

Enrico Piovesana

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The Afghan Maoist movement
Testimonies told by militants (1965-2011)



Preface by Malalai Joya



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A special thanks to
The Afghan women of RAWA

INTRODUCTION

It is not often that one comes across an important political and historical phenomenon so completely ignored by Western historiography, essay writing and journalism. It is all the more astonishing if it is regarding a country of the first importance in geopolitical terms, such as Afghanistan which, for decades now, has had the misfortune of appearing in the front pages of world press.

No one has ever told the story of Sholayi, the Afghan Maoist movement, a prime mover of the student uprisings and the peasants' and workers' revolts typical of the 'Afghan '68' and of the early Seventies, organizer of insurrections against the pro-Soviet 'khalqist' regime of the late 1970s, and active participant in the armed resistance against both the Soviet invader and the US backed fundamentalist militias. Even to this day – under the guise of the ALO (Afghan Liberation Organization) born in 1973 – it is active in a clandestine political resistance against NATO occupation and all forms of fundamentalism, be it of the Taliban or of the warlords who have returned to positions of power with Karzai and with U.S. backing. Just as it was in the Seventies, the fighters are young Afghans who believe there is a 'third way' for their country – “Neither with the foreign imperialism, nor with fundamentalist fascism” - who look upon the Maoist version of Communism as still a valid solution to the problems of a country hibernating in a pre-modern era.

The only existing publication in the western press with even a superficial mention of Sholayi is Louis Dupree's 1973 essay on the

history of Afghanistan: a valuable track which no one has ever sought to follow or pursue.

Not even the development of the global information superhighway has brought back from oblivion what was hidden in the layers of the country's history. The information which has been made available on ALO's website does not appear to have generated any interest outside of Afghanistan other than the occasional 'cut and paste' appearing on some specialized blog.

If today's lack of interest can be attributed to a general ignorance of the phenomenon – if you don't know of it, how can you research it? – the reasons for which there has been so little mention of the Afghan Maoist movement in the history books are to be sought in the cultural climate that existed during the Cold War era, a time in which, on both sides, there were either 'friends' or 'foes': *tertium non datur*. It was a rigid dualism which didn't leave room for anyone attempting to create confusion or sow doubt in the mind of public opinion. If, in the 1980s were considered the 'bad guys' and the Afghan Mujaheddin were the 'good guys' (the Islamic fundamentalists, with CIA funding, were 'resistance fighters') it was better to ignore the existence of a Communist Afghan resistance: someone might have been led to think that there could be such a thing as 'good communism'. The same reasoning, only turned on its head, was made by the Western Communist parties for whom it would have been very embarrassing to mention 'Afghan comrades' being imprisoned, tortured and executed by the Soviets.

From the 60s and 70s the only people who might have had an interest in the Afghan Sholayi were the European left wing intellectuals and the youth movements born out of the events of 1968. But it was not to be, simply because in those years no one spoke of Afghanistan if not as a paradise for dope consumption. At that time, western anti-Soviet communism was busy looking at the Chinese Cultural Revolution and the Prague Spring: no one was interested in the political affairs of a backwater like Afghanistan.

If the students and the workers who confronted the police and occupied factories and universities throughout Western Europe had only known what their Afghan comrades were doing, this

publication wouldn't be the first ever written about the Sholayi.

Far from claiming the scientific value of a history essay, this publication is just the fruit of numerous interviews held in Afghanistan over the summer of 2011 with members in hiding of the ALO, young and old, women and men who, after specific deliberation by the movement's Central Committee, accepted to be interviewed by a foreign correspondent in order to put an end to the enduring silence there has been concerning the Afghan Maoist movement.

PREFACE

When, back in 2003, in the *Loya Jirga*, I denounced the crimes committed by the warlords who sat next to me in Parliament, they shouted at me from their seats that I was a whore, an infidel, a communist. They used the term 'Sholayi' which, for them, was an insult. Only for them, because in Afghanistan the Sholayi don't have a bad reputation. People are well aware of the differences between the self-styled communists of the pro-soviet Khalq Party who, in the name of Socialism, have committed horrendous crimes and who sit in Parliament today, arm in arm with the fundamentalists, and the Sholayi who sacrificed their lives while fighting both of those.

The Maoist militants are the only ones, in the tragic history of my country, whose hands are clean of the blood of our people, who didn't commit crimes against Humanity, who didn't act as puppets in the hands of foreign masters. For this reason I respect them and I consider them heroes. Like heroes are the young militants of the ALO, the Afghan Liberation Organization, who to this day continue their underground opposition to those same criminal fundamentalists and to the military occupation by NATO and United States forces who commit their crimes in the name of peace and democracy.

I underwrite, and I share, their choice to go underground, to work with the people and outside of the corrupt institutions of this puppet-regime full of criminals backed by the West. As I have been able to witness personally, in Afghanistan today there is no real alternative to underground opposition. This is because it is obvious that no chance will ever take place through the farcical elections with which these warlords have sought to legitimize their power. It is also because working underground is the only way for

us to fight these criminal gangs without being physically eliminated. We haven't got weapons, real weapons, and I personally hope we'll never have to take up a gun, though I would be ready to do so if it was the only way to defend my country's freedom, like my father did at the time of the Soviet occupation.

I strongly believe that people should learn about the Sholayi, and that the world should be made aware of the history of this movement, whose role has been important, and whose record is clean, in the often shady history of this country, a movement which continues to work alongside with the people, against the foreign occupying forces and against the fundamentalists, be they the warlords currently in power or the Taliban who could well return to power with the help of the United States.

Malalai Joya

Former Member of Parliament, activist and author of *'Raising my Voice: The extraordinary story of the Afghan woman who dares to speak out'*.

1. THE AFGHAN CHE GUEVARA

Traffic is congested on the notorious Jalalabad Road that winds its way along the bottom of the Kabul river canyon, the long line of cars and trucks blocked for hours by the charred carcass of a tank truck hit by a Taliban rocket.

The Pakistani drivers, lying under their psychedelic tractor trailers, watch with fatalistic indifference as two American Kiowa helicopters hover high overhead like a pair of vultures looking for their prey: the guerrillas who fired from the rocky peak towering above the road.

But Naoki, my photographer, and I look with slightly more apprehension towards the long line of diesel-filled tank trucks we are stuck with: like sitting ducks. If the Taliban are still around up there, they could easily hit them and all hell would break loose.

That's what we're expecting will happen when all of a sudden a loud blast shakes the air in the canyon, followed by a just as loud second one. Seeing the two choppers fly away and a cloud of smoke climb from the tip of the rock, we understand that they're not Taliban rockets but missiles launched from the Kiowas. They immediately start a second round of attack with heavy machine-guns: a long rattling sound, then another, and yet another.

Two more raids follow within minutes this first one. Then all becomes quiet. Nobody knows if the Taliban have been neutralized: "They'll have killed a couple of goats" jokes one of the truck drivers. But in the meantime everybody is turning on the engines and the long line of trucks starts to move again hesitantly. Everyone is honking their horn and overtaking, trying to get out of

there as soon as they can. We too get into our car and pass the smoking, burned smelling wreck of the tanker truck, and resume our journey towards Jalalabad.

After a couple of hours, while our Corolla bumps along the dirt road that winds up the splendid Dar-e-Nur valley (the House of Light), the car is filled with another, very different smell, though equally strong: it's the smell emanating from the wild Marijuana bushes that grow along the side of the road.

We continue to climb through woods and meadows until we reach the town of Lomkandàh, our final destination in this excursion. Like the actors Roberto Benigni and Massimo Troisi in their famous film "*Nothing Left to Do but Cry*" we found ourselves thrown into a medieval scenario. A shady wood full of rounded boulders and bordered by a brook, here and there ancient tower-houses in stone, each two or three stories high, with finely sculpted wooden door and window frames. Even the faces of the elderly peasants look as if sculpted out of the same wood, their blue eyes made up with kajal. They gently sway as they ride on the back of their tiny donkeys, followed by blond children and orange little goats whose wool has been coloured with henna. Like in so many other Afghan villages, the women don't wear the burqa: they go around bare-headed and wear bright cyclamen-coloured dresses. This is Pashai territory, one of the ancient tribes of the remote mountainous region which was once called Kafiristan, Land of the infidel, and which, after the enforced conversion to Islam, in the XIX century, was renamed Nuristan the Land of light, or of the enlightened. As a matter of fact, the Islamic religion never really caught on here, leaving remnants of various pre-Islamic creeds and beliefs and a relatively secular environment. This is another reason why, in the 1980s, the first Maoist resistance fighters decided to establish their bases in this mountain region, among these people.

Mardekhàn, the local Sheriff (there's nobody else in the way of police or even representative of the central government), is son of a resistance fighter from the ALO. His shyness and our difficulty to a conversation (he speaks no Pashtun, only the local dialect called Pashai) don't allow us to gather much in the way of information

about his past. Without a word, he shoulders his old AK 47 and opens a path for us in the woods towards the village cemetery.

Next to an unordered group of stone slabs all vaguely resembling a horse's head, each marking an individual burial site, two tombs stand out, of very different style from the rest, with abundance of stonework and coloured engravings: a small Afghan flag and writings in red. These are the tombs of two commanders of the resistance killed by the Soviets in 1985. Our guide, a young ALO militant from Uzbekistan, explains that one of the two was the famous Qubad, "the Afghan Che Guevara".

"He was formerly a school teacher, originally from the Takhar province. His heroic deeds, performed as a resistance fighter on various fronts, were famous throughout Afghanistan, even among the Soviets, who had been after him for a long time. On the night of 17 October 1985, the Soviets made a surprise attack on the village of Lomkandàh, where Qubad and his men were hiding: they held out for hours, until they ran out of ammunition. Qubad, already wounded, fought with his bare hands in a desperate hand-to-hand grapple with a Soviet soldier who finally killed him with a dagger. They say that when they found his body he was still clenching a button from the uniform of the soldier who had killed him."

The young Maoist tells us that there are other famous Sholayi resistance fighters buried in the valley, in particular there are three brothers, all of them ALO fighters. That tomb-site has an inscription which says: "To whoever passes this way, may he leave a flower in memory of these fighters who died in the name of freedom."

2. BEFORE THE RUSSIANS

The first meeting is organized in a private residence on the outskirts of Kabul where we are driven to at the very last moment. Nasseem - this is his 'nom de guerre' - sits quietly while he waits for us behind a curtain in a room with all the blinds closed. His face is hidden by the curtain, to the great frustration of Naoki, the photographer who's with me.

«Welcome and please excuse me for this bothersome precaution. It's not that we don't trust you but, you see, ours is a clandestine organisation so we have to protect our identities. We are happy to finally have the opportunity to tell people in Italy and elsewhere a piece of Afghan history which has been ignored to this day.»

Nasseem is 62 years old. Thanks to his decades-long experience as a teacher of Marxism, he was chosen by the ALO's Central Committee to tell us the history of the Afghan Maoist Movement. Excuse me, Marxist.

«We don't call ourselves 'Maoist' – says Nasseem – because Mao Zedong himself said that Maoism is not an ideology. It's an adaptation of Marxism-Leninism to fit the social conditions in China. Our ideology is Marxism-Leninism-Maoist thought.»

Once this matter (which doesn't change the essence) has been cleared, he begins.

«The first Marxist (Maoist) revolutionary movement in Afghanistan was the PYO, the Progressive Youth Organization (*Sazmàn-e Jawanàn-e Mutarraqi*) born in 1965, the same year in which the PDPA, or Popular Democratic Party of Afghanistan

(*Hezb-e Dimokratik-e Khalq-e Afghanistan*) was founded.»

Even in this far away land you could feel the effects of the international clash of ideologies between Chinese Communism and Soviet revisionism: the PYO represented the more radical Left, the so-called *chap-e-chap*, the left of the left.

«The founder of the PYO was called Akram Yari, he was a Hazara intellectual originating from a village called Jaghori, in the central province of Ghazni, the rebel son of a noble, monarchist landowner. As a young boy he was much perturbed by the appalling conditions of quasi-slavery endured by the peasants of his region, and by the revolts he witnessed, which were often violently suppressed. Having moved to Kabul to study, he gradually developed his political thought through the study of Marx and Mao. He got his degrees in Mathematics and Physics, which he began to teach at the Naderya School in Kabul during the day. Instead, at night he began an intense propaganda campaign among the students and started his political movement. This took a heavy toll on his health and even cost him his teaching job. Back in Jaghori, he decided to give up his family possessions, handing them over to the peasants, and dedicate himself wholly to their defence against the local despots' brutalities. Nevertheless, he continued to direct the organization in the capital through his brother Sadiq who was professor of Medicine at the University of Kabul.»

«The PYO began as a clandestine operation but it soon turned out to be an openly visible political activity in universities and factories throughout Kabul and other Afghan cities, namely Herat, Mazar-e-Sharif and Jalalabad. The first public appearance of the PYO was tragic: on October 25th, 1965, dozens of students were killed when the army opened fire on them as they marched peacefully in front of the Parliament building in Kabul.»

«Within a few years the PYO came to number as much as fifty thousand activists, most of them students, intellectuals, workers and miners, from all of the country's ethnic groups. Though the organization had some political activity in the countryside, most of the action took place in the cities. Towards the end of the 1960s the PYO organized some large student protest marches in Kabul,

strikes in factories throughout the country and even some peasant uprisings. These actions were all condemned by the pro-Soviet Khalq which was making appeals to conserve social peace, but on the other hand they obliged the monarchy to make some important social and economic concessions.»

«The organization's leadership was made up of four members: Yari, his brother Sadiq and two young brothers, Hadi and Rahim Mahmudi. Rahim was later to become the director of the movement's official paper, "Eternal Flame" (*Sholai Jawaid*, from which the term Sholayi derives).»

«The paper – says Nasseem – was published from April to July 1968 and was a great success, serving as a means for mobilization throughout the country which, in fact, was overrun by a series of strikes. For this reason, after only eleven issues the republican regime of Daud Khan ordered its closure. The following years were fraught with difficulties: hundreds of PYO activists ended up in jail. This created a certain tension within the organization's ranks and, by the beginning of the 1970s, many members began pushing to go underground again. They also started to question the choice of working only within the cities, sacrificing the countryside and the masses of poor peasants which made up, then and now, by far the greater part of the Afghan population. At the head of this group was a young charismatic doctor, Faiz Ahmad, a Pashtun from Kandahar and former pupil of Yari's school teacher days.»

«The growing tensions within the PYO, due in part to the void in the directorate left by Akram Yari's return to Jaghuri, finally burst after the government repression of the violent clashes on 7th July 1972 at the university campus in Kabul between Sholayi militants and young fundamentalists headed by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar.»

«So it was that in 1973, after the internal quarrels had led to the de-facto break-up of the PYO, Dr Faiz Ahmad founded a new Marxist (Maoist) movement, the RGPA or Revolutionary Group of the People of Afghanistan (*Grooh-e Inqelabi-e Khalqhay-e Afghanistan*), in other words, the future ALO. The political strategy of the new organization consisted in sending its members to work

as doctors or teachers in the country's rural areas with the aim of doing both cultural work and underground political activity with the poor peasants and the illiterate. The thinking was that no revolution would ever be possible without prior education of the masses, in this case the peasant population.»

«After a few years of this long and difficult work in far away villages buried deep in the countryside many intellectuals began to show signs of restlessness: they wanted to return to live in the cities and move on to the more 'Guevarist' form of armed conflict brought forth by the revolutionary vanguard. Not that they disagreed with the strategy, they just thought that strategy alone was not enough: they needed some sort of spark, so they chose the name of AKHGAR (spark in Dari). Their leader was Dr. Akef who, in 1977, started an autonomous revolutionary movement which claimed responsibility for the defence of the Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy. He criticized the Chinese ideological drift that followed the death of Mao Zedong and looked instead to the Albanian Stalinist leader, Enver Hoxha.»

«At that time, the former leaders of the PYO who had not adhered to Faiz Ahmad's RGPA went on to start a series of smaller Sholayi groups on the basis of subtle strategic and ideological distinctions. Akram and Sadiq Yari founded SURKHA (*Sazmàn-e Rahaibàkhsh-e Khalq-ye Afghànistàn*) the Afghan People's Liberation Organization. The Mahmudi brothers (Rahim and Hadi) formed PAIKAR (*Sazmàn-e Paikàr bara-ye Rahaibàkhsh-e Afghànistàn*), the Afghan Liberation Organization. Also, Bashir Bahman (from the Panshir region) created SAWO (*Sazmàn Watanparastàn-e Waqiei*) Organization of True Patriots. As we will see, all of these organizations went on to join a new unitary revolutionary organization: SAMA.»

«The same year 1977 saw the birth of yet another new group which deserves a particular mention on its own. The RGPA saw the problems relating to the conditions of the Afghan woman as a central issue in its political strategy. For this reason a decision was made that same year to create an autonomous political women's movement, which is active to this day: the RAWA, Revolutionary Association of Afghan Women. It was founded by Meena, wife of

Faiz Ahmad.»

Overcome by all these acronyms, we beg Nasseem for a few minutes' pause, joking on the fact that fragmentation appears to be pathological as well as a universal trait among revolutionary movements of the left.

3. THE WAR OF RESISTANCE

After a lavish luncheon offered by the lady of the house who, quite exceptionally, shows up and speaks with us – what a pleasure it is to be in a progressive family – Nasim picks up his story where he had left off.

«In 1978 the Soviet influence started to grow in Afghanistan with the so-called ‘April Revolution’, a *coup d’état* which brought the Khalq party to power. This was accompanied by a violent repression against all the anti-Soviet opposition parties and movements: against the Democrats but especially against the Sholayi of all groupings, all accused of the same crime: being counter-revolutionary, and for this they were tortured and killed. Among those arrested was Akram Yari who was captured in his village of Jaghori, brought to the notorious detention centre in Kabul, in Sedarat, and tortured to death.»

«The new regime’s ferocious repression had the effect of re-strengthening the ties between the various ex-PYO militants: had they remained divided in little groups they would not have survived. So in 1979 they decided to reunite under the banner of the SAMA (*Sazmàn-e Azadibàkhsh-e Mardòm-e Afghanistàn*), headed by a respected and charismatic ex-member of the Central Committee of the RGPA, the writer and poet Majid Kalakani. He was a Tajik from the Shomali Plain, North of Kabul. His resounding victories against local chiefs and government officials who lorded over the population awarded him the nickname of ‘Afghan Robin Hood’.»

«The dramatic worsening of the situation brought both Maoist

groups, the RGPA and the SAMA, to come together in a united revolutionary front against the Khalq regime, building tactical alliances with some smaller moderate Islamic parties.»

«Together with these, in June 1979 the AMFF (the Afghan Mujaheddin Freedom Fighters Front) was formed. The opportunistic decision to set aside their ideological differences in the name of the fight against a common enemy was later considered a serious mistake. So was another initiative: the armed revolt in Kabul without any popular support outside the city. The insurrection which was to take control of the ancient military fortification of Bala Hissar, under the command of Faiz Ahmad's RGPA, began on the 5th of August, 1979, but was harshly put down: many militants were killed and many others were jailed.»

«On the 24th of December of that same year, Soviet troops invaded Afghanistan. The RGPA changed its name becoming ALO (*Sazmân-e Rihay-e Afghânistân*) and began a guerrilla war of resistance, concentrating its military initiatives in the eastern provinces of Nuristan (where it placed its GHQ), Kunar, Nangarhar and Laghman, in the northern province of Takhar, in the central province of Ghazni and in the western Farah province.»

«Even the militants of SAMA started to fight the Soviets, this despite the arrest and hanging of their leader, Majid Kalaqani, immediately replaced by his brother Qayum Rahbar. They too put together a partnership with small moderate Islamic groups, creating the National United Front of Afghanistan (NUFA). The NUFA operated mainly in the eastern provinces of Kapisa and Parwan, where they had their headquarters, in the northern Balkh province and in the western provinces of Herat and Nimruz.»

«Aside from fighting against the Soviet occupation forces, the resistance fighters of both ALO and SAMA had to counter the attacks by the fundamentalist Mujaheddin groups which were being backed by the United States and by Pakistan, especially their historic enemy, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar.»

«We don't know precisely how many the fighters were who fought with the ALO and SAMA because there weren't any registers or other papers. We can be sure that their numbers were in the thousands and that many of them were killed. To this day

we of ALO commemorate the loss every year on November 12th, the official Day of the Martyrs: it's the day Faiz Ahmad was assassinated, in 1986, by men close to Hekmatyar, in Pakistan, where he had taken refuge.»

«Women contributed greatly in the war of resistance. They didn't fight but they tended to the wounded and performed the essential role of messengers, dispatching messages, supplies and weapons by concealing them in baskets for the firewood. Evidently, their involvement was greater in those areas where they were more emancipated, like Nuristan (ex-Kafiristan, the Land of the Infidel) where Islam never quite caught on. Many women were captured, like Parwana, wife of Sadiq Yari.»

«After the Soviet retreat and the beginning of the civil war among the Afghan Islamist parties, many Sholayi sought refuge in Pakistan together with over a million other Afghans who were escaping the terrible slaughter. While SAMA broke up, ALO has continued its political activity and to provide humanitarian aid to the Pakistani refugee camps, in particular in Peshawar. Once the Taliban regime had fallen, we returned to Afghanistan and took up again our underground political activity, handing over control to a new generation of young Afghan communists.»

«Whereas in the past we were opposed to both Soviet socialist-imperialism and fundamentalist 'Islamic-fascism', today our fight is against American imperialism and against the fundamentalism of the Taliban and the warlords, who have returned to power within the puppet regime of Hamid Karzai backed by the West. 'Neither with America, nor with the Taliban': we are for a third way, the way of Socialism.»

«The important thing in Afghanistan today is the fight against the illiteracy and ignorance that afflict our people. Only this way will we be able to counter both the religious obscurantism of the Taliban and of the fundamentalists who are in power today, which has brought us only poverty, war and suffering, and also the negative cultural influence of Communism on the one hand and of Capitalism on the other which, as Marx had foreseen, despite its promises of well-being, has entered a historical phase of global and irreversible crisis: a crisis from which there are only two ways

to get out: socialism or barbarity.»

4. A REVOLUTIONARY FOOTBALL PLAYER

After the intellectual Nasseem's history lesson, we get to meet a former resistance fighter.

Even Bahram, 55 years old, receives us behind a curtain. On the walls of the room we are in, the figures of Marx and Che Guevara have been carefully painted in red paint. Among the books lined up on a small bookshelf there is a summary of Karl Marx's 'Capital', writings by Mao Zedong bound in red with gold print on the cover and other political and history books. Among the photos placed on another shelf lies an old revolver with the red star stamped on the handle.

«That's my old Makarov» Bahram explains, «I stole it from a Soviet soldier after a battle, like the Kalashnikov» he says passing us a heavy AK-47 under the curtain, not before having removed the magazine. «All our weapons came from the Russians, from the Russian soldiers who were killed in combat or from the depots we plundered: guns, rifles, machine-guns, RPG-7 rocket-propelled grenades, 82 mm. mortars and Ziko-1 multiple missile launchers. With these we shot down a few Russian helicopters.» he says, not without a touch of pride.

Among the photos on the bookshelf we see one black and white picture of a group of young football players posing on a football pitch. They are wearing black and white striped jerseys and smiling at the camera. In the background, at the top of a hill is the unmistakable outline of Kabul's Intercontinental hotel.

«One of those is me when I was young, I was a centre-back» says Bahram from behind the curtain, without indicating which of

those moustachioed youths with sideburns he is. «It was the summer of 1979 and we were training for the championship finals at the end of a terrific season. But we never played that match because, just a few days after that picture was taken, our team was decimated by the Bala Hissar insurrection. Our team, the 'Beràdar' (Brothers), had one special feature which nobody knew except for us: it was made up almost exclusively of Sholayi militants from the ALO. After the unsuccessful uprising of the 5th of August of that year against the Khalq regime, which I took part in too, together with my fellow teammates, some of us were killed and others were arrested. So, on the day of the championship final, the Beràdar didn't show-up as half the team was missing. The Hindukush, a government sponsored team, won by adjudication. It was a double loss: both a football and a political defeat.»

«My militancy began in the late 1960s, when I was studying Engineering at the Kabul Polytechnic. My older brother was with Akram Yari's *Young Progressive Organization* (PYO) and he used to bring me along to the student and workers' demonstrations that the Sholayi organized in those years in Kabul and other cities around the country. In 1968 I was selling the Sholayi review (*Sholai Jawaïd*) and it was while reading this publication and talking to my brother that I developed my political beliefs and decided to take active part in the PYO.»

«In the early 1970s I joined the RGPA (Revolutionary Group of the Peoples of Afghanistan), a Marxist movement founded by Dr. Faiz Ahmad. My twelve siblings did the same. Together we made up a group under the guidance of our eldest brother. We started doing underground political activity in the countryside, among the peasants living between the Nangarhar and Nuristan provinces. Unfortunately, we were caught by the regime's police and six of my brothers were arrested and executed.»

«After this tragic event I returned to Kabul for a while where, as I said, in 1979 I took part in the Bala Hissar insurrection. I wanted to avenge my brothers. After a few months, the Soviets invaded Afghanistan and I fled to the mountains like all my comrades from the RGPA (which had changed its name to ALO). With Dr. Faiz

Ahmad I went to the Panjshir valley which, at that time, was not yet controlled by the Islamic party of Burhanuddin Rabbani and Ahmad Shah Massoud.»

«We set up our operations in an area called Bazarak and, with the help of the local Bakakhil clan, we organized an armed resistance against the Soviet forces trying to enter the valley. We created fifteen resistance groups, each one made up of 20 to 30 local volunteers, trained and led by the ALO. We also did political campaigning with the locals, explaining to them Marxism and Mao Zedong.»

«I was commander of group number 4. The fighters in my formation were all young except for one old-timer who insisted on joining our group with his old gun. I remember that he used to shoot that museum piece of his at Russian helicopters flying low over our valley: I would tell him it wasn't worth it, that he was only putting us in danger of being killed, but he would answer that at least this way the Russians would have understood that they were not welcome in Afghanistan. I never managed to make him stop.»

We conducted daily sorties against Soviet outposts and Russian armoured columns that entered the valley. We did this by using RPGs and mortars, followed by heavy exchanges of gunfire. There were usually several of our groups taking part in these operations since, as Mao teaches us, one must always outnumber one's enemy by at least 2 to 1. At first we focussed on stealing the enemy's arms and munitions, including the bombs that our experts would then use to make improvised explosive devices which we placed along the roads: with a 50 Kg bomb we could make up to 3 anti-tank mines.»

During that time I was able to get to know Dr. Faiz Ahmad a little better. He couldn't fight because, after the Bala Hissar insurrection, he had begun to have heart problems. But apart from practicing medicine to cure the sick and wounded, he was always with us to give us strength, to motivate us with his words, his sharp intelligence, his political passion and his humanity.»

«In our irregular army there was no ranking and no uniform» Bahram explains, pushing under the curtain an old photo album with pictures of his old comrades in arms, photos taken during

those years. «As you can see, we looked exactly like the Islamic Mujaheddin who fought in the valley like us against the Soviets. At first, there were no problems with them, especially with the local fighters. But at the end of 1980, everything changed.»

5. WAR ON TWO FRONTS

Bahram leaves the room to answer a phone call. In the meantime we go on leafing through the old photo albums and we observe how the young resistance fighters did, in fact, look different from the Islamic Mujaheddin, not just because they shaved their beards, but also because they wore 'Bell Bottom' jeans, shirts and jerseys instead of the traditional garb, the *shalwar-kameez*. If it wasn't for the Kalashnikov rifles and the *pakul* (Afghan headdress), they looked more like your average Sixties European youths gone hiking.

Wiping his feet on a mat with the American flag on it, Bahram enters the room again and returns to his place behind the curtain, apologizing for the interruption and picking up his story where he had left off.

«The most influential ALO commander in the Panjshir was called Ahmad Jan. He was a local, very popular in the valley because of his past as a professional sportsman. Everybody in the area knew him and looked up to him, and this was of great help to the ALO, for its political penetration of the region. As we were soon to find out, for Commander Massoud, who liked to be called 'Lion of Panjshir', Ahmad Jan and the ALO's growing popularity and influence was unacceptable. He saw them as a threat to his own political and military hegemony which he was building in the area thanks to the heaps of money and armaments he was getting from his international backers. So it was that one day Massoud asked to meet Ahmad Jan and make him an offer to create a military alliance which would start with an intelligence gathering

mission to Kabul, in order to find out what military operations the Soviets were planning in the Panjshir: so he asked him to take up this task. Ahmad Jan accepted, but as soon as he reached Kabul he was captured and killed by Massoud's own henchmen.»

«From then on, we had two enemies in Panjshir: the Soviets and Massoud's forces. For many months we were forced to defend ourselves from them too, but after a while we were unable to fight on two fronts, so in 1981 we decided to leave the valley and move to other areas of the country.»

«I left and went to the mountains of the central Hazarajat region, between the provinces of Ghazni, Zabul and Uruzgan, where other ALO resistance groups were operating. During the first few months our guerrilla activities against the Soviet troops went ahead without problems, thanks also to the support we got from the locals, who had been supporting the Sholayi since the days of Akram Yari, who came from those parts. But soon even in these regions the Islamic parties began to grow stronger, especially in those which had the backing of Iran whose Ayatollah regime wanted to transform the Afghan Shiite Hazarajat region into an Iranian protectorate. Again, we found ourselves fighting on two fronts, against the Soviet army and also against the Islamic militias of Mazari, Khalili and Mohaqiq.»

«The same thing was happening throughout all of Afghanistan and very soon, aside from the Soviets, our worst enemies turned out to be the fundamentalists led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar who was supported by Pakistan, by the CIA and even by Deng Xiaoping who, instead of helping us, was sending hundreds of millions of dollars in armament to the fundamentalist Mujaheddin.»

«I stayed on and fought in the Hazarajat mountains for three years. They were three very harsh years: we were continuously fighting and suffered many hardships, especially during the winter months. In my formation there were two young resistance fighters who had become close friends. They were called Nadir and Mussah: one was a Pashtun, the second was a Hazara, but among our group these distinctions made no difference whatsoever. One very cold night, after a snow blizzard, the Russians attacked our camp on the border between Ghazni and

Zabul. We took shelter in the nearby woods and, from there, we were able to fight off the attackers. When, once again, everything was calm we returned to our camp where we found the dead bodies of Nadir and Mussah. One had tried to rescue the other who was wounded, but in doing so he too had been hit by enemy fire as he tried to shield his friend. We tried to separate the bodies so as to carry them to the nearest village but the cold had frozen them together. We were forced to bury them on the spot as they were, in an embrace. To this day villagers still pray on their tomb.»

«In 1984 I moved once again, this time into the Dar-e-Nur valley, in the eastern Nangarhar province. That's where I met my future wife. She was working as a dispatch rider for the ALO militants who were fighting in the area. When she returned from a trip to Jalalabad she would always bring back some revolutionary poems written by a comrade of ours called Faruq. We would put them to music and then sing in the evenings by the campfire with someone playing the guitar. In Dar-e-Nur I was fortunate enough to meet one of the greatest ALO fighters, comrade Qubad.»

«After the Russian retreat from Afghanistan and the beginning of the civil war between the Islamic parties, in the early 1990s, I took refuge in Pakistan like most of my fellow comrades of the ALO. I continued to work there with my organization inside a refugee camp in Peshawar where the ALO managed clinics, schools and generally came in aid of the neediest families, especially the widows.»

«Once I was back in Afghanistan, after the end of the Taliban regime, I returned with my family to the Dar-e-Noor valley. I am still an ALO militant, teaching adult literacy classes and trying to bring political awareness to the villages, both against our old foe, the Fundamentalists who have returned to power, and against the new occupying forces in our country, the Americans and their NATO allies. At the moment, the ALO hasn't got the strength to fight a new war of resistance. Our main task during this historical time is train a new generation of young Marxists which will be capable of fighting against fundamentalism and foreign imperialism like we elders did in the past.»

«My Kalashnikov is gathering dust under my bed but, should it

be necessary, I'm ready to pick it up again.»

6. IN THE MOUNTAIN CAVES

Nemat, a 50-year old from Herat, speaking from behind the inevitable curtain hanging from the ceiling, tells us about his time as a resistance fighter.

«I was operating in the West, in particular in the Farah region, where one of the main underground ALO bases was. I was responsible for training the new recruits.»

«Hundreds of us lived in that permanent base hidden in the mountains in eastern Farah. It was a big structure made up of a network of natural underground cavities and artificial tunnels that had been blasted out with explosives. All the chambers had lighting thanks to a few diesel-powered generators, which also provided electricity for some radios and television sets. We had running water that reached us from nearby springs through a network of pipes. We even built toilettes. There was a great kitchen area where we cooked meals for everyone, and a clinic where we tended to the wounded. We slept in large dormitories where we plastered the cave walls with quicklime and covered the floors with carpets on which we placed dozens of mattresses. In a word, we had all we needed.»

«Even our women came to the base, especially for military training and for important meetings but they were not allowed to stay the night. This was not due to ideological reasons – the ALO made no distinction between men and women – the rule was established to respect our comrades and the customs of the locals who worked alongside. Apart from a small minority of city-educated militants, most of the ALO fighters, in Farah as in all

other bases, were mainly peasants from the countryside or from villages with strong traditions and where, if we wanted to be accepted, we had to tread carefully. Some things cannot be imposed, they need time.»

«Naturally, apart from performing my training duties, I also fought alongside my comrades. The number of them I saw be killed! I remember, for example, a terrible battle we fought against the Russians. There were about a hundred of us, all concentrated in one camp which had evidently been exposed. One night we were surrounded by about a thousand Russian soldiers with dozens of tanks, artillery fire and helicopters from the nearby Shindand airbase. They bombed our camp for 26 straight hours. It was a hellish pounding at the end of which we counted 45 dead comrades. It was terrible.»

«We also had to beware of the fundamentalist Mujaheddin. At that same time, I believe it was 1981 or 1982, seven ALO commanders were killed in Farah by Rabbani and Massoud militias: they blocked the car in which they were travelling, got them out and shot them. Their bodies were then hacked to pieces. The Islamic parties' strategy against us wasn't so much about military action, it was more like targeted assassinations of our best men, especially the political and military leadership of the ALO. Similar massacres were carried out in those years throughout the country, at the hands of all the fundamentalist Mujaheddin groupings: the Tajiks under Rabbani and Massoud, the Pashtuns of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, Khalili's Hazaras, Dostum's Uzbeks.»

«What's really scandalous is that the same criminals who have destroyed our country are back in power today with the backing and support of the West. That same West that sent its troops here saying it was to bring peace and democracy, and instead is behaving like an army of occupation, with the same brutality and inhumanity as the Soviets.»

«Just think of the dozens of innocent civilians that have been massacred these past years by NATO bombs! You Italians should remember the 50 children who died in 2008, killed in an air-raid over Shindand, in the Herat province which is controlled by your own troops, or the 150 civilians killed in 2009 in another raid over

Bala Baluk, also under Italian control. Do you think your crimes are less awful than the ones committed by the Soviet occupiers just because your occupation was legitimized by some scandalous United Nations resolution?»

«We've fought for years against Soviet imperialism and their Khalq servants, and when we're ready we will do the same against NATO imperialism and their criminal fundamentalist puppets. And even against the Islamic Fascism of the Taliban: false patriots created by America for its own purposes, and today serving as a pretext for the United States to continue their occupation of Afghanistan, and tomorrow they will close another deal to return to power.»

«There's only one alternative to the two plagues which have been devastating our country for decades: imperialism and fundamentalism, and that's Socialism.»

7. PEASANT WARS

Latif is 55 years old. He's responsible for the ALO in the province of Takhar, where he comes from. His is the story of a teacher turned political agitator.

«I started my work as an activist in the late Sixties with the Progressive Youth Organization (PYO) founded by Akram Yari. I discovered and developed my political passion through continued reading of Marxist and Maoist works. I had hundreds of books at home, which I considered my secret treasure. When I was first arrested, under suspicion of plotting subversive activities, my father, who was afraid the police was going to search our house, burnt all my books. I was freed for lack of evidence and when I returned home I remember my father cried for joy because they hadn't killed me like he feared they would do. I instead was crying out of despair and said to him: 'They didn't kill me but you did, father, by burning my books. They were my life, they meant everything to me'.»

«I quickly forgot my adolescent mourning for the loss of my beloved books as soon as I discovered the much more gratifying feeling that I got working and living among the people. So, abandoning theory in favour of practice, I travelled for years through the poorer provinces of the North, teaching landless peasants to read and write, creating awareness of the legitimate rights of workers and human beings.»

«Between the Sixties and the early Seventies, together with my PYO colleagues, I organized a series of peasant revolts, fighting for land re-distribution. The peasants would occupy small portions

of their landlords' immense estates, which were often left untilled, and work them. Invariably the landlords' guards and soldiers would arrive and chase them away with gunfire. With only pitchforks and shovels to defend themselves, the peasants had no other way of resisting.»

«At Yangi Qala, in my province, things went differently. They occupied 800 jirib (about 160 hectares) of untilled land belonging to a landlord called Mir Wali. His lands were so immense that, having once sent his army to chase the peasants away, he completely washed his hands of the affair and just lost interest. Or maybe he forgot all about them. Anyway, the peasants, we are talking about hundreds of families and thousands of people, took advantage of the situation and installed themselves on the land, proclaimed it a collective property and started to work it all together as a cooperative, sharing everything, tools, animals, seeds and harvests. After the Soviet invasion, the owner, Mir Wali, fled to Pakistan, from where he returned only years later, with his children, who had grown up in the meantime. It was they who decided to reclaim the property their careless father had left to the peasants. By now these peasants were reduced to about eighty families who had divided up the land into equal sized plots, assigning one to each family. When the owners' emissaries brought the eviction notices, the peasants of Yangi Qala, with the help of the ALO, started a tough resistance movement to defend the lands that their fathers and grandfathers had conquered.»

«During the Soviet occupation, when I was serving in the ALO, the peasant movements, born in the Seventies at the instigation of the Sholayi, turned into resistance units that fought not only to defend their country but also and especially to defend the land they had conquered. I remember a comrade of mine, called Ghiàs, who led a peasant resistance unit in the Farkhar area. In 1983, Rabbani's Islamic Mujaheddin, possibly in cahoots with the local ex-landowners of the lands occupied by Ghiàs' peasants, attacked his group, killing him and exterminating all of his men. I will never forget that massacre.»

«Going back to the end of the Seventies, you must bear in mind that we Sholayi didn't only work for the peasants but also for

the factory workers. Nowadays there are none left in Afghanistan, because the factories were all destroyed by the war and never rebuilt, but at the time our industry was running well, not only in Kabul but in all of the major cities. I used to spend a lot of time with workers in the northern cities, doing political awareness work especially regarding their awful working conditions and their miserable salaries. Together with them and other comrades of mine we organized several strikes and demonstrations, especially in the Spring/Summer of 1968, when the winds of revolt blew over our country as well.»

«During those months, thanks to our precious instrument of mobilization that was our very own weekly *Shola-e Jawid*, we were able to organize dozens of protest marches throughout Afghanistan. The harshest of them was a protest by the workers of the automobile plant of Jangalak, in Kabul, who occupied the factory for weeks until finally they were forced to move out by the army with violent clashes and hundreds of arrests. But the most spectacular demonstration was the one held by the workers of the oil refinery of Sheberghan, who marched on foot through the Salang Pass, all the way to Kabul.»

«Thanks to the PYO's coordination, the workers protests were regularly backed by university students demonstrating their solidarity, especially in Kabul. They would also march in the street to protest against the laws limiting students' rights. These demonstrations were violently suppressed by the army, which even opened fire once, on a student march, killing several youngsters. Another time, in order to stop the demonstrations, the government even closed the University of Kabul for five months. But the marches went on until the rules governing admission to the university were finally changed. The PYO's popularity grew so much in those years that in 1971, when the government allowed the students to set up Student Councils in universities throughout the country, these were dominated by representatives of our organization.»

«Now that we have to start all over again, I've gone back to my original activity, that is teaching: I hold literacy classes in the countryside and I teach Marxism in the city. It will be many years

before there is any real political or social change, we are aware of this, but this the only hope for our country.»

8. A FORTUNATE PRISONER

Mohammad is 60 years old. He's Pashtu originally from the eastern Paktia province. Even though he has had close ties with the ALO, his main political activism is closely linked to Akram Yari, even after the organization he founded was disbanded.

«I met Akram Yari in the late Sixties. He was my teacher at the Naderya High School in Kabul. He was a fascinating person because he was intelligent and so likeable. I remember one day, during a lesson on Islamic religion, he said to us: "They say that God created Man, but who created God?" I started reading his articles on the PYO review, *Shula-e Jawid*, and to take part in the student demonstrations. In 1970 I decided to join the PYO, even though my family opposed it. My father was a democrat but he was afraid I would end up in jail. And that's exactly what happened.»

«After the PYO was disbanded, I continued to follow Yari, joining the small group that he and his brother founded in 1974, SURKHA (*Sazmàn-e Rahaibàkhsh-e Khalq-ye Afghanistan*) the Organization for the Liberation of the People of Afghanistan.»

«The first time I ended up in jail was in 1978, right after the pro-Soviet coup by the Khalq. I was in the North, in Kunduz, where I was teaching in a secondary school. Naturally, it wasn't usual to talk of politics in class with the students, and I would explain the difference between the Khalq puppet-regime and real Communism. Someone heard about it and reported me. I was in Kunduz jail for a year and a half.»

«I spent the first eleven months in isolation, in a tiny cell

without any bedding, with no way of washing and very little food. Every night the guards would come into my cell and beat me. More and more the jail was filled with Sholayi and other democratic opponents of the regime. Every month some prisoners would be brought into the courtyard to be executed: we could hear the rounds of machine-gun fire and then complete silence. The bodies would be loaded onto Russian army trucks and then dumped into mass graves.»

«For the duration of my imprisonment, the police interrogated me all the time trying to find out to which Marxist organization I belonged to, but I always answered that I was a nobody. They accused me of being a counter-revolutionary, an enemy of the people and of Communism. Funny, isn't it? In the end, they became convinced that I was harmless and, luckily, they let me go.»

«Once back in Kabul, in the Autumn of 1979, I learnt that Akram Yari had been captured and killed a year before. Still, I was able to contact the ALO. But I was free for long. In 1980, after the Soviet invasion, there was a new wave of arrests of masses of known regime opponents. They caught me too and locked me up in the big Pol-e-Charki prison camp where I met Majid Kalaqani, the head of SAMA, and Bashir Bahman, head of SAWO. They were both constantly being beaten and tortured by the Soviet guards, but they never spoke a word. They were extremely brave. But in the end, they were both shot, Majid in June of 1980 and Bashir in 1981, in the prison courtyard, the notorious Rifle Range, where hundreds of other Sholayi went to their death.»

«As for me, being just a school teacher and having previously been released for insufficient evidence, I was again set free after a few months. Remembering my father's words, I decided not to tempt fate again. So, while still keeping contacts with the ALO, I decided to take refuge in Pakistan, where I remained until a few years ago.»

9. THE WIDOWS OF THE DESAPARECIDOS

The sad face of Rohafzah is worn, not by old age – she’s only 50 years old – but by suffering. Her suffering goes back a long way: ever since that day, in 1980, when her husband, a Maoist resistance fighter with SAMA, was captured in Kabul by the KHAD secret services, the Afghan KGB.

«Allah Mohammad and I had been married for only a few years when they took him, and we had two small children: a boy, less than a year old, and a girl who had been born just 40 days before. We lived in hiding because we were both part of the same Maoist organization, SAMA, which was founded by Majid Kalakani. They [my husband and Kalakani] had known each other for a long time and were very close friends, because they were both born in the same area, in Kalakan, North of Kabul. My husband was always with him: I remember that he used to joke about it saying that he considered himself as a kind of bodyguard.»

«He was with him on that fateful day. They were arrested together in Microrayon, the residential area of Kabul which had just been built by the Soviets. They were both transferred to the KHAD detention centre of Sedarat. He was held in isolation and no one could see him. I was desperate, I didn’t know what to do, I didn’t how to get any news of him.»

«A few days after their arrest, there was an announcement over the radio that Majid had been hanged. I burst into tears, because I was afraid they had killed my husband as well. Finally, after about three months, I got a message from him written on the back of a piece of aluminium foil torn from the inside of a pack of

cigarettes. He had managed to write to me thanks to a young Soviet guard who came from Tajikistan. He told me he was well and that he was being transferred to the Pol-e-Charki prison and not to worry. I never heard from him again.»

«That is when my nightmare began. My father-in-law decided to visit the prison to ask about his son: he never returned. In the following weeks the KHAD arrested my brother-in-law (also a member of SAMA) and he too disappeared. Then it was the turn of my other brother-in-law, who was killed by Hekmatyar's henchmen. I couldn't believe this was really happening to me. I was very frightened and especially worried for my two children. My SAMA comrades told me it was no longer safe for me to stay and that we should leave Kabul. So they brought us up to the Koh-e-Safi mountains, in the Parwan province, where our organization had its military base.»

«At first, we were safe there, but the living conditions were very harsh, especially for the two little ones. We lived in caves or we slept outside. It was cold and the food was scarce, what little bits the local peasants could bring to the base, and it had to feed hundreds of fighters. But we had no choice, so we stayed there for over a year.»

«In the winter of 1982 the Mujaheddin of Rabbani and Massoud discovered our base and attacked it. I will never forget one young comrade who, before being shot with dozens of his companions, cried out 'Long live SAMA! Long live Majid!'. His name was Zilmay. My children and I were saved by some comrades who helped us to escape into Pakistan. We owe our lives to SAMA.»

«I owe the same to ALO, the other main Sholayi organization. In the refugee camp in Peshawar where we were, my children were able to study in the ALO schools. And thanks to the ALO my son, once he turned fifteen, was able to find work in a factory making matches. When I was a little girl I wanted to become a nurse. Now I was working in a clinic that the ALO managed inside a hospital: there I was in charge of the vaccinations.»

«It was toward the end of the Nineties, through the ALO, that I came to learn what I had always know deep down inside. A man

was presented to me, and from his pocket he pulled out a watch and handed it to me: it was my husband's wristwatch. He told me that he had met him in the Pol-e-Charki prison, that they had become friends and that he always spoke of me. Until one day, in 1981, he gave the man his wristwatch and made him promise that he would return it to me if one day we were to meet. My husband knew that this man would sooner or later be released because he was not an agitator, he was just one of the hundreds who were being arrested in those years for no serious reason. He also knew that he was going to be shot that same evening.»

Rohafzah's voice is broken by her sobs and her eyes fill with tears. From her bag she takes out a magazine: she is on the front cover, wearing a white veil – white is the colour of mourning in Afghanistan – and in her hands she is holding a framed picture of a young man, her husband, and a bunch of flowers. She is surrounded by other women. The headline says: “Peace needs justice”.

«This is a demonstration held by the committee of widows which I founded upon my return to Afghanistan. We number about fifty women, all former wives of Sholayi victims of the Khalq regime and of Islamic fundamentalism, of war criminals who are now members of Parliament, government ministers, generals. Every December 10th, on the anniversary of the signature, in 1948, of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, we Afghan women march in silence in front of the general headquarters of UNAMA, the UN mission in Afghanistan. We demand the abolition of the laws granting amnesty to the war criminals who back the Karzai government and that the government protects. We ask that those who assassinated our husbands and hundreds of thousands of our countrymen be arrested and tried by the International Court of Justice. In other words, we ask for justice because without justice there will never be peace or democracy in this country.»

10. LIKE CHINA BEFORE MAO

Saleem, 26 years old, his head covered with a keffiyeh and a bonnet, is part of the new generation of Sholayi. He studied engineering in Herat where, in 2005, he made contact with the ALO.

«I met some students in university. We used to talk about politics, about our country's situation and the international news. I didn't know they were with the ALO. As a matter of fact, I wasn't even aware that this organization was still active. But when we started talking about Communism and they noticed my eager interest, they revealed to me their affiliation and they offered me to join it. Since then I've been reading lots of books they have provided me with: writings by Marx, Lenin, Mao and, naturally, the book written by the founder of the ALO, Dr. Faiz Ahmad: "*The Lighthouse of Emancipation*".»

«The more I read, the more I came to realize that the apparently anachronistic Communism of Mao Zedong applies perfectly to contemporary Afghanistan. The backward situation we have today in our country holds many analogies with the situation of pre-Maoist China over seventy years ago: 80% of the population living in abject poverty, almost completely illiterate, dominated by a handful of warlords and landowners with huge estates, an imperialist occupation, by the Japanese back then in China, and by the West in Afghanistan today, and finally the presence of a reactionary and collaborationist regime in power.»

No social progress will ever be possible in Afghanistan until we

rid ourselves of the foreign occupation and the fundamentalist fascism of the Taliban and the criminals who are in the government and who sit in Parliament. We hope we can reach this goal peacefully because our people are tired of war and violence. But if guns are the only possible solution, we won't hesitate to use them. As we stand today, we aren't ready for this possibility. First we must work with and among the people, to spread a revolutionary conscience and create a strong Communist Party.»

We ask Saleem if he thinks this is possible and also if it is not a paradox to advertise communism in a country which, in that same name, has been oppressed and violated for ten years and which, for this reason, identifies communism as absolute evil.

«It is not so – he says strongly – because the great majority of us Afghans are well aware of the difference between the Soviet invaders with their Afghan servants, whose only link to communism were the flags, and the tens of thousands of real communist Sholayi who sacrificed their lives to defend the Afghan people from all their enemies: the feudal lords, the monarchic oppression, the Khalq dictatorship, the Soviet occupation and now the fundamentalist fascism supported by America.»

«If anything, it's the West who's lost the respect of the Afghan people, who has betrayed us with all its false promises, revealing its true imperialist face, and the ethnic-based Islamic parties of the former Northern Alliance, which today has the impudence to present itself as an opponent after having served the imperialist Americans and having backed the collaborationist Karzai regime for years.»

«Then there are the Taliban who still have a strong following in the rural areas. There it's to do with ignorance, the fact that many people don't know that they are an American creation, ready to go back to serving the imperialists. It is our job to fight this ignorance, which is the biggest weapon in the hands of our enemies, be they fundamentalists or imperialists.»

«Only when these two cancers will have torn out of our country will we be able to build what Mao called 'new democracy': a revolutionary government based on an alliance between the peasant proletariat and the progressive urban lower middle class

which would achieve important social and economic reforms, and then to move on the road to building socialism under the guidance of the communist party.»

Clearly, we will have to avoid the authoritarian degenerations which have characterized the history of socialism. Times have changed, history moves on and doesn't back-step. We cannot allow ourselves to make the same mistakes that were made in Russia, in China and in other socialist states where the revolution simply replaced one ruling minority with that of another new elite. Neither must we remain enslaved by the taboo of false bourgeois democracy that the West has forcibly exported into our country: here in Afghanistan elections and a multi-party system are simply not enough to make a true democracy. This can only be achieved when power is in the hands of the people.»

11. COMPUTERS AND POVERTY

Aziz is 24 years old and joined the ALO in 2002, upon his return from Pakistan where he grew up in a refugee camp with his mother and his siblings. He wanted to follow in his ex-Sholayi father's footsteps.

«My father – he says, fixing the keffiyeh and hat over his face – took part in the failed 1979 insurrection of Bala Hissar against the pro-soviet Khalq regime. All the heads of his cell were either killed or made prisoners, and he lost all contact with the organization. He took refuge in the SAMA base in the Koh-e-Safi mountains and fought alongside them against the Soviets and the fundamentalists. But soon his failing health forced him to put down his gun and before long he was gone.»

Aziz studies Computer Sciences at a private university, which he pays for by doing two different jobs, one by day and one by night. The bags under his eyes are proof of the sacrifices he is making, for which he explains his double motivation.

«First of all, because public university is closely monitored by the police, my political activity with the students would have been impossible to do. Where I am now I can act much more freely. Last year I was suspended for six months by order of the NDS, the Secret Services, but at least I didn't end up in jail. And then, at the public university they haven't even got computers, and the professors have no training to speak of. I had no other choice if I really wanted to learn something.»

«Unfortunately, I can't use the computer for my political activity: for that I would at least need to hook up to the internet, which I

can't afford, just like 95% of the Afghan population. For this reason I decided to study computer science, because I hope that one day I will be able to put my knowledge to good use for the people, contributing to the modernization and the development of my country.»

Aziz's computer is the only modern object he has in his home, a very modest apartment hidden among the back alleys and the open drains of one of Kabul's poorest neighbourhoods. He has placed it on a low wooden table above which an unlit light-bulb is dangling. «In winter we use it as a heater: we all sit around it with our feet under the table and we turn on the light-bulb. It works, I tell you!», he says smiling and then goes on to say, this time seriously, that his is a poor family.

«We are poor in a poor country. Despite the promises and your governments' propaganda, Afghanistan remains the country with the greatest social inequalities in the world. Ten years of western aid have only lined the pockets of the criminals and the Mafiosi who govern in Kabul for the benefit of NATO, not for the Afghan people. Humanitarian imperialism will never bring benefits to this country. Worse still would be a return of the Taliban, for whom poverty and ignorance are indispensable governing tools.»

«Our only hope is socialism, a real socialism, new and different from the 'red monarchies' of the past, a government of the people and for the people that can guarantee equality and freedom.»

12. MARX VERSUS THE BURQA

Roya is 27 years old and comes from a Pashtun village in eastern Afghanistan. She studied medicine and that's where she found her political bearings, thanks to a professor of hers, an ex-freedom fighter with the ALO and friend of Dr. Faiz Ahmad. Today, she does her political work underground among the women of her own village, where she works as a doctor.

«After finishing my studies at university I returned home to my village to open a small clinic for women. Here, aside from my work as a doctor, I can do important social and political work with the women, though it isn't without difficulties. Here we are talking about a rural community, very conservative and mindful of tradition, where the mullah's authority reigns and where social and family life are regulated by the fundamentalist Islamic laws.»

«To make things worse, there are the NATO troops. Because of their constant searches and night-time operations into people's houses, which often end up with innocent people being accused and arrested for aiding the insurgents, the support for the Taliban grows stronger every day.»

«At first I would speak to my patients individually, about their family situations, their denied rights, the situation in the country and in our organization. Then, with the help of a couple of them, I started holding weekly group meetings inside the clinic, where dozens of women participate. With them we hold discussions, we read and discuss Marxist writings. We also get a lot of young girls who come to study here because their fathers forbid them from going to school.»

«Gradually, this work has begun to bear fruit, and the village men have begun to see changes in their women. That's where the problems started. Every Friday, during the sermon at the mosque, the mullah levels accusations against the clinic, saying it is a threat to the men's authority and to Islamic tradition: I've been warned to stick to my medical work, otherwise the clinic will be closed. Until now, thanks to the women of the village, we are resisting.»

«As communist activists, our political work is very difficult in Afghanistan these days, certainly much harder than it was when the ALO was founded, in the early 1970s. Back then, the influence of fundamentalism on society was limited to a few political groupings: for sure, people were generally religious and careful of tradition, but today's hard-line vision of Islam didn't exist back then. It was easier to talk to people.»

«Also because, before the Khalq regime and the Soviet occupation, talking about Marxism didn't mean colliding with the negative ideological prejudice that, understandably, is prevailing among Afghans today. It's difficult to explain to people, especially those who don't know about the Sholayi movement and the persecutions it has suffered, the difference between true communism and those criminals who committed all kinds of atrocities in its name.»

«Ours is a difficult task, sometimes even a desperate one. But I'm convinced that, even if it will take time, maybe generations, in the end the Afghan people will realize that the situation will change in Afghanistan only if they take the power out of the hands of the mullahs and the warlords who serve the foreigners, into their own hands.»

«And I'm deeply convinced that the revolution in Afghanistan, which is first of all a cultural revolution, will succeed only thanks to us women. For this reason I believe it is fundamentally and politically revolutionary to work for women's liberation.»

13. THE VILLAGE CHIEF'S DAUGHTER

Benafshah, 27 years old, joined the ALO to uphold those ideals for which her father sacrificed his own life. He was a freedom fighter with SAMA, and was killed in the late 1980s by Hekmatyar's fundamentalists.

«My father was killed when I was only seven. I came back home from school one day to find lots of relatives crying. Without saying a word, my mother took my sister and me to live with friends of ours. Months later she joined us and we left for Pakistan. When I asked her where my father was, she replied that he would soon be back. Only when I was a little older did she tell me that he was dead, and for me it was a terrible blow. That is how, going through his things, I came across his books by Marx and Mao. I began to read them only because they reminded me of him, but after a while I became very interested in them. When my mother explained to me why he was killed, explaining his political activity and how it had started with work in favour of women's emancipation, I decided to dedicate my life to furthering his work. So it was that, once I was back in Afghanistan with my family, I contacted the ALO and, a couple of years ago, I decided to join the organization.»

«I could say that the first battle I had to fight for women's liberation was against my own husband. As a matter of fact, I'm still fighting it», says Benafshah smiling behind her turquoise veil. «My husband is a good man and we love each other, but when it came to politics, we always quarrel. We quarrelled when, in the elections, he voted for the fundamentalist criminals who backed

Karzai, and even when he said that Malalai Joya was a whore. We always quarrelled when he would sit around all evening watching those stupid Bollywood sitcoms on television with which they are driving the Afghan people to stupidity. But very gradually, with a lot of patience, I managed to turn things around a little. In the latest elections he voted for an independent woman, the widow of a Sholayi freedom fighter. In the evenings he watches BBC News and when they talk about Malalai Joya he calls me over to the TV and stays there watching with me. But he still doesn't know about my political activities: when I go out to one of my evening ALO meetings, I tell him I'm going to visit my mother. Sooner or later I'll have to settle this matter as well.»

Even her political work with the other women is something which Benafshah takes very personally, as we soon learn from the story she tells us, which is worth being made into a novel.

«My family comes from a small village. I went back to it one day for a relative's wedding. The entire village was there, including the head of the village, a powerful man, a well known former Mujaheddin commander. He was accompanied by his daughter, a splendid 22-year old with the proud look of someone who is well aware of her own social status. This made her unpopular among the village women, maybe just out of jealousy, since she was coveted by all the young men of good standing in the region. I introduced myself and we immediately became friends: she didn't have all that many of them. We started a correspondence and soon our letters became more and more intimate.»

«One day she wrote me a desperate letter saying that her father had decided not to send her to study and that, after she had protested, he had shouted: "Here's what the school does: it teaches children to rebel against the parents' authority!" I decided to tell her that her father, in whom she had had complete trust until that day, was in fact a war criminal, a bad person who before long would have revealed his wicked nature. She took it badly but, soon after that, events proved me right.»

«Her father decided to marry her to the nephew of one of the most powerful men in the country. She refused, telling her father that she would never marry a man she didn't even know. So he

beat her without pity, ordering her to obey. She wrote me saying she would rather kill herself than be married that way. I suggested that she obtain a forged document stating that she was sterile, which was reason enough to rescind the marriage contract. So that's what she did, which got her father so mad that he threatened to kill her. I recommended that she run away, but she was too scared.»

«She hid all my letters in her personal Quran, the only place where nobody could ever go poking their nose. In that same period she discovered, to her horror, that every Friday afternoon, returning from the mosque, her father would receive some of the most prominent men of the area in his house and they would watch porn films and get drunk. All of this while he was ordering the local girls' schools to be closed. My friend was indignant and furious, and so was I. Then I suggested that she open a dressmaker's shop where the village girls could secretly continue to receive some schooling.»

«Today, she runs an underground school there, in the shop, which also serves as a meeting point for all the women of the village who, needless to say, have completely changed their opinion about her: she is now a sort of heroine for them. She now wants to join the ALO and teach Marxism to the women of her village.»

Surprised by Benafshah's amazing story, my photographer and I jokingly say that, well, her friend was rich and without a worry in the world, and she, Benafshah, has ruined her life.

«No – she says with a serious look on her face – I've opened her eyes.»

AFTERWORD

I was lucky enough to meet the Maoist resistance fighters in Kabul, in the Summer of 1980, where I had been able to go with the excuse of a business trip. It hadn't been easy to understand who was heading the resistance in the capital. The strategy had changed over the previous months. The population, after the massacres of the Spring demonstrations, was not to be involved. The new course of action included attacks against barracks, to take their arms and ammunition, bombings and targeting important Soviet officials. They were quiet, lethal operations, mainly by night, under cover of the local population. A Russian general was killed in a restaurant, a few feet from the table where I was sitting, but people hardly moved. The underground fabric slowly revealed itself, with patient networking and building reciprocal trust, dribbling the tight surveillance of the agents of the KHAD who closely followed every foreigner who set foot in town. I came into contact with some SAMA activists who, together with other leftist and moderate Islamic groups, had just joined the National United Front. They assured me that I would be contacted, they couldn't leave any address. They kept their promise and after a month I left with them for the Paktia mountains, bordering Pakistan, and we shared the night-time assaults, the endless marches and daily life. They accepted to take me along so that I would speak and write about them upon my return to Europe, in order to let the world know that in Afghanistan there was such a thing as a democratic resistance which was asking for international solidarity and that the fundamentalist parties did not represent the Afghan people. In

the years that followed I tried to accomplish this task, not without considerable difficulties. In the early 1980s, the major disappointments came, funnily enough, from the parties of the left, whose newspapers refused to publish my pieces. At that time, to criticize the Soviet Union was still very much 'taboo', especially if the very people who were fighting against Soviet imperialism were women and men who found their inspiration precisely in Marxism, and who were being tortured and killed in the name of its ideals.

When, thirty years later, I learnt that a journalist, Enrico Piovesana, was finally writing a book on the Maoist Afghan fighters who, to this day, continued to be called 'the real Mujaheddin' by the Afghan population, I thought it would be fitting to contribute with my own account from way back then.

Cristiana Cella

(freelance journalist, contributes to the Italian daily 'Unità').

In 1980 she was working for two weeklies, 'Panorama' and 'Europeo')

PAKTIA, SEPTEMBER, 1980 – A small line of men in the blinding light. The fighters walk in single line, their rifle on their shoulder and, in their hands, a tea pot, a portable radio, a string of beads. There are about thirty of them: boys, men, young and old, all locals from these valleys, shepherds and peasants. Only the commander has a Kalashnikov, the others are satisfied of their trusty old Enfield rifles, which they have lovingly kept for ages. The mortar has been taken apart, and the bigger pieces are packed on the back of patient mares, the smaller ones are on the backs of some Khalq prisoners, captured in action. Two slightly chubby youths who do the cooking for the group. They often send me a complicit smile: maybe they think I'm a prisoner too, that I'm being re-educated.

«We don't want the blood of our people, like the Islamist parties do. By living with us, these boys have understood their mistake and are now on our side.» That's what commander Khasan says. He's from these parts, from Paktia, from a Pashtun tribe that will be hosting us in the Tribal Zone. He got his degree

with a government grant in Germany, where he lived through the fights and the hopes of 1968. This is one thing that we have in common. After a spell in a Fedayeen training camp, he's back home. He sees his country with German eyes, and dreams of a Marxist revolution and a radical change. It doesn't take long for him to understand that his ideas had been overtaken by the events. Things have changed. He returns to his people, re-learning from them what he had forgotten. He teaches with passion in Khost and in Kabul, opposing as best he can the communist Khalq government that has taken power. He is arrested and spends a year in the Pol-e-Charki prison, where every day can be your last. «A great gift from the government» he says, smiling. Because of the cramped living conditions, no one has anything to lose and everyone speaks his mind. Nobody knows who will be shot the next day. That's how his first fighting cell is born. Once released, he returns to his village. In the meantime the Soviets have invaded Afghanistan. His people never forgot his opposition to government that cost him his stay in prison. They trust him. They follow him in growing numbers. So he becomes the undisputed commander of about a hundred men. They are constantly on the move, in small groups around the city of Khost. He's got authority, a curt manner and a typically Afghan sense of irony.

Actually, his little army is not very aggressive and the objective is ambitious: to attack the Khost airbase. We can see it from up above on the hills. The MI-24 helicopters sparkle in the sunlight. Evidently he won't attack all alone. Khasan's group is one of the many moving around independently on the territory, organizing assaults and ambushes almost every night. For the more important operations they create alliances. Meetings at Base Camp are held on a daily basis, with infinite cups of tea. In order to fight together there must be trust. In other words, there must be agreement on at least two fundamental points: the fight against the Russians and against the fundamentalist parties, the latter being particularly disliked. Khasan tries to share his dreams for the future of his country, patiently explaining the errors of Islamic fundamentalism, which anyway is of foreign origin, and those of

the pro-soviet governments. The assault on the airbase is brought up in every meeting: they will need weapons and fighters in large quantities. The biggest help will come from a commander famous in all of Paktia for his courage. A dear friend, says Khasan. He invites us to dinner, they will be discussing plans for the assault.

His headquarters are nearby, just an hour's walk. With his men, he has taken over an abandoned village. Many of the houses have crumbled. Bomb craters are all over. «The Sholayi have already come through here. That's why it's safe» says Khasan. The smell of fresh baked bread is already in the air, everyone is pitching in to help. Bul Bul greets us like a prince in his own court. He's sorry that he can't offer the two ladies (my Swiss colleague and I) a better welcome, he's shocked that we had to cover so much ground on foot. If we come back he promises a tour of Afghanistan by helicopter. He has no doubt about taking the city of Khost in a matter of months. He offers us hot water for our shower, that his Mujaheddin heated for us, rice and even a cake and fresh grapes, purposefully bought in Pakistan. It's an unimaginable menu for these parts. His men are numerous and heavily armed. We all eat together.

All through the dinner he speaks to me of the Quran, he asks me which sacred books I have read, which embarrasses me. He says his group is part of the Khalez party, very close to the Hezb-e-Islami, the most ferocious among the fundamentalist parties. He praises them out loud, as if reciting a poem. Then he asks me what I think of them. I came across them in Peshawar and decide to be open in my response, wondering at each word whether or not it is good choice. I cannot understand how such a man, who talks like a maddened mullah, can possibly be a friend and an ally of our commander.

It's getting late and the Mujaheddin are starting to yawn. Little by little they lie down next to their guns. «You needn't worry» whispers Bul Bul. «I am of your opinion and now that I know this, I can trust you. But my men must not know. For now.» He picks up a twig and writes three letters on the dusty ground: MAO. I look at him, amazed, while he quickly erases what he wrote. «These are my ideas, for this reason I am happy to help Khasan and the

Front.» While the fighters are gradually falling asleep, he speaks to me freely. He's an engineer, has read a lot, from the Quran to Marx's *Capital*. «But here, I must go day by day. And I must not lose my men's trust.»

They number about a thousand but they often move in small groups, more agile and less visible. They have infiltrators in the army, in the government. Those are the ones who transmit information for the assaults. Here is another piece of the puzzle I'm trying to piece together. Bul Bul's choice is exactly what the SAMA activists were telling me about back in Kabul: whenever possible one of them will infiltrate a fundamentalist group and, taking advantage of their military training and abundance of weapons, he will strive to make a name for himself on the battlefield and to obtain command of a group. The efficacy in the field is not the only advantage. They have the extraordinary opportunity of working politically from within, to stop a foreign fundamentalist ideology from poisoning the people, to talk Marxism without ever mentioning Marx. Bul Bul is a hero and his men would give their lives for him. He takes care of them and of their families and he makes them think about the present situation and what kind of future they want to build for Afghanistan, a future that's very clear to them and about which they have no illusions.

The war will go on, they have no doubt about that, but sooner or later the Russians will leave. «We can't beat them militarily, but we can make their occupation impossible, too expensive, in terms of both money and men.» They are aware of the political fragility of the country and of the pressure from abroad. After the Russians have gone, the stakes will be very high. «If the Islamist groups in Peshawar take over, things will get even worse than they are now. The country will be overrun by a horrific civil war.»

That's precisely what happened. The Maoist activists continued alone their difficult fight, caught in between Russian and fundamentalist violence, each with their own agenda. Many of them will die in the nine following years, but perhaps for Bul Bul, proudly leading us along the attack road to the airstrip, this is something he had not foreseen.

CHRONOLOGY

1964

King Zahir Shah grants a liberal Constitution and opens up to democratic reforms

1965

Akram Yari forms the Maoist student movement Progressive Youth Organisation

1968

PYO publishes the weekly magazine *Eternal Flame (Sholai Jawaid)* from which the term Sholayi. The magazine is terminated after only eleven issues. The PYO organizes student protests, strikes and peasant revolts

1972

Violent clashes occur on the Kabul university campus between PYO students and fundamentalists led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar. The PYO is broken up due to internal quarrels

1973

Faiz Ahmad forms the Maoist movement Revolutionary Group of the People of Afghanistan (RGPA) which changes its name in 1979 to Afghanistan Liberation Organisation (ALO)

Prince Daoud Khan stages a 'coup' (April Revolution) and installs an authoritarian regime controlled by the police.

1978

In disagreement with Faiz Ahmad, Majid Kalakani abandons the RGPA and founds another Maoist group, SAMA, Afghanistan People's Liberation Organisation

Pro-Soviet 'putsch' by the Khalq Party (PDPA) and beginning of a massive wave of repression of the Maoist movements (with the arrest and execution of Akram Yari)

1979

The ALO organizes the Bala Hissar insurrection in Kabul (5 August), which ends in bloody repression by the Khalq regime

The Soviet troops invade Afghanistan (24 December): ALO and SAMA start an armed resistance, fighting against fundamentalist Islamic groups backed by the United States

1980

Majid Kalakani is arrested and executed by the Khalq regime

1985

Soviet troops kill commander "Qubad" (the Afghan 'Che Guevara')

1986

Hekmatyar's fundamentalist Islamists kill Faiz Ahmad

1992

The Soviet retreat from Afghanistan marks the beginning of the civil war between Islamic parties

1996

Beginning of Taliban rule with the support of Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the United States

2001

Invasion of Afghanistan by American troops (7 October)

Photographs



Bahram, former Maoist resistance fighter with the ALO, with his Kalashnikov (Photo Naoki Tomasini)



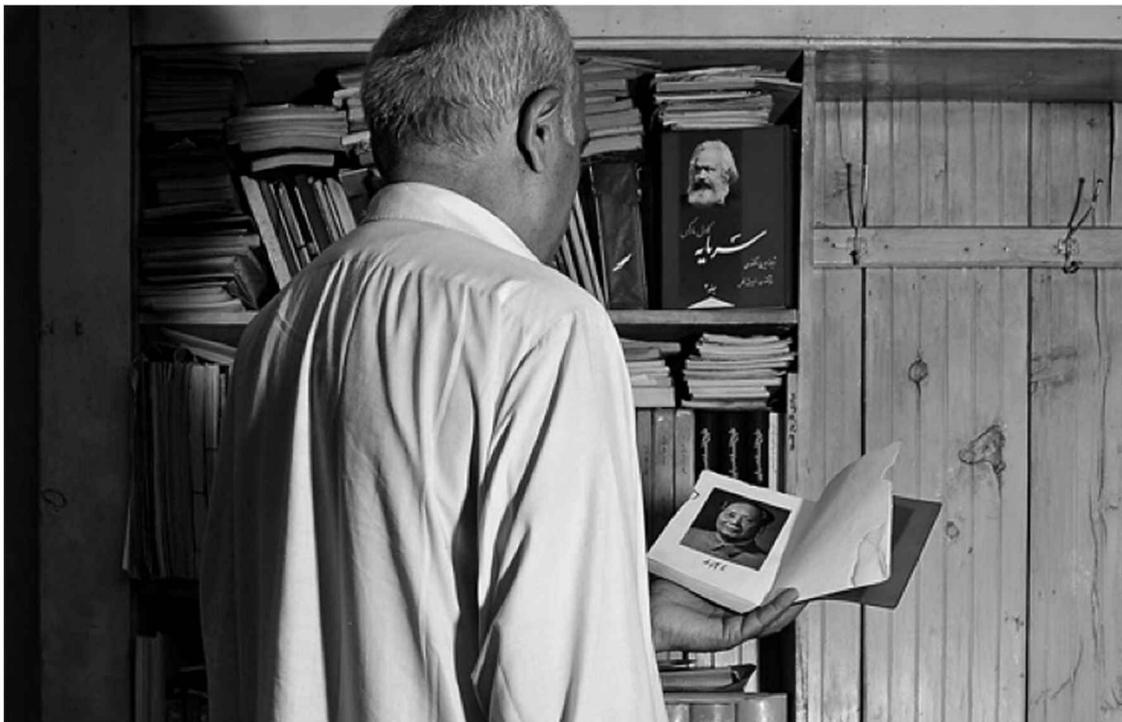
The texts of Marx and Mao and Bahram's Makarov pistol (Photo Naoki Tomasini)



ALO propaganda material (Photo Naoki Tomasini)



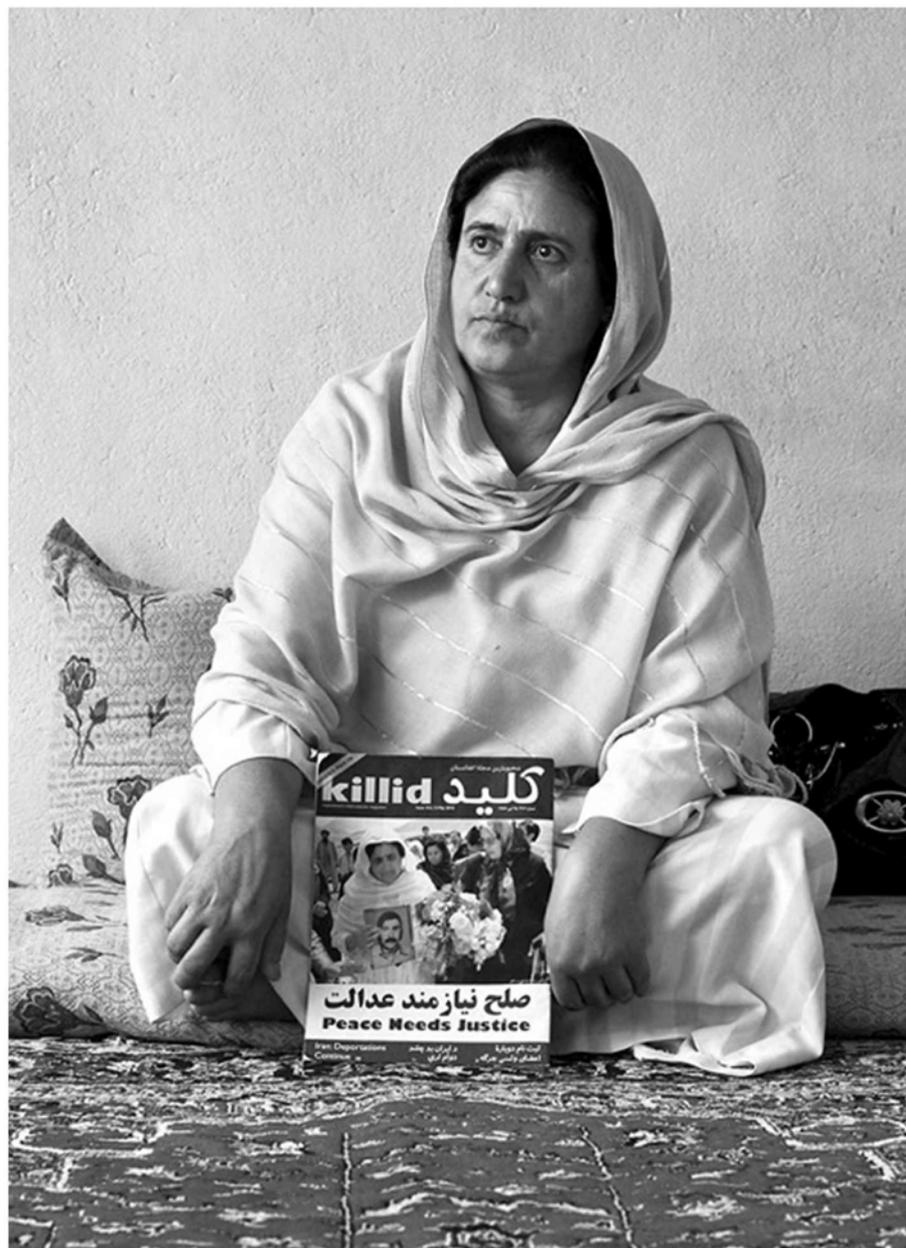
Doormat with an American flag at the entrance of Bahram's room (Photo Naoki Tomasini)



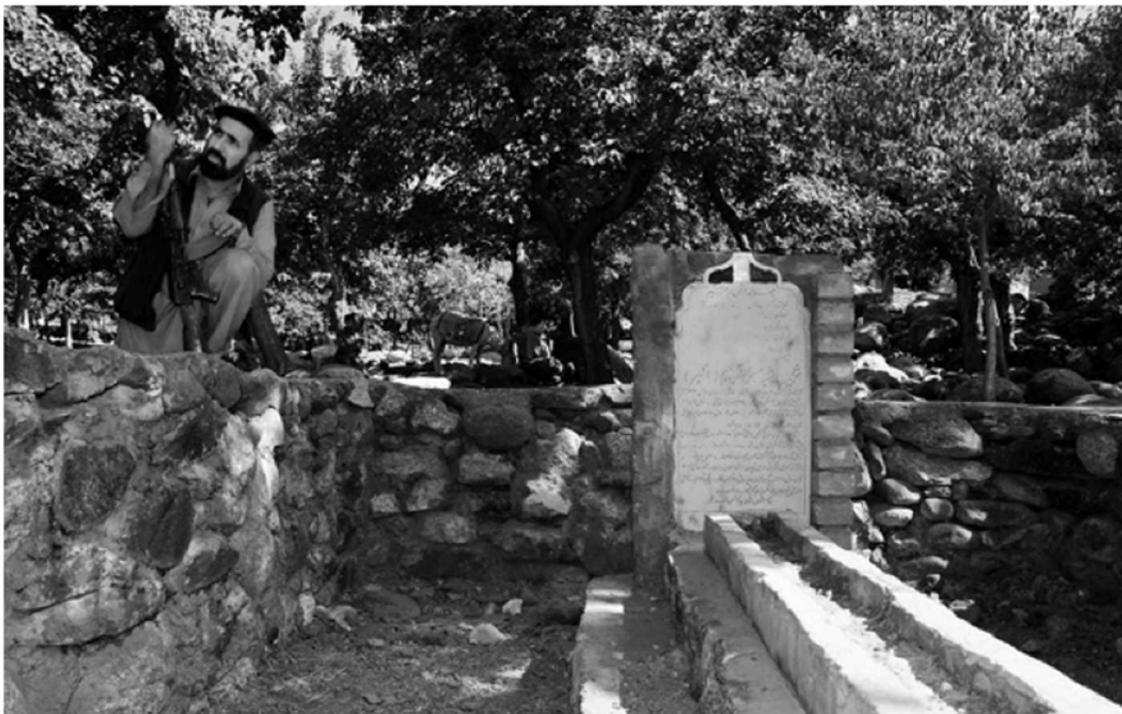
Mohammad, ex Sholayi political prisoner, shows a text by Mao Zedong (Photo Naoki Tomasini)



Behind the curtain, Nimat, former ALO resistance fighter (Photo Naoki Tomasini)



Rohafzah, widow of a Maoist militant murdered by the Khalq regime (Photo Naoki Tomasini)



The tomb of Qubad, "the Afghan Che Guevara" (Photo Naoki Tomasini)



Aziz, a young ALO militant, with his computer (Photo Naoki Tomasini)



Saleem, young ALO activist, explains the movement's strategy (Photo Naoki Tomasini)



Roya, ALO activist, manages a women's clinic in a village (Photo Naoki Tomasini)



Benafshah, young ALO militant, reads a letter from her friend (Photo Naoki Tomasini) *"Dear sister, I did as you suggested. I created a group of girls with whom I meet twice a week with the excuse of a sowing lesson. Please send me more of the books I asked for."*

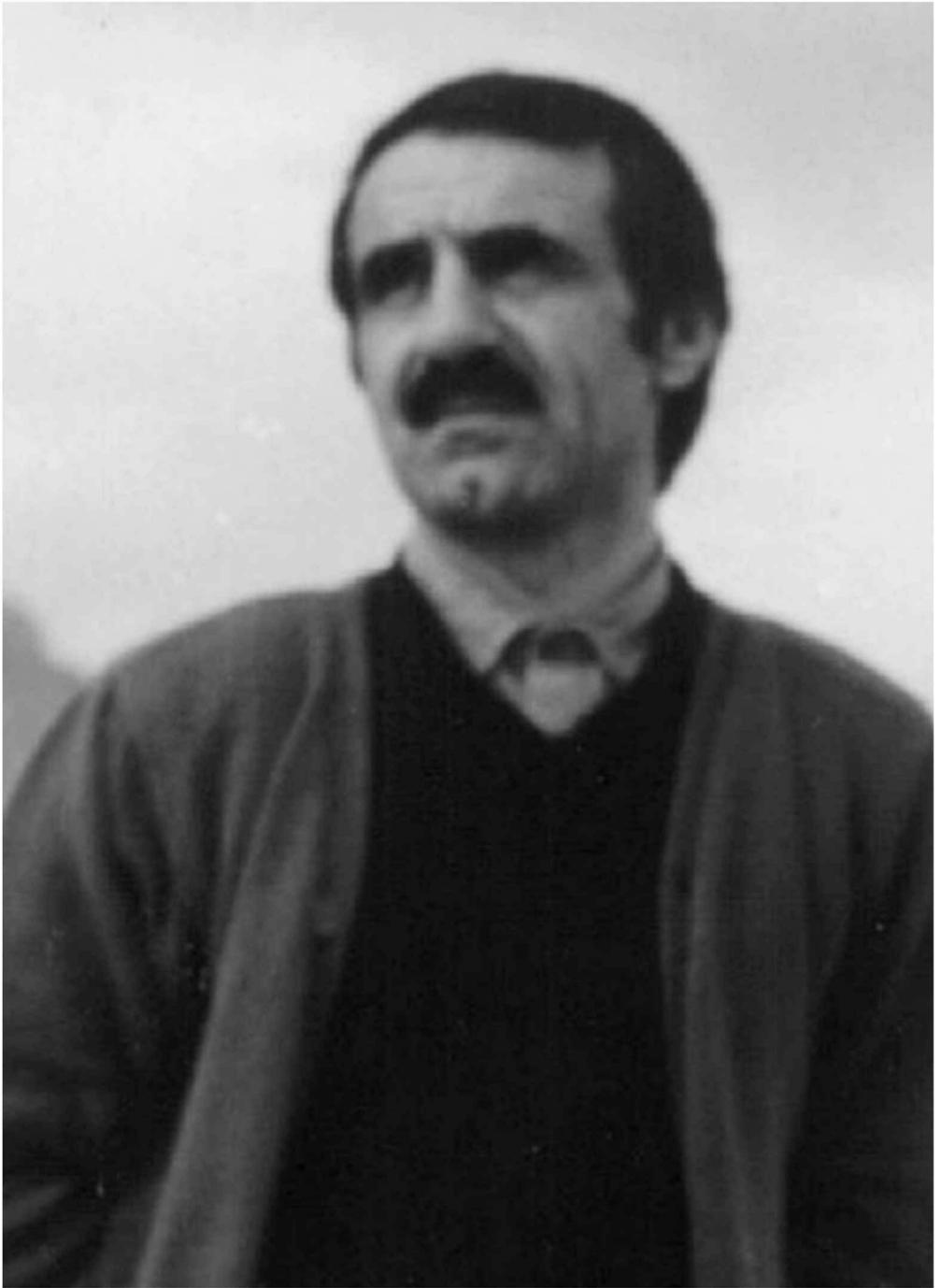




ALO militants celebrate in a secret place the Day of the Martyrs, 12 November, date of the murder of Dr. Faiz Ahmad, founder of the ALO



Akram Yari, founder of the PYO, first Maoist movement in Afghanistan



Faiz Ahmad, founder and leader of the Afghanistan Liberation Organisation (Photo Naoki Tomasini)



Area di attività militare dei principali gruppi partigiani maoisti durante la guerra degli anni '80

A Organizzazione per la Liberazione dell'Afghanistan (ALO)

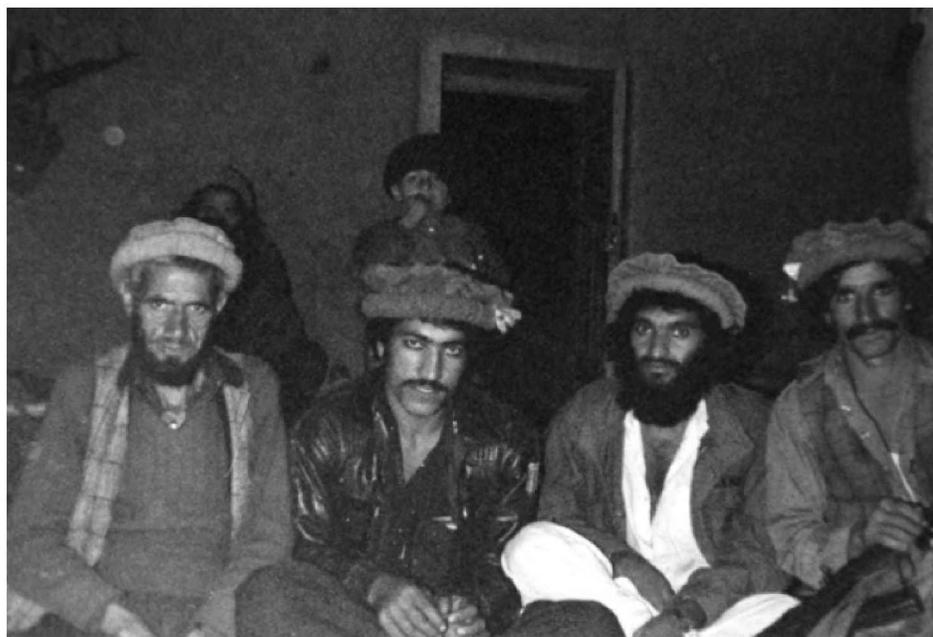
S Organizzazione per l'Indipendenza dei Popoli dell'Afghanistan (SAMA)

0 100 200 Kilometers
0 100 200 Miles
Lambert Conformal Conic Projection, SP 29N/39N

In the following pages, images of ALO resistance fighters in the war against the Soviet troops and the Islamic militias backed by Pakistan, the United States and even by the People's Republic of China (private collection)























BACK COVER

It is not often that one comes across an important political and historical phenomenon so completely ignored by Western historiography, essay writing and journalism. It is all the more astonishing if it concerns a country of the first importance in geopolitical terms, such as Afghanistan which, for decades now, has had the misfortune of appearing in the front pages of world press.

This book tells, for the first time ever, the story of Sholayi, the Maoist movement in Afghanistan, which organized many of the strikes, student revolts, peasant uprisings that marked the so-called 'Afghan '68' season, and the early 1970s. Sholayi was also behind many of the insurrections against the pro-soviet Khalq regime in the late 1970s, and had a major part in fighting against the Soviet occupiers and the Islamic fundamentalist militias financed by the United States. Even to this day the Sholayi movement – under the banner of the Afghanistan Liberation Organisation (ALO) founded in October 1973 – is actively committed in an underground struggle against the NATO occupiers but also against fundamentalism of the Taliban kind and of the warlords who are back in power with Karzai and his American support. As it was in the past, the struggle today is being fought by a new generation of militants who believe in a 'third way' for the country - «neither with foreign imperialism, nor with fundamentalist fascism» - who see Maoist communism as a valid solution to the problems of a country, like their own, that has yet to wake up from its hibernation in a pre-modern era.

ENRICO PIOVESANA, born in Perugia, starts working on international affairs creating the website 'warnews.it' in collaboration with the Corriere dell'Umbria newspaper. He has

freelanced in Iraq for the newspapers L'Unità and Liberazione and as envoy for PeaceReporter in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Chechnya, South Ossetia, Sri Lanka, Burma (Myanmar) and the Philippines. His pieces are published in the Corriere della Sera, La Stampa, Il Manifesto, Famiglia Cristiana, L'Espresso, Il Venerdì di Repubblica, Diario, Left and Oggi. His video reports have been shown by Annozero and RaiNews24. He was awarded the Ezio Baldoni journalistic prize in 2007. He is currently editor of the E-online website and E-online monthly edition.

NAOKI TOMASINI, photo-journalist with an Italian father and a Japanese mother, he started out in his profession in Ramallah as editor of Mustafa Barghouti's Palestine Monitor. From 2004 to 2009 he has worked as journalist and photographer for the online daily 'PeaceReporter', travelling to all the main theatres of war in the Middle East and Central Asia. From 2009 he has been an independent photo-journalist. He presently lives in Brazil.