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Afghanistan's Early Reformists

Mahmud Tarzi's ideas and their influence on the Wesh Zalmian movement

Author's remark: This paper was initially presented at the ,International conference on Allama Mahmoud Tarzi and Mohammad Wali Khan Darwazi in Kabul', held on 23-24 August 2008 in Kabul, which was organised by Afghanistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It is published now as the first of AAN's Occasional Papers series. The paper addresses the influence of the thoughts of Afghan nationalist and moderniser Mahmud Tarzi (1865-1933) on Afghanistan's 1940-50s pro-democratic opposition movement, the Wesh Zalmian (*Awakened Youth*).

In 1958/1337, after years of government-imposed silence on Mahmud Tarzi, Afghan scholar Muhammad Haidar Zhubal mentioned this key figure of 20th century Afghan history, for the first time again in the public media. Zhubal called Tarzi the 'father of (Afghan) press'. For Vartan Gregorian, who's book *The Emergence of Modern Afghanistan* is probably the most important Western contribution to research on Tarzi, *Seraj-ul-Akhbar*, the newspaper he edited from 1911 to 1918, is the 'first successful newsmedium [sic] in modern Afghan history'. By also calling him and the Young Afghan movement 'proselytizers of

modernism' he indicated that there is much more to Tarzi and *Seraj-ul-Akhbar* than journalism.¹

By way of this newspaper, Mahmud Tarzi became a translator for ideas on modernisation, inspired by events in the Ottoman Empire and Europe, into Afghan languages. His newspaper constituted a beacon of the Young Afghan movement's ideas that he contributed to and shaped like no one else.

Most importantly, Tarzi and the Young Afghans, in *Seraj-ul-Akhbar*, defined Afghan nationalism.² They aspired to create an Afghan identity that would go beyond notions of (sub-national) tribal and ethnic contexts, and to generate a positive feeling amongst Afghans about being part of the Afghan nation. Tarzi and the Young Afghans saw "fatherland" (*watan*), "nation" (*millat*), "state" (*daulat*) and "religion" (*din*) as the indispensable elements of each Afghan's existence. To prove that the Islam notion of the 'umma does not contradict

¹ Muhammad Haidar Zhubal, 'Mahmud Tarzi, padar-e matbu'at', in: *Irfan* (Kabul) 1958; Vartan Gregorian, *The Emergence of Modern Afghanistan, Politics of Reform and Modernization, 1880-1946*, Stanford University Press, 1969, p. 163; Vartan Gregorian, 'Mahmud Tarzi and Saraj-ul-Akhbar: Ideology of Nationalism and Modernization in Afghanistan', in: *Middle East Journal* XXI (1967), p. 350.

² Gregorian, *Mahmud Tarzi and Saraj-ul-Akhbar...* [see footnote 1], pp. 360-2.

nationalism, they took recourse to a well-known *hadith*: 'Hubb al-watan min al-iman' ('The love of the fatherland is embodied in faith.') These were concepts which today we would label 'nation-building'.

A keyword in the Young Afghan's struggle was 'independence'. Their movement was active in the period after the 1879 Gandamak treaty (with Great Britain) that had cost Afghanistan its independence in foreign affairs and, after the drawing of the Durand Line, large Pashtun-inhabited areas, today belonging to Pakistan. Up to 1919, independence was the primary political goal of the Young Afghan movement. In that year, their leader Prince Amanullah ascended to the Afghan throne, becoming Amanullah Khan and later King Amanullah. A second Young Afghan keyword was 'education', seen by the movement as the major driving force for modernisation. Afghans, they argued, had to become aware of belonging to an Afghan nation through education. In their view, this also necessitated support for the education of women who, due to their role in bringing up children, could lay the foundations of patriotic feelings in future generations. The Young Afghans used references to the glorious Islamic past of their country to justify this bold position – by pointing to the role of women in the Abbasid caliphate (750 – 1258) as poets, as holders of public offices etc.³

For the Young Afghans, modernization did not mean blindly copying the West, or *gharbzadegi* as the great Iranian Al-e Ahmad called it. Tarzi and the Young Afghans were extremely critical of Western colonialism. They took the side of the Muslims in conflicts like the Italian-Turkish war of 1911/12 and condemned atrocities committed against fellow Muslims. At the same time, they looked beyond Islam (and Pan-Islamism) and promoted a wider Asian solidarity, or Pan-Asianism, by quoting the advance of Japan and other non-Muslim Asian peoples as potential examples for Afghanistan. Perhaps, this can be seen as an early form of *third-worldism*.

In order to promote Afghan nationalism, the Young Afghans were strongly in favour of studying and publicising about Afghan history, of archaeological surveys of the country and of the development of the Pashto language as unifying factors. From today's perspective, when Afghan ethnicisms are growing again, the promotion of Pashto could be perceived as promoting the ethno-nationalism of

³ Quoted from: S. Imomov, *Iz istorii obshchestvennoi mysli Afganistana* [From the history of Afghanistan's social thinking], Moscow: Mysl, 1982, p. 149, in: Amin Saikal, *Modern Afghanistan, A History of Struggle and Survival*, London & New York: I.B. Tauris, 2004, p. 274.

this particular group to the disadvantage of other Afghan ethnic groups. But in the context of the early 20th century, these initiatives can be interpreted as emancipatory: Many in the Afghan elite did not speak the Pashto language properly or at all at that time, and its official use was not developed. It is possible that, in the context of developing a nationalism that referred to Afghanistan as a whole (as opposed to Afghan or Pashtun nationalism), the Pashto language was seen by Mahmud Tarzi and the Young Afghans as a main feature that would distinguish the Afghan nation from its neighbour Iran with which Afghanistan shares partially a common history and culture and its second major language, Dari (Farsi).

Another Young Afghan key term, not often noticed though, is the rule of law which included equality between all citizens in the framework of constitutionalism. These principles were enshrined for the first time in Amanullah's 1923 constitution, the *nezam-name*. But, more practically, the rule of law were also seen as an effective instrument to counter administrative corruption which already had been a problem of those days. 'The laws are developed not for the benefit of *khans* and *maliks*, officials and princes, but to allow the most oppressed and impoverished strata of society to lead a quiet and happy life' wrote Tarzi in *Aman-e Afghan*, the government-run successor paper to *Seraj-ul-Akhbar*. Another, even earlier quote from an article titled 'Aman wa Asayesh' in *Seraj-ul-Akhbar* sounds equally familiar and up-to-date: '(W)hen he [a new governor] is appointed, he is so indigent and unfortunate that he has to borrow money to hire horses and help [to reach] his place of provincial appointment. The moment he reaches there, he becomes a man-devouring snake, an *azhdaha*, if you will! ...He becomes the owner of a stable full of horses! flocks and flocks of small animals! rows and rows of camels! – bundles and bundles of cash! houses full of boxes and goods!'⁴

In contrast to Zhobal, Amin Saikal's characterisation of Mahmud Tarzi as 'the instigator and mentor of the Young Afghans' and Mir Ghulam Muhammad Ghubar's definition of *Seraj-ul-Akhbar* and the Young Afghan movement as '*markaz-e alani-ye azadikhwahan wa islah-talaban*' ('the open center of liberation fighters and reformist') describes them in a more correct, broader, political way. The accuracy of Saikal's and Ghubar's definitions cannot be better reflected than by their

⁴ Quoted from: M. Nazif Shahrani, 'State Building and Social Fragmentation in Afghanistan. A Historical Perspective', in: Ali Banuazizi/Myron Weiner (Eds.), *The State, Religion, and Ethnic Politics. Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan*, Lahore, Islamabad, Karachi: Vanguard, 1987, p. 42.

opponents' assessment of how influential Tarzi personally was: When the Shinwari tribe in eastern Afghanistan rose against Amanullah in 1928, its leaders issued a list of demands which included the expulsion (again) of the Tarzi family from Afghanistan; Mahmud Tarzi himself was supposed to be put on trial.⁵

It has often been argued that the Young Afghan reforms, instigated by Tarzi and implemented during King Amanullah's reign (1919-29), had failed. This might be the case, if one looks only at their short-term outcome. Indeed, the reforms were stopped and even reversed under his short-lived successor Habibullah II (also known as Bacha-ye Saqao, the Watercarrier's Son) and King Muhammad Nader Shah (1929-33) who followed a much more conservative course and tried not to upset the Ulema again.

There has been a remarkably strong impact of the Young Afghan reforms, however, over the longer term: they triggered notable changes in Afghan society throughout the 20th century, first of all in the field of education. Between 1918 and 1928, Afghanistan's expenses for education grew 1000-fold. Each district received one basic school at least, with 40,000 students in 1928, and each province at least one secondary school for the first time. Education was made free-of-charge.⁶ Access to education was not limited to the court, the aristocracy and the Ulema any more. The urban middle-classes and tribal leaders sent their sons (under Amanullah also some daughters – there were 800 girls in school in 1928) to the new schools. Those educated descendants of tribal leaders traditionally kept their links to their tribal origins even after they entered the state bureaucracy and settled down in Kabul or other cities. This way, modern thoughts slowly also penetrated the tribal society. As a result of the Young Afghans' educational reforms, the educated class grew considerably over the following decades.

This educated class (often called the *roshanfikran* in Afghanistan) became the breeding ground for the re-emergence of a reformist political movement in the late 1940s and early 1950s. It picked up the ideas and political demands formulated by the first constitutional movement (*mashrutiat*) and the Young Afghans. For this

movement I use the term 'Wesh Zalmian'⁷ under which it started to influence and possibly even dominate the political debate at least in the Afghan cities towards the end of the 1940s.

THE WESH ZALMIAN MOVEMENT AND ITS IDEAS⁸

The Wesh Zalmian were a current consisting of different initially cultural-political groupings in the 1940/50s that became politicised more and more in the early 1950s. In its formative phase – between the publication of the special issue (nos. 211-212) in 1326/1947 of *Kabul* magazine under the bilingual headline 'Wesh Zalmian/Jawanan-e Bedar'⁹ and the establishment of the political movement under this name in 1327/1948 -, it called itself a 'social tendency with political character'. It was ethnically diverse, pursued broader reformist aims, including demands for a constitution, and evolved into an organised political movement. In 1950, it generated Afghanistan's first political parties who crystallised around some independent publications, another first in Afghan history.¹⁰ Some Wesh Zalmian leaders were elected into parliament.

⁷ Pashto: Awakened Youth (the Dari term used by the movement was *Jawanan-e Bedar*)

⁸ In this part, I mainly draw from my 1985 diploma thesis: Thomas Ruttig, *Zur Bedeutung der bürgerlichen Oppositionsbewegung der 50er Jahre unseres Jahrhunderts für die Formierung progressiver politischer Kräfte in Afghanistan* [On the significance of the civil opposition movement for the formation of progressive political forces in Afghanistan], Berlin: Humboldt-Universität, 1985 and from my later paper: *Islamists, Leftists – and a Void in the Center. Afghanistan's Political Parties and where they come from (1902-2006)*, Kabul: Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, 2006 (http://www.kas.de/proj/home/pub/80/1/dokument_id-9674/index.html). On the spelling: In the present paper, I consistently use Wesh Zalmian, not Wesh Dalmian as it would be correct. (In Pashto, 'dz' is a separate consonant from 'z' that does not exist in Dari. Even many Pashtun Wesh Zalmian members wrote the word with a 'z'.)

⁹ See: Thomas Ruttig, *op. cit.*; Muhammad Alam Batsarkai, *Wesh Zalmian: De Afghanistan yau siasi tahrak (1325-1350)* [The Wesh Zalmian, A Political Movement of Afghanistan], [Netherlands], 1379 (2000).

¹⁰ Ghubar calls the different secret constitutional groups at the court and outside 'parties'. But there is no source that indicates that these groups considered themselves political parties or even called themselves so. Some authors call those and later groups 'party nuclei' (Wahedi) or 'proto-parties' (Boyko). See: Taqi Wahedi, 'Diruz wa imruz-e ahzab-e Afghani' [The Yesterday and Today of Afghan Parties], In: *Khat-e sewum* (Meshhed), no. 2-3 (spring/summer 1382=2003), p. 97; Vladimir

⁵ Saikal, *op. cit.*, p. 87. The Tarzi family had already been exiled under King Amanullah's predecessor and father Habibullah.

⁶ Barnett R. Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995, p. 310; Gregorian, *The Emergence...*, pp. 240-2, 355-7.

The movement benefited from the more liberal policies pursued by the new Prime Minister Shah Mahmud who was appointed by King Muhammad Zaher in 1946, replacing his more restrictive brother Muhammad Hashem Khan. Shah Mahmud pardoned still imprisoned or exiled Young Afghan leaders. Some of them immediately were given high governmental offices – a parallel to Amanullah who integrated activists of the first constitutional movement into his regime. The most prominent examples were those of Mir Seyyed Muhammad Qasem who directly became Minister of Justice upon leaving jail and of Abdul Hadi Dawe who was made an official at the court and elected speaker of the Lower House in 1949.

Shah Mahmud stopped his predecessors' practices of openly interfering in elections and allowed a relatively free political competition for the 1949 parliamentary campaign. For the first time, secret ballots were used during these elections.¹¹ One year before, the first pluralistic – although indirect - elections for the office of the Kabul mayor were held.¹² The government also signed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Later, this time was dubbed Afghanistan's 'first democratic period', as compared to the 'decade of democracy', or second democratic period, starting with the enforcement with the new constitution of 1964 and the Daud coup of 1973.¹³

The origins of the Wesh Zalmian movement go back to the 1930s and even the 1920s. It emerged from a cultural-linguistic (Pashto) movement that had gathered pace by the mid-1930s and was driven by the first generation of Pashtun intellectuals not linked to the Muhammadzai tribal aristocracy from which the Afghan monarchy had emerged.

This also was a result of Amanullah's educational reforms. Still in Amanullah's time, in 1302/1923, the *Maraka de Pashto* (Pashto Convention) was established at the court to promote this language. Literary societies (*anjumanha-ye adabi*) sprang up

in Kabul (1931), Kandahar and Herat (both 1932) to popularise both Dari and Pashto literature, to codify their orthographies and scientific termini, to translate scientific literature etc.

The *Pashto Anjuman-e Adabi* in Kandahar was initiated by Muhammad Gul Khan Momand, Minister of Interior from 1930 to 1939.¹⁴ It counted Mawlawi Saleh Muhammad Khan, a former Young Afghan (and the country's first Pashto teacher) and Abdulhai Habibi, one of Afghanistan's leading historians and writers, amongst its members. Going beyond cultural and linguistic issues, these societies declared in their statutes that they would also aim for 'mobilising the intellectuals' and 'strengthening their patriotic thoughts'. In 1937, the three societies were merged into the *Pashto Tolena*, or 'Pashto Society', based in Kabul on the urging of the government.¹⁵ In its journal *Kabul*, they soon started to discuss social and political issues. The president of the Pashto Tolena Abdurrauf Benawa also promoted a renewal in literature proclaiming that the (classical) poetry of '*gul wa bulbul*' (rose and nightingale) was over, turning to social and political issues.

At the same time, and driven by government policy, the emphasis on Pashto became stronger again. An edict of King Muhammad Zaher dated 12. Aqrab 1315 (3 November 1936) had officially elevated Pashto as the second official language, equal to Dari. All state employees were required to learn Pashto within three years. The Pashto Tolena was made responsible for the implementation of this edict.

Initially, the term Wesh Zalmian was not the name of an organisation. Its singular, *wesh zalmai* (awakened young man), stood for the moral ideals a member of the movement should embody and the aims he or she¹⁶ should strive for. Most probably, the term stems from a poem by Nek Muhammad Feda'i Milani titled '*Wesh zalmi ba tol shi*' ('The awakened youth will gather'), published in Kabul in September 1947. It partially reads:

Boyko, 'The Origins of Political Parties in Contemporary Afghanistan in the Light of New Archival Data', *Central Asia Journal* No. 46 (Summer 2000), p. 196.

¹¹ Wahedi, *op. cit.*, p. 96; Rassoul Rahim, *The democracy movement in Afghanistan – fragmented and in lack of funds*. A political analysis by Rassoul Rahim, manuscript, [Kabul], n.d., p. 1.

¹² Abdulhamid Mubarez, *Tahlil-e waq'e'at.e siasi-ye Afghanistan 1919-1996* [Analysis of Afghanistan's Political Realities 1919-1996], [Kabul] 1375 (1996).

¹³ Zaher Tanin, *Afghanistan dar qarn-e bistum 1900-1996* [Afghanistan in the Twentieth Century], Tehran 1383 (2004), p. 86ff. Wahedi, in order to point out the continuity, calls it the third *mashrutiat*. *Op. cit.*, p. 97.

¹⁴ Z. Zewar, *De Pashto adabiato tarikh: Osenei daura* [History of Pashto Literature – The Current Period], Kabul 1360 (1981), p. 83; Habibullah Rafi, 'De Pashto tserene au palene markazuna' [Centers of Pashto Studies and Fosterage], In: *Jumhuri Palwasha* (Kabul) 2/1355 (1976), pp. 5-7.

¹⁵ Pashto Tolena (ed.), *De Pashto Tolene tarikhcha 1316-1356* [Short History of the Pashto Society 1927-1977], Kabul 1356 (1977).

¹⁶ There female contributors to the *wesh zalmai* discussion were: Ms. Homaira, Ms. Hamida, Ms. Maga Rahmani, Ms. Rabea Hairat.

'The time of sleep is gone (...),
the awakened youths will gather
and bring the intricate affairs in order
Over is the time we existed solitarily'¹⁷

The discussion about the meaning of *wesh zalmi/wesh zalmian* took place in various Afghan newspapers and magazine. Because of the broad interest it generated, Pashto Tolena president Benawa decided to collect those articles and publicise them in a compact form in *Kabul* magazine. *Kabul's* editor-in-chief Yar Muhammad Nezami, in his own contribution, explained the aim of this exercise: to communicate 'what opinions the people of our country hold about the youth, which duties the young people have and which services the fatherland expects from them'.¹⁸

The result was the publication of the *Kabul 'Wesh Zalmian/Jawan-e Bedar'*¹⁹ special issue. It contains articles and poems by 44 authors, among them four women, and also of a few representatives of the government and the clergy. Most of them (not those by the women and a few others) are accompanied by a photograph of the author. The collection is preceded by a picture of the King, a short poem and a two-line verse. The former one, titled, '*Wesh zalmi depara*' ('For the Awakened Young Man'), is by Abdulhadi Dawe, the former Young Afghan then employed at the court, the latter one by Khushhal Khan Khattak (1613-89), the Pashtun national poet. This selection strongly indicated in which tradition the *Wesh Zalmian* saw themselves and which historical sources they referred to. Dawe's poem, in particular, symbolises the continuity of the Afghan reformist movement.

On many occasions, the tone and the content of this collection of articles is strikingly reminiscent of Tarzi's writings, of his analysis of the country's backwardness and need for reform. The same key words, ideals and remedies were invoked again. The *Wesh Zalmian* emphasised the need for modernisation and rule of law. Afghanistan, the 'most backward amongst the nations of the world', one author demanded, 'at least must catch up with its neighbours in the fields of science, art, industry, commerce, technology and agriculture'. While features of western civilisation had reached the rich, 'the people in those cities, in their abysses, in

their suburbs and, first of all, in the villages' led 'medieval lives'. Meanwhile, 'a large part of the youth has occupied official chairs and trample the rights of the majority under their feet'. The youth only faces examples 'of sycophancy and selfishness, lies and corruption, indifference vis-à-vis the future of the society and the country' amongst the governing class; 'khans, maleks and other influential people' treat 'the country and the people without interest'.²⁰ In order to achieve modernisation, according to Ghulam Hassan Safi, national unity had to be achieved, based on Tarzi's four pillars: '*din, watan, millat, hukumat*' (religion, fatherland, nation or people, government). Nezami speaks of a 'progressive government (...) under the banner of the holy religion of Islam and the flag of Afghandom' (*afghaniat*). Mahmudi, representative of the Shia minority, adds the dimensions of equality and citizenship: 'Each person that dwells in this geographical place called Afghanistan is called Afghan and is entitled to equal rights and there is no difference between any person in this country from north to south and from east to west.' Benawa not only addressed his like-minded brothers but also the '*wesho mermano*' ('awakened women').²¹ On the other side, there were ethno-nationalist undertones exclusively emphasising Pashtun history and language.

Later, in 1947, the main protagonists of this discussion launched a – still loosely structured – movement called *Wesh Zalmian*, referring to its manifesto '*Wesh Zalmian ghwaru*', or 'We want an Awake Youth'.²² This important historical document was drafted and published by Benawa on the basis of the collected contributions of the *Wesh Zalmian/Jawan-e Bedar Kabul* issue. The decision for turning it in to a political party was taken in a meeting of a small group consisting of Benawa, Gul Pacha Ulfat, Seyyed Shamsuddin Majruh and Muhammad Karim Nazihi in the month of Assad 1326 (July/August 1947). Subsequently, the participants drew in Ghubar, Dr. Mahmudi, Mir

¹⁷ Nek Muhammad Feda'i Milani, 'Wesh zalmi ba tol shi' [The Awakened Youths Will Gather], in: *Kabul* (Kabul) 8/1326 (1947), p.13.

¹⁸ Yar Muhammad Nezami, 'Jawan-e haqiqi, jawan-e nemayeshi' [True Youth, Pretending Youth], in: *Wesh Zalmian/Jawan-e Bedar, Kabul* (Kabul) 211/212 (1326/1947), p. 173.

¹⁹ See: Thomas Ruttig, *op. cit.*, for a more detailed discussion, the list of contributors etc.

²⁰ Abdurrahman Mahmudi, 'Jawan kist?' [Who Is a Youth?], in: *Kabul* (Kabul) no. 211-2 (1947), p. 85; Abdulhai Habibi, 'Khod-ra be-shenas!' [Know Yourself!], *op. cit.*, p. 70; Rashid Latifi, 'Ah, az jawan wa jawani!' [Woe betide the Young and the Youth!], *op. cit.*, p. 112; Mir Ghulam Muhammad Ghubar, 'Wazifa-ye jawan-e Afghan' [The Duty of a Young Afghan], *op. cit.*, p. 43; Qeyamuddin Khadem, 'Wesh zalmian tse kawee' [What Do Awakened Youths Do], *op. cit.*, p. 45.

²¹ Ghulam Hassan Safi, 'Mas'uliat-e Wesh Zalmian' [The Responsibility of the Awakened Youth], *op. cit.*, p. 91; Nezami, *op. cit.*, p. 179; Mahmudi, *op. cit.*, p. 87; Abdurrauf Benawa, 'Wesh Zalmian ghwaru' [We Want an Awakened Youth], *Kabul* (Kabul) no. 13/1326 (1947), 2nd cover page.

²² Benawa, 'Wesh Zalmian ghwaru' [*op. cit.*].

Muhammad Seddiq Farhang, Mir Ali Asghar Shu'a and others which made the movement initially an ethnically diverse one.

A year later in Kabul, on 7 Jauza 1327 (27 May 1948), 22 young Pashtun writers from Kandahar, Nangrahar and Kabul turned the Wesh Zalmian into an organisation with a programme, regular meetings and membership, without elected leaders however. It advocated a constitutional monarchy, the separation of powers, free elections and civil liberties²³. At this point, some 100 people were active in the movement, with subgroups in Jalalabad, Kandahar and Farah. From that time onwards, the movement became increasingly politically active and for the first time played the role of an active political opposition.

At the same time, the movement had already started to develop differences of opinion over some political issues and split along ethnic lines – a fault-line that would continue to haunt the Afghan reformist movement. The group around Ghubar and Farhang, mainly urban Tajiks, as well as Mahmudi's group, mainly attracting Shiites, had left the Wesh Zalmian criticizing a Pashtun ethno-nationalist and pro-government tone in Benawa's manifesto. (Here, Benawa already had addressed the 'Pashtun', not the 'Afghan' youth.) As the Young Afghans had, the Wesh Zalmian faced a similar dilemma between being critical but constructively supporters of an existing and rather open-minded government or presenting itself as a clear-cut opposition.

Finally, the *Wesh Zalmian* party was set up on 27 Mizan 1329 (18 October 1950). Uniting the younger and more radical Pashtuns in the original movement, it was Afghanistan's first political party to officially use this term.²⁴ Its programme concentrated on Pashtun issues again - the language and the irredentist demand of the creation of Pashtunistan - and emphasised 'cooperation (...) with the national government'.²⁵ It had a ten-member Central Committee²⁶ but still with no elected leader. It was actively recruiting new members and reached a membership of 816

²³ Muhammad Wali Zalmaj, *Milli Mubarize*, Kabul 1382 (2003), p.268.

²⁴ Bacarkai claims that the party has already been founded on 27 Assad 1328 (17 Aug 1949). *Op. cit.*, p. 36.

²⁵ *De Wesh Zalmiyano maramnama* (unpublished), Kabul, n.d. A German translation in: Ruttig, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, annex 3. Also see: Zalmaj, *op. cit.*, p. 268.; Bacarkai, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

²⁶ Three each from Kabul and Kandahar, two each from the Eastern and the Southern province (Loya Paktia). See. Ruttig, *op. cit.*, p. 62-3.

in nine cities by 1951.²⁷ However, the Wesh Zalmian party did not publicly announce the fact of its launch or its founding document, an apparent attempt not to estrange the government.

In a short time, two more parties followed them into existence. In Jaddi 1329 (December 1950/January 1951), *Hezb-e Watan*, or 'Fatherland Party', led by Ghubar, was established; in early 1951, *Hezb-e Khalq*, or 'People's Party', led by Dr. Mahmudi, started its activities. Both raised pro-democratic slogans: a 'national government', free elections and the establishment of political parties.²⁸ *Hezb-e Watan* which is said to have had between 170 and 270 members tried to obtain official recognition from the King through one of its sympathisers who had connections to the court - but failed.²⁹ *Hezb-e Khalq* had a somewhat more left-leaning agenda, pronouncing 'social justice' and the 'fight against exploitation' in addition to the demand for democratic rights.³⁰

Five Wesh Zalmian leaders were elected into the parliament's lower chamber, the *Wolesi Jirga*, in 1949.³¹ Under the impression of events in neighbouring Iran, those five called themselves after Prime Minister Mossadegh's alliance *Jabha-ye Melli*, or 'National Front'³² - this being the first political faction in an Afghan parliament. It was joined by eleven other MPs³³, between 30 and 40 more MPs supported their reformist agenda.³⁴ In Northern Afghanistan, *Ittehad wa Taraqi*, or 'Unity and Progress', a group that followed pan-Turkist

²⁷ Kabul, Kandahar, Jalalabad, Gardez, Mazar-e Sharif, Baghlan, Maimana, Pul-e Khumri and Herat. See: Boyko, *op. cit.*, p. 193.

²⁸ Ruttig, *op. cit.*, pp. 71-2, 75.

²⁹ Author's interview in Kabul, 1983/84.

³⁰ Ruttig, *op. cit.*, p. 72; Saikal, *op. cit.*, p. 115.

³¹ Ghubar and the Shiite medical doctor Abdulrahman Mahmudi, originally from a Hazara family in Jaghori (Ghazni province), in Kabul; Abdulhai Habibi in Kandahar; the Pashtun poet Gul Pacha Ulfat in the Eastern province and Muhammad Karim Nazihi in the Northern town of Andkhui. See: Ruttig, *op. cit.*, pp. 57-8.

³² Ghubar, 'Dar Shura-ye Melli chi kardem?' [What Did We Do in the National Council?], *Watan* (Kabul), 19 Jaddi 1330 (8 Jan 1952).

³³ Seyyed Muhammad Dehqan (Faizabad, Badakhshan province), Abdulawwal Qureishi (Taluqan, Qataghan), Muhammad Anwar Barakai (Bagrami, Kabul), Nur Alam, (Maidan, Kabul), Khal Muhammad Khasta (Mazar-e Sharif), Nazer Muhammad Nawa (Maimana), Abdullah Beg Mazlum (Darwaz, Badakhshan), Sakhi Amin (Dushi, Qataghan), Muhammad Yunus (nomads, Katawaz), Muhammad Taher (Jaghatu, Ghazni), Mir Hatem (Dzadran, Southern prov.). Ali Muhammad Shinwari, *Wesh Zalmian* (unpublished), Kabul 1352 (1973).

³⁴ Louis Dupree, *Afghanistan*, Princeton 1973, p. 494; G. Grassmuck, L.W. Adamec and F.H. Irwin, *Afghanistan: Some New Approaches*, Ann Arbor 1969, p. 153.

ideas and apparently mainly worked underground, also had representatives in the *Wolesi Jirga* and cooperated with the *Jabha-ye Melli*.³⁵

In June 1951, the *Jabha-ye Melli* faction successfully called for a no-confidence vote against the government after an embezzlement scandal involving some ministers but was finally outvoted. Amongst its main achievements was the passing of a more liberal press law in January 1951 that opened the way for a handful of pro-reform periodicals that supported the agenda of the reformist MPs but were only short-lived.³⁶

The attempt to create political parties – and in particular when *Hezb-e Khalq*, as the first party to do so, published its programme in *Neda-ye Khalq*³⁷ – led to the suppression of the movement. The government was not ready to tolerate that degree of freedom. *Hezb-e Khalq* and its newspaper were banned, followed by *Watan*. Both parties continued to work clandestinely – *Hezb-e Watan* continued for five more years. It only dissolved when its leader Ghubar left prison³⁸ – perhaps a precondition for his release.

³⁵ It was led by two brothers, the Faryab MP Muhammad Nazar Nawa and Abu-l-Khair Khairi. The group is reported to later have promoted the strategy of an armed uprising. Its name is the same used by the constitutionalist Young Turks movement that emerged around 1870 in the Ottoman Empire. The Afghan group of that name has only recently been mentioned in the literature. See: Daftar-e mutale'at-e siasi "Rah-e ayenda" (ed.) [Muhammad Ismail Akbar], *Rah-e ayenda*, n.d. [Kabul 2006], p. 10.

³⁶ *Angar*, or 'Ember', with Faiz Muhammad Angar as publisher and editor-in-chief; *Watan*, or 'Fatherland', with Ghubar as publisher and Farhang as editor-in-chief; *Neda-ye Khalq*, or 'People's Voice', with Dr. Mahmudi as publisher and Wali Ahmad Atta'i as editor-in-chief; and *Ulus*, or 'Nation', with Ulfat as publisher and Ali Muhammad Shinwari as editor-in-chief. *Angar* and *Neda-ye Khalq* appeared twice weekly, *Watan* and *Ulus* once weekly, in not more than 1,500 copies each according to Dupree. There were other independent, or semi-independent, periodicals edited by *Wesh Zalmian* and National Front activists in Herat, Kandahar, Mazar-e Sharif and perhaps in Baghlan but no collections of them seem to have survived. See: Ruttig, *op. cit.*, pp. 67-73; Dupree, *op. cit.*, p. 495; 'Me-guyand' [They Say], *Watan* (Kabul), 9 Jauza 1330 (29 May 1951); Muhammad Kazem Ahang and Muhammad Z. Seddiq, *Matbu'ato ta yaua katena: De Afghanistan de matbu'ato de wradze pe wiar*, [A Look at the Press, On Occasion of the Afghanistan Press Day], Kabul 1351 (1972); Grassmuck, Adamec, Irwin, *op. cit.*, pp. 186-7; author's interviews in Kabul, 1983/84.

³⁷ A copy of this issue of *Neda-ye Khalq* (no. 29) could not be found in Kabul. The only source for this is Korgun, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

³⁸ Author's interviews in Kabul, 1983/84.

Speaking on the work of the reformist MPs in parliament in early 1952, Ghubar gave a realistic assessment of their achievements in general. Even if they had not been 'completely successful', he wrote at the end of the legislative period, 'the National Front (...) has honestly and courageously fulfilled its mandate until the last minute (...) in a spirit of reformism and reconciliation between the nation and the state (...). The ability of the nation to achieve a democratic government (...) has become obvious'.³⁹ However, one major goal had not been reached: Afghanistan had not yet become a constitutional monarchy. This only would happen in 1964.

CONCLUSION

Afghanistan's reformist movement of the 1940s and 1950s was another link in the chain of an Afghan constitutional, democratic and reformist movement towards modernization and political liberalization that started with the first constitutionalists (*mashruta-khwahan*) executed under King Habibullah in 1907. It never was defeated, continued to be active throughout the 20th century and was only interrupted by periods of suppression. After the fall of the Taleban regime in 2001, it resurfaced again from the political underground and the diaspora: a number of political parties sees itself in the tradition of the first constitutional movements.

As this paper shows, there has been a continuity of ideas and even some personnel between the Young Afghan movement and the Wesh Zalmian. The same was the case between the activists of the Wesh Zalmian period and the 'decade of democracy' (1964-73) as well as between the activists of the 1964-73 period and those who tried to utilize the political space emerging at the end of late President Dr. Najibullah's regime when he established a controlled multi-party experiment. This continuity can even be extended back into the 19th century, to the ideas of Seyyed Jamaluddin Afghani which inspired Mahmud Tarzi and the Young Afghans.

The most prominent Young Afghan amongst the Wesh Zalmian was Mir Ghulam Muhammad Ghubar, the earliest Afghan chronicler of 20th century Afghan history. He had been the editor of *Sitara-ye Afghan*, a newspaper published in the town of Jabl-us-Seraj north of Kabul, one of various local newspapers that sprang up in Amanullah's time, in 1920-21 and later chief of police and also a diplomat. But also Dawe, Seyyed Ali Muhammad Zo'ama, Habibi and Abdulali Mostaghni – all

³⁹ Ghubar, 'Dar Shura-ye melli chi kardem?' [*op. cit.*].

activists in the 1940/50s and in the mid-1960s, the latter two as young journalists - had already been active in the Amani period.

This movement always included elements of a resolutely Islamic tendency that supported the modernisation of Afghan society within the framework of Islam. Mahmud Tarzi himself stands for this particular 'Islamic model of modernisation', seen in contrast to the more secularist, Atatürk-oriented Amanullah.⁴⁰ This is an encouragement for those who advocate the establishment of modern political institutions within the framework of the current Afghan constitution with its synthesis of Afghanistan's traditional values, including those of Islam, and who argue that democracy and Islam are not mutually excluding concepts.

At the same time, this does not mean that this continuity of Afghanistan's constitutional modernist movement was linear and unbroken. The main difference seems to be that there was a much stronger thread of Pashtun ethno-nationalism within the Wesh Zalmian than within the Young Afghans (although this hypothesis needs further research.) The evolution of the Wesh Zalmian movement - even in times when there was not such an acute crisis as during the 1980/1990s or as currently - also highlighted a political danger that periodically surfaces in Afghanistan's political class and undermines the work in progress on Afghan nation-building: the tendency to split along ethnic lines and ignore common political ground.

⁴⁰ Asta Olesen, *Islam and Politics in Afghanistan*, Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 1995, pp.126-33.

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