it will lead to a new approach to resolving Afghanistan's crisis.

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