

Planning Kabul: The politics of urbanization in Afghanistan

by

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Abstract
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This dissertation is an analysis of how the city of Kabul is being planned. This study addresses a gap in planning scholarship, which rarely focuses on the planning of cities in “developing” countries. Kabul is uniquely important in the geopolitics of security; and at the same time, Kabul is a mid-sized, rapidly-growing city with limited resources and substantial constraints to effective governing. In these respects, the case of Kabul is representative of the way most of the world's urbanization is being planned—more so than the planning of any city in “developed” countries.

The core argument is that urban planning in the capital of Afghanistan occurs in three modes that operate both in parallel and in tension with each other. The first mode is formal planning, in which Afghan public agencies are developing and implementing strategies for guiding urban development. The second mode is informal planning, in which the urban regime sets both direct and indirect rules that guide urban development. These include denial of recognition, exclusion from the legal sphere, and maintenance of a ‘vulnerable reserve’ of available labor and space for potential investment. The third mode is exceptionalist planning, in which elites—including Afghans, Afghan-expatriates, and non-Afghans—violate rules and expectations with knowing impunity.

I argue that in each mode, the *management of risk* strongly defines the political rationalities that shape policy. Formal planning encourages deeper local investment because it clarifies spaces of reduced potential conflict with the urban regime. Informal planning is a space in which poor households submit to conditions of elevated risk in exchange for long-term opportunities for their families. Exceptionalist planning involves lowering the life-risks of elite individuals, often at the expense of increased risk for non-elites.

The three modes of planning identified through this research are explained as a product of both specific conditions in Kabul and underlying tensions within political rationality itself. The context-specific conditions include a century of modernization and thirty years of political violence that have become increasingly geopolitical, resulting in a substantial fragmentation of sovereignty. The underlying political rationalities which shape and are shaped by this context are *sovereign political reason* and *biopolitical reason*. These political rationalities operate at the local, national, and transnational scale to constitute a de facto urban regime in Kabul. The tension between these two political rationalities has been resolved into a series of sociopolitical ‘bargains’ over the past two

centuries. At the urban level each bargain involves a rearticulation of the relationship between coercive authority and the promotion of health, prosperity, and material conditions. In Kabul the ‘modernization bargain’ was succeeded in turn by the ‘developmentalist bargain’ of the Cold War era, and then the ‘neoliberal bargain’ of market-led growth. Although deregulation continues to be promoted in Kabul, a new bargain of ‘segmented security’ is being negotiated across urban space.

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Preface

Magic World

“Wait a minute. I know this place.”

I was walking through Terminal 1 of Dubai International Airport on May 27th, 2003, on my way to Kabul for the first time. The Society of Afghan Engineers had invited me to participate in a capacity-building program in which Afghan-Americans were returning to Kabul to volunteer their professional services to the new Afghan Transitional Administration. The easiest way to fly to Kabul at the time was to connect through either Frankfurt or London to Dubai, and then on to Kabul.

This was just before Dubai became world-famous for its opulence; but the Emirate had already begun upgrading its infrastructure for some time. They had contracted with Bechtel Civil for the design and construction of this new airport terminal. Bechtel, based in San Francisco, had extensive experience building airports, and building in the Middle East. It also had experience with large hospitality facilities. Bechtel built the EPCOT center at Disneyworld. They had been involved in the construction of Dubai International’s Terminal 1 in the mid 1990s. While overseeing the construction of the terminal building, they were commissioned with the design of Magic World Theme Park, to be built in the desert adjacent to the Dubai Lagoon.

I was hired by Bechtel in 1998 to help design the “Sinbad’s Voyage” water-ride, modeled on the “Pirates of the Caribbean” ride at Disneyland. I had just spent a year doing Commedia Dell’Arte performance, mask design, and set design, including some work for the San Francisco Mime Troupe. I needed to pay down my bills and I thought that working on an amusement park design would be a fun and strange way to integrate set design with my professional training in urban design. So, I ended up detailing onion-domes that would be framed out on top of a tilt-up structure (like a Wal-Mart) and sculpted in architectural foam.

Why had the Sheikh commissioned a team in San Francisco to design a Sindbad-themed variant on the Pirates of the Caribbean ride? Only fifty years earlier, actual dhows were sailing from that same lagoon. There is now a replica of a dhow housed outside of the Dubai Museum, next to Dubai’s Old Town replica of its own old town. But the Sheikh was after world-class branding. He wanted the firm that had built the world’s most famous amusement park to build his amusement park, only better. Besides: for a Sindbad’s Voyage ride, who better to design it than the Californians who had extracted so many traditional stories and folktales and converted them into profitable commodities? The Sheikh *was* getting the real thing. We would take bits of *the thousand nights and one night* and convert them into a profitable, well-built carnival ride.

Magic World never got built. The Sheikh could not be contacted in the fall of 1998, and he had stopped paying Bechtel. At one point a manager walked through our row of cubicles, complaining that the Sheikh was in southern Afghanistan, of all places, spending his time falcon-hunting. Riley Bechtel decided to concentrate the business focus on mining, bridges, and nuclear facilities. The whole amusement park design team was

laid off; the unit was disbanded. That was painful to witness. Some of the staff had been hired straight out of school and worked at Bechtel for twenty-five years. They had received their commemorative watches for such loyalty to the firm; but now they were asking me how to put together resumes and design portfolios for the first time. The era of stable employment in the United States was over.

During my brief time at Bechtel I saw the drawings of Terminal 1. Five years later, I was walking through part of the magical world of Dubai that *did* get built. I was completely taken by surprise: I was on my way from San Francisco (presumably the First World) to Kabul (the Third World, or maybe even Fourth). But here at my last connection, just four hours from Kabul, I found myself in a world that made San Francisco look shabby and somewhat backward. Dubai was the latest manifestation of what Walter Benjamin called our present phantasmagoria—an enchanted world created for the purpose of selling commodities. Benjamin began to reveal the stage-set workings of modern capitalism through his analysis of the outdated, discarded, yester-year phantasmagoria of the Parisian arcades. In their time, they had been the height of fashion; but sixty years later, in the 1920s, Benjamin sensed the uneasiness of contemporary Parisians around these decidedly out-of-fashion spaces. What did that reveal about the present-day world that he—and now we—inhabit? I was experiencing the reverse: I had participated in the creation of this latest Oz, and the shock of the new made it difficult to absorb. Besides, I was struggling with another dimension of the modern phantasmagory. I was in transit to a land that was haunting the imaginations of Americans. At the time, the glitzy mall of Dubai Terminal One seemed entirely incongruous with the war zone I was about to enter. Only later would I begin to understand some of the vital relations between San Francisco, Dubai, and Kabul.

Part of what I was experiencing in May of 2003 was direct evidence that the Cold War era division of the world into First and Third was obsolete. As Aihwa Ong and Ananya Roy point out, Dubai was not even referencing Western cities in its modernization. The image of modernity for Dubai is Singapore. Emiratis can buy the services of Americans to apply some brand-California sheen to their cities; but we are seen as quaint, not as the model of their future.

I was also seeing the metropole of a very different, emergent type of urban complex. At the time there were direct flights from Dubai to the major cities of east Asia, Europe, and South Africa. Since then, Emirates Airlines has bought longer-range jets and there are now direct flights from San Francisco as well, straight over the shrinking ice-cap of the Arctic. Closer in, Dubai is a regional employer of Bangladeshis, Indians, Pakistanis, and Afghans in construction and service jobs. Closer still, Dubai is part of a cluster of cities in the Emirates. Abu Dhabi is focusing on higher education and environmental sustainability; Dubai is focusing on business and tourism. Rapid urbanization in South Asia and the Middle East involves extended relationships across space, just as Atlantic Coast urbanization in the United States depended upon long-distance linkages by canal and rail to Chicago and the ranchers of the Western Plains. The scale and pattern are very different; but extended relationships continue to play a crucial role in urbanization.

A year after my first visit to Kabul I learned about another connection between it and

Dubai. During his testimony before the 9/11 Commission on March 24, 2004, Richard A. Clarke reviewed several instances when the Clinton Administration tried to assassinate Osama bin Laden. One missed chance was in October of 1998, when bin Laden's location in southern Afghanistan had been confirmed. A final high-resolution satellite photo was taken to confirm the target for a cruise-missile attack. However that image also revealed the presence of the jet of the royal family of Dubai, parked at the camp. Apparently in the fall of 1998 the Sheikh was out falcon-hunting with his friend bin Laden, rather than paying us for design services on Sindbad's Voyage.

Refugees and pronouns

Authors like to write prefaces as one last chance to reflect upon a work nearing completion. For readers, though, prefaces are often most useful for getting a sense of the author, hopefully one that clarifies their perspective and their agenda in the text that follows. I have read my fair share of prefaces for exactly that reason. I want to encourage a great deal more research on the planning of cities in our rapidly-urbanizing world. So, while it may seem crass to wax autobiographic in the opening of a story about a remarkable city, I hope that this indulgence will be useful in critiquing this work. Maybe it will help you design better research methodologies than I have used thus far. Maybe it will help bend our use of language into a better instrument to describe the emergent world we inhabit.

My own narrative has problems. The instability of first-personness throughout this text disturbed my dissertation advisors. I am still grappling with how to write in a mode which expresses some uncomfortable identitarian tensions. Usually the problem is with the pronoun "we," but behind that are some unstable aspects of the "I." That instability is important in how it connects to migration, geopolitics, and urbanization.

My ancestors are Italian, Greek-Italian, and Swedish. My parents met in lower Manhattan, a quintessential site of waves of American urbanization. *Their* parents had assimilated thoroughly, refusing to pass on either language or folk-superstitions. Arriving in America meant arriving in modernity, breaking with tradition. And yet, both sets of my grandparents were uncomfortable with a Catholic-Lutheran wedding. As a sort of compromise, my parents settled in suburban Connecticut among Ashkehazi Jews who did not mind our mixed-Christian household. As normal as West Hartford might seem, though, it was very much haunted by the Holocaust. So many of my classmates had no grandparents, no uncles and aunts, no cousins. This calm, bland place was a refuge from the intensely violent geopolitics of the twentieth century: the attempted extermination of an entire people.

I grew up as a minority Christian in a Jewish community in Connecticut, and then came of age as a minority Christian in the secular community of the San Francisco Bay Area. Early on, I had to develop a dual dialect for discussing religion with either believers or nonbelievers. This tension was exacerbated by the rise of intolerant Christian fundamentalism during the 1980s. The use of Christianity as a pretext for violent hatred is especially painful for me, because what Jesus demands most directly through his teachings is to be compassionate. Homophobes, Islamophobes, and enemies of scientific

research are usually my co-religionists. I cannot separate from them, cannot set them apart as Other, no matter how divisive American politics may become. Seeing through the eyes of the other, opening up to radically different ways of *feeling* the world is the most sacred and most disturbing act of faith that I can commit. As my wife reminded me on September 11, 2001, we need to pray for our enemies as well. That is our fullest act of humanity.

Those formative experiences shaped how I would approach Afghanistan. During my work and research, I often had extended conversations with taxi-drivers while we were stuck in traffic. Usually we would discuss politics and religion; most Afghans I met were tremendously relieved to find out that I was a Christian. That provided a shared basis of identity, as we discussed the shared qualities of Christianity and Islam. It was a basis of connection, *ertebat*, that was deeply human. It also revealed to me how anxious Afghans are about Westerners who fail to recognize the shared lineage of Islam and Christianity, and perhaps an even greater anxiety about secular, ‘post-religion’ Westerners including aid workers and diplomatic staff in Kabul. Stern Islamists might regard such unbelievers as corrupting threats; but the Afghans I met seemed most worried that such nonbelievers were lost souls.

I felt a great deal of affinity for the Afghans I met and worked with, but affinity is not the same as identity. Mindful of the questionable ethics of British explorers who had pretended to ‘go native’ in this region, I had to be very careful to actually maintain my non-Afghanness during my research. I happen to look like many Kabulis, in part because I inherited more of the Graeco-Italian features of my ancestors, but also because Afghans themselves are so diverse. This made it easy for me to ride buses, take shared taxis, and walk through crowded urban areas unnoticed. Afghans in Europe do likewise: they pass as Italians when they want to avoid attention. Even King Amanullah commented about how congenial he found Naples to be. Most Kabulis explained my resemblance to them as a result of passage of Alexander’s army through the region. However, Martin Schwartz, professor of Near Eastern Studies at Berkeley, doubts the Hellenic connection. I look Nuristani, and there is little evidence that Greeks intermarried with the people of that region. Schwartz made his point with a characteristic shrug: “Maybe you just happen to resemble Afghans because you are a human being, and so are they.”

When I use the ‘we’ in this text, there are times when it does not imply a complementary or contrasting ‘they.’ When it does, the ‘they’ is not always Afghans.

Shifting terrain

I first become interested in Afghanistan in the late 1980s, when Americans paid far too little attention to events in Kabul. I took advantage of the sea-change in geopolitics after 2001 to gain access to Kabul, to work for the Afghan government and learn about the city through that work. But I expected the situation to stabilize; indeed I expected Afghanistan to slip back into obscurity.

What has happened since 2001 is even more peculiar. Though Afghanistan remains an important site in the daily drama of geopolitics, in many ways the country remains

obscure to Westerners. In part this is because Afghanistan has always been difficult to explore. The terrain is rugged and arid, and Afghans have a justified suspicion about the intentions of outsiders. Meanwhile, Westerners have treated Afghans as an object of geopolitical struggle, or as subjects of development and aid. Neither approach tends to promote careful consideration of what Afghans are saying and thinking. But most importantly, Afghanistan remains a site of anxiety for Westerners—an anxiety through which Westerners produce our own identity.

Edward Said shared this remarkable insight in the opening pages of *Orientalism*: that Europeans *produced* the exotic Orient as part of a process of producing their own identities as Western, as modern, as *not-Oriental*. This is a process in which a whole geographic region is rendered into an abstract, symbolic object, which tends to interfere with any discussion of the actual human beings in that region in terms other than mythology. Said's observation helps explain a struggle I have had throughout the writing of this study. Yes, Afghans do traffic planning, land-use planning, and all sorts of administrative work that Westerners usually classify as normal, even prosaic. That is a vital part of this story, as is the distinctiveness of planning in Kabul. How do we use words like *distinctive* and *different* in this context without shading into words like *exotic*? The issue is not Afghans themselves, who are both normal and remarkable as all humans are; the issue is the politically-lopsided shape of English as we use it.

Anxiety plays a direct role in the shaping of Kabul. The center of the city is a bizarre, securitized landscape serving a complex elite class: Western military commanders, diplomats, aid workers, and Afghan political leaders themselves. Large portions of foreign aid are expended in maintaining this environment in which the suppression of physical risk for preferred individuals is the highest priority. That, in itself, reflects a longer trend in urbanization. Through practices of public health, surveillance, and discipline, Western cities have become extraordinarily safe environments. The probable longevity of citizens in Western cities means we can invest vast sums in individuals, and expect those individuals to generate millions in revenue over their working lifetimes. To place a group of college-educated, highly-skilled aid workers or diplomats in Kabul, the agencies responsible for their physical well-being are willing to create environments so distinct from the surrounding city that we might study Kabul as an example of alien occupation of another planet.

I will occasionally resort to science-fiction metaphors throughout this text, in part to emphasize that Westerners experience Afghanistan at least in part as a projection of our own imaginations. Imagination and visualization are essential functions of urban planning itself, and both our material and institutional world is in large part a product of our imaginations. Thus I do not use science-fiction merely facetiously. I also use it as a tool for strategic dislocation of our own identities in an effort to achieve a little clarity about the world we are observing and creating. As best I can tell from an Afghan perspective, Westerners often are the Borg or the Cylons in the dystopian epic of occupation and survival that comprises the recent history of Afghanistan. We can only laugh at that by recognizing how painful it is; the depth of suffering that humor can touch. We are indeed cybernetic, from our vaccine-enhanced immune systems to our

digital asynchronous communication—web pages, email, texting, and the softcopy of this very text. Most importantly, the ‘we’ in this case extends steadily to encompass Afghans as well as non-Afghans through linkages of communication, political engagement, and even loyal ties of friendship. The very meaning of first-person pronouns shifts in the description of this urbanizing world.

Toward a history of the vanishing present

During the entire period over which this dissertation was researched and written, Kabul remained a focus of international attention, and political developments significantly altered urban policy in Kabul. I had not expected this. I became interested in Kabul in 1987, and for fifteen years far too little attention was paid to Afghanistan. Despite the dramatic geopolitical shift in 2001-2002 that gave me access to Kabul, I expected that international attention would drift away, for better or worse. Instead, I began to dread hearing the morning news on my clock-radio. Would the latest ‘developing story’ precipitate a rewrite of one of my chapters? Mostly they did not. As I argue in the chapter “Concrete,” the politics of urban planning often involves remarkable continuity in the face of other political changes.

However geopolitics—including the internal politics of the United States—plays a direct role in the planning of central Kabul, and an indirect role in the shaping of the city as a whole. Thus when an Afghan joined the Facebook group “Afghan-Americans for Obama” in the spring of 2008 I posted on his Wall that perhaps Afghans should lobby for a vote in the U.S. election. “No occupation without representation” might be a fitting slogan for Afghans, considering the potential consequences of differing electoral outcomes in the U.S. on their daily lives. The controversies in the re-election of Hamid Karzai in 2009 also had a strong effect, revealing his remarkable loss of both domestic and international legitimacy. The arrival and departure of Stanley McChrystal, worldwide food price inflation in 2007, the return of Pakistan to civilian rule; all of these affected the form and meaning of spaces in Kabul. The political uprisings in North Africa and the Middle East in the spring of 2011 may also have a profound effect over political change in the Afghan capital.

In the week between the signing of my dissertation and the writing of this preface, Barack Obama announced the assassination of Usama bin Laden. Within two days this event began to affect the political calculus over continuing U.S. military involvement in Afghanistan. In a series of satellite photographs of Abbottabad from 2004 through 2010, I also noticed that bin Laden’s compound became less isolated as the area around it continued to urbanize. As a researcher, I am acutely aware of how this preface itself will become an historical text, the moment I hit the ‘upload’ button to file it in the university system. The subtitle of Gayatri Spivak’s *Critique of postcolonial reason* is *Toward a history of the vanishing present*. When I first read this phrase, I thought it was deliberately abstract. I suspect the phrase does “carry other valences;” but at one level Spivak is bluntly describing the core problem of writing any cultural or political analysis of an always-changing present.

One of my longer-term concerns, while sifting through emerging news items, is that

the business-model of journalism itself is collapsing. The article which first alerted me to the emerging housing crisis in Kabul in 2002 was written by Barry Bearak for the *San Francisco Chronicle*. Since that time, most American newspapers have laid off their international reporters. At the same time, an increasing number of individuals have begun to post blogs and other bits of writing which provide an expanding, unedited flow of information. My sense is that scholar-researchers will play an increasingly important role in sifting and editing current events, as our counterparts in journalism struggle to find new ways to fund their own work. Discerning signals (changes in the tone of public discourse in Kabul) from the noise (weddings and scandals in the global North) sometimes feels like trying to spot a distant, earth-sized planet against the glare of its parent star.

David Harvey once remarked that the most difficult aspect of social-theory research is the art of negotiating between different scales. This is true of time as well as space. We, as a species, are urbanizing rapidly at this moment. But *rapid*, in this case, is a relational as well as a relative term. Our connection, and how we understand our connection to complex, distributed processes of urbanization, plays a role in shaping that reality. Ethical questions about intervention versus self-determination and responsibility versus accountability are not easily answered under present conditions of fragmenting sovereignty. We are each participants in that urbanization. Our daily lifestyle choices—such as driving versus walking and biking—affect the pattern of our own cities as well as the flow of resources across the planet, from weapons to food. This is how we live together, build cities together, and thrive.

This story is an effort to influence that shaping of that emergent urban reality, however minutely. I hope it is an engaging read.

Berkeley, California
5 May 2011

Acknowledgments

Before conducting my field research I came to a quick agreement with the Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects: if the Islamic Republic collapses, many of my interviewees could be targeted. Therefore I have written in a way that conveys what they taught me, but masks the settings of my interviews. I am deeply grateful to many people whom I cannot name.

Of those whom I can name, I begin with my committee: Nezar Alsayyad, who taught me housing in 1990; Karen Christensen, who introduced me to planning theory; Michael Watts, who introduced me to the politics of development in 1985; and Ananya Roy, who recruited me into the doctoral program. The metaphor I use for Ananya's advising style is to be thrown into deep, turbulent water with the exhortation, "Come on! I know you can swim in this!" From a technical background in housing and urban design, this doctoral program felt like a compressed re-do of a bachelor's in development studies, a master's in political economy, and a doctorate in urban philosophy. Quite a swim; thank you Ananya for your belief in me.

My funders deserve great credit, sending me into a place where the U.S. State Department and most granting foundations would not consider supporting research. The al-Falah grant through the Center for Middle Eastern Studies at UC Berkeley supports research of any type in Muslim-majority countries. When I returned to Kabul in 2007 the al-Falah Bank had erected a billboard over the Airport Road with the slogan "The bank who cares..." and it felt like a welcome-sign.

The World Bank Institute and the Aga Khan Trust for Culture went through considerable effort to make my fieldwork possible. By advancing to candidacy as a doctoral student I qualified to fulfill a contract to teach planning at Kabul University; but I stipulated that I could not be restricted to a secured compound during my contract. It took Soraya Goga and Barjor Mehta six months to locate a fiduciary agency that would allow me to roam free for my research. When the AKTC agreed to supervise me I was thrilled. As many Kabulis know, Jolyon Leslie at the AKTC has extraordinary perspective on Kabul. It was an honor to have him as my supervisor.

Some of the Afghans I can name are some of the most important to me: Sayed Maqbool at Kabul University, who provided me time, space, and students to teach; Samiullah Wardak, strong friend and insightful critic; Honorable Engineer Yusuf Pashtoon, Minister of Urban Development; and Abdul Khaliq Nemat, who shows how Afghans can really plan at a whole range of scales.

The first chapter I wrote in this dissertation was called "Invitation" because of the welcome I received from the Afghan-American community in the San Francisco Bay Area. Rona Popal and Waheed Momand at the Afghan Coalition; Nagib Poya and Ghulam Qader Popal of the Society of Afghan Engineers—as well as the SAE co-founder and my first host in Kabul, Malik Mortaza. The group who funded that first volunteer work included Milan and Tish Momirov, and Carol Ruth Silver and Humaira Ghilzai, with whom I helped form the Afghan Coalition. The welcome of the Afghan-American community extends into the past—the Raz family of Castro Valley—and the present: the

members of the Afghan Students Association at UC Berkeley, including Michelle Kabiri, Susan Sabry, and Amina Kator.

The people who have read drafts of this dissertation were incredibly helpful. My committee, my parents, my wife, Dan Buch, Don Watts, and Saboor Atrafi. My Writing Group partners—Ria Hutabarat Lo, Bruce Appleyard, Jennie Day, and Yael Perez have provided critique, encouragement, and outside perspective throughout the process.

Separately, I would like to thank my parents, Doctors John and Barbara Calogero, who not only read every draft chapter I wrote, but also supported us financially, and endured great anxiety while I was in Kabul. This was especially challenging since my brother, John, was working as a peace activist in Batticaloa when the Sri Lanka government resumed its war with the Tamil Tigers. The work he does makes my fieldwork seem tame. I also thank my in-laws, John and Judy Robinson, who helped support our family and keep my own parents calm; and the community of Saint Gregory of Nyssa Episcopal Church, for the collective friendship, family support, and spiritual guidance that they continue to provide.

Those whom I have missed or cannot mention, know that I thank you and pray for you, your health, and our shared future.

As every doctoral student understands, my wife, lover, and friend Lizzie deserves a major part of this degree. She is also a most excellent editor. And my children will now have to adjust to what it is like for Dad to *not* be ‘working on his dissertation.’

Colophon

I would like to thank the open-source movement for the software and data used to make this dissertation. Especially the following projects:

- Operating system: Ubuntu Linux
- Word processing: OpenOffice, and now LibreOffice
- Research: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU), Project Gutenberg, the “Harry Rud” blogger, and the foreign correspondents who risk so much
- Image processing: the Graphic Image Manipulation Program (GIMP) and Inkscape
- Geographic Information System: Quantum GIS and GRASS
- Satellite imagery: Google Earth, Digital Globe, NASA, and IKONOS
- Maps: Afghanistan Information Management Service and the Perry-Castañeda Online Library
- Historic images: the British Library
- Bibliographic reference management: Zotero
- Web browsing: Mozilla Firefox
- DARPA and their demand for the TCP/IP standard, and Al Gore who got the Senate to declassify ARPANET and make the internet possible

These projects are freely shared, and represent thousands of hours of work. Librarians and journalists might not consider themselves ‘open-source,’ but they are the precursors in the open dissemination of information. As North Africans are teaching us in the spring of 2011, open sharing of information—the power of the word—is the most effective means of pushing political regimes towards accountability.

Introduction: geopolitics, refugees, and urbanization

Something is wrong with this picture

Under the Taliban, Afghans fled the country in large numbers, seeking safety abroad. Today, more than 4.6 million Afghan refugees have come home—one of the largest return movements in history.

—George W. Bush, 15

February 2007¹

During his second presidential term, George W. Bush often focused on US policy toward Afghanistan as a success story, in contrast to the political failures of Iraq, the response to Hurricane Katrina, and the destabilization of the American housing market. The US-led intervention in Afghanistan was still considered a justified response to the attacks of September 11, 2001. Furthermore, the Bush administration argued that a ‘collateral benefit’ of this military intervention was the resolution of a long-standing refugee crisis. He was invoking the politics of ‘military humanitarianism’ that the Clinton administration had begun to develop during its intervention in Kosovo in 1999.

However, repatriation of Afghans was not going well. Three weeks before Bush delivered his optimistic address to the American Enterprise Institute, Washington Post correspondent Pamela Constable wrote about the dire conditions of returnees who had no actual home to return to in Afghanistan. Instead, they were squatting on the outskirts of Kabul—jobless, destitute, and vulnerable to the frigid winters of this high-altitude capital.² A month after Bush’s speech, Abubakar Siddique reported that many Afghans remained in refugee camps in Pakistan, reluctant to surrender their formal international legal status as refugees in exchange for an uncertain life as internally-displaced persons (IDPs) within their home country of Afghanistan.³ By May of 2007, the Musharraf administration in Pakistan decided to close the three remaining camps on the Afghan frontier, and Afghan refugees rioted to resist being forcibly returned to Afghanistan.⁴

1 Bush, George W. 2007. Speech delivered at the American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, Washington, D.C., February 15.

2 Constable, Pamela. 2007. “Harsh winter has Afghans struggling for survival.” *Washington Post*, January 22, A12.

3 Siddique, Abubakar. 2007. “Afghan refugees reluctant to leave Pakistan.” *Eurasia Insight*, March 26.

4 “Clashes at refugee camp.” BBC News, May 16.

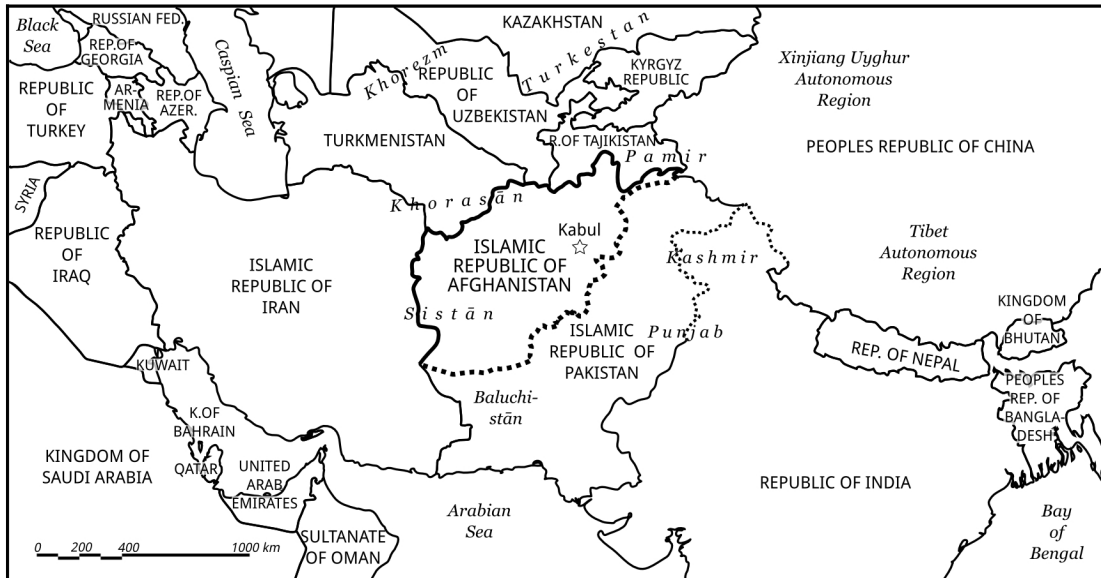


Figure 1.1: Afghanistan in its local region.

‘Home’ turns out to be a geopolitically charged term when discussing refugees and internally-displaced persons, especially as refugees become informal urban squatters. It is only possible to conflate refugee-repatriation with ‘returning home’ to an audience that is well-insulated from the living conditions, life-opportunities, and political constraints of refugee households. For an American voting constituency, Afghan refugees were a political problem to be solved—a humanitarian crisis for which many Americans felt compassion, but a problem so far removed from the daily experience that it has remained abstract.

In the Spring of 2003 I had the extraordinary opportunity to work directly for the Afghan government. One of my tasks for the Afghan Ministry of Urban Development and Housing was to coordinate interviews of households, randomly sampled across Kabul. Based on those and subsequent interviews, I estimate that about half the population of Kabul are refugees who cannot return to their ancestral villages, or even nearby provincial districts. These households cannot feasibly return home; and in a country where identity is often tied to very specific places, Kabul is a foreign terrain. Thus for about one half of the population of Kabul, the capital is a permanent refugee camp—one where their right claim to resources is permanently truncated.

In her article on winter conditions in Kabul, Constable focuses on the plight of Reza Khan, whose three-year-old daughter froze to death in her bed because Reza could not afford fuel for heat, nor blankets for insulation. Constable explicitly states that Khan’s family is among refugee-returnees, and therefore most vulnerable:

Worst off are thousands of former refugees such as Khan and his family, unskilled people who returned to Kabul after years of wartime exile in Pakistan. Unable to find stable jobs or shelter, they survive on the margins of a chaotic, crowded capital that has quadrupled in population since the U.S.-led invasion. Some live in tents on vacant lots or squeeze into alleys, squatting on narrow

bits of frozen land.⁵

As she points out, many of the returnees end up being squatters in abandoned houses and ruined buildings, such as the one shown below in figure 1.2.



Figure 1.2. Partially destroyed building, Dar ul-Aman Avenue, May 2003 (author). Squatters have hung curtains in the second and third story bays on the right.

The challenge facing Afghan refugees had been known for some time. The Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU), funded by the European Commission and the EC Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO), emerged as the premier policy research institute from the beginning of the Karzai administration. In 2002, the AREU published a report called “Taking refugees for a ride? The politics of refugee repatriation in Afghanistan.”⁶ In their report they argue the massive repatriation of the refugees served many institutional interests. The UNHCR could use this as an affirmation of its continued relevance; Pakistan and Iran could relieve longstanding internal political tensions around housing an impoverished immigrant population; and Western powers could use it to justify the military intervention in Afghanistan. However, Turton and Marsden are clear that even by late summer of 2002, mass-repatriation was not serving the interests of the refugees themselves.

Although rightly seen as a massive vote of confidence in the new, UN-backed Afghanistan Transitional Administration (ATA), the return of so many people over such a short period, to a country devastated by 23 years of war and nearly four years of drought, was causing widespread anxiety by the end of the summer. Many of those who had returned were finding it difficult or impossible to survive in their home areas and the slow arrival of money pledged by donor states for the reconstruction of Afghanistan was threatening the “sustainability” of the return movement.⁷

Turton and Marsden’s report is not an obscure source. The entire body of AREU publications has been freely available as PDFs on their website since 2002, and I found their reports to be well-known and well-respected among aid workers and diplomats working in Kabul at least as early as 2003.

⁵ Constable, 2007.

⁶ Turton, David, and Peter Marsden. 2002. *Taking refugees for a ride? The politics of refugee return to Afghanistan*. Kabul: AREU. Available online at www.areas.org.af

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

Imagining Afghanistan

I focus on this gap of awareness about nuanced, in-depth research on Afghanistan because it remains very difficult to write about issues that fall outside of expected media portrayals of the country. I now classify these as the ‘four expected narratives’ about Afghanistan:

1.	Afghanistan as a source of Islamist terrorism, and an attempt to return to ‘medieval,’ anti-modern conditions.
2.	Poorer Afghans—especially women and children—as victims of violence and poverty.
3.	Afghanistan as a source of opium narcotics.
4.	An incapable, increasingly corrupt Afghan government that abets narcotics-trafficking.

Table 1.1: the ‘four expected narratives’ that create an imagined Afghanistan.

The first pair of stories reproduce a persistent theme in Western literature: what Stephen Hall describes as the portrayal of dominated peoples as both noble and savage: alluring females and cannibalistic males.⁸ Gayatri Spivak argues that there is a political project at work in this way of portraying the ‘native other:’ the justification of foreign intervention, domination, and profitable exploitation. However, for Spivak this project does not operate simply (nor cynically) at a conscious level; it is wedded to the erotic desire of ‘white men to save brown women from brown men’.⁹ Spivak’s expression may be deeply offensive to aid workers, soldiers, and journalists who have risked and often lost their lives in what they understand to be humanitarian efforts. Those personal motivations and experiences have a complex relationship with the wider terrain of geopolitics. Consider one example: in a century where images of women were commodified and objectified, perhaps the single most famous photograph was of Sharbat Gula in 1984, as a twelve-year-old Afghan refugee in a frontier camp in Pakistan.¹⁰ Is it her helplessness, or her beauty—or both—which makes this image so memorable? Consistent with Spivak’s argument that the “native other cannot speak,” it is important to note that Gula’s name was not even known until 2002.¹¹ In this pair of savage/victim narratives, Afghans are reduced to symbols.

The third and fourth narratives also operate in tandem to support a particular understanding of ‘developed’ and ‘developing’ societies. In the growth of humans to adulthood, ‘developed’ and ‘developing’ are synonyms for ‘mature’ and ‘immature.’ By associated implication, a ‘least-developed country’ such as Afghanistan needs to be treated like a very immature child. I observed exactly this sort of condescension among some Westerners during my fieldwork. This ‘infantilization’ of Afghans profoundly frames the international aid project in the country. The idea of Afghans as immature is reinforced by media reports, presentations, and daily conversations—by public discourse. Before aid programs are implemented, even before they are designed, these assumptions

⁸ Hall, Stuart, and Bram Gieben. 1993. *Formations of modernity*. Polity Press.

⁹ Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. 1988. “Can the subaltern speak?.” in *Marxism and the interpretation of culture*, edited by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

¹⁰ McCurry, Steve. 1985. “Afghan girl.” *National Geographic Magazine*. June.

¹¹ McCurry, Steve. 2002. “A life revealed.” *National Geographic Magazine*. April.

frame the way the Afghanistan is imagined as a problem-space.

Taking one critical step back, it is worth considering: can any country, can any people be described by only four narratives? Imagine another country you have never visited, but is well-known. Could any four narratives be sufficient to describe that country? Now consider Afghanistan again: thousands of articles have been written about the country since 2001. How many stories have you seen, heard, or read that fall outside of the four narratives described above? They do exist—and journalists such as Christina Lamb, Elizabeth Rubin, Carlotta Gall, and Pamela Constable try to get those stories published—but in a predominantly commercial mediascape, they must also sell stories to a purchasing audience. What do we want to hear? What are we willing to hear? It is too easy to disparage George W. Bush for persistent ignorance about the plight of refugees in Afghanistan, five years after well-known field researchers began to report that something was going awry. But as a demonstrably effective politician, Bush would never have made such an argument unless he and most of his team believed that his claims were credible. Furthermore, after a dramatically different American president was elected in 2008, this shallow narrative characterization of Afghanistan did not deepen. The expansion of the internet since the mid-1990s has facilitated access to a remarkable spectrum of information; but ‘public awareness gaps’ remain an important feature of geopolitics. It remains possible for the socioeconomic and political condition of several million people to remain fundamentally misunderstood for years on end.

The geography of that awareness-gap—particularly among the American electorate—reveals aspects of geopolitics that will be vital for understanding this study of the planning of Kabul. Many populations fall into this gap, including most of sub-Saharan Africa and Central Asia. Even cities of geostrategic importance to the United States fall into this gap, such as Port Harcourt, Aden, and Kabul. For example: on May 29, 2006, a city-wide riot broke out in Kabul that caught both the Afghan government and its American backers completely by surprise. This had nothing to do with ‘political Islam,’ nor did any Afghan nor American make any such claim in the interviews that I conducted in the days and weeks afterward. A common incident—US military vehicles smashing Afghan cars in Kabul during rush-hour traffic—triggered the riot in the morning. But over the next eight hours, as thousands of young men joined the riot and it spread across the city, all sorts of buildings were targeted. Aid offices, a new office building, and a television station were all attacked. Word-of-mouth over the following several days indicated that these men were attacking all the symbols of the new wealth that was flowing through the city, and not benefiting them. The fact that they could be out rioting through the middle of a work day was itself evidence of their own argument. They were despairing, and the mood across the city for the next several weeks was of sad, resigned grief. The emotional buildup of that collective expression of despair at the failure of the Western aid project had been missed, in the years leading up to it.

Taking another critical step back, it is worth considering which stories are being missed, which are being eclipsed by the sensational material that has been coming out of Afghanistan since 2001. The story of urban planning told in this dissertation may seem very incongruous. Kabul is generally assumed to be a site of sustained conflict where

social institutions, where social and governmental institutions were presumably wiped out. But why do Westerners presume that chronic warfare erases institutions? The way I have heard Afghanistan described in English over the past decade seems to reference an unstated image: post-apocalyptic settings portrayed in popular American films such as *the Road Warrior*, the *Terminator* franchise, *The Matrix* trilogy, *The Postman*, *The Road*, and *The Book of Eli*. Given the popularity of this genre, current imaginings of Afghanistan reflect a desire to believe that such a condition actually exists; or perhaps the vivid imagery of these many films ‘stands in’ for lack of direct familiarity with anything resembling Afghanistan. The idea that property-claims, municipal agencies, and urban plans would persist through the incredible violence of Afghanistan’s civil war might feel anticlimactic. But by failing to imagine that urban planning is possible in such a city, we all may be missing the really big story: the way the human race is urbanizing.

At least one billion people will be moving into cities in Asia and sub-Saharan Africa over the next twenty years. This is one of the great events of the entire human species. It might be disastrous, as Mike Davis warns.¹² Or it might be fantastic; or most likely, the outcome will be an unexpected combination of the two. Though the outcome of this urbanization cannot be predicted, that does not mean that the process is ungoverned. The very choice of households to shift into urban settings depends upon changes in political economies, changes in the collective rule-setting that governs rights, property-relations, and expectations about life-opportunities. These rules are human products, even if no individual dictates entirely which rules will be effective. Urban planning is a tangible, observable manifestation of this complex process. It is at the level of urban development, and the planning of that development, where one can directly observe this profound transformation of the human experience.

The study of urbanization and its politics can also reveal unexpected aspects of geopolitics, as they are played out at the local scale. The following sections describes in greater detail how geopolitics played a major role in refugee-induced urbanization in Kabul.

This is not nation-building

Following five weeks of aerial bombardment by Coalition Forces, the United Islamic Front (UIF) captured Kabul on November 12, 2001. In order to appeal to Western backers, the UIF is usually called the “Northern Alliance” in English-language media. However the UIF is an Islamist militant organization descended directly from the mujahideen factions who fought the Soviet occupying forces in Afghanistan in the 1980s. In Arabic, mujahid means one who wages [Islamic] jihad. This label was appropriate up to 1989, because the Soviets were explicitly and officially nonbelievers. After the Soviet withdrawal, though, these same insurgents continued to fight the Najibullah regime, the Afghan National Army, and pro-government militias. Najibullah quickly abandoned the Soviet anti-religious stance, reverted the name of the country to Republic of Afghanistan by dropping “Democratic” from the title, and allowed mullahs to pray, preach, and speak

¹² Davis, Mike. 2004. “Planet of Slums: Urban Involution and the Informal Proletariat.” *New left review* 26:5-34.

publicly. For an increasing number of Afghans, the insurgents no longer merited the title of mujahideen, and were simply called commandan, or ‘commanders.’ In 1992, these forces overthrew Najibullah, and four years later, they in turn were driven out of Kabul by the Taliban. By 2001, the UIF were a commandan force reclaiming Kabul from the Islamic Emirate led by Mullah Omar.

The destruction of the Taliban has made the United States a safer country, but the same cannot be said for Afghanistan.—Peter Maass, January, 2002.

The Bush administration objected to the hasty capture of Kabul, because it violated the terms of the agreement by which the Coalition provided air power support to the UIF.¹³ The Blair administration was more concerned with the political implications of this bad-faith maneuver. At the Bonn Conference in late November, Blair pushed for the creation of an international military force, separate from the Coalition, whose mission would be to maintain security in Kabul. American military leaders were uncomfortable with the potential logistical complications from introducing yet another military organization into the situation, and the UIF representatives at the conference actively resisted an idea that would restrict their ability to define the new regime. However, the three non-UIF factions present at the Bonn Conference strongly supported the idea, because UIF leaders had seized all of the key ministries when they entered Kabul, and were behaving as de facto ministers.¹⁴ This was complicated by the fact that the UIF was allied with Barhanuddin Rabbani, who had been the actual President of Afghanistan from 1994 until he had to flee the Taliban in 1996. The United Nations still recognized Rabbani as the legitimate head of state as of 2001, and he accompanied the UIF into Kabul on November 13. Rabbani did not attend the Bonn Conference, only sending Abdullah Abdullah as the new Foreign Minister to represent his government.¹⁵

Over Rabbani’s objections, the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) was agreed upon in the Bonn Accord of December 5, 2001. However ISAF had a very limited mission: to secure Kabul itself so that the new Afghan Transitional Administration could establish itself in a ‘neutral political space’ that was not dominated by the UIF.¹⁶ Formed almost as an afterthought in the Accord, British General MacColl had to renegotiate the agreement with Interior Minister Yunus Qanooni when he arrived in Kabul on December 31.¹⁷ Yet once ISAF was in place, it was greatly appreciated by the UN, the returning diplomatic community, and the new wave of small NGOs that had formed to help in the recovery of Afghanistan.

Meanwhile, the Bush administration sent strong signals that the United States would remain committed to rebuilding Afghanistan. In media reports and speeches from 2002 and 2003, a common phrase is “after twenty-three years of war,” implying that the

13 Knowlton, Brian. 2001. “The fight against terrorism / Looking ahead: Bush ‘Very pleased,’ though he told opposition not to enter Kabul.” *The New York Times*, November 14.

14 Erlanger, Steven. 2001. “A nation challenged: After the Taliban; After arm-twisting, Afghan factions pick interim government and leader.” *The New York Times*, December 6.

15 Erlanger, Steven. 2001. “A nation challenged: The talks; Delegates meet in first step towards post-Taliban rule.” *The New York Times*, November 27.

16 Erlanger, 2001, December 6.

17 Waldman, Amy. 2002. “A nation challenged: Kabul; Afghanistan endorses plan that gives autonomy to British-led peacekeepers.” *The New York Times*, January 5.

conflicts from 1978 to 2001 were now ended. At his first State of the Union address in January of 2002, Bush stated:

America and Afghanistan are now allies against terror. We'll be partners in rebuilding that country. And this evening we welcomed the distinguished interim leader of a liberated Afghanistan, Chairman Hamid Karzai.

The last time we met in this Chamber, the mothers and daughters of Afghanistan were captives in their own homes, forbidden from working or going to school. Today women are free and are part of Afghanistan's new Government. And we welcome the new Minister of Women's Affairs, Dr. Sima Samar.¹⁸

Afghan refugees and the governments of Pakistan and Iran, all interpreted this as a signal that refugees could return to Afghanistan. In the spring of 2002, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) prepared to coordinate the repatriation of up to seven hundred thousand refugees from Pakistan and Iran. Turton and Marsden estimate that more than 1.7 million returned in 2002 alone.¹⁹ The first returnees appeared to be enthusiastic volunteers. But as it became apparent that returnees were facing severe difficulties in Afghanistan, those who had not yet returned became increasingly reluctant to do so. Iran had let Afghans settle and work in its cities informally. By 2005, Iran began enforcing existing employment restrictions against illegal immigrants to pressure Afghans to leave. By 2007, Pakistan was trying to close its last three remaining refugee camps, and the refugees were rioting in protest against being forced to return to Afghanistan.²⁰

In the midst of initial optimism about defeating the Taliban, what Americans failed to notice was that Afghanistan was becoming increasingly insecure with the return of the commanders whom the Taliban had expelled.²¹ Some of the commanders, such as Abdul Rab Rassoul Sayyaf, immediately began pushing for a blanket amnesty for past war crimes during the Bonn Conference of December 2001.²² Six years later as a member of the Afghan Parliament, Sayyaf would succeed in getting this amnesty ratified as law over the loud protests of Afghan human rights groups²³ (only in March of 2010 did Hamid Karzai admit that the law had gone into effect).²⁴ Another commander, Abdul Rashid Dostum, declared himself governor of Balkh Province even as human rights organizations were raising questions about his involvement in a massacre of hundreds of Taliban prisoners at Kunduz.²⁵ A third commander, Gul Agha Sherzai, recaptured Kandahar and declared himself governor of the province.²⁶ It was the corrupt governing of Kandahar by Sherzai and other commanders from 1992 to 1994 that had originally

18 Bush, George W. 2002. "Address before a joint session of the Congress on the state of the Union." *Congressional record*. Washington, D.C.: United States Congress, January 29.

19 Turton and Marsden, 2002.

20 BBC News. 2007. "Clashes at Pakistan refugee camp." May 16. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/6662367.stm

21 Maass, Peter. 2002. "Gul Agha Gets His Province Back." *The New York Times*, January 6.

22 Erlanger, Steven, and John Kiefer. 2001. "A nation challenged: The politics; Afghan talks stall in Bonn on comments from Kabul." *The New York Times*, December 1.

23 Salahuddin, Sayed. 2007. "Afghan Assembly grants immunity for war crimes." *Reuters News Service*, February 1.

24 Katyal, Sugita. 2010. "Afghanistan confirms blanket pardon for war crimes." *Reuters News Service*, March 16.

25 Gall, Carlotta. 2001. "A nation challenged: Prisoners; Witnesses say many Taliban died in custody." *The New York Times*, December 11.

26 Maass, 2002.

motivated Mullah Muhammad Omar to recruit his students (his ‘talibs,’ or in Arabic plural, taliban) to engage in vigilante-style enforcement of Islamic law and order.²⁷ Like the United Islamic Front in Kabul, returning commanders began seizing land and houses by force, occasionally fighting each other for local control, and engaging in the opium trade to finance their activities and their retainues.



Figure 1.3. Mansion of Gul Aga Sherzai, in the Shir Pur district of Central Kabul, as of 2005 (Google Earth). This house, on the lot in the center of the image that is three times the area of its neighbors, is located at 34°32'07.42"N by 64°10'23.00"E.

Figure 1.3 is a satellite image showing the private residence of Gul Aga Sherzai in Kabul, which was still under construction while I was conducting fieldwork in Kabul in 2007. Sherzai has been governor of Nangahar Province (east of Kabul) since 2005. I have not found any evidence that he is involved in narcotics-trafficking, even indirectly. But poppy-cultivation increased dramatically in Nangarhar Province after 2005, and the palatial house shown in figure 1.3 could not be built on the salary of an Afghan governor.²⁸

With the removal of the brutally-effective Taliban, most provinces began to revert to the conditions of insecurity and violence that had plagued the country from 1992 to 1996 under the rule of the commanders. Rural insecurity was compounded by the decision of the Bush Administration to focus on rebuilding the Afghan National Army, but not the police nor the judicial system. This reflects Bush’s particular understanding of political sovereignty. During the electoral debates with Al Gore in 2000, moderator Jim Lehrer asked Bush about nation-building, and Bush immediately expressed strong skepticism for ‘military humanitarianism.’ Lehrer guided the discussion back to nation-building in general, and Bush responded:

I think what we need to do is convince people who live in the lands they live in to build the nations. Maybe I'm missing something here. I mean, we're going to have kind of a nation building core from America? Absolutely not.²⁹

²⁷ Eckholm, Erik. 2001. “A nation challenged: Government; Meet the new warlord, same as the old one.” *The New York Times*, December 17.

²⁸ *ibid.*

²⁹ Bush, George W. 2000. Second presidential debate, October 11. Accessed December 9, 2008 at:

As soon as possible, Bush wanted to restore a sovereign government in Kabul. Consistent with this restoration of sovereignty, he wanted to leave the internal organization of the regime for Afghans to determine. However the United States immediately engaged in rebuilding the Afghan military, the organization that would ostensibly protect and maintain the territorial integrity—the spatial sovereignty—of the country as a whole. Rebuilding of the Afghan police was left to Germany. At that time, the Schröder government met strong domestic political resistance from the Green Party, who challenged the idea that Germany should engage in any foreign interventions. Reconstruction of the judiciary was left to Italy, which was also underfunded and unable to push for strong reforms as a minor partner in the Coalition.

Enabling Afghanistan to defend its borders fits the ideal, Westphalian conception of political sovereignty; but it does not fit the actual practice of politics in the twenty-first century. Once a new regime was established with close ties to the United States; once that regime allowed a major, US-led military force to remain in the country, which nation was likely to invade Afghanistan in opposition to this partnership? Iran? Tajikistan? The only force that was actively opposing the Karzai regime, at least at first, was the retreated Taliban. They, and other insurgents, were infiltrating from Pakistan, the long-standing military ally of the United States. In which case, perhaps the new Islamic Republic needed an anti-insurgent force, but above all it needed the United States to get its own ally, Pakistan, to help protect the territorial sovereignty of Afghanistan.

What the new Karzai regime needed most, though, was to demonstrate that it had the capacity to govern internally. The police and the judiciary would have been the two most important institutions to reestablish fine-grained spatial security and rule of law. Since these institutions were not given substantial backing, crime and government corruption expanded rapidly, as did opium cultivation. Farmers were driven off their lands by returning commanders and narcotics-traffickers, contributing to the growing number of IDPs in addition to the refugees being repatriated from Pakistan and Iran.

Refugee-induced urbanization

In fact one of the few safe spaces in the entire country was the city of Kabul, under the protection of ISAF. To explain how this geopolitical dysfunction became an urban crisis, it is helpful to understand the actual topography of Kabul. Figures 1.4 and 1.5 are two maps of Kabul. The first is a close-cropped map designed to show and label major features of the city. Kabul is situated in two intermontane basins, divided by the central mountains labeled in figure 1.4. The Kabul River cuts through these mountains in a deep gap called the Lion's Gate (Sher Darwaza), flowing north from the Chahr Dehi basin in the southwest into the larger northeastern basin, through which it flows eastward through Jalalabad and into Pakistan. The original city of Kabul, labeled 'Old City' in figure 1.4, was protected by the steep ridge of Lion's Gate Mountain to the south, and Kabul River on the west and north.

<http://www.debates.org/pages/trans2000b.html>

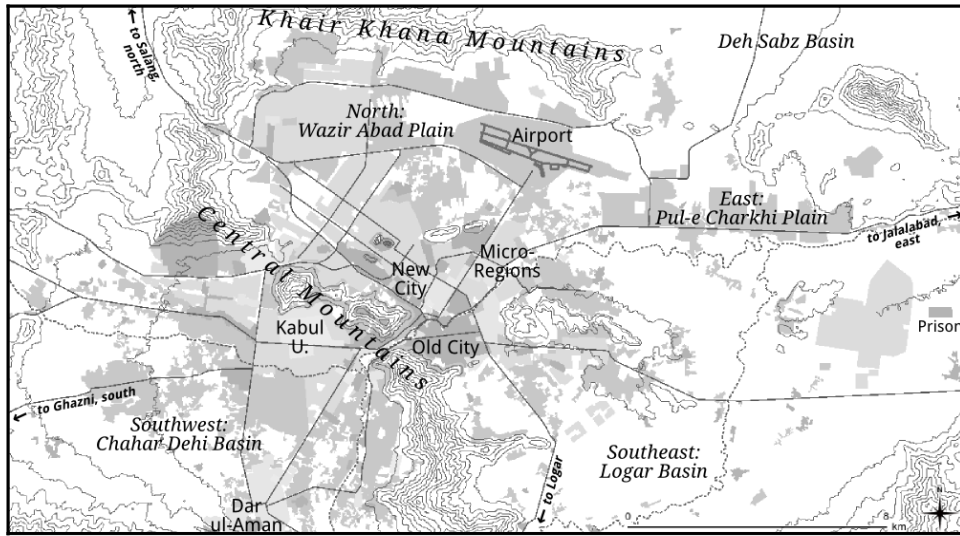


Figure 1.4: Main geographic features of Kabul.

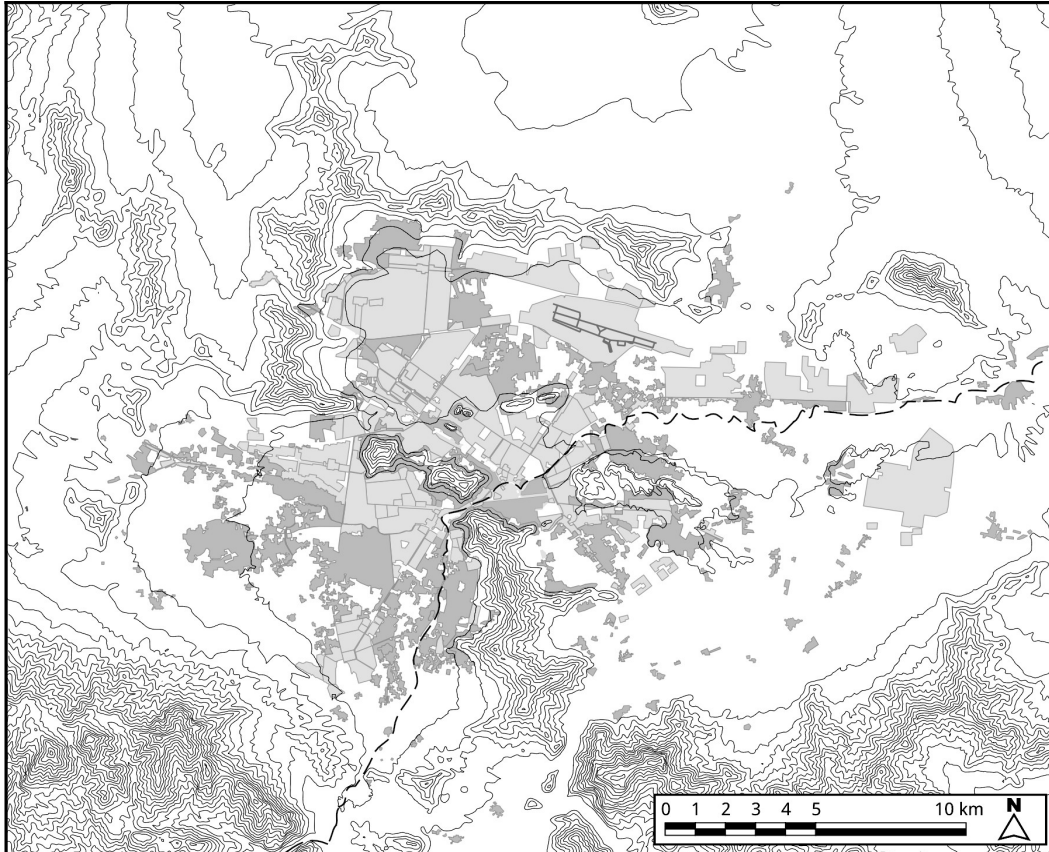


Figure 1.5. Topographic overview map of Kabul in 2001 (author, 2010). Labels are omitted and topography is darkened to show the overall landforms. By securing these two basins, ISAF inadvertently created a 'walled city' at the regional scale.

At a much larger scale, the natural terrain serves a defensive function for Kabul again

in the twenty-first century. The Khair Khana Mountains on the north separate Kabul from the southern tip of the Shomali plain (upper left in figure 1.5), and the dry basin of Deh Sabz to the north and northeast. A series of massifs to the south and east separate Kabul from adjacent provinces. Only a few roads lead into and out of the city, shown on figure 1.4; and ISAF was able to secure the perimeter of the city at these bottlenecks. The ruggedness of the mountains around Kabul facilitated this policy. While the bottoms of each intermontane basin are very flat, the mountains are extremely steep due to strong tectonic activity in the region (see figures 1.6 and 1.8 below).

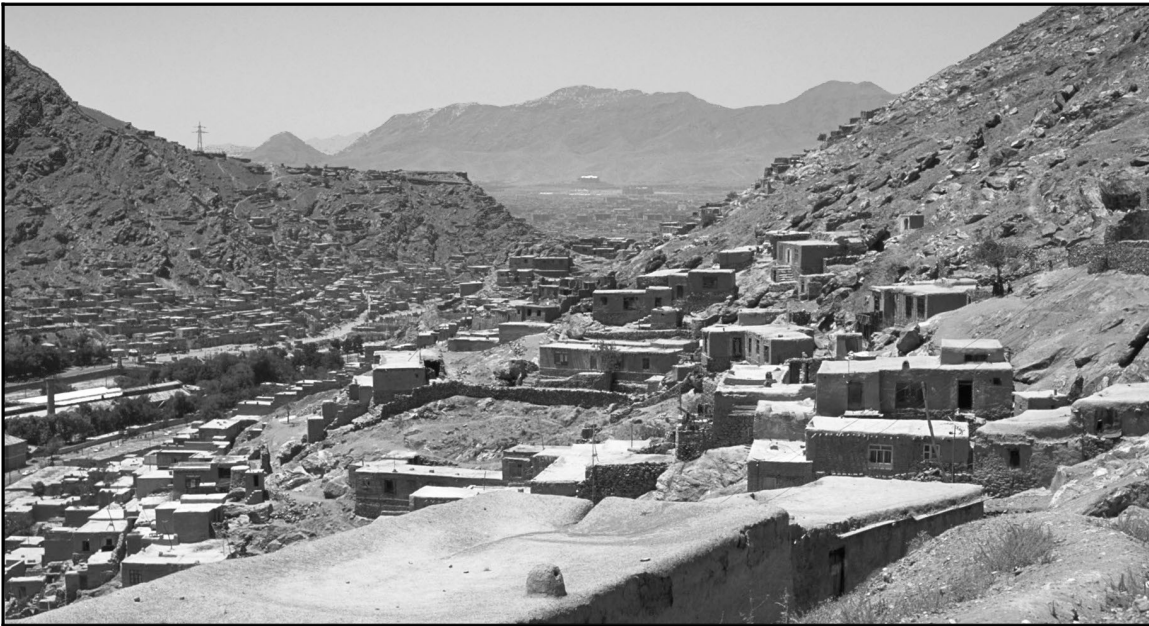


Figure 1.6. The Lion's Gate (author, 2003). In the far distance are the ruins of Dar ul-Aman Palace and the partially-restored Taj Beg Palace; the sun is glinting off the new roof on the latter.

By securing Kabul, and only Kabul in 2002, ISAF had created a kind of walled city within these two intermontane basins. That spatial security was a precious resource for at least half of the 4.5 million Afghans who (were) returned to the country after 2001. Spatial security is a public good insofar as it is non-excludable. In Afghanistan, that security was an extraordinarily important use-value whose worth cannot be captured entirely in the market-price of land. Indirectly, however, the housing market in Kabul began to reflect the presence of this new asset almost immediately, and hundreds of thousands of households sought shelter under the protective shield of ISAF (Figure 1.5).



Figure 1.7. Refugee camp in Chaman-e Babrak, western Kabul, 2003 (author). By 2006 this area had been cleared out and turned into a construction-supply depot. Refugees were relocated even further away from jobs, or found their own way into informal housing.

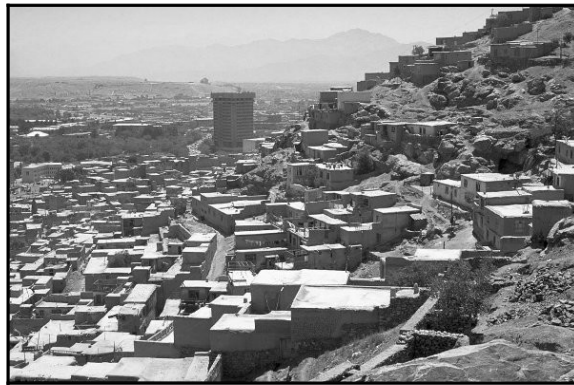


Figure 1.8. New housing extending up the northern slope of Asmayi Mountain (also known as 'Television Mountain'), central Kabul. The seventeen-story Ministry of Communication in the middle distance marks the center of the city (author).

In their effort to find any possible space to live in Kabul, households doubled- and tripled-up in existing houses, and began to build new houses as quickly as possible within every available space within the city. The built area of Kabul is roughly the same area as San Francisco, the second most dense city in the United States after Manhattan. However the population of Kabul was climbing over 2.5 million by May of 2003; already three times the density of San Francisco in the same area.

Informal housing extends hundreds of meters up the flanks of the mountains in and around Kabul (Figure 1.6). As one Afghan explained, "A foreigner arrived at Kabul by night. Seeing the lights of all the houses on the mountains rising so suddenly in the middle of the city, he thought he was seeing skyscrapers." The anecdote is a sweet expression of modernist aspirations; but the steepness of this terrain also reveals that mountainside households are taking a great risk. Kabul is located in Seismic Zone IV, the highest danger. Severe earthquakes are very frequent in Afghanistan and the surrounding region. When earthquakes strike clay-brick houses with heavy, built-up roofs, whole neighborhoods tend to collapse in landslides with 100% fatalities. Randolph Langenbach points out that if the walls of these structures are 'laced' together with inlaid wood

beams, they can be very seismically resistant.³⁰ But twentieth-century deforestation has made wood rare and expensive in Kabul. Poorer houses can only afford the structural wood necessary for the roof-beams, not for inlaid reinforcing. The same poverty that drives households to build illegal housing on steep mountainsides means that they cannot afford to make those houses seismically resistant. Through interviews I found that the risk was widely known among mountainside settlers. They are taking the known, calculated risk of death by earthquake in order to maintain close access to jobs, schools, and other life-opportunities.

The 'permanent fix' that isn't: refugee resettlement policy in Afghanistan

The successful repatriation of refugees is so politically important to the new Afghan regime that an entire national-level ministry was created to address this issue. In 2007 I visited one of the sites where the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation (MoRR) was attempting to permanently resettle refugees with the assistance of UNHCR. The MoRR had secured sites in each province so that refugees who could not return to their ancestral village could at least settle in their own province, and not in Kabul. This was explicit policy: if a household chose to settle in Kabul they would lose their claim to a refugee-resettlement benefit package. Among those benefits was security of tenure: the land that the Ministry obtained was uncontested by other parties, so that the Ministry could subdivide the site and provide the returnees with formal landownership for a minimal fee. At the site I visited, each parcel was 4 beswa (about 400m² or 4,000ft²), and the MoRR was charging settlers AFS 6,000 (US \$120) per lot.

Consider, however, the type of land the government could obtain in Afghanistan that was uncontested. Twelve per cent of the land in the country is arable, and that land has been claimed for centuries. Beyond the arable limit, nomads herd goats, sheep and camels to the limits of vegetation. Beyond that limit are mountains of bare rock and desert. To quote one UNHCR worker, "Land in Afghanistan is like cigarettes in a prison." It is scarce, and it is fought over.

We visited Beni Worsak, the permanent resettlement site for Parwan Province, just north of Kabul. The site had been subdivided into four thousand lots, but only 290 families had settled there. The site is at about 34° 54' N, 69° 19' E, but as of 2010, the satellite imagery used by Google Earth for that area dates from 2004, a year before the site was occupied. What you will see is a small plain, on the south side of a dry river that separates this area from Bagram Air Base to the northwest. Streaks of windswept dust cover the plain. The satellite image may not be updated soon, because the area to the south side of the dirt road is an American weapons range.

The site is accessed via a rough dirt road off the 'back route' secondary highway between Bagram Air Base and Kabul. Other than the weapons range, the area is featureless. As we approached the site I was surprised to see that much of the landscape was covered with about 10cm of dust that was so dry and powdery that it reminded me of the surface of the moon. The water table at the site is about 65 meters (200 ft) deep, so

30 Langenbach, Randolph. 2002. "Survivors in the midst of devastation: a comparative assessment of traditional timber and masonry construction in seismic areas." *Proceedings of the 7th US national conference on earthquake engineering*. Oakland: Earthquake Engineering Research Institute.

groundwater is inaccessible without a motorized pump and its constant fuel expense. There is no electricity. There is no apparent basis for any form of livelihood here.

The families we met at Beni Worsk had been squatting in public buildings in Kabul, and the government wanted those buildings back. So the MoRR offered the squatters a place where they could live in their home province, without constant threat of eviction. In 2005 several hundred families were trucked to Beni Worsk and essentially dumped there. UNHCR was working with MoRR to implement the overall national resettlement policy, but found out about this incident after it became a local news scandal. Technically, it was consistent with the overall strategy of settling refugees back in their own province, so UNHCR followed up by providing building materials to each family, and by trying to develop a livelihoods strategy for the community. CESVI, an Italian NGO, drilled wells and is assisting with the land allocation; the American NGO Women of Hope was providing a nurse; and UNICEF was helping provide education to the third grade level. Nine men were the only functionally literate people in the whole community.

The main source of livelihood for the community at that point was men who commuted to Kabul. They would walk out to the highway, hitch a ride on a southbound truck back to Kabul, and earn money through whatever work they could find. Since the journey from Beni Worsk to Kabul took about five hours, daily commuting was infeasible. Instead, the men would find a place to squat for a week, and then return to Beni Worsk for a week.

I questioned the whole idea of this resettlement program with the UNHCR staff. Why expend scarce resources trying to get households to settle in a place where they don't want to settle? First, they argued that UNHCR respects and abides by the policies of each country in which it operates. Afghanistan is in fact an original signatory to the UN Charter, and was a member of the League of Nations before that. Second, they argued that squatting in abandoned buildings was untenable; the UN needed to find a lasting solution to this problem.

I agreed with respecting the sovereign will of Afghans, but clearly the will of Afghan political leaders was at odds with the will of hundreds of thousands of Afghan households who were trying to find their place in Kabul. What if the UN started shifting its policy to support refugees in Kabul? No, that would trigger an even larger rush into the city. True, I conceded; but is that the worst possible outcome? In 2007 the population of Kabul was about 3.5 million. What if Kabul grew to eight million? Or twelve? The UNHCR workers blanched. That would be catastrophic. Kabul at eight million? That was unthinkable.

Pushpa Pathak, one of the most experienced urban policy consultants in Kabul, explained that she had seen entrenched bias against urban growth wherever she has worked. My surprise at this revealed my provincial American assumption that anti-growth, anti-urban politics and discourse were peculiar to the United States. The UNHCR workers shared some of the same bias as the Afghans who hoped to implement policies of 'deconcentration' to make their own life in Kabul more pleasant. Apparent inaction was in fact a pointed decision by Kabul Municipality to not extend urban services and infrastructure into informal areas. In this case, the deliberate refusal to officially acknowledge the presence of more than half of Kabul's population is the planning

decision. The ‘anticipated future benefit’ is the hope that the newcomers will go away through official neglect and discouragement. Unfortunately this normative position does not allow for imagining the probable: a future in which far more newcomers will be settling permanently in the city.

As urban planners—and here I include both Westerners and the Afghan planners I have worked with—I believe we need to make this scale of urban growth thinkable. The population of Kabul will be eight million, and it may climb to that size in twenty years regardless of formal policy opposition to this trend. About fifteen per cent of Afghans live in cites today. Consistent with Kingsley Davis’ 1965 observation of the urbanization of Western countries during the Industrial Revolution,³¹ Asian and African societies are following a similar trend towards urbanization now. The cause-effect relationships between urbanization, economic growth, rising education, and improved overall health are complex; urbanization cannot be simply equated with ‘development.’ However, the respondents to the social-demographic survey expressed clearly that these are precisely the factors that convinced them to settle in Kabul. How will the urban regime of Kabul respond to the collective aspirations of all of these households? Since a wide array of agencies are part of that urban regime—from the local municipality to the US Department of Defense—the challenge is not just to heed what a population desires, but to figure out who needs to listen and respond, and how.

31 Davis, Kingsley. 1965. “The urbanization of the human population.” *Scientific American* (September).

Chapter Two: Invitation



Figure 2.1. Planned Kabul (author, 2003). View southwest from the summit of Asmayi Mountain. In the far distance at the base of Qurogh Mountain, King Amanullah began to build the new capital of Modern Kabul (Kabul Jadid) in the 1920s. Dar ul-Aman Avenue, running down the center of the photo, was laid out at that time. The curved building at the near end of that avenue is the Ministry of Transportation, and the rectangular compound on the near side of that Ministry is a municipal police compound. In the foreground, the informal Deh Mazang neighborhood has been extending uphill, especially since the early 1990s.

I. The Half-Mirror of Modernity

This dissertation is a study of the way that Kabul, Afghanistan is being planned. The study focuses primarily on the policies and urban transformations that occurred during first five years of the Western-backed Islamic Republic, from 2002 to 2007. The different ways in which the city is being planned require different conceptual lenses, and yield very different lessons in planning. First, this is an in-depth case study of a Central Asian city which remains understudied and poorly understood by Westerners, despite a decade of intense Western intervention. I have been interested in the cities of Central Asia since the mid-1980s, and I hope that this study can contribute to urban scholarship on this region as a whole. That longstanding interest in Central Asian urbanism was a precondition that intersected very unexpectedly with more immediate geopolitics in 2001-2002, enabling me to work for the urban ministry of the Islamic Republic in June of 2003. The Western intervention in Afghanistan made possible my very direct involvement in urban planning in Kabul and gave me a chance to witness urban transformations at a very unusual moment in Kabul's history. Part of that sudden change was the peculiar role of Western involvement, itself, in the shaping of Kabul. The second contribution of this study, therefore, is to understand how twenty-first century imperial geopolitics operates as an agent of urban planning in an occupied capital.

The third contribution builds on these first two. This study aims to contribute to an extension of urban planning theory to understand the rapid process of species-urbanization occurring across the world today. As Jennifer Robinson points out, both urban theory and planning theory were developed primarily in Europe and North America in the twentieth century, while urbanization in the 'rest of the world' was studied very differently, and very separately, in the field of Development Studies.¹ A political call to 'decolonize' social theory in the 1960s and 1970s has become a practical necessity today, as older conceptual categorizations of the world become obsolete. Urbanization and planning policies in Santiago, Lagos, Cairo, Dubai, Singapore, Kabul, and Shanghai are radically diverse. To treat these cities together is possible only at the most general level, where political, economic, and communicative linkages mean that no city can be treated as an isolated object. But for that same reason, the generic division of the world into First and Third, or North and South—or whatever euphemism comes next—is not only conceptually flawed, but actively misleading. 'Split-world ideology' remains real in the sense that many conversations and policy decisions are framed by it; but it gets in the way of understanding processes I have observed through professional work in San Francisco and Kabul.

This peculiar pair of experiences—working for local agencies in a professional capacity in both San Francisco and Kabul—frames this entire study. In the former I worked in an architectural firm with the SF Housing Authority as my client; in the latter I worked for the Ministry of Urban Development and Housing. Since that time, my most unusual fieldwork has been at the University of California, learning the social and political theories I needed in order to make sense not just of what I observed in Kabul,

¹ Robinson, Jennifer. 2002. "Global and World Cities: A View from off the Map." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 26:531-554.

but also more general problems in urbanism that I had experienced both in Afghanistan and in California. This study is a report back to professional planners, and those interested in planning and urbanization, based on findings in San Francisco, then Kabul, then Berkeley. In the site is my referent of social formation; its presence cannot be ignored even where it is not mentioned in this study. The second is the main subject of this study, from which I draw both very specific and very general lessons. The third, which must also be characterized, is the University of California. I returned to the Department of City and Regional Planning after ten years of professional practice, and pursued an entirely different path in social theory. What I hope to make clear is a way of understanding planning and urbanization that I had not been able to clarify through what I had learned from practical experience.

The first finding to report back from this research is that my understanding of my audience has changed. This study is certainly addressed to Americans, particularly the troubling findings about the way our intervention has shaped the form and meaning of urban space in the city. However these same findings pertain to Westerners involved in aid, development, diplomacy, and security work in Kabul—from the Spaniards who rented one of the aid-palaces in Shir Pur as their embassy to the South Africans working as close-protection bodyguards for “Very Important Persons.” Yet this report is also addressed to Afghan planners—my peers at the Ministry and the Municipality, my former students at Kabul University and Kabul Polytechnic University, and their successors. As Ananya Roy has pointed out in reviewing drafts of this text, this compound audience make the use first-person plural extremely problematic. At times, “we,” and “our” are used as not just the ‘royal we,’ but the ‘*imperial* we.’ At other times, I am insisting that practicing professionals in very different sites regard each other as peers.

In responding to Jennifer Robinson’s call to dismantle the disciplinary and political divisions between planning, urban theory, and development studies, I have found this rough edge in my narrative. Hopefully this narrative instability helps remind us of the imperial asymmetries not just of national geopolitics, but urban geopolitics—and at the same time, a way toward dismantling that empire through both accountability and identitarian inclusiveness. Some politics can be attacked most directly by challenging how ideas get phrased. Communicative planners argue that the way an issue gets described and framed as a policy ‘problem’ has a powerful, often determinant influence on the type of policy used to address it. Since 2003 I have frequently heard strange policy questions being asked, based on incomplete information about the city and its legacy of modernizing urban policy. In response to the many Afghans and Americans who have asked me ‘What should we do?’ in Kabul, the main purpose of this report is to simply clarify what I have seen, in a way that I hope leads to better-informed policy questions. On the idealistic side, I hope this provides better information (and a big vote of confidence) for Afghan planners to make their own decisions. At the same time, it is clear that foreign agencies will control funding, and thereby control a great deal of policy in Kabul for the foreseeable future. If Westerners do not like the increasingly extreme inequalities that shape both development policy and geopolitics across the world, then we face a major policy challenge: transforming our empire into something more just. The way that Westerners take on this issue will profoundly impact the patterns and processes

of urbanization across the world over the next generation, so this issue is centrally relevant to urban planning theory and practice.

Planning as an expression of political rationalities

The conceptual tool that I have found most useful in understanding a wide variety of urban policy problems is the idea of *political rationalities*. Urban planners usually employ technical rationalities, often assuming that this is the only way to rationally approach a policy problem. Technical rationalities imply a uniform world: indeed, a mobile phone and the chemistry of concrete work the same way regardless of our location on the planet. But political rationalities imply localness, peculiarity, and contingency. In English at least, the axiom that ‘politics is local’ is reinforced by the need to add qualifiers to identify politics at the larger scale of the region and the world. The tension between local urban politics and national politics within a capital city play a central role in this study, as does the tension between urban politics and geopolitics. In Chapter Two I explain both the distinctions and interactions between different modes of rationality that underlie the three modes of planning I observed in Kabul. In Chapters Three, Four, and Five, each of these three modes is examined in detail. In Chapter Six I reflect on the implications of this analysis. For the remainder of this chapter, I focus on the way that I came to experience Kabul as a problem-space, leading to my research question: How is Kabul being planned?

Misperceptions of the city

This first chapter introduces Kabul through several contradictions between the city as it continues to be portrayed and imagined, and the city that I observed. Figure 2.1 begins to reveal some of these troubling contradictions. This image shows a large area of southwestern Kabul that was planned and zoned in the 1920s. The road receding from the center of the image into the distance was built to link the existing city to a new, *Modern Kabul (Kabul-e Jadid)*. King Amanullah who commissioned this plan was a contemporary and close admirer of the Young Turks. He sought to aggressively modernize Afghanistan, beginning with the embodied experience of Kabulis. Not only would they experience Beaux-Arts style urban design, electrification, and a railroad; but Kabulis were also required to dress in European-style clothing while in the public spaces of the capital.² The design of a modern capital to catalyze the modernization of a whole society parallels the ideals of Brazilian leaders in the 1950s and 1960s, who imagined a radically new Modernist capital intended to trigger the transformation of Brazilian society through spatial-aesthetic lived experience.³

Even though King Amanullah’s modernizing regime collapsed in 1929, the successor monarchy recognized the 1923 plan as it developed new districts. The original land-use allocations persist to this day. At the far end of the straight road in Figure 2.1 is Dar ul-Aman Palace. That was to be the center of the new capital, and the area around it was allocated for administrative uses. The palace itself is a ruin, and has become a visual trope for ‘the ruined state of Afghanistan’ in Anglophone media. In fact few Afghans are

2 Wild, Roland. 1982[1932]. *Amanullah: Ex-King of Afghanistan*. Quetta: Nisa traders.

3 Berman, Marshall. 1988. *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity*. New York: Viking Penguin.

interested in the building—except to take wedding photographs with the palace as the backdrop, as the metaphorical gift the groom would give to his bride. That, in itself, is a rich expression of ironic Kabuli humor. But foreign journalists, unlike Afghans, photograph this neglected building to represent the devastation of the country as a whole. Thus Dar ul-Aman Palace is one of the few non-foreign sites in Kabul that foreigners like to walk through, but Afghans do not. Afghan police had to start patrolling the grounds in 2002 because it was the first place where anti-Western insurgents started planting new land-mines to attack foreigners.

Meanwhile the urban-planning story that does not get told in the English-language press is that the surrounding urban district continues to develop as an administrative area, consistent with the 1923 land-use plan. The United Nations and the International Security Assistance Force have built large facilities on the public land on the south side of the Palace. On the north side, the National Museum has been rebuilt. One of the most powerful national ministries, the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, moved into a new building complex just north of the Palace in 2007. While both the capital and the country as a whole are described as chaotic, lawless, ungoverned, demodernized, and ‘medieval,’ large parts of the capital continue to develop according to a zoned master-plan from the first quarter of the twentieth century.

The dramatic tension between what I observed in Kabul, and how I have seen it presented in Western media, is a recurring theme throughout this research. Though this story is about Kabul, the city also plays a powerful role in the Western imagination of the West’s own modernity. Those Western assumptions are reflected *back* into Kabul through foreign policies framed within a discourse where Kabul is insistently and repeatedly portrayed as that-which-is-not-modern: the anti-Modern.

Writing against the linguistic grain

The mistake that has been made in Afghanistan, not only on the part of the Americans troops, but also on the part of NATO, is that we are disregarding the people of Afghanistan. We talk about the people of Afghanistan in the third person.⁴

– Prince Abdul Ali Seraj, cousin of Zahir Shah, 15 May 2010

These opening pages already reveal one of the central problems in writing this text. I frequently and repeatedly need to challenge the way that Kabul is portrayed in English, even as I describe it in English; I am constrained by the connotations of words and phrases that are normally assembled to assert or imply that Afghanistan is un-modern. Metaphorically, the problem is that most outside observers see Kabul through a partially-reflective mirror—a mirror in which they are busy constituting their own identities. Thus, assertions and implications that Kabul is not modern are performing a kind of cultural work: this shared mythological image of Afghanistan and Afghans is used as a negative referent to assert what ‘we’ are. In that collective constitution of modern identities, the actual place that is Afghanistan is not really relevant, so long as images and narratives can support the imagined Afghanistan as an un-modern place that affirms ‘our’

4 Wells, Kathleen. 2010. “Afghan Prince says U.S. and Coalition Forces making big mistake.” interview posted at *AlterNet*, May 15. Accessed 20 Dec 2010 from: <http://blogs.alternet.org/speakeasy/2010/03/15/afghan-prince-says-u-s-and-coalition-forces-making-big-mistake/>

modernity.⁵

However even the frames of reference for modernity are shifting in ways that each reader of this study must consider in relation to other readers. When *Orientalism* was published in 1978, Edward Said was arguing that Westerners constituted their own modern identity against the Otherness of ‘Easterners.’ Today that process is more distributed. When I traveled from Kabul to New Delhi in October of 2007, I found that Indians in the School of Planning and Architecture regarded Afghanistan with the same differentiating fear and awe that Americans did. In the conversations that I had, Indians subconsciously asserted their modernity through their expressions of anxiety about Afghans. So again, as I ‘report back’ to practicing planners and planning scholars, my own frame of reference needs to be clarified. Among my audience are planning theorists at the Center for Environmental Planning and Technology (Ahmedabad) and the School for Planning and Architecture (New Delhi); and I am poaching social theory from the deep intellectual streams of Kolkata by way of Berkeley, Columbia, and Chicago. This is not a story of generic ‘globalization’ at all: indeed it is the opposite. The urban sites of intellectual argument that I draw from, and report back to, are very unevenly dispersed. They are also rapidly changing. English is becoming a shared *second* language across the world, spanning geopolitical alignments and intensely local frames of cultural reference. I have tried to write in that dialect as much as possible, to engage with planners across this much broader terrain of practice and theory.

In this shifted dialect I distinguish modern—which includes Afghans—from Western, which is a geopolitical alignment. This is consistent with the way that ‘Western’ (*gharbi*) is used by Kabulis themselves, in contrast to modern (*jadid*). For Western readers of this text, the inclusion of Western agencies as planners of Kabul presents another writing challenge. Westerners are justifiably concerned about their failed attempt at a post-Taliban project of political and social development. That is an important part of the story of Kabul at the beginning of the twenty-first century because of the interconnectedness of policy decisions and urbanization processes across the world. But self-reflection and introspection can also distract focus away from other aspects of Kabul’s planning and development. In the metaphorical terms of a partially-reflective mirror, the art is to pay close attention to what we learn about ‘the international community’ and ‘humanitarian interventionism’ reflected back from this analysis, while also paying attention to the urbanization and planning processes being observed through that half-mirror.

In Chapter Five that partial-reflection resolves into a disturbingly imperial image. I believe that Americans are ashamed of this image, because it clashes so sharply with the myths that constitute American identity. I argue that practicing professionals and scholars need to observe and recognize existing conditions first, while still holding a normative vision of what we want cities to be. This tension between difficult present realities and hoped-for futures lies at the core of practice for planners working in what we regard as ‘home’ or ‘native’ urban environments. Urban policy requires a vision of what a city *can* be, as well as a sufficient understanding of opportunities and constraints to develop a strategy for implementing that vision. While policy implementation involves myriad

5 Chatterjee, Partha. 1997. *Our modernity*. Rotterdam/Dakar: SEPHIS/CODESRIA.

technical means and empirically-derived methods, the vision itself is a fundamentally moral, *political* vision—such as, ‘we want our city to be environmentally sustainable’—that must be articulated before framing the terms and goals of more technical forecasting models. There is no objectively correct way to plan a city. The first move is always a moral one: to choose how we live together.

Planners also pay close attention to cultural plurality within cities, an ethic that was most influentially by Paul Davidoff in his 1965 article “Advocacy and pluralism in planning.” In *Mongrel cities*, Leonie Sandercock goes further in arguing that we need to ‘make strange’ even the cities we think we know. Professional practice in Vancouver, for instance, may involve as much cross-cultural listening for a Canadian as they would need to use when working transnationally as an urban planner in Asia. Presuming one’s own familiarity with a ‘home’ city may interfere with the recognition of deep cultural plurality that planners must maintain in order to ethically and competently serve urban populations that are somehow different from the planner—meaning practically any urban population. Presuming that Kabul is incommensurably different is the converse side of this same problem. Indeed, Kabul is very different from San Francisco. But treating Kabul as somehow alien, as Other, is an act of ‘setting-apart’ that goes beyond mere acknowledgment of difference. In this particular case, it serves a whole array of arguments that ‘we should not meddle’ in a place where Americans have been meddling, quite destructively, for decades. The argument against transnational planning also presumes that any one group *can* withdraw from engagement with shaping of other cities. Westerners can afford to adopt such a principled position only because Westerners have the power to ignore the powerful, unequal relations that bind our collective urbanization together.

Moral questions intimately bind Kabul to American politics. However many of those binding ligaments are subtle, not just the current American concern for security. In the 1990s, the increasing interconnectedness of the world was considered a (mostly) happy outcome of the end of the Cold War; the rise of the internet; and the lowering of barriers to trade and capital flows. In very different ways, Manuel Castells and David Harvey pointed out how interconnections affect urbanization. These ‘flows’ of information and this ‘compression’ of space and time continue, increasing both exposure and inequality. The fact that most of my former students in Kabul are now my ‘friends’ on Facebook is countervailed by the fact that it would be much more difficult for any of them to enter the United States today than at any time in the past. For the record, I relay the complaint that many Afghans expressed to me: no Afghan was directly involved in al-Qaeda’s terrorist attack on the United States in 2001. This also seems to be true of subsequent attacks in Bali, Madrid, and Mumbai. Americans should be most concerned about attacks from citizens of countries that have been close allies for decades (Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Egypt), or centuries (Morocco was the first country to recognize American sovereignty in 1787). American anxiety towards Afghans seems deeply misplaced, and that anxiety may be eclipsing an important opportunity to witness and engage in a massive process of sociopolitical development underway in Asia—development that is likely to involve the urbanization of several billion people over the next thirty years. Done poorly, it may indeed yield the ‘planet of slums’ that Mike Davis warns about. Done better, it is likely to

yield results beyond our collective imagining because we are so preoccupied with what is going wrong. Furthermore, by invoking a myth of reciprocal sovereignty as an excuse for self-isolation, we overlook the linkages that bind us ethically and materially together. If increasing the voice and self-determination of Afghans is an American ideal, it cannot be implemented under conditions of elective disengagement while we occupy their country and buy their opium. Hopefully a closer look at Kabul will make these arguments more clear.

II. Two Cities, Two Failures in Housing Policy

On May 14, 2002, the *San Francisco Chronicle* published an article by Barry Bearak entitled “In the Afghan capital, rents go through the roof.”⁶ At the time, I was overseeing the completion of 193 units of public housing in San Francisco, at a site called Yerba Buena Plaza East. I was painfully aware of the way that the housing market was failing in San Francisco. Plaza East had taken eight years to demolish and rebuild, spanning the era of the “dot-com” boom in the city. Tens of thousands of people, and hundreds of billions of dollars in venture capital, rushed into the city in search of profit from the initial commercial development of the World Wide Web. Chronically impoverished, under-educated, under-skilled humans who had grown up in San Francisco were disregarded as irrelevant to this business boom. Or worse: the poor were seen as an inconvenience because they took up residential space in a city that was desperately short on space. It took almost four years just to complete the plans, permitting, and construction of two hundred units of housing, from 1998 to 2002. And yet, this was one of the largest projects (public or private) being built in a city that was falling behind by an estimated two thousand units per year.⁷ I had the distinct sensation that our effort to build our way out of this housing shortage was like trying to dig a hole in a lake.

Now, in a city on the far side of the world that Americans had just ‘liberated’ from the Taliban, a similar housing crisis was emerging. Bearak even used the same phrases that were prevalent in local descriptions of our own housing shortage, to describe the sudden change in Kabul:

House No. 181 on 15th Street, while spacious, is definitely a fixer-upper. The kitchen cabinets, built with cheap plywood, are cracked. The linoleum floors in the halls are buckling. Wires hang like nooses from bedroom ceilings. The last tenant paid \$500 a month for the place, an amount that now seems decidedly paltry in this city of galloping rents. The current cost is \$10,000. Location, location, location: the usual rules of real estate apply. But who would have thought Kabul, a bombed-out cadaver of a city, was as well situated as Manhattan?⁸

Landowners in the central neighborhood of Wazir Akbar Khan were experiencing an extraordinary windfall. Hundreds of small and large organizations were arriving to aid or save Afghans, while large multilateral agencies were arriving to provide large-scale assistance. All of these agencies needed office space and guest-house space in the capital,

6 Bearak, Barry. 2002. “Kabul Journal: In the Afghan Capital, Rents Go Through the Roof.” *New York Times*, May 14.

7 Wellman, Laurel. 2001. “Housing is S.F.’s Mission Impossible: City has yet to reach its goal.” *The San Francisco Chronicle*, November 29, p. A-2, and San Francisco Planning and Urban Research Association. 2001. “San Francisco’s response to the housing crisis: An update on recent policies.” *SPUR Newsletter*, November.

8 Bearak, 2002.

and were willing to pay thousands of dollars per month to rent a site in the intact neighborhoods of central Kabul.

Bearak's article clashed very sharply with the way that the West was portraying its own presence in Afghanistan to itself. The ideal that prevailed then, as now, was that small, nimble non-governmental organizations (NGOs) would be able to 'do development better' than big, rigid, 'inherently inefficient' government agencies. Large UN agencies were still considered necessary in this case, because the general assumption was that all Afghan government institutions had been destroyed by twenty-three years of unrelenting warfare. But if Kabul was such a shattered wasteland, how could landlords be charging such high rents? How could they even claim and enforce property-rights if all the social institutions of Afghanistan had been shattered? And shouldn't the budgets of aid agencies be devoted exclusively to helping the desperately poor population of the city, rather than renting houses for thousands of dollars per month?

In fact Bearak's article had been provoked by a collective protest of the aid agencies themselves. The Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief (ACBAR) issued an open letter to the Ministry of Finance on May 12, 2002 calling for a cap on rents in central Kabul, because the sudden inflation was disrupting the entire housing market—at exactly the same moment that hundreds of thousands of returnees were settling in the city. ACBAR made the following requests:

- Allocate more money to housing in the National Development Budget;
- Take concrete measures to protect the rights to shelter of all Afghans, including protection from unlawful evictions and provision of appropriate shelter for particularly vulnerable populations.
- Impose rent controls to protect lower income brackets from high rents;
- Clamp down on corruption by landlords who are seeking to avoid taxes.
- Relax current restrictions on housing reconstruction at the lower end of the market.
- Ensure security and provision of services (electricity, water and sanitation) in those areas of Kabul that are presently under-populated.⁹

These requests were ignored by the new US-backed Karzai regime, in light of what were considered far more urgent problems. Using a generic conception of Afghanistan as a 'failed state' that needed to be re-created from scratch, the United States supported a National Solidarity Program to rebuild the agricultural economy of the provinces.¹⁰ This was intended not only to stabilize the food supply and the rural economy, but also to prevent the country from breaking apart under the leadership of local commanders. Wali Ahmadi, a professor of Near Eastern Studies at UC Berkeley who was born in Kabul, remarks on this misjudgment of the political mindset of Afghans. So far as he knows, no Afghan faction in living memory had ever proposed to secede or attempt to divide the country.¹¹ Barnett Rubin likewise argues that the mujahideen fought their bloody civil war *within* Kabul because, in the minds of Afghan leaders, control of Kabul meant control of Afghanistan. In practice, effective control became very decentralized as

9 Danish Committee for Aid to Afghan Refugees (DACAAR). 2002.

10 Government of Afghanistan, Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development. See: www.nspafghanistan.org

11 Ahmadi, Wali. 2006. "History and culture of Afghanistan." Course taught in the Department of Near Eastern Studies.

factions fought the Soviets, and then fought each other from 1992 to 1996.¹² But the political ideal of every faction was to gain control of the whole country, not to break it apart.

Based on the mistaken American concern that local commanders would need to be convinced to keep the country together, foreign donors funded the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD) very heavily.¹³ Out of \$300 million in non-military aid given to the Ministries in 2006, \$160 million was given to the MRRD. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Urban Development and Housing received about eight million in aid. In fact the MRRD was so dominant in providing infrastructure that foreign donors asked the Ministry of *Rural* Rehabilitation and Development to install seven thousand hand-pump wells in Kabul.¹⁴ Meanwhile neither the Ministry of Urban Development nor the Ministry of Public Works have extended the piped water and sewer systems of Kabul. To this day only the Soviet-era Micro-region housing in the center of the city has a sanitary sewer system. In the rest of the city, wealthier residents pay to have septic tanks pumped out, with the sewage dumped along the roadsides outside of the city. Poorer residents live with raw sewage draining down their streets and footpaths (figure 2.2).



Figure 2.2. Missing infrastructure (author, 2003). A boy hauls water up an unpaved, ungraded street, past the neighborhood dump-site. The one widely-available urban service in much of Kabul has been electricity, for which even informal households are charged. Here, individually-metered circuits extend to each house from the bent pole at the right.

12 Rubin, Barnett R. 1995 [second edition, 2002]. *The fragmentation of Afghanistan: State formation and collapse in the international system*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

13 Tarnoff, Kurt. 2009. *Afghanistan: U.S. Foreign Assistance*. Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, p.5.

14 Engineer Raz Muhammad, Deputy Minister of Finance, Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development; personal interview, 2007.

Neoliberalizing Afghanistan

The letter from ACBAR requests more than mere aid: ACBAR asks the new Karzai regime to regulate the housing market. But how could NGOs even imagine the imposition of rent controls in such a chaotic city? What “current restrictions” could possibly be enforced on “housing reconstruction at the lower end of the market” in a city which Bearak describes as a “bombed-out cadaver”? Could it be possible to enforce tenants’ rights and prevent “unlawful evictions” in a place that seemed so lawless? The assumptions behind the ACBAR letter—co-signed by sixty of the leading NGOs with substantial prior experience in Afghanistan—seemed completely at odds with the dramatic portrayal of Afghanistan in English-language media at that time, and for years to follow.

I later discovered that there was indeed a great deal of surviving institutional structure in Kabul, and that a large part of the American effort from 2002 to 2005 was to *dismantle* those institutions. My assumption when I first arrived in 2003 was that any surviving institutions would be ideologically ‘Islamist,’ established by the Taliban during the Emirate of 1996-2001. In fact many of the surviving institutions that were being dismantled were the *socialist* ones that had been established during the period spanning from Decade of Democracy (1963-1973) through the Soviet occupation (1980-1989). For instance, the government of Afghanistan has an Office of Price Controls. Wahid Ahad, a senior planner within the government, pleaded with the new Karzai regime to use this bureau to regulate rents in Kabul.¹⁵ His request was ignored by the Office of the President. So far as I can tell the Office of Price Controls still exists, but it has not been used since the establishment of the Karzai regime.

The dismantling of social institutions in Kabul after 2001 is part of a longer American-led project to ‘neo-liberalize’ Afghanistan. As of 2001, the national government also still had a Ministry of Planning. This was entirely different from the Ministry of Urban Development and Housing (MUDH), where I worked in 2003. Under socialist regimes, a ‘ministry of planning’ means a ministry of *economic* planning. Whereas the Ministry of Finance managed revenue, budget, and currency, the Ministry of Planning was created to manage the implementation of the five-year national economic development plans, as in other Soviet-bloc countries. In 2002 Hamid Karzai named the French-educated Dr. Ramazan Bashardost as Minister of Planning. In late 2004, Bashardost sought to regulate the several thousand NGOs that were operating in Kabul out of concern for how donor funds were actually being spent. Westerners protested loudly, and Karzai used this controversy as a justification for not only dismissing Bashardost, but for dissolving the entire Ministry of Planning.¹⁶

Sayed Jawad, the Afghan Ambassador to the United States, expressed a continuing belief in neoliberal ideology in a speech to the World Affairs Council of California on October 24, 2008:

The expectation of the [Afghan] people is that many of these services [ought] to be delivered by the government because the private sector, civil society, is weak. And that is why sometimes you

15 Ahad, Wahid. 2007. Personal interview. Kabul: Ministry of Urban Development.

16 Gall, Carlotta and Amy Waldman. 2004. “Under siege in Afghanistan, aid groups say their effort is being criticized unfairly.” *New York Times*, December 19.

hear a lot of complaint about the performance of the government, because everybody expects the government to do a lot of things that's been destroyed through thirty years of war and violence in Afghanistan.

Yet, it is our job to build what I call 'a government that fits inside the constitution.' To prevent a government to become too big, to have its hand all over the place. Because everywhere we see that the government get involved, in many instances instead of improving it further, it causes further problems. We have to work together to make the government small and efficient instead of making it big and expecting that everything will be delivered by the government.

Ambassador Jawad's description of 'our job' in the second paragraph expresses a specific set of expectations about governing—a *governmentality*—that is explicitly neoliberal. This position is usually tacit, expressed by the government of Afghanistan in the form of *inactions*. In Kabul, the most apparent inactions were the lack of reconstruction of destroyed industrial complexes and high schools (figure 2.3), and the absence of any government assistance in 'scaling-up' productive sectors of the economy, such as the many tailors in the central market area.¹⁷



Figure 2.3. *Lysa Ghazi (Ghazi High School), May, 2007 (author). By 2007, most of the other high schools in Kabul had been rebuilt. Apparently the American Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad, an alumnus of Ghazi, had promised to rebuild this high school. However the project was postponed when he was reassigned as Ambassador to Iraq in 2003.*

Over the past decade, social theorists have focused on neoliberalism exhaustively. This research does not contribute substantively to neoliberal theory; the only argument here is that Afghanistan has not been isolated from neoliberalizing reforms. As Peck, Theodore, and Brenner argue, neoliberalization is in fact a series of process including both a 'roll-back' of the regulatory state and a 'roll-out' of the punitive, marketizing state.¹⁸ The initial American effort to 'roll back' the Afghan state began in 1980 with selective support for Islamist opponents to the Soviet occupation. As Wali Ahmadi observes, an initial nationalist resistance to foreign occupation was then transformed into an anti-Communist *jihad* through U.S., Saudi, and Pakistani support of what had been minority factions within the Afghan resistance up to about 1984. Whereas secular

17 Nixon, Hamish. 2007. Personal interview. Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU).

18 Peck, Jamie, and Adam Tickell. 2002. "Neoliberalizing space." *Antipode* 34:380-404.

nationalists might have restored the ‘developmental regime’ of the 1960s and 1970s, the *muhajideen* sought to establish a minimal state with free trade and free enterprise. In this sense, the U.S. intervention was consistent with the anti-Communist sentiments of the German, Austrian, and Swedish neo-Liberal economists of the 1930s and 1940s.¹⁹

Foreign intervention in Afghanistan also fits the second, “roll-out” aspect of neoliberalization: replacing social interventionism with the promotion of self-discipline and ‘self-responsibilization.’²⁰ In the United States, religious hard-liners advocate ‘faith-based’ initiatives in the place of government social policy. Those same American reformers, such as George W. Casey under Ronald Reagan, worked with the Saudis and the Islamist regime of Zia ul Haq in Pakistan to promote a new Afghan regime in which publicly-enforced personal piety would replace government-led reform.²¹ Afghan leaders, from Amanullah Khan (1919-1929) to Sardar Muhammad Daoud (1953-1963 and 1973-1978), Zahir Shah (1963-1973), and Muhammad Najibullah (1986-1992) all promoted increasingly public roles for women, including the operation of the electric trolley-bus routes in Kabul. The violent elimination of a public role for women in Kabul in the spring of 1992 was, perversely, part of a foreign attempt to convert Afghanistan from an ‘unfree’ socialist state to a ‘free’ and newly-Liberal state. Consistent with an ideology articulated by Hayek and Friedman, a market-based economic system was equated with personal and political freedoms. Hayek had called socialism “the road to serfdom” and Friedman had equated “Capitalism and freedom”—the respective titles of their most influential books.

The creation of an Islamic State in Afghanistan to implement this marketization in 1992 might have been considered ironic by any Western political leader with even the most rudimentary awareness of Afghan history from 1978 back to 1919. However, both the Bush and Clinton Administrations treated the Islamization of politics in Afghanistan as an expression of *sovereign self-determination* by Afghans. If the mujahideen wanted to impose restrictive policies on Afghan women as part of their dismantling of a socially-interventionist regime, that was regarded as their sovereign right. While such a ‘deference to sovereign local culture’ framed political discourse, what gets overlooked is the political aspirations and expectations of the female half of the Afghan population, as well as the fact that the mujahid ideology had been shaped by years of foreign intervention. Afghans—including some who are quite pious Muslims—repeatedly remarked to me that the hard-line politicization of Islam still shocks them, given the mood of toleration and openness to social change that they remember from the 1960s and 1970s.

As theorists of neoliberalization have pointed out, marketization of an existing political economy does not simply shift a developmental regime ‘back’ so an unregulated condition. Instead it shifts a regulated political economy towards a *deregulated* condition.²² Assets that had been produced by collective effort, and at public expense, are

19 Walpen, Bernhard. 2005. *The plan to end planning: A short history of neoliberalism*. International center for advanced studies: New York University.

20 Ferguson, James, and Akhil Gupta. 2002. “Spatializing states: Toward an ethnography of neoliberal governmentality.” *American Ethnologist* 29:981-1002.

21 Crile, George. 2003. *Charlie Wilson's war: The extraordinary story of the largest covert operation in history*. New York: Atlantic Monthly Press.

22 Jessop, Bob. 2002. “Liberalism, neoliberalism, and the urban condition.” *Antipode* 34:452-472.

shifted towards private profit for the sector of the society that is in a position to buy those assets at the moment of privatization. Perhaps the most dramatic examples of this process are the emergence of the Russian oligarchs during the Yeltsin Administration, and the emergence of Party-connected multi-billionaires in the Peoples' Republic of China since the late 1990s.²³ This process also began shaping Kabul after 2001, when asset-values shot up with the arrival of the U.S.-backed United Islamic Front ("Northern Alliance") and its successor Islamic Republic in 2002. Senior planner Wahid Ahad said,

All of those landowners in Wazir Akbar Khan, and neighboring Shir Pur and Shahr-e Naw began getting rents of ten thousand, twelve thousand, fifteen thousand dollars per month, every month, from the foreign agencies renting their houses. Do you know what they did with that cash? They started buying more houses, and renting them out, too. They have five, ten, twenty houses that they rent now. How many houses do you need?

Not only is this sudden capital-accretion consistent with the pattern of elite profiteering from privatization in other economies, it also echoes the pattern of sudden capital-accretion during the first and second 'Industrial Revolutions' in Western Europe and the United States. Friedrich Engels observed this dramatic accumulation of urban capital in England in his essay "the Great Towns" in 1844, and Americans reacted to the latter phase of accumulation by 'the robber-barons and plutocrats' of the late 19th century by enacting an estate tax and then a progressive income tax. Yet in Kabul, I found no foreign advocacy of the institution of an income tax; and even property-tax was only implemented in a very partial way in 2005.

One of the core principles of neoliberalization is to minimize government expenditures.²⁴ Government expenditures *can* be wasteful, but there are other dimensions to cost than strict cash value. The ideal of minimal government may need to be balanced against questions of security, stabilization, and the potential wastefulness of an underfunded project. By 2004, two publications expressed concern about insufficient commitment to the stabilization and postwar recovery of Afghanistan. CARE, which has operated within Afghanistan for decades, jointly published a policy brief with New York University's Center for International Cooperation (CIC) entitled "The cost of doing too little." This policy brief was addressed to participants in the 2004 Afghan donor conference in Berlin. CARE and the CIC warned about the return of insecurity across most of Afghanistan after 2001, similar to the conditions in the early 1990s during the mujahid civil war.²⁵ As Barnett Rubin and Ahmed Rashid have pointed out, Taliban rule was accepted in many parts of Afghanistan not because local Afghans embraced the Taliban interpretation of Islam. Rather, Afghans accepted the Taliban because they were effective in re-establishing local security by forcing out corrupt mujahid commanders. CARE and the CIC also warned against the alarming increase in poppy cultivation from 2002 to 2004, and its spread to new regions where opium poppies had not been cultivated before, such as Helmand Province.

The second publication which expressed concern about the state of Afghanistan in

23 Harvey, David. 2005. *A brief history of neoliberalism*. New York: Oxford University Press.

24 Foucault, Michel. 2003. "The birth of biopolitics." Pp. 202-207 in *The essential Foucault*, edited by Paul Rabinow and Nikolas S Rose. New York: New Press.

25 Henry, Kevin et al. 2004. "Afghanistan policy brief: The cost of doing too little." New York: CARE and the Center on International Cooperation, New York University, March 25.

2004 was the book by Chris Johnson and Jolyon Leslie entitled *Afghanistan: The mirage of peace*. Johnson and Leslie argue that the United States in particular and the ‘international community’ in general are abetting the reestablishment of a highly corrupt state, very much against the hopes and aspirations of the majority of Afghans.²⁶ Chris Johnson was a co-founder of the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU), which continues to publish policy-oriented research on Afghanistan, and remains based in Kabul.²⁷ Leslie, who has worked in Afghanistan almost continuously since 1989, says that the book was poorly received in 2004, when most foreign actors still believed that the intervention in Afghanistan was going well. However, as Bearak’s article indicates, something was already going awry in Kabul by the spring of 2002.

Extremism and accretion, rather than fundamentalism and accumulation

The overall failure of economic and political development in Afghanistan since 2001 suggests a more general flaw in the categorical opposition to state-led (re)development of the urban and national economy. Government interventions may indeed cause inefficiencies under *some* conditions; but stated as a universal principle, the neoliberal argument is that state interventions are inefficient under *all* conditions. State intervention in the economy is assumed to be *always* detrimental not just to specific owners, but to the general welfare of the entire society. A society that has been disrupted by thirty years of warfare might be considered one instance in which government intervention is necessary—to rebuild basic infrastructure, to reduce risks for investment, to foster economic sectors that are considered nationally important—much as the United States did under the Truman and Eisenhower Administrations in the 1950s. In subsequent comments Ambassador Jawad agrees implicitly that some government intervention is necessary, but only by admitting that the government needs to rebuild roads that facilitate trade. But his explicit argument is that the ‘job’ of government is to remain a minimal, efficient referee of a for market-led postwar recovery. When the economist Joseph Stiglitz criticized the neoliberal shift in the policies of Bretton Woods institutions, he called this ideology ‘market fundamentalism.’²⁸ However if ‘fundamentalism’ indicates strict adherence to a foundational text, then the problem with this term is that market-only political economists do not acknowledge their strict adherence to the tenets of Alfred Marshall and claim to rely on the moral philosophy of Adam Smith.²⁹ Furthermore, Sunni Muslims *do* believe in strict, literal adherence to the Qur’an, complicating the meaning of fundamentalism in this context. To clarify terms, then, I place market-only advocates on a spectrum of political economists who advocate either more or less regulation and less or more freedom for private firms to operate without any governing restrictions. On this spectrum, the prevailing attitude expressed by the Bush Administration and its Afghan allies lies at the extreme edge in favor of maximum deregulation. I call this position *market extremism*.

The only other contribution think I can make to the heavily-worked field of neoliberal theory is a metaphor. Rather than referring to capital-accumulation, I call it capital-

26 Johnson, Chris, and Jolyon Leslie. 2004. *Afghanistan: the mirage of peace*. New York: Zed Books.

27 All AREU publications are available free as PDFs at: www.areu.org.af

28 Stiglitz, Joseph E. 2002. *Globalization and its discontents*. New York: W.W. Norton.

29 Robert Reich, personal interview, 2008.

accretion. ‘Accumulation’ has passive connotations, like pooling and condensation processes; these, in turn, imply the very misleading idea of a ‘rising tide’ that automatically redistributes wealth by some unspecified (and nonexistent) trickle-down mechanism. ‘Accretion’ is a term from astrophysics used to describe how massive bodies condense out of diffuse, more-or-less evenly distributed clouds of matter. Mass attracts to mass, converting a relatively even distribution into a sharply uneven distribution of material. Only countervailing, regulatory forces such as angular momentum prevent violently destructive hyper-accumulations of matter. Those regulatory forces keep planets from falling into stars, and stars from collapsing together into singularities—monopolies of matter, one could say. If capital is actively deregulated—meaning that only the accretive tendency is allowed and all countervailing tendencies are suppressed or disbanded, the unimodal destructive tendency of capital-accretion is better represented by the mass-accretion metaphor than by any myth of an inherent tendency towards redistribution. The ability of landowners in Wazir Akbar Khan to multiply their wealth with little or no return of benefit to the population of Kabul is a remarkably clear example of the way that accretion leads to rapid increases of inequality in wealth-distribution.

Hard lessons in de facto urban policy

During that spring of 2002 we were finishing Plaza East, and I began to sense that the project was a tactical success, but within an overall strategic failure of housing policy. On paper and in public pronouncements, San Francisco was an explicitly pro-housing city. However beginning in late 1998, it had taken us fifteen months to obtain permits to build the housing.³⁰ The permit-issuing agencies were swamped by applications from internet companies funded by a massive influx of venture-capital into San Francisco. Unlike these ‘dot-com’ startups, the Housing Authority could not hire expensive ‘permit expediter’ consultants to move our application along. We could not donate to their favorite charities, we could not buy them lunch; and our application had to be reviewed by eight agencies that often gave conflicting comments. Overall, I found that the *de facto* policies of San Francisco were decidedly hostile to the creation and maintenance of an affordable housing stock.³¹

Here I learned an important lesson about urban planning. Effective housing policy was not the product of any single agency; in fact it was a collective decision of the population in the city as a whole. As house-price inflation approached twenty-five per cent per year in San Francisco, individuals increasingly referred to their houses as *investments* rather than as *homes*. ‘Investment’ can have a broad social meaning. But in this context we specifically meant the cash value, the *exchange-value* of a house, in contrast to its social meaning, its *use-value*. The relative public indifference to the shortage of low-end housing in San Francisco reflected a collective belief that public interventions in the housing market were inefficient distortions, and that the market logic of supply and demand was very, very profitable for the politically-dominant fraction of the population who could afford to enter that housing market.

30 San Francisco Planning and Urban Research. 2000. “Reducing uncertainty, increasing efficiency.” *Report adopted by the Board*, July 19.

31 Smith, Charles, et al. 2001. “Change the rules: The problem is in the planning, regulation, building codes—and with the neighbors.” *The San Francisco Chronicle*. December 19, p. HO-1.

Something similar was happening in Kabul, with dire social consequences. Bearak describes the way that the rent-boom in central Kabul began to affect rents across the city:

Unfortunately, there are but a few winners in Kabul's real estate bonanza and a great many losers. Those who can afford the higher rents are displacing those who cannot, who in turn push out those even lower on the economic ladder. Evictions have become epidemic.

In the poorer neighborhoods, where sewers run in an open ditch and houses have mud floors, people are stunned by the upheaval of escalating prices.

Kabul has an estimated population of two million, including 200,000 refugees who have come in just the past few months, seemingly limitless rivals for extremely limited shelter.

On Saturday, a distraught woman named Farishta visited a property agent in Khair Khana, a low-income neighborhood. For years, her rent had been about \$12.50 a month. Suddenly, her landlord has demanded \$95. She must find another place.

"I am a teacher and my husband is an engineer," she said, her voice a quivering plea emerging from beneath the camouflage of a burka. "There are no houses that even literate people can afford. What are the very poorest going to do?"

Shah Bacha, a proud man wearing the threadbare clothes of a day laborer, is among the poorest. His family lives in one of the squalid hovels of Khwoja Bughra, paying about \$6.25 for rent. Last week, the owner of the house said the rent was rising to \$90, an impossible sum for Mr. Bacha. "I will have to take my children and sleep in the streets," he said.³²

Khwoja Bughra and Khair Khana, the two neighborhoods Bearak mentions, are five kilometers away from central Kabul (Figure 2.4). At the time the article was published, they were at the northern and northwestern edge of the city, respectively. Within a few years, several hundred thousand families would settle in the hills beyond these two neighborhoods. What I learned a year later was that Western agencies had inadvertently caused upward pressure at *both* ends of the housing market in Kabul.

³² Bearak 2002.

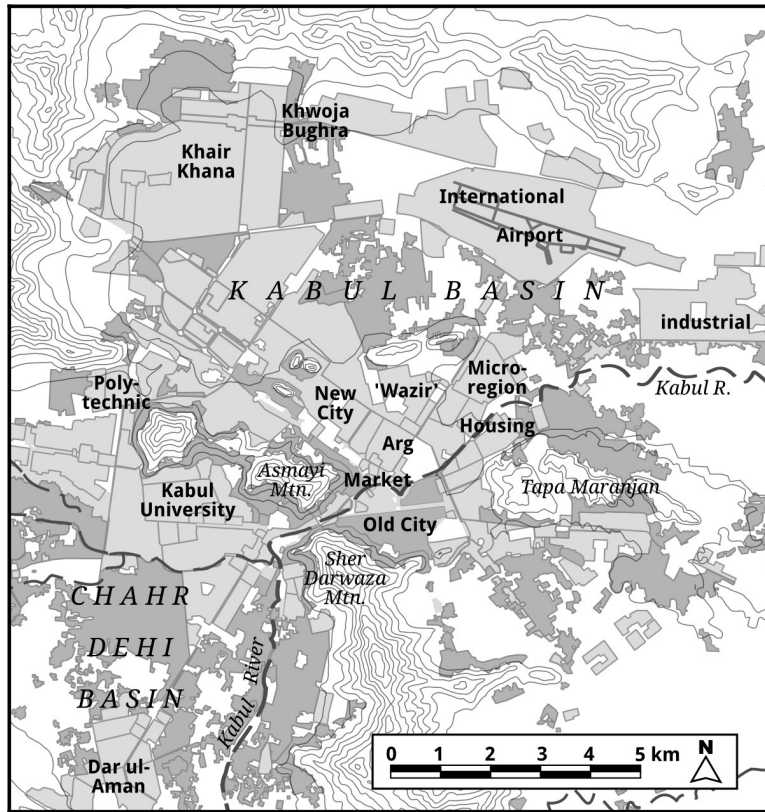


Figure 2.4. Kabul in 2001 (author, 2010). The Khair Khana urban district and Khwoja Bughra were at the northern extent of the city at that time.

III. The politics of position: working for the Islamic Republic

In the first section of this chapter I made a general argument for the ethics of transnational planning. It is a difficult ethical position, insisting that planners need to acknowledge the extreme asymmetry of contemporary geopolitics—and that we *must* engage ourselves within that framework in order to pursue the core planning goal of social justice. There are powerful arguments against that position, one of which is strongly held by my former advisor, Allan Jacobs. He sharply rejects any Western presumption that transnational planning is appropriate, or even feasible. Jacobs speaks from direct experience: in 1960, the Ford Foundation chose him to establish the planning department of the city of Kolkata. The lesson he draws from that bitter experience is that an American has no business telling anyone else how to plan their cities.³³ Nezar Alsayyad expressed similar skepticism even as he taught me international planning and housing policy from 1990 through 1993. I am still sympathetic to the ethical basis of these objections. Jacobs' concerns, in particular, reflect the anti-interventionist argument of activists trying to stop American involvement in the war in Viet Nam. However in this section I will describe specific findings that now challenge prior reasons for anti-interventionism.

My path towards working for the Islamic Republic in 2003 began as an intersection of very local and very global conditions. I was interested in the Pamir region as an undergraduate student in geography at Berkeley. I met Sheraga Gulshan Raz, an Afghan-American who had fled the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan and set up an import shop in downtown Berkeley. The location was appropriate, because the 'tribal' and 'ethnic' clothing that he sold appeals to people living in Berkeley, some of whom had traveled through Afghanistan as hippies in the late 1960s and early 1970s. That post-hippie/Afghan-American interface continues to shape activism and fundraising in the San Francisco Bay Area. Sheraga showed me photos of Afghanistan, described the disastrous refugee crisis, and speculated that maybe we could both go back to Kabul after the Soviet occupation to help rebuild the country. What neither of us knew, in 1987, was that Kabul was still very intact, but that the city would soon be devastated by the *mujahideen* who were fighting the Soviets at the time.

I remained in touch with Sheraga. In 1994 I designed an addition to his ranch house in San Leandro for his growing family, and we occasionally discussed the disastrous conditions in Afghanistan through the 1990s. The Coalition overthrow of the Taliban Emirate was very encouraging for us both, because for the first time in fifteen years it looked like travel to Kabul would be possible. As 2002 progressed, that enthusiasm turned to anxiety as I learned about the severe housing crisis in Kabul, and as it became clear that the Bush Administration was transferring resources out of Afghanistan in preparation for invading Iraq. In October I contacted Sheraga to find out if there were any Afghan-American efforts to help Afghanistan. I felt that Afghan-Americans would know best how to provide aid, and that personal references from a longtime friend would be my

33 Jacobs, Allan B. 2011. *The Good City: Reflections and Imaginations*. Routledge.

best security guarantee in a country that still seemed very unstable.

Sheraga referred me to a doctor in Hayward, who in turn referred me to the Afghan Coalition in Fremont, California. Early in 2002, the Afghan-American community organizations in the Bay Area convened and agreed to coordinate aid through the Coalition. I met the president, Rona Popal, and the Executive Director, Waheed Momand, and gave them my resume and a statement of interest in which I argued that “I also believe strongly that the best hope of doing anything helpful is to work for Afghans, at their request and invitation, rather than for a foreign nongovernmental organization.”³⁴

Five days later, Najib Poya of the Society of Afghan Engineers invited me to participate in a volunteer capacity-building program in which Afghan-American professionals were returning to Kabul to provide urgent assessments and services. The Society did not regard the stipulation of *Afghan-American* was not considered critical; and since many Afghans tried to pass as Italians to avoid being profiled as Muslim, a temporary reversal of roles was fair play. More importantly, the engineers recognized the importance of beginning long-range planning right away. Otherwise, they were concerned that urban policy would be reduced to reactive position, merely responding to crises rather than proactively preventing them. They also agreed with my concern about the housing crisis in Kabul. None of us knew what to do about it—we certainly hadn’t solved this problem in San Francisco—but it was the area of policy I wanted to focus on. When I arrived in Kabul at the end of May, 2003, the founder of the Society of Afghan Engineers, Malik Mortaza, introduced me to Engineer Pashtun, the Minister of Urban Development and Housing.

On that first day the Minister gave me four tasks. First, he explained that an Afghan-American team was doing a rapid assessment of urban conditions in Kabul, but they were only visiting for one week. He wanted me to learn their methods and carry their project forward. Second, he wanted me to work with the research department to develop a planning code for Kabul. Third, he wanted me to help the Construction Office of the Ministry review American building codes and identify sections that might be worth translating into Dari and Pashto. Fourth, he wanted me to initiate a neighborhood-upgrading plan as a pilot project to demonstrate the merits of keeping existing informal housing. I will describe the outcomes of these four tasks in reverse order.

4. Neighborhood upgrading

Towards the end of my five weeks I was able to identify a candidate site for neighborhood upgrading: the series of informal neighborhoods just east of the center of the city, on the north slope of Maranjan Hill. Collectively they are known as Qala-ye Zaman Khan, Deh Khuda-e Dad, and the newer expansions (*naw abad*) of these two older settlements. On the last day of my stay, Minister Pashtun asked me to stay on for a year to begin this upgrading process. But my son was four months old at the time; too young for immunizations and vulnerable to dehydration if he contracted diarrhea. I also did not have access to a good phone connection at that time, and I needed to have a long conversation with my wife about committing to spending a year in Kabul. I regret this

³⁴ This letter has been posted since November 2002 at: <http://www.calogero.us/Afghanistan/Correspondence/29Oct-Objectives.html>

lost opportunity, because the Ministry's efforts to begin upgrading informal neighborhoods proceeded very slowly from that point. Four years later, the Kabul Urban Reconstruction Program first broke ground on a small pilot-project in two neighborhoods of eastern Kabul. The process was too slow, and far too small in scope, to keep up with the pace of informal urban growth in the city. I will return to this issue in Chapter Four.

3. Building codes

The selection of building code passages turned out to be the easiest task to complete, partly because the engineers in the Ministry were already very experienced at reinforced concrete design. Furthermore the only two building codes I knew were the Uniform Building Code and the International Building Code (IBC).³⁵ Despite their names, these two codes are essentially North American, with large sections dedicated to light wood frame construction. Only three sections of the IBC seemed potentially useful for the Ministry to consider. First, accessibility design standards are particularly relevant for Kabul, where a high proportion of the population has been disabled by war; remaining landmines and unexploded ordnance; car accidents; and disease, including polio. Second, the concept of exit as a performative standard is also well-developed in the IBC, and is useful regardless of the type of assembly system. Third, the IBC includes a section on post-construction strength inspection tests for reinforced concrete buildings. This section was of particular interest to the Ministry engineers because dozens of multi-story concrete buildings were already under construction across the city, and neither the Ministry nor the Municipality had the capacity to inspect or enforce building standards (Figure 2.5).



Figure 2.5. Sixth floor being added to a commercial building, central Kabul, 2003.

Kabul is in Seismic Zone Four, which is the most severe seismic classification. San Francisco is classified in the same zone; but severe earthquakes are much more common in the geologic belt where Kabul is located. (the most severe), as are large parts of Turkey, Armenia, Iran, and Pakistan. In the past twenty years major earthquakes have struck in Turkey (Izmit, 1999); Armenia (Yerevan, 1988); Iran (Bam, 2003, and Manjil

³⁵ International Code Council (ICC), Building Officials and Code Administrators International, International Conference of Building Officials, and Southern Building Code Congress International. 2000. *International Building Code*. Falls Church, Va: International Code Council.

1990); and Kashmir (Pakistan/India, 2005). Afghan officials are deeply concerned about this threat. In August of 2007 I was invited to participate in a three-day conference on disaster resilience chaired by Vice President Khalili. Sadly, staff-members in the office of Disaster Preparedness explained to me that there is still insufficient political will to implement the reforms necessary for disaster resilience. They sought much more transparency, interagency cooperation, and the effective vertical networks of information dissemination and collection between state agencies and community leaders at the neighborhood (*gozar*) level.

As a technical concern, building safety policies translated across cultural differences more easily than the other three tasks. Likewise disability design. The director of research for the Ministry, Engineer Dehyar, showed me the final draft of disability design guidelines in Farsi when I returned in 2007. What remains unclear is how the Ministry will convince other public agencies—let alone private developers—to obey the standards. That is part of a larger question of the collective social expectation of regimes of enforcement, and the more fundamental expectations of governing, what Foucault termed *governmentality*.³⁶ Chapter Two begins to explain why code enforcement is likely to remain difficult in Kabul under existing political conditions.

2. Land use planning

Land-use planning turned out to be an entirely different challenge. I began by inventorying the types of land-use I saw, and observing what seemed to work. Given the weakness of regulatory enforcement in Kabul at the time, I thought that a very minimal, easily enforceable code would be the best place to start. I was surprised to discover that an Afghan-American from Northern Virginia was already working with the Ministry team, translating the Fairfax County Planning Code into Farsi.³⁷ I raised several concerns about this effort. First, the Fairfax Code is primarily designed for low-density suburban development, with the embedded ‘Euclidean’ assumption that land uses should be segregated. Kabul was already three times as dense as San Francisco, and commercial uses were dispersed throughout residential areas. As it happens, the mixed-use, low-rise, density of Kabul fits a pattern that many urban designers in the United States aspire to. It fit Jane Jacobs’ description of vibrant, urbane development better than any of the Transit-Oriented Development I had seen or helped design. This was largely out of necessity: Kabul was walkable because most Afghans could not afford cars. It was a sustainable pattern of urban development because Kabulis cannot afford to consume resources the way that Westerners do. It seemed to me that the ideals embedded in the Fairfax Code were thoroughly inappropriate; Afghans probably could never afford to suburbanize the city, and I did not think it was a good idea to promote this American model on Kabul when so many American planners regarded our own suburbanization as a mistake. Furthermore, the Fairfax Code was extremely elaborate. I felt that it would be more feasible to start with a very simple code that was easily enforceable and developed from scratch with Afghans who were familiar with Kabul.

36 Foucault, Michel. 1991. “Governmentality.” in *The Foucault effect*, edited by Burchell Graham, Colin Gordon, and Peter Miller. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

37 As of July 2009, a current version of the code remains publicly available on the internet at: <http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/dpz/zoningordinance/>

Based on what I saw, I proposed a distinction of retail spaces into three regulatory types. Standard shops (*dukan*) were those that customers could enter. I proposed that this should trigger building-code enforcement because owners should be responsible for the safety of strangers who have entered their building. “Cabinet-shops” (*dukan-e aymari*) were too small for customers to enter, and therefore did not need regulation. Pushcart-vendors (*dukan-e karachi*) also did not need to meet building codes, but I thought they might need to be regulated as a form of traffic. At the time, a number of wealthy Afghans were complaining that the pushcart vendors should be banned altogether, blaming them for the severe traffic congestion in the center of the city (more on that in Chapter Five). I argued that one of the advantages of regulation was to clarify where pushcart-vendors had a protected right to operate, rather than suffer sporadic police harassment and the need to pay bribes. The Ministry planner-engineers were extremely amused by my improvised terminology for various types of retail, but extremely appreciative of this thought-exercise based on actual practices in Kabul.

As a strategy for encouraging popular participation in the enforcement of regulations, I suggested incorporating some customary practices into formal regulation. A good first candidate was the customary enforcement of visual privacy between houses. New construction was beginning to look dramatically different from the designs of the 1960s through 1980s; more and larger windows were being positioned on all sides of new buildings, often very close to property-boundaries of existing houses. If the Ministry were seen as supporting older, longer-term residents in protecting their visual modesty against a rather ostentatious new style that clashed with Kabuli sensibilities, I argued that the Ministry would get more local support for other policies it would try to implement.

The Afghan-American who was involved in translating the Fairfax Code took offense at my proposals, and my objections to the Fairfax Code. He thought I was aestheticizing the dysfunctional *otherness* of Kabul, and that I was opposed to modernizing the city. I had made several comparisons of Kabul to the mixed uses and relative density of San Francisco; but he pointed out that the pattern of urban development in San Francisco was a legacy of pre-twentieth-century urbanization. I agreed that it is very difficult to find parking in the older, denser section quarters of San Francisco; but I felt that density was a necessary component of what made San Francisco a city worth living in. In contrast, he argued that the Fairfax Code is more contemporary, and provides a realistic model for urban development that makes room for the widespread use of automobiles. He asked me not to come back to meetings on land-use planning and zoning.

Our disagreement highlights two issues. First, there is no clean boundary between ‘native’ and ‘foreign’ in terms of urban planning. Personal ethnicity and the genealogy of our respective planning ideals bore no relationship. If the anti-interventionist position is that “We have no business meddling over there,” the conceptual categories in that statement have shifted. Who is the “we”? Does that include the Afghan-Virginian with longstanding professional experience in the United States? Moreover, whom does the “we” exclude, and how? These are questions of identity that I have found to be under constant negotiation. Said, and most subsequent post-colonial theorists argue that a hazard of identity-politics is that a group defines itself by what it is *not*. Mouffe argues

that this is not inherent to the constitution of identities, but to an antagonistic understanding of difference.³⁸ Most of the Afghans I met defined their identities through their connections and relationships to others, including to me. Afghans are very proud of the Greco-Bactrian cultural legacy of northern Afghanistan, and usually attributed my resemblance to northern Afghans to my Greco-Italian ancestry. The similarity of features may be entirely coincidental. The range of features among local Kabulis is very great, reflecting the longstanding role of the city as crossroads of human exchange. However this sense of connection (*ertebat*) and shared humanness (*adamiyat*) powerfully shaped my working relationships and friendships with Kabulis. Again, this narrative does not indicate a world bulldozed flat by inexorable forces of globalization. But it also challenges the argument that cultural differences are unbridgeable and unworkable.

Furthermore, while the ethic of scholarship is respectful non-intervention, urban planners are meddlers by profession. No-one was arguing for keeping Kabul as it is: not the Ministry engineers, not the Afghan-Virginian, not myself. I was arguing for what I thought would be a feasible, incremental way to build a regime of regulation and enforcement by starting with easy successes. I advocated a normative position that planners should promote sustainability by minimizing the promotion of automobile use. That is not an ‘objectively correct’ position; it is a moral position consistent with my planning education. The policies I was advocating at the time would not have produced obvious short-term visible change; but I *was* advocating rapid shifts in practice towards engaged regulation. Later, I would find planners in the Municipal government with a much more aggressive vision of modernization, deriving from their Soviet planning education. That story is the focus of Chapter Four.

The second issue revealed by this conflict is a fundamental disagreement about what it means to modernize—and behind that, what it means to be modern. My image of urban modernization was to establish a functional regulatory regime that promoted the legitimacy of the urban government. I wasn’t particularly interested in whether buildings were built out of sun-dried clay bricks or concrete. I was concerned about whether engineers and building-inspectors could promote earthquake resilience in whatever structures were actually built. I was already familiar with Randolph Langenbach’s argument that softer, masonry structures could absorb more lateral energy.³⁹ He had noticed that timber-laced masonry structures in Kashmir, northern Pakistan, and Turkey had all survived for centuries through multiple, severe earthquakes. I was also skeptical about concrete construction because insufficient reinforcing in modern Soviet apartment blocks had caused the deaths of fifty thousand people in 1988. The deaths of almost one quarter million people under collapsing concrete structures in Haiti in January of 2010 reinforces my concern that concrete may be an outward symbol of modernization, but does not necessarily perform any better than much less costly earthen assembly systems.

Another view of modernization is that Afghans deserve what Americans have. Fairfax County is one of the wealthiest regions in the United States. Rather than replicate an old city (like San Francisco) or repeat the long, incremental process through which Americans

38 Mouffe 2005:3.

39 Langenbach, Randolph. 2009. *Don't tear it down! Preserving the earthquake resistant vernacular architecture of Kashmir*. New Delhi: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

developed standard planning codes, Kabul could skip ahead and adopt a contemporary American code that has already been tested and implemented successfully.

A third position, evolving among planners at Kabul Municipality, is to emulate successful urban models that are much nearer and more familiar: especially Dubai. The concrete and steel, high-rise, high-tech image of Dubai—and its model, Singapore—fit more consistently as updates of the Soviet urban model. Ananya Roy and Aihwa Ong are studying this new ‘inter-referencing’ of Asian models of modernity. My initial concern—shared by staff at the World Bank—was that pursuit of this model would require demolition of most of the informal housing in Kabul. That was in fact the stated position of Kabul Municipality in 2003. By 2007, they had backed off from that hard position and were focusing on modernizing the road infrastructure. In practice, visions of Kabul’s modernity continue to be contested and renegotiated.

1. Surveying in haste

The social-demographic survey took up most of my time during my first visit to Kabul. Minister Pashtun introduced me to the Afghan-American team conducting the initial assessment on my first afternoon in Kabul.

The survey team was led by the head of PADCO. This planning consultancy has worked in more than twenty countries in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and Europe since 1965. The Ministry had provided the team with prints of a set of IKONOS satellite photos, covering the entire built area of Kabul at 60 centimeter resolution. The team was using the images to develop a snapshot of existing urban conditions, intended as a first step toward identifying planning priorities. They had distinguished nine different settlement patterns, and were in the process of calculating the total number of units within each settlement by estimating units per hectare, and summarizing the total built area of each settlement pattern. The IKONOS images had been taken in October 2001, commissioned by the U.S. military in preparation for attacking Kabul. The unintended consequence was that we had unusually good quality spatial data available as a basis for urban policy development. Subsequent fieldwork confirmed that the land area of residential development was about the same in June of 2003 as it had been in October 2001; substantial residential expansion was only just beginning.

Demographic data was an entirely different problem, though. Within the existing built area of Kabul, anecdotal evidence from staff at the Ministry, the World Food Program (WFP), and UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) suggested dramatic demographic change. Damaged areas were being reoccupied, de-mined, and rebuilt very hastily—and not necessarily in that order. Families were doubling and tripling up in houses of fifty to one hundred square meters. By their own definition, Afghan families in Kabul are typically six or seven people. So the houses that we were seeing in the satellite photographs might have had seven occupants in 2001, and twenty by 2003. Furthermore, as the Bearak article indicated, many families occupying informal houses were renters. Precise satellite imagery told us nothing about changes in tenure-security, and little about emerging strains on infrastructure. Even the regularity or irregularity of settlement patterns could be misleading. Orthogonal patterns did not necessarily mean legal housing, because there were numerous stories about UIF commanders seizing houses by force.

‘Grabbed land’ might be on rectangular streets, but was considered at least as great a threat to legitimate urban governance as informal developments. Likewise, irregular settlement patterns might indicate historic villages which had been incorporated into the expanding urban fabric. Their customary ownership and use was recognized as formal on a par with officially recorded titles.

To clarify the situation, a sampling survey of locations across Kabul would have to be done. The PADCO team developed a list of thirty-five questions about population, recent migration, income and living costs, and urban services. We turned this over to senior Ministry advisors to create an official survey form. The advisors were also interested in factors contributing to transportation demand, and added another fifteen questions about journeys to work, school, shops, and hammams (bath-houses). I was not aware of the additions until the advisors issued the completed form a full week later. By that point I realized how little data was available on existing conditions in Kabul, and was not surprised that Ministry planners would want to take the opportunity to gather as much data as possible. The resulting fifty-question survey looked unreasonably long, and I expected that people would be unwilling to participate. I was mistaken: at the time, respondents were very cooperative and respectful; we rarely encountered someone who would answer the door but refuse to take the survey. However, it took a long time to administer, which limited the number that the team could do.

While the form was being created I did preparatory research, hoping to find demographic data I could build upon. I interviewed staff at the Afghanistan Information Management Service (AIMS), the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU), the World Bank, and UN-HABITAT to find out which other surveys had already been done. I was shocked to discover that no comprehensive urban demographic surveys had been conducted in the previous seventeen months. The World Food Program (WFP) had conducted a city-wide evaluation of food vulnerability, and HABITAT had inventoried the number of damaged houses (a little under 65,000). But none of these data could be used to give even a gross estimate of the population of the city. Lalith Lankatillike, director of UN-HABITAT for Afghanistan at the time, suggested that the prevailing estimate of 3.5 million people was probably high. In the struggle to obtain donor funding, both state and non-state agencies had a strong incentive to inflate their population estimates, and there was not countervailing need to keep them accurate. He looked forward to the results of the survey, which was encouraging, but also left me wondering what knowledge-base was being created in Kabul.

Data by accident, in a regime that chooses not to see

The survey form was ready at the beginning of my second week. By that time I had pared down almost one hundred candidate locations to seventy-two, shown in Figure 2.13. I chose sites with the intention of a roughly even distribution across the existing residential area. However I tried to make sure to capture at least two samplings from each of the nine settlement patterns identified by the Afghan-American team. I also used my own ignorance of the city at that point as a method of randomization. I was concerned that ethnic tensions might make the Ministry engineers more reluctant to survey some sites, and more comfortable studying others.

The staff engineers agreed with this, but they also wanted to obtain at least six survey responses per location, to minimize problems with outlier data. They used the IKONOS images to determine daily routes to a sequence of survey sites (Figure 2.6), which turned out to be a challenge because of severely damaged roads and blockages in central parts of the city. Out of respect for their modesty I have not included images of the women engineers who were also part of the survey team, but their role was critical. We surveyed during the day, and frequently women would answer the door. Among many families, a married Afghan woman is reluctant to talk to a male stranger (true among Italians and many Americans, I might add). In that case a female engineer would ask them to participate in the survey, and a male engineer would stand just outside the door, filling in the responses on the form. If a man answered the roles of the engineers would reverse.



Figure 2.6. Ministry survey team engineers deciding the routes and locations to be surveyed that day. Sticky notes tacked to the mosaic on the wall behind them mark survey-locations (author, 2003).

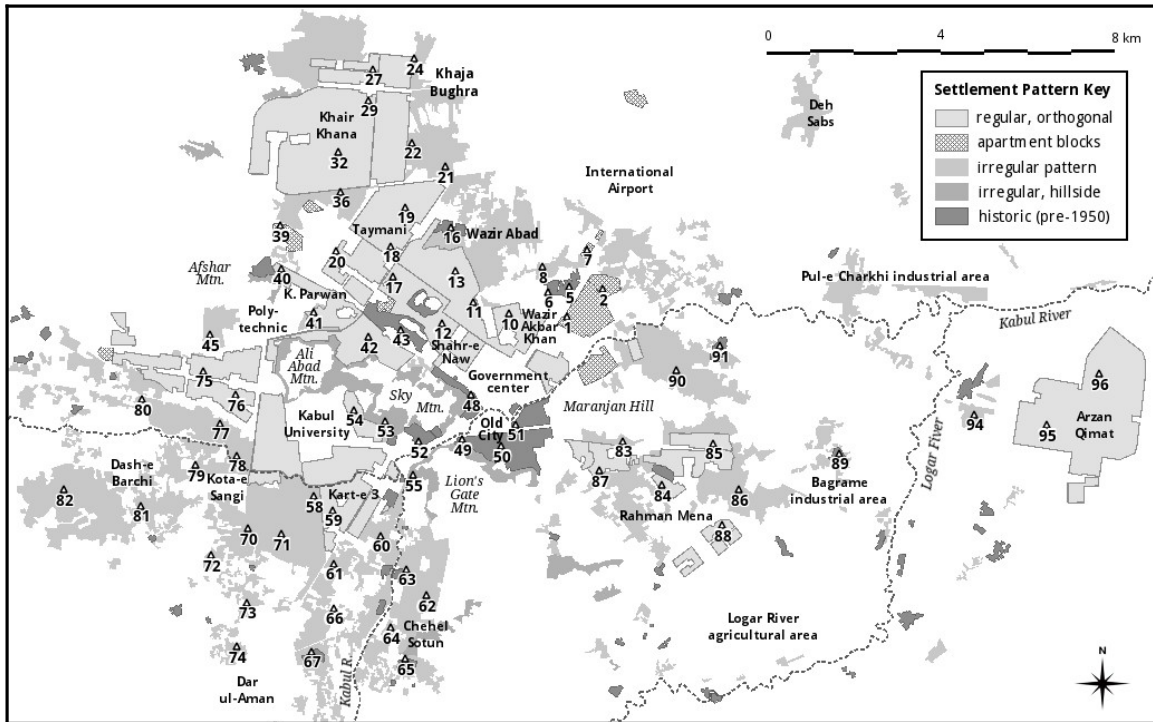


Figure 2.7. SURVEY LOCATIONS (INITIAL).

Initial sampling locations for social-demographic survey, June 2003 (author). Numbers indicate the survey location. Survey locations are overlaid on polygons depicting residential settlement patterns in 2001-2003. Commercial, industrial, public, and security uses are omitted for clarity. Orthogonal settlement patterns are edged with a dark border.

The survey proceeded more slowly than I had hoped. We eliminated a few more sites as we proceeded, but unfortunately we had to omit eleven sites in southwest Kabul: numbers 66, 67, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 79, 80, 81, and 82. The Ministry was located in Microregion-3, near survey site number 1 on Figure 2.7. Traffic through the city was very congested and roads in the southwest were poor. These sites were left for last, and we ran out of time. As it happens the far southwest is also an area which is predominantly Hazara, and has been one of the fastest-growing parts of the city. The two sites we did survey there, numbers 77 and 78, suggest unusual overcrowding in 2003 (Figure 2.9). This was a clue to the sustained rapid expansion that occurred in southwestern Kabul from 2003 to 2007.

Figure 2.8 shows the locations that were actually surveyed. In this map, the numbers below each location-marker show the lot density per hectare at each location. Since I could not use PADCO's work in this analysis, unit densities were recalculated later for every survey location, rather than the original average unit density per settlement pattern. Several hectare-images used to determine lot density are included as Figures 2.9 and 2.10, to show how unit density was calculated for very different settlement types. The settlement-pattern classification shown in these maps is simplified and refined based on subsequent fieldwork in 2006 and 2007; but PADCO should still be credited with the overall method of classification for rapid assessment.

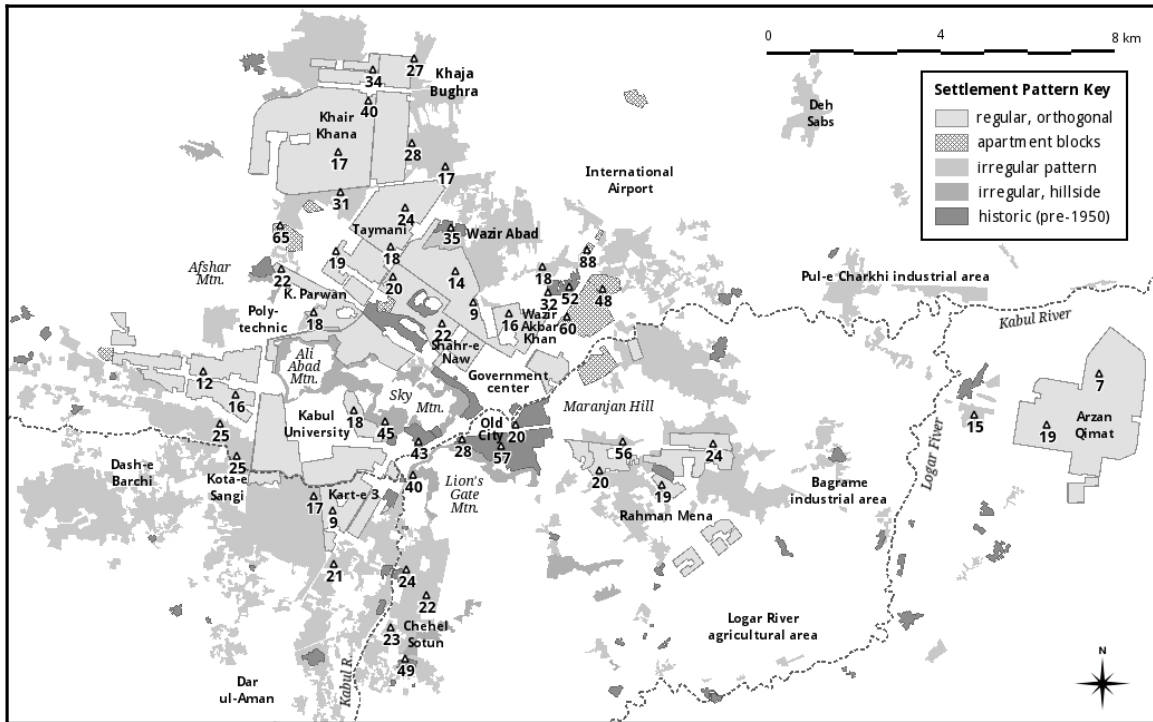


Figure 2.8. DWELLING UNIT DENSITIES.
 Dwelling unit density per hectare at locations that were actually sampled, 2003.



Figure 2.9. Survey location #6, Bibi Mahro Village; 32 units per hectare. This is an historic village.

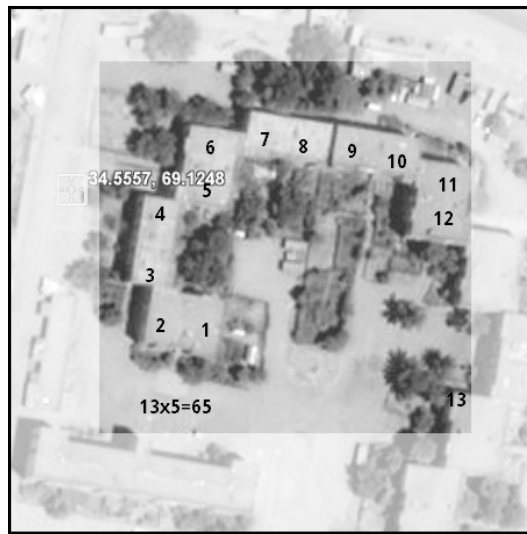


Figure 2.10. Survey location #39, Tahya Maskan; 65 units per hectare.

Figure 2.11 shows the population density at each survey location, again overlaid onto polygons that distinguish settlement patterns. We found that the orthogonal-pattern areas and apartment blocks were generally formally owned; the more difficult question is to discern which irregular-pattern areas were formal or not.

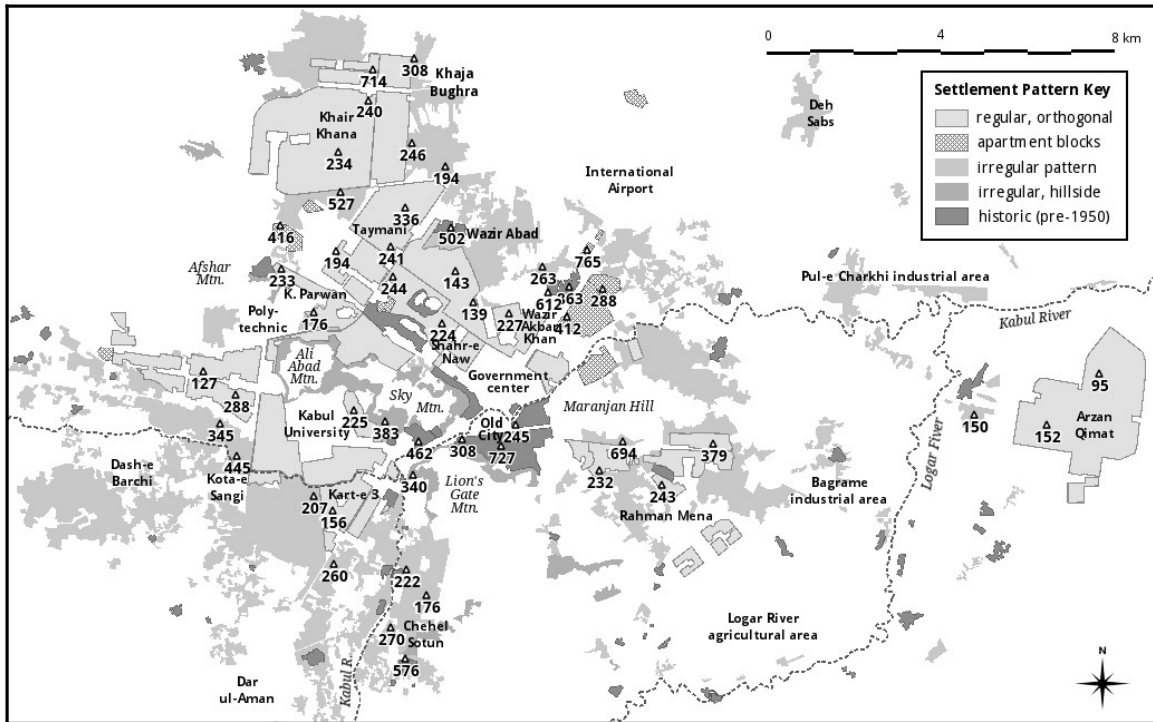


Figure 2.11. POPULATION DENSITIES.
Population density per hectare at the fifty sampled sites, 2003 (author).

Population densities in the apartments were higher but varied at each site based on the building designs and layouts; the average was 410 people per hectare. Population densities across the orthogonal areas were more consistent, averaging 238 people per hectare. People per lot tended to be higher where lots were larger.

Survey location	DU/ Ha	Pop/ DU	Pop/ Ha
59. Kart-3 southwest: lowest DU/Ha, highest Pop/DU in this pattern	9	17.3	156
40. Kart-e Parwan, center-west Kabul: typical of this pattern	22	10.6	233
29. Blok Sira Mena: highest DU/Ha, lowest Pop/DU in this pattern	40	6.0	240

Table 2.1. Selected survey locations in regular-pattern residential areas

Table 2.1 shows some outlier and typical survey locations in the orthogonal areas. The relationship between lot density and people per lot is roughly inverse. Kart-e 3, with the lowest lot density, was laid out in the 1950s. Afghans remark that in the 1970s it looked like an American suburb. In 2003, multiple families were occupying the main houses as well as buildings and sheds on each lot. At the high end of lot density, Blok Sira Mena was developed in the 1980s as efficiency housing for public servants. At six people per unit, they were already at capacity.

The highest densities by far were in the historic areas. The houses are small, the streets are narrow, so lot density is high; but often several families would be living in

each house anyway. At the two survey locations in Bibi Mahro village (locations 5 and 6, Figure 2.7), densities were 863 and 612 people per hectare (on Figure 2.11 the first number is partly obscured). In the relatively intact Old City neighborhood of Ashiqan wa Arifan (location 50), the density was 727 per hectare. Overall, historic areas housed 500 people per hectare, compared to 225 people per hectare for the typical newer irregular-pattern areas. Three factors seem to contribute to this difference. First, many of the historic areas are near the city center, where demand for space is very high. Second, Nemat points out that the people who remained in the historic areas tended to be poorer, and consume less space.⁴⁰ Third, as we found in our survey, Afghan families are very extended, and in many cases part of a family was ‘test-settling’ in Kabul at a net loss of income, while hoping to build up social and business contacts. Many families retain connections to the houses in the historic areas, and so an unusual number of families were extending branches into these particular areas.

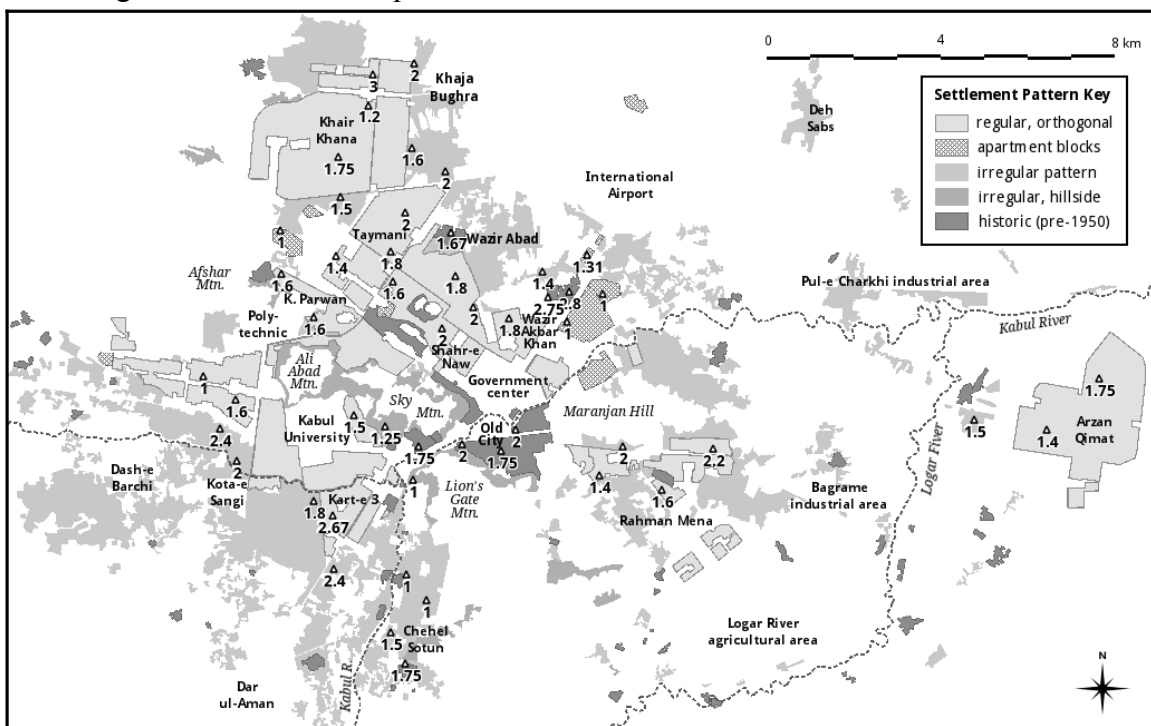


Figure 2.12. CROWDING: FAMILIES PER DWELLING UNIT
 Number of self-reportedly different families per dwelling unit, 2003 (author).

Figure 2.12 shows a confirmation of one of the rumors we were hearing: that families were doubling and often tripling up within houses. Given the norms of modesty among Afghans—similar to the high value for privacy among Americans, and unlike Europeans—this data may be the better indicator of stress due to crowding.

40 Nemat, Abdul Khaliq. 1976. “A strategy for restructuring of the central business district of Kabul.” New Delhi: School of Planning and Architecture.

Settlement Pattern	Apart-ments	Historic	Regular	Irregular Hill	Irreg-flat Hi Dens	Irreg-flat Low Dens	TOTAL
Area in Ha	227.7	676.3	3546.4	450.0	366.8	4377.9	9,645
Avg. Pop/Ha	410	500	238	400	395	225	
Pop by Patt.	93,357	338,150	844,043	180,000	144,886	985,028	2,585,464

Table 2.2. Population estimate of Kabul, June 2003 (author).

Using the survey data it is possible to estimate the population of Kabul (Table 2.2). With more preliminary analysis of the data in October 2003 I estimated 2.13 million people. With a more careful review in 2008 I estimate the population was 2.58 million people in June 2003. This is thirty per cent smaller than the prevailing estimate of the time, of 3.5 million. Based on Lalith Lankatillike's observations it seems that numbers were misused to emphasize what is a very real urgency in living conditions. Unfortunately this means that revising the population estimate downward can be misinterpreted as 'belittling' the urgency in living conditions in Kabul at the time. Yet our findings reveal conditions as severe as aid agencies were claiming. The engineers I worked with had remained in Kabul through the 1990s, so many of them had experienced significant hardships. Furthermore, surviving through years of violent political uncertainty had made them very circumspect in expressing their emotions. Afghan expatriate returnees frequently remarked to me that the apparent lack of expressiveness among Afghans today is an alarming change from the 1970s, suggesting widespread emotional trauma. However, at some of the survey sites the engineers became visibly upset by the living conditions they were finding, especially as they asked the survey questions. At Siah Sang (location 87, Figure 2.7), one of the engineers said that the local water was bad. The water table, adjacent to the brackish Bini Hesar lake, is saline. The residents had to buy water to drink, and they were reluctant to use the groundwater even for washing. A boy lifted up his sleeve, revealing skin sores. It was unclear whether this was from washing in bad water, or avoiding washing because the water was suspect.

During the first two weeks of the survey I accompanied the teams, to get a sense of the city and identify an appropriate site for neighborhood upgrading, my fourth task. My Farsi was so minimal that I could not help with the survey. For the engineers, my main function was to be the foreigner who complained loudly enough to get the team one of the scarce vehicles from the Ministry motor pool each morning. After two weeks the access to vehicles had been resolved and I remained back at the Ministry office, not only to pursue my other tasks but also to code the data. The cost of skipping the pre-test soon became apparent, as inconsistent answers about the number of men and women, and then the number of children, did not add up to the total per household. Apparently the sequencing of the questions skewed responses. Much of the finer-grained data about intra-family demographics had to be discarded. Among several poorly-worded questions, we even asked about piped gas for cooking, and yet there is no piped network in Kabul. Meanwhile we had *not* asked whether occupants were owners or tenants. The assumption

of ‘self-help’ housing had blinded us to a possibility indicated a full year before in Bearak’s article: that even in the poorest districts many people could be renters. Some of the surveyors began asking that question midway through the survey; but from that partial data all we can tell is that in some informal areas—particularly on mountainsides—as many as seventy per cent of the occupants were tenants. In 2007 Jolyon Leslie, director of the Aga Khan Trust for Culture for Afghanistan, pointed out that families in Kabul were moving on an average of once per year. Because they have so few possessions, it is difficult to see; they might be packed into a Corolla with a few pots and blankets in the back, but that was indistinguishable from the usual six or seven Afghans sharing a taxi ride across town. Such a high rate of relocation suggests extreme tenure-insecurity. As families are forced to move to different neighborhoods, social networks are also disrupted. This probably inhibits exchanges of information and the access to further resources that comes with that information. In other words tenure insecurity is a direct cause of extreme poverty.

Numbers and regime accountability

The most shocking aspect of the social-demographic survey was—and continues to be—the lack of official interest in it. The important exception was the staff of the World Bank. In April of 2004 Soraya Goga, the urban specialist at the World Bank focused on Afghanistan, contacted me to find out about the results of the social-demographic survey. In October 2003, I had completed a preliminary analysis of the data under contract to PADCO. As of April 2004, PADCO was still trying to secure a lucrative consultancy contract to develop a preliminary general plan for Kabul; therefore PADCO was withholding the analysis as negotiating leverage. However, I had done the data-gathering as a volunteer under direct request from the Minister; therefore the raw data was public property of the Islamic Republic. I told Soraya where to find the spreadsheet file of raw data in the Ministry. However I also warned her, at length, about the methodological flaws in our hasty survey; the leading questions that biased subsequent responses; the inconsistent recording of answers. My only excuse for not conducting a survey pre-test was my own time-constraint. After hearing me out, Dr. Goga advised me that this was probably the most accurate data available on Kabul. I pointed out that the survey was already ten months old; surely some agency or Ministry had gathered better data in the meantime? She was fairly certain that no governmental nor nongovernmental agency had gathered comprehensive demographic data, nor was any such effort underway.

To complicate this issue of scant data, I ended up inadvertently offending the PADCO staff by sharing the raw survey data with the World Bank. PADCO staff believe that I shared the preliminary analysis work from October of 2001, and that this ‘leak’ weakened their negotiating position for securing a contract to develop a preliminary general plan for the city. Since PADCO never did get such a contract, the survey-analysis work that was done in October of 2003 has never released, unfortunately. For this study I had to begin again, building a GIS model of Kabul in order to re-analyze the data while avoiding PADCO’s methods. I have never been released from my contract with PADCO, so the work I did for them remains withheld and wasted. I have made this newer analysis available to Afghan civil servants since 2008 through an early draft of this chapter.

The privatization of planning services and information is certainly troubling; it parallels the privatization of intelligence services and causes similar problems. Once information is treated as a capital asset whose value increases with scarcity, private consultants have a perverse incentive to withhold information that could serve the public interest. Again, this is an aspect of neoliberalization that has been critiqued at length.

What I find more striking is the lack of will and lack of interest in comprehensive demographic data. So far as I know only one more sampling survey of Kabul has been done: by Abdul Khaliq Nemat, as he was setting up the Strategic Development Program within the Ministry in 2005. Yet neither the 2003 nor the 2005 data is used to give population-estimates of the city, nor as a basis upon which to build policy decisions. This is in striking contrast to James Scott's thesis that modern states seek to 'render societies legible' through enumeration, standardization, and documentation. Scott's argument describes what I call 'modernizing regimes' very well; but it fails to describe the technologies of rule I observed in Kabul. Instead, what I witnessed seems to match the 'unmapping' that Ananya Roy found in her dissertation fieldwork in Kolkata in the late 1990s. If actual numbers are not known, then neither the current situation nor any changes to that situation can be evaluated. Roy argues that this is a strategy of 'flexibilization;' the urban regime can hold valuable land in a state of limbo until a lucrative development project can be realized. Meanwhile, the votes of people who are kept in a state of de-documented urban informality can be bought cheaply through very minor improvements to a neighborhood, or a promise to forestall a demolition-eviction of the undocumented residents of that neighborhood.

This same political logic applies to Kabul. Chapter Five is a detailed analysis of the way that the urban regime of Kabul is becoming informalized. But the pronounced lack of interest in the most basic demographic information suggests an even more profound shift in the rationality of rule itself. As my classmate Daniel Buch commented, "If the regime is not interested in knowing who and how many people there are, then what is the object of government for that regime? What does it seek to rule?"

As I will argue in the succeeding chapters, part of the problem is identifying the urban regime itself. Ostensibly, the Coalition Forces assisted the United Islamic Front to overthrow and eject the Taliban Emirate from Kabul. Through the Bonn Accord of December 2001 and the Emergency Loya Jirga of June 2002, the UIF handed over rulership to the Islamic Republic—or re-branded itself the Islamic Republic, depending upon whom one asks. But the sovereignty of that national regime remains severely compromised by the presence of the Coalition Forces and their overriding political imperative to prevent another terrorist attack upon American civilians. In effect, this means that the Coalition Forces and ISAF are part of the urban regime of Kabul as they play a direct role in shaping the urban space, the meaning of that space, and the way that space is governed. However as an occupying force, neither Coalition nor ISAF need nor want to know how many people live in Kabul, nor under what conditions.

Another fundamental, structural reason why the Islamic Republic is not accountable to the Afghan population is that it does not receive revenue from that population: most Afghans do not pay taxes. Barnett Rubin points out that this has been a persistent

problem in Afghanistan for more than a century. Since at least the time of Amir AbdurRahman Khan (1881-1901), Afghanistan has been a *rentier state*.⁴¹ AbdurRahman received eighty thousand pounds and several thousand rifles per year from the British Raj, in exchange for favoring them over the Russian Empire. He did not have to tax his subjects, and therefore he owed them nothing. When AbdurRahman agreed to the demarcation line proposed by Mortimer Durand in 1893, the Raj increased his stipend to one hundred twenty thousand pounds and increased his supply of rifles by five thousand per year.

Likewise the present Islamic Republic receives substantial military support from the United States, and support for social services from international donors. Most of the revenue it actually collects is from customs-duties at the borders of the country. Thus again, the Islamic Republic does not need to enumerate and document Afghans; it does not need to assess the value of properties across the country, and it does not have to bargain with the population over its domestic and foreign policies. These national and geopolitical rationalities directly affect urban politics in Kabul as well. If governing agencies don't count a population, then they cannot be held strictly *accountable* to that population.

The patent disinterest in hard demographic data by both the local and transnational agencies that shape Kabul has profoundly affected the structure of this study. The data presented above could have been used as evidence towards a quantitative analysis and set of technical planning recommendations. However, like the attempt to build our way out of a housing shortage in San Francisco, a quantitative-technocratic analysis of planning problems in Kabul would have focused on issues too far down the decision-stream to be of any use. Such an analysis would have yielded a quick, tidy, and irrelevant dissertation. Instead I moved back up the decision-stream to analyze the political rationalities that shape the way that policies are framed and implemented. By stepping back both analytically and theoretically, I have brought geopolitics, development studies, and political philosophy to bear in trying to make sense out of how Kabul is being planned. Hopefully this unusually broad scope will help clarify a process of urbanization and planning that has thus far confounded many observers.

41 Rubin, Barnett R. 2002. *The fragmentation of Afghanistan: State formation and collapse in the international system*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

IV. From housing policy to urban politics

That first political act—positioning myself as a professional answerable to Afghans—taught me a great deal that I would have otherwise missed. First, the cultural and contextual appropriateness of urban policy is not a knowledge-object that can be learned as course material. Systematic research is a crucial prerequisite to planning work, and I am very grateful that I was given the opportunity to observe so many parts of Kabul on my first visit. But the way in which I visited these sites—as an agent of the Islamic Republic trying to identify planning priorities in the capital—played a central role in how data was formed into planning knowledge. There is no substitute for being answerable to the stakeholders in the quest for contextually appropriate planning. A partial model of this relationship is the client-professional relationship in which one might have specialized knowledge, but it is put at the express service of a client. This model does not quite fit, though, because the population of a city is not a tightly-defined client. In the fuzzy-logic process of ‘serving the public interest,’ an ongoing problem is figuring out who that public is, and what various parts of a population actually desire. Critics of communicative planning—notably Jean Hillier,⁴² Vanessa Watson,⁴³ and Oren Yiftachel⁴⁴—have shown how this is a deeply fraught process. One of the themes that runs through this dissertation is, What is ‘the public interest’ in Kabul? Who wants what, and to what degree?

A mistaken assumption about planning is that, as a problem-solving activity, these questions should be conclusively answered at some point. But if one of the crucial steps in policy-formation is to “identify and describe policy problems,” then continually re-asking these questions is in fact be a core component of the planning task. Getting underrepresented stakeholders to the table—early enough to set the agenda, not just to respond to someone else’s agenda—is a crucial social-justice problem in planning. Since urbanization, and the planning of urbanization is going on across the world *now*, the question of inclusion *before* planning begins is irrelevant. The relevant question is to identify omissions and injustices in the ongoing activity of urban planning and adjust a running process to increase inclusivity and balance as it proceeds. The United States is one of the powerful agenda-setting agents in the planning of Kabul as it is actually done. A summary rejection of that involvement might seem like an ethical act; but the very act of holding aloof from such sticky realities is an expression of privilege on the part of Westerners. It is a principled position that perpetuates the extreme vulnerability of several hundred thousand of Afghan households. Nor will an eventual military withdrawal of the United States remove its lopsided dominance in shaping the city in important ways. Kabul will remain part of a political economy with powerful transnational connections over which the United States and other economically powerful countries will exert asymmetrical power for the foreseeable, plannable future. Responding to that interconnectedness is an exercise in standard professional

42 Hillier, Jean. 1998. “Beyond confused noise: ideas toward communicative procedural justice.” *Journal of planning education and research* 18:14-24.

43 Watson, Vanessa. 2006. “Deep difference: diversity, planning and ethics.” *Planning Theory* 5:31-50.

44 Yiftachel, Oren, and Haim Yacobi. 2003. “Urban ethnocracy: ethnicization and the production of space in an Israeli ‘mixed city’.” *Environment and planning D* 21:673-693.

competence, once that accountability becomes apparent.

My initial experience at the Ministry of Urban Development and Housing also shifted my concern from housing policy in particular to urban policy in general. Housing is a critical aspect of the urban question, but it is one of multiple, interwoven factors that shape cities together with public health, education, economic growth, and transportation. Using the metaphor of woven fabric, my focus has shifted ninety degrees to look at the weft that laces through these interwoven issues: risk and opportunity, rights-claims, identity, public rhetoric, and the production of knowledge—the threads of urban politics.

From the perspective of the household, for instance, residential location is largely driven by an overall calculation of *risk* and *opportunity*. The management of risk—and its obverse, the pursuit of longer-term opportunities for the household—forms the underlying logic of household location and the demand for urban services. However we miss the point if we assume that locational *choice* is made by the (Kantian, sovereign) individual as a ‘rational actor.’ The calculation is certainly reasonable—more so than that of political leaders, in this case—but it is not made as an *individual choice* in the way that neoliberal ideology construes the autonomous person. The respondents to the social-demographic survey consistently explained that they made locational decisions on behalf of the whole household, for the general welfare of the existing family, and its future. While conducting the survey, I witnessed parents who lived and worked under dangerous conditions so that their children could learn to read, and have a chance at a future that the parents themselves might have difficulty imagining. That, too, is planning in the most profound sense; and the factors that shape each household’s decision are the stuff of urban policy.

Towards an understanding of planning in Kabul

Ananya Roy suggested that each chapter of this study should be written as a story. The story of this chapter is that the urbanization of Kabul is a troubled thing. Even more troubling than the specific challenges of a housing shortage, poverty, and the Western advocacy of ‘market-led reconstruction,’ there is the underlying difficulty of persistent misinterpretation of Afghanistan. The fact that peoples around the world index their modernity to an imagined ‘anti-modernity’ in Kabul would not be a problem *within* the planning processes in Kabul if not for the fact that a very large proportion of the cash entering the city is controlled by Westerners, and the policy conditions that Westerners attach to that money are predicated on the misconceptions that they carry. Specific observations in this chapter challenge a number of the externally-propagated myths about Afghanistan, and reveal fundamental problems in how categories continue to be constructed. Above all else, a ‘Western/Afghan’ distinction is invalidated by the fact that many of the leaders in the current national and urban regimes in Kabul were educated in the West. Minister Pashtun’s educational background and worldview are substantially the same as my own. As we will see in Chapter Four, the “real locals” among the planners in Kabul are the Soviet-educated planner-engineers in Kabul Municipality. Their commitment to Modernism with a capital “M” is reminiscent of Robert Moses and the optimistic technocrats from the Italian Fascists to the Brazilian Communists. Difference, in this case, is between different conceptions of modernity. So difference matters, but the

genealogies and geographies of that difference are of a radically different configuration than an assumed dichotomy between “Islamist retrospectiveness” and a forward-thinking Western modernity. Even the very assumption of a dichotomy distracts from a useful parsing of observable planning processes in the city.

Chapter Three is the ‘theory chapter’ of this text. It is also written as a story: a story about theory, and about where this research is placed within current streams of scholarship. This analysis draws heavily on both planning theory and development theory, and belongs within both disciplines—or rather, it affirms Jennifer Robinson’s argument that the distinction between those disciplines should be dismantled. More specifically, this analysis focuses on the politics of urban resource-allocation as a question of political rationalities, more than a mere agglomeration of unique choices by individuals. To make sense out of political rationalities, I build on the work of Lyotard, Flyvbjerg, and Foucault to explain how *plural rationalities* shape urban planning. Once this general theoretical framework is developed, each subsequent chapter is a specific case study that illustrates a different mode of planning, again told as a different story.

Chapter Three: Planning as urban politics

In this chapter I explain the theoretical framework through which I describe the planning of Kabul. In Chapter One I give a critical introduction to the city through a retelling of my initial involvement and findings. Those findings provoked the question: How is Kabul being planned? In this chapter, that research question is answered in an argument that frames the entire dissertation:

Kabul is being planned in multiple *modes* that express different political rationalities. The three modes I identify in Kabul are formal planning, informal planning, and exceptionalist planning. The political rationality of each of these three modes is a different intersection of sovereign power and biopower.

Each mode of planning is analyzed in detail in Chapters Three, Four, and Five. This chapter introduces the relationship between each mode, and the political rationalities that drive them.

The first step in this multi-part hypothesis is to argue that multiple modes and rationalities in planning can occur together in one city. From interviews of Afghans and Westerners it is clear that one reason why they believed Kabul lacked planning was that there was not a *singular, unified* planning process. Two assumptions need to be challenged in order to argue the possibility of a plurality of planning. First, the assumption that “the state” is a monolithic, unified entity. Second, the assumption that rationality itself is singular and unified.

Governing regimes versus domination by “the state”

The First World War was a moment of tremendous political uncertainty in Germany, a country that had only existed for fifty years on a terrain of tremendous political conflict. The ‘Westphalian settlement’ of 1648 had established the practices of European nation-states as a strategy for avoiding mutual annihilation after thirty years of political-religious warfare.¹ Still, the concept of political regimes remained contested because in monarchies, “the state” was often conflated with the person of the king. Since the French Revolution, however, the practice of sovereign power began to be distinguished from the person of the Sovereign. During the political crisis in 1918, German activists were raising fundamental questions about what the German nation-state might be, and might become. In this context, Max Weber gave his famous formulation of the concept of state power to the Free Students Association:

Today, however, we have to say that a state is a human community that (successfully) claims the *monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force* within a given territory.²

What is implied in this definition is that the state is an agent that can claim and act. In many respects this model corresponds to the perception of a government that its political leaders would prefer. The implicit metaphor of state-as-person projects an image of internal coherence and consistency which promotes the legitimacy of government. Gramsci points out how rule-by-consent is far more efficient and preferable than rule-by-

¹ Wilson, Peter. 2009. *The Thirty Years War: Europe's tragedy*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

² Weber, Max. 1918. “Politics as a vocation (*Politik als Beruf*).” Munich: Free Students Association.

overt coercion. But to project this unified image, it appears that nation-state republics appropriated an implicitly monarchist set of phrases and concepts (such as *raison d'état*) that fundamentally mischaracterize how modern regimes operate.

Michel Foucault began to study the emergence of the modern institutions of the clinic, the asylum, and the prison through what was actually practiced in each site. Foucault became well known for his detailed investigations and their implications for how power operates in practice; however many of his Marxist colleagues began to criticize the absence of a critique of the state in his work. However the assumption that such a thing as “the state” existed as an autonomous entity—an agent in itself—did not reconcile with his findings from either his earlier ‘archaeological’ method nor his later ‘genealogical’ method of research.³

Instead, Foucault focused on the concepts of ‘government and governing’ because they fit both the micropolitics he observed in intersubjective relations, and the broader processes of regime power. The question of how one governs oneself fits his overall project of investigating “the relationship of the self to the self,” and the way that political regimes govern populations fits with his methodological focus on techniques and practices. Individuals are expected to govern their own behavior and choices, while also expecting that they will be governed: a dual condition that corresponds to his double-entendre usage of the figure of the *subject* as both agent of action and *object* of domination.⁴ At the social scale, governing describes a *relationship* rather than a stable *object*. Colin Gordon explains that for Foucault,

the state has no essence. The nature of the institution of the state is, Foucault thinks, a function of changes in practices of government, rather than the converse. Political theory attends too much to institutions, and too little to practices.⁵

Rather than presume a coherent state, it is more useful to evaluate the *degree of coherence* between the various entities that govern a space. Foucault argues that the coherence of a political regime is an *effect* of the collective perceptions, habits, and expectations of the governed population—what he calls governmentality.⁶

This fundamental re-think of government fits particularly well with planning theory and practice. Karen Christensen argues that urban planning is inherently complex because of interagency conflict at multiple levels.⁷ Agencies, she reminds us, are aggregations of people whose practices are shaped by discourse, organizational cultures, and interests which vary by site and by scope of responsibility. Even so, Christensen’s site of analysis is a group of agencies that at least nominally identify themselves as part of the federated regime of government within the United States. The complexity and intensity of interagency conflict she describes is far greater in Kabul where multiple regimes, militaries, and agencies based both inside and outside the country are directly affecting

3 Gordon, Colin. 1991. “Governmental rationality: An introduction.” Pp. 1-51 in *The Foucault effect*, edited by Burchell Graham, Colin Gordon, and Peter Miller. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p. 4.

4 Foucault, Michel. 1983. “The subject and power.” Pp. 208-26 in *Michel Foucault, beyond structuralism and hermeneutics*, Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, eds. Chicago: U of Chicago Press, p. 212.

5 Gordon 1991, p. 4.

6 Foucault, Michel. 1991. “Governmentality.” Pp. 87-104 in *The Foucault effect*.

7 Christensen, Karen Stromme. 1999. *Cities and complexity: Making intergovernmental decisions*. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications.

local politics.

The loss of governing coherence in Kabul, therefore, is not merely a product of a loss of coherence within a regime: it is a product fragmenting sovereignty. Foreign ministries and head offices of nongovernmental agencies far from Afghanistan make operational decisions—especially about risk-management—that profoundly affect urban space within the city, without local consultation or recourse.

During my work in Kabul I observed several incidents which indicated the degree to which sovereignty had fragmented in the governing of Kabul. When I worked for the Ministry of Urban Development and Housing in 2003 I was based in a back office on the second floor of the main building. On two occasions, staff-members from different international agencies wandered into our office, desperate to find anyone who would tell them where to get clear permission to build their various projects. We could not help them; we had no idea ourselves who actually gave final authority for building permits in the city at that time. After 2005, it became increasingly clear that the Municipality had wrested that power back from an attempted usurpation by the Ministry. Far from a unitary urban planning project governed by a unitary state, the multiple processes of planning in Kabul reflect the degree of fragmentation of the political regime.

This re-think of the nature of political regimes and government also affects development discourse and practice. Foucault's usage of government is also crucially different from the term *governance*, which connotes practices of administration as apolitical, technical processes. Governing encompasses administrative practices, but within the broader framework of politics and political regimes.

In *Global assemblages: Technology, politics, and ethics as anthropological problems*, a group of social theorists have adopted a much more nuanced concept of governing processes, using Gilles Deleuze's idea of "assemblage." In the following passage, Kris Olds and Nigel Thrift specify what they mean by 'assemblages of governmental power':

We do not want to think of these centers of calculation as homogeneous and tightly knit structures or even as a loosely linked constitution, but rather as "functions" that bring into play particular populations, territories, affects, events—"withs." They are not therefore to be thought of as subjects but as "something which happens." Assemblages differ from structures in that they consist of cofunctioning "symbiotic elements," which may be quite unlike (but have "agreements of convenience") and coevolve with other assemblages, mutating into something else, which both parties have built. They do not, therefore, function according to a strict cause-and-effect model.⁸

This concept challenges another assumption embedded in the idea of a unitary, personified state: that policies are intentional. If urban space is governed by such loosely-aggregated assemblages, the personified concept of intentionality becomes irrelevant. Instead, if there is any coherence at all, the 'cofunctioning' of different agents within an assemblage needs to be studied as shared techniques, practices, and rationalities of rule. Governing rationalities are analyzed in the following section.

8 Olds, Kris, and Nigel Thrift. 2005. "Cultures on the brink: Reengineering the soul of capitalism—on a global scale." Pp. 270-90 in *Global Assemblages: Technology, Politics, and Ethics as Anthropological Problems*, edited by Aihwa Ong and Stephen J Collier. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, p. 271.

A plurality of rationalities

The second assumption that needs to be challenged in order to proceed with my central argument is the possibility of plural rationalities in urban planning. In a 1988 interview in *Theory, Culture and Society*, Jean-Francois Lyotard defended his work from accusations of irrationalism by explaining that “there is no reason, only reasons.”⁹ This is a succinct refutation of a modern assumption that reason is unitary, and that furthermore, the only legitimate mode of reasoning is empirical logic. Lyotard further argues that “it is easy to show that it is never a question of *one* massive and unique reason—that is nothing but an ideology.”

The ideology Lyotard is referring to is positivism: the belief that the one legitimate form of rationality is empirical logic. This ideology deeply influenced the concept and practice of urban planning. John Friedmann traces the genealogy of planning to Saint-Simon and his erstwhile disciple, Auguste Comte. In 1822, Comte proposed the development of a rigorously empirical ‘science of humanity’ (*sociologie*) that deeply influenced modern assumptions about the study of the human condition, including the very term social *science*, in contrast to social *theory* or moral philosophy.¹⁰ Positivism relies on older roots in natural philosophy, such as Occam’s fourteenth-century logical argument that “plurality should not be posited without necessity.” But the application of ‘scientism’ to knowledge-production well outside of the natural sciences reflects the prestige of the scientific method after the remarkable technological advances of the nineteenth century. In his reformulation of Political Economy into the ‘scientific’ discipline of Economics in 1890, Alfred Marshall explicitly notes the prestige of the natural sciences, and his hopes for a prestigious, reputable, mathematically-driven discipline stripped of the disreputable dimension of politics.¹¹

Likewise, the positivist assumption of a singular rationality was formally encoded into planning practice through the adoption of the Rational Planning Model of Herbert Simon in the 1940s.¹² Here, urban planning overlaps with both military planning and development planning in ways that are relevant to this analysis of Kabul. The U.S. military also adopted the Rational Planning Model, and development organizations adopted a close variant known as the Logical Framework, or LogFrame, for the rational design and evaluation of aid and development programs. Thus, the assumption that there is a ‘single rational way of planning’ is embedded in the practices of many of the key agencies shaping Kabul after 2001.

Max Horkheimer began to challenge positivism in 1937 with his article, “Traditional and critical theory.” The title of Horkheimer’s article contains a peculiar inversion: what he calls “traditional theory” was the empiricist positivism that had become hegemonic only one hundred years earlier. “Critical theory”, in contrast, referred to the much more

9 van Reijen, Willem and Dick Veerman. 1988. “An Interview with Jean-François Lyotard” in *Theory Culture & Society* 5:277.

10 Wallerstein, Immanuel Maurice. 2004. *World-systems analysis: An introduction*. Durham: Duke University Press, p. 4.

11 Marshall, Alfred. 2009[1890]. *Principles of economics*. Eighth edition (unabridged). New York: Cosimo Classics, p. 36.

12 Simon, Herbert Alexander. 1945. *Administrative behavior; a study of decision-making processes in administrative organization*. New York: Macmillan.

ancient Hellenic understanding of *theoria* as a virtuous struggle to ‘see through’ the distractions and distortions of prevailing opinion (*doxa*). Horkheimer argued that there was no such thing as ‘disinterested’ research and theorization, and that the positivist claim of neutral objectivity was itself a political assertion of domination by adherents to a particular mode of reasoning.

By the early 1970s, a sequence of events in the United States had combined to cause urban planners to doubt the positivist paradigm. Civil rights activists challenged the singular ideal of efficiency, with a demand that policies be judged on the basis of social justice as well. Anti-war activists had challenged the legitimacy Robert MacNamara—the ‘whiz kid of numbers’—and his planning of the American involvement in Viet Nam.¹³ Perhaps most quietly but most profoundly, environmentalists had challenged the inherent benefits of industrial and economic progress itself.¹⁴ Social scientists and social theorists provided the language to articulate these doubts. Thomas Kuhn’s *The structure of scientific revolutions* was reissued as a widely-read second edition in 1970;¹⁵ Horkheimer’s essays were translated and published in English in 1972;¹⁶ and among urban planners, Horst Rittel articulated doubts about viability of positivist assumptions in “Dilemmas in a general theory of planning” in 1973.¹⁷ A generation later, a strong German-British movement of ‘post-positivist’ planning theorists continues through the work of Frank Fischer,¹⁸ Maarten Hajer,¹⁹ Hendrik Wagenaar,²⁰ Philip Allmendinger,²¹ and Mark Tewdwr-Jones.²² These theorists do not reject the legitimate role of empirical reason in the planning process; but they point out that policy formulation and implementation also involve a substantial use of ‘practical reason,’ or *phronesis*.

Bent Flyvbjerg, the Danish planner and social theorist, initially brought the concept of *phronesis* to the attention of planners in the early 1990s.²³ He explored the idea further in his 2001 book *Making social science matter*.²⁴ Flyvbjerg cited passages in Book VI of Aristotle’s *Nicomachean ethics* as the source of his understanding of *phronesis*. Aristotle distinguishes five “states” or “qualities” (*ois*) of mind “by which we achieve the truth.”²⁵ These are:

nous (cognition itself);

13 Halberstam, David. 1972. *The Best and the Brightest*. New York: Random House.

14 Carson, Rachel. 1962. *Silent spring*. Greenwich, Conn.: Fawcett Publications.

15 Kuhn, Thomas S. 1970. *The structure of scientific revolutions*. 2nd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

16 Horkheimer, Max. 1972. *Critical theory; selected essays*. New York: Herder and Herder.

17 Rittel, Horst, and Melvin Webber. 1973. “Dilemmas in a general theory of planning.” *Policy Sciences* 155-169.

18 Fischer, Frank. 2003. *Reframing public policy: Discursive politics and deliberative practices*. Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press.

19 Hajer, Maarten A. 1995. *The politics of environmental discourse: Ecological modernization and the policy process*. New York: Clarendon Press.

20 Hajer, Maarten A, and Hendrik Wagenaar. 2003. *Deliberative policy analysis: Understanding governance in the network society*. New York: Cambridge University Press

21 Allmendinger, Philip. 2002. “Towards a post-positivist typology of planning theory.” *Planning Theory* 1:77-99.

22 Tewdwr-Jones, M., and P. Allmendinger. 1998. “Deconstructing communicative rationality: A critique of Habermasian collaborative planning.” *Environment and planning A* 30:1975-1989.

23 Sandercock, Leonie. 1998. *Towards cosmopolis: Planning for multicultural cities*. New York: John Wiley, p. 65.

24 Flyvbjerg, Bent. 2001. *Making social science matter: Why social inquiry fails and how it can succeed again*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

25 Flyvbjerg, Bent. 2001. *Making social science matter: why social inquiry fails and how it can succeed again*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

techne (knowing how to execute a specific task or skill);
episteme (reasoning from unchanging, universal principles);
phronesis (case-specific reasoning about specific problems); and
sophia (wisdom, derived from reflective accumulation of experience).²⁶

Flyvbjerg identifies three of these five states as discrete modes of rationality. Of these three—*techne*, *episteme*, and *phronesis*—it is *episteme* which most closely matches the mode of empirical rationality implicated in the Rational Planning Model. However Flyvbjerg points out that *phronesis* is a mode of rationality that, by Aristotle's own description, seems to match the way planners actually deliberate and form policy.

Aristotle argues that:

Political wisdom (*politikè*) and practical wisdom (*phrónesis*) are the same state of mind...Of the wisdom concerned with the city[-state], the practical wisdom which plays a controlling part is legislative wisdom (*nomothetiké*), while that which is related to this [*phrónesis*] as particulars to their universal is known by the general name 'political wisdom' (*politikí*); this has to do with action and deliberation (*praktikè kai bouleutiké*), for a decree is a thing to be carried out in the form of an individual act.

[Ross-Urmson 1984 translation, supplemented by the 1926 Rakhman translation].²⁷

In modern terms, Aristotle argues that the mode of reasoning for particular contingencies (*phronesis*) is distinct from the mode of reasoning for unchanging universals (*episteme*).

Rationalities in relation

For urban planners, three crucial lessons need to be drawn from this analysis. First, that the conception of rationality as singular and unimodal is a peculiarity of nineteenth and twentieth century Western thought. In his refutation of a unitary Reason, Lyotard continues, “On the contrary, it is a question of *plural* rationalities, which are, at the least, respectively, theoretical, practical, aesthetic. They are profoundly heterogeneous, ‘autonomous’ as Kant says.”²⁸ Leonie Sandercock emphasized the importance of recognizing rationality as plural in “Exploring Planning's Knowledges” in 1998, citing Lyotard explicitly.²⁹

Aristotle's writings open up the possibility of conceiving of multiple modes of rationality. At least three of Aristotle's “qualities of mind” are distinct modes of rationality—*techne*, *episteme*, and *phronesis*—but this is only a starting point. Through his studies of Kant, Lyotard also distinguishes aesthetic rationality, what I will call *aesthesis* for brevity. From my fieldwork in Kabul I suggest another mode: *ontological* rationality, meaning that some information and assumptions are accepted as truth based upon one's relationship of trust to the source of that information. As targets of decades of propaganda, Afghans today tend to believe only things that are told to them by a friend whom they trust, based on the moral character of that friend.

26 Aristotle. circa 350 B.C. *Nicomachean Ethics* VI:iii. Bekker numbers: 1139b:15-18.

27 Aristotle. 1989 (Ross-Urmson trans., 1984). “Nicomachean Ethics.” pp. 363-478 in *A new Aristotle reader*, edited by J. L. Ackrill. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, p. 423; and Aristotle. 1934 [1926]. *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. H. Rakhman. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. VI:iii:2, p. 333.

28 Ibid.

29 Sandercock, Leonie. 1998. *Towards cosmopolis: Planning for multicultural cities*. New York: John Wiley, Chapter

If rationality is plural, then the relationships between these different modes of rationality are at least as important as the distinction between them. Each mode of rationality may operate as a ‘verification-test’ on reasoning done through another mode. For example, Albert Einstein once argued that “the only physical theories that we are willing to accept are the beautiful ones.”³⁰ He is arguing that one of the truth-tests of epistemic reason is aesthetic reason (an insight that would have delighted Nietzsche). Even if *phronesis* is the primary mode of rationality used in policy deliberation, planners typically prefer to use data-analyses to confirm findings, an affirmation of *phronesis* via *episteme*. The ‘workability’ (Lindblom) and ‘satisficing’ (Simon) of pragmatic planning rely on experience to develop feasible plans, a relationship in which both *sophia* and *techne* affirm *phronesis*. Furthermore, a persuasive policy design often has what planners call ‘elegance.’ This, too, is an affirmation of *phronesis* via *aesthesis*. Rather than a substitution of one mode for another, planning rationality may need to be rethought as various reconciliations between multiple modes of rationality.

The second vital lesson from this analysis of Aristotlean thought is that *phronesis* is a context-specific mode of rationality. Distinguishing *phronesis* from *episteme* supports the post-structural challenge to universal, ahistoric rationality; or at least it compartmentalizes those ‘universal truths’ as a particular epistemological domain that does not encompass the whole of rationality, let alone reality. There is still a place for epistemological reason, but epistemology’s relationship to context, and to contextually-sensitive *phronetic* reason, needs to be continuously re-evaluated.

The third lesson, for urban planners in particular, is that the *phronetic* mode of reason is political reason applied to cities. Aristotle’s own example, cited above, is the context of public deliberation over policy. Sovereign political entities were not distinguished from the *polis* at the time. Thus, *politiki* meant both deliberation over urban policy. Far from the *technocratic* conception of planning in the middle of the twentieth century, this reexamination of planning thought reintroduces politics to the core of the discipline.

While modern political science tends to focus on the nation-state as the fundamental unit of political analysis, urban politics persisted long after the concept of the polity was virtualized and expanded into the nation-state. Furthermore, as this research shows, tidy jurisdictional distinctions between urban government, national government, and transnational empire have been fragmented and eroded considerably. Both national politics and geopolitics bleed into, and help constitute, the urban regime of Kabul.

Thus far I have built on Flyvbjerg’s argument that the primary mode of rationality employed in the practice of planning is *phronesis*, a form of applied political rationality. The following section explores a crucial differentiation that has emerged *within* political rationality which profoundly influences the practices of modern urban planning: the fission into sovereign politics and biopolitics.

30 Zeidler, Eberhard. 2000. *Quantum field theory: Basics in mathematics and physics*, Berlin, Springer-Verlag, p. 971.

Biopolitics and the pluralization of political reason

‘Post-positivist’ planning theorists argue that the primary mode of rationality used in actual planning practice is phronesis. I take a further step by arguing that Foucault’s distinction of political reason into sovereign politics and biopolitics is central to the specific forms of political rationality employed by urban planners. Indeed, the emergence of modern urban planning is itself one of the chief expressions of ‘the birth of biopolitical reason’ as a response to industrial urbanization.

Foucault develops his theory of biopolitics by first identifying a style of governing he calls “pastoral.”³¹ This style of government was adapted from the Christian practice of caring for the souls of each and every member of a church congregation. The guiding metaphor for this practice was Jesus as the Good Shepherd who cares for all of his flock, including the least among them. In the eighteenth century, European political leaders adapted this pastoral model to develop *regimes of care* for the material well-being of their subjects. An early expression of this emerging political rationality is Thomas Hobbes’ 1651 metaphor of the state as Leviathan—constituted from the bodies of the entire population, not the unique body of the monarch.

Here we return to the same time and place cited at the beginning of this chapter: the political crisis that defined the European nation-state. Religious schism among Christians had been mobilized by political interests, precipitating extraordinary violence. Hobbes’ putative ‘state of nature’ was in fact a condition of regime-instability and revolutionary change in the social and personal role of religion. Bruno Latour points out that to prevent life from being ‘nasty, brutish and short,’ Hobbes believed that the political crisis had to be resolved by re-thinking the state.³² While the Peace of Westphalia established a system of mutually recognized sovereign nation-states, Hobbes’ argument set the basis for thinking of each nation-state as the totality of its population.

Foucault traces the articulation of this new political rationality through the idea of ‘Police Science’ (Polizeiwissenschaft) of German principalities:

in the eighteenth century the police force was not invented only for maintaining law and order, nor for assisting governments in their struggle against their enemies, but for assuring urban supplies, hygiene, health and standards considered necessary for handicrafts and commerce.³³

While the rationale for armed forces is to maintain sovereign control—to ‘take and hold ground,’ in military parlance—the rationale for police is to provide a regime of care.

Translations: political rationalities in the Afghan context

Before I proceed with Foucault’s development of the concept of biopolitics, I need to translate two aspects of the argument thus far to the present situation in Afghanistan. First: the genealogy of *regimes of care* in Christian and Muslim societies is significantly different. What Foucault describes as emergent in Germany in the eighteenth century closely parallels the practices which Muslims developed with the founding of Islam.

31 Foucault, Michel. 1979. “Omnes et singulatim: Towards a criticism of ‘Political Reason’.” *The Tanner lectures on human values* 2:223-254.

32 Hobbes, Thomas. 1996[1651]. *Leviathan*. Rev. student ed. New York: Cambridge University Press.

33 Foucault, Michel. 1983. “The subject and power.” Pp. 208-26 in *Michel Foucault, beyond structuralism and hermeneutics*, edited by Hubert L Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p. 215.

Like Christianity, Islam is centrally concerned with the salvation of every soul within the community of believers. But for Muslims this concern extends to the health and material well-being of the living believer. The Qur'an mandates the regular hygienic practice of ablution as an integral part of daily prayers, along with moderation in eating and drinking. By at least the eleventh century, Muslims had also institutionalized the care for 'the social body' through the office of the public inspector, the *muhtasib*.³⁴ The fundamental charge of the *muhtasib* is "the promotion of virtue and prevention of vice." In practice, this meant ensuring moral behavior in public spaces, as well as inspection of weights and measures, and the cleanliness of food preparation in marketplaces.³⁵

During the mid-twentieth century, the Saudi Kingdom developed this office into a state bureau of religious enforcement. The Iranian Revolutionary Council developed a similar 'religious police' after 1980. This bureaucratization of the police-function seems to parallel the subordination of Muslim judiciaries to modernizing regimes, a process which Brinkley Messick traces in Yemen.³⁶

The U.S.-backed Afghan mujahideen established a Committee for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice under President Rabbani in 1992. When the Taliban overthrew the mujahid Islamic State and established the Islamic Emirate in 1996, they promoted this agency to a Ministry and used it to restore order after four years of extremely chaotic civil war in the capital.³⁷ In other words, to reestablish spatial security, the Emirate employed the police apparatus.

The insecurity and politicized violence in Kabul throughout the 1990s echoes the "Hobbesian problem" of seventeenth-century Germany and England. Both the recurrence, and the recurrent misinterpretation of that problem, are striking. Again, a politicized mobilization of religion had produced intensely violent and intractable conflict. Again, foreign interventions had exacerbated the conflict. In seventeenth-century Europe, the Danish, Swedish, French, and Spanish monarchies intervened and prolonged the conflict in Germany in the name of religion, but in fact out of political interests. In Afghanistan, the Pakistani, Saudi, American, and Iranian regimes armed various mujahid factions against the Godless Soviets. These foreign meddlers had no interest in compelling their respective factions to cooperate with each other after the Najibullah regime was overthrown.³⁸ And again, a nominal settlement was achieved through fine-grained application of policing. To this day, both Afghans and foreigners tend to stereotype Afghans as 'naturally warlike.' But the conditions of violence in Afghanistan since 1980 are no more natural than the conditions in England and Germany that Hobbes was describing in 1651.

A second 'translation' to Foucault's line of argumentation is the relevance of context. Foucault argues against universals and 'grand narratives' in social theory. He insisted that

34 Mottahedeh, Roy, and Kristen Stilt. 2003. "Public and private as viewed through the work of the *muhtasib*." *Social research* 70:735-48.

35 Mottahedeh and Stilt 2003, p.735.

36 Messick, Brinkley Morris. 1993. *The calligraphic state: Textual domination and history in a Muslim society*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

37 Rashid, 2000.

38 Rubin, Barnett R. 2002. *The fragmentation of Afghanistan: State formation and collapse in the international system*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

the specific conditions of emergence in practices of government must be recognized and accounted for. He therefore cautioned against any generic application of his own work to other contexts. Post-colonial theorists, beginning with Edward Said's publication of *Orientalism*, have challenged the implicit Westernness in ostensibly universal knowledge-claims. These points of connection between Foucault's theorization and present-day Afghanistan are examples of 'the work of translation' that Dipesh Chakrabarty describes as part of the due-diligence of re-situating grounded theory.³⁹ When Chakrabarty argues for 'provincializing Europe,' this is not a contrived effort to marginalize political and cultural events that remain extremely important; rather, it is to set them in a genealogical context of actual spaces and practices. Chakrabarty uses this angle of critique to argue how key elements of modernity first emerged in sites outside of Europe. Here, I recognize the peculiar political conditions of modern and early-modern Europe for a different purpose. It is easier to translate concepts of political rationality from one definite site to another definite site, rather than try to apply a supposedly universal concept to an 'Other' site that betrays the Western—and in this case specifically Christian—genealogy of the concepts of sovereign political rationality and biopolitical rationality.

Chadwick's bargain and the Liberal limits of biopower

In this section I discuss the relationship of biopolitical rationality to the emergence of modern urban planning.

The political concern for the body politic intensified in Europe as that body increasingly became the political *demos* of republics and parliamentary monarchies at the end of the eighteenth century. But the extension of police-based regimes of care into a substantially new political rationality of biological care occurred through a series of developments in the nineteenth century. The first step in this shift was a dramatic increase in practices of measuring and knowledge-production about populations, through the development of statistics. Ian Hacking calls the sudden increase in population data-gathering after 1820 "an avalanche of numbers."⁴⁰ New techniques of methodical, spatialized data-collection and mapping enabled John Snow to identify the Broad Street Pump as the water-borne source of cholera contagion in 1854—despite prevailing belief that the only vector of contagion was 'bad air' (miasma), and forty years before the Pasteur-Koch germ theory of disease was widely understood.

One of the new British statisticians was Edwin Chadwick. After producing a series of shorter reports in the 1830s, Chadwick took three years to produce the *Report into the sanitary condition of the labouring populations of Great Britain* in 1842. The *Report* was immediately adopted by engineering schools across Britain to design pressurized municipal water systems and sanitary sewer systems, separated from stormwater drains. The *Report* also changed the discourse about the working poor. Through his fieldwork Chadwick discovered, and then convinced others, that corrupt morals were not a direct cause of poor health. Both virtuous and morally corrupt people were getting sick under

39 Chakrabarty, Dipesh. 2000. *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial thought and historical difference*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, p. 17.

40 Hacking, Ian. 1982. "Bio-power and the avalanche of printed numbers." *Humanities in society* 5:279-94.

the same unsanitary living conditions. In direct opposition to prevailing opinion at the time, Chadwick argued that the unrelenting stress of unsanitary living conditions could corrupt the morals of the British working poor—poverty and sickness causing immorality, rather than immorality causing poverty and sickness. This argument moved a significant step away from the Christian focus on the moral well-being of the community, and towards a more functional concern for the material living conditions of the poor.

In his essay “The birth of biopolitics,” Foucault identifies this moment as an indicator of the shift in governmentality that marks the emergence of this new political rationality of biopolitics. However he also sets biopolitical rationality in tension with the Liberal ideology of minimal government ensuring maximum individual liberty:

I mean the endeavor, begun in the eighteenth century, to rationalize the problems presented to governmental practice by the phenomena characteristic of a group of living human beings constituted as a population: health, sanitation, birthrate, longevity, race...

It seemed to me that these problems could not be dissociated from the framework of political rationality within which they appeared and developed their urgency. 'Liberalism' enters the picture here, because it was in connection with liberalism that they began to have the look of a challenge. In a system anxious to have the respect of legal subjects and to ensure the free enterprise of individuals, how can the 'population' phenomenon, with its specific effects and problems, be taken into account? On behalf of what, and according to what rules, can it be managed? The debate that took place in England in the middle of the nineteenth century concerning public health legislation can serve as an example.⁴¹

My first impression upon reading this passage was that the ‘birth of biopolitics’ corresponds directly with the birth of urban planning. Here we have infrastructure, the justification for enforcement of regulation for the benefit of the public, and the emergence of the regime of knowledge in which urban planning continues to operate. From this line of reasoning I initially began to equate urban planning rationality with biopolitical rationality. However Thomas Osborne points out what did not happen in this moment: the implementation of a regime of totalizing care.

Osborne points out that there were advocates of a regime of totalizing biological care at the time, notably Henry Rumsey,⁴² and John Friedmann describes similar totalizing aspirations in France expressed Saint-Simon and Comte.⁴³ However Chadwick was concerned with governing efficiently, with the least cost and the lowest tax burden. Since 1832 he had been involved in the reform and administration of the New Poor Laws. This reform had been intended to make poverty relief more efficient and less prone to perverse incentives such as farmers underpaying laborers with the expectation that the wage shortfall would be compensated by parish relief. The new system was not working well. Impoverished workers were shifting from scattered riots to the more organized Chartist movement, and the public expense of poor relief remained difficult to control. Osborne therefore argues that Chadwick’s concern for the underlying conditions of poverty may

41 Foucault, Michel. 2003. “The birth of biopolitics.” Pp. 202-207 in *The essential Foucault*, edited by Paul Rabinow and Nikolas S Rose. New York: New Press.

42 Osborne, Thomas. 1996. “Security and vitality: Drains, liberalism and power in the nineteenth century.” Pp. 99-121 in *Foucault and political reason: Liberalism, neo-liberalism and rationalities of government*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p. 103.

43 Friedmann, John. 1987. *Planning in the public domain: From knowledge to action*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.

have been motivated by ethical compassion, but also by a public administrator's concern for efficient government.

Osborne also points out how Liberal ideology—now as much as in 1840—promotes an aversion to a more totalizing regime. For English-speakers, the neologism 'biopower' itself connotes totalitarian biological control of the type portrayed by Aldous Huxley in *Brave new world*. Thomas Osborne gives other examples:⁴⁴

Perhaps invocations of bio-politics or such like can seem to have rather a sinister ring to them; we conjure up visions of eugenics or the Nazi politics of life. And it is true that bio-politics can take a more or less, if not necessarily sinister, then totalizing form.

Liberal ideology portrays itself positively, from declarations of the Rights of Man and the sovereignty of the modern subject (Kant) to the liberty of the individual (John Stuart Mill). The converse of this optimism is a constant anxiety about the threat of over-governing, over-reach by the state.⁴⁵ Foucault describes this as a contradiction that is constitutive of Liberal politics: on the one hand, modern regimes continue to develop more sophisticated means of surveillance and fine-grained record-keeping on individuals and our behavior. On the other hand, Liberal ideology places strong emphasis on individual freedoms through the constraint of government interventions. Furthermore, Liberal philosophers emphasize the need to govern efficiently, with an economy of means. Foucault uses this tension to explain the manifestation of neoliberal reforms in the early 1980s; but stresses the longer genealogy of this tension.⁴⁶ Adam Smith published *An inquiry into the nature and causes of the wealth of nations* in 1776. In Book V Smith argues for parsimony in the administration of peacetime costs, especially because of the destabilizing burden of debt incurred by the cost of war.⁴⁷ Together with an ideal of maximization of individual liberties—personal sovereignty—the principle of parsimony in government has constrained the extension of biopower.⁴⁸

This tension between sovereignty and biopower has governed the evolution of modern urban planning. In his history of housing in New York City, Plunz argues that the assertion of government authority to require minimum daylight and natural ventilation in apartment-buildings was initially resisted as an infringement on the *sovereign* property rights of landlords in the 1860s and 1870s.⁴⁹ In the *Euclid v. Ambler* decision, which has legitimized and shaped American land-use planning since 1926, the landowner protested that community regulation of land uses was an infringement on his sovereign right to dispose of his property as he pleased.⁵⁰ The 2005 Supreme Court decision in *Kelo v. City of New London*—that community economic development may be a justification for use of the power of eminent domain—provoked sharp populist opposition in the United States.⁵¹ One group of opponents organized as the Castle Coalition, invoking the (gendered) adage that “a man's home is his castle.”⁵² It is an ideal of property-ownership quite

44 Osborne 1996, p. 100.

45 Osborne 1996, p. 101.

46 Foucault 2003.

47 Smith, Adam. 1993. *An inquiry into the nature and causes of the wealth of nations*. New York: Oxford University Press, p. 458.

48 Osborne 1996, p. 103.

49 Plunz, Richard. 1990. *A history of housing in New York City: Dwelling type and social change in the American metropolis*. New York: Columbia University Press.

50 *Village of Euclid, Ohio v. Ambler Realty Co.*, 272 U.S. 365 (1926).

51 *Kelo v. City of New London*, 545 U.S. 469 (2005).

52 <http://www.castlecoalition.org>

literally as sovereign power.

Formal urban planning, as it has evolved since the 1840s, continues to operate under this tension between sovereign political rationality and biopolitical rationality, shaped by Liberal ideals of efficient government and minimal interference by government into the liberty and sovereignty of the individual. I call this “Chadwick’s bargain,” referring both to the pursuit of efficient means, and to the negotiated deal between the capacity of a regime to govern lives and the desire by the governed to constrain that capacity.

Plural rationalities, plural modes of planning

Thus far in this chapter I have taken Lyotard’s argument for the plurality of rationality, and used Flyvbjerg’s work to specify both the nature of that plurality and the primary role of phronesis as the mode of rationality used by urban planners. A closer look at Aristotle’s original arguments revealed that phronesis was understood as a type of political reason: the pragmatic, case-specific reasoning used in public deliberation about allocation of urban resources. Through Foucault’s late work I then point out that political reason itself has become plural, and that modern urban planning seems to be shaped primarily by biopolitical rationality, rather than the older sovereign political rationality. The technologies of rule which Foucault cites as markers of the emergence of biopolitics are in fact the same technologies—population statistics, public health, urban infrastructure, building codes—that planning historians identify as the emergence of modern urban planning.

But a simple equation of planning rationality with biopolitical rationality ignores too much of planning practice. Planners a series of techniques (*techne*), statistical and spatial analysis and predictive modeling (*episteme*), and professional experience (*sophia*) in the practice of planning. In fact the mixed usage of each of these modes of rationality may be as important to theorize as the recognition of their distinctiveness. How do they interact? In his early (1959) critique of the Rational-Comprehensive model, Charles Lindblom provides a clue: the “branch” method of ‘successive limited comparisons’ may not just indicate an incremental approach, but also a way of using each mode of reasoning to cross-verify the other. The synthesis of partial and imperfect knowledge towards a ‘best guess’ policy is in fact legally defensible in the United States as ‘the exercise of due care and best professional judgment’ in decision-making. Phronesis, as characterized by Aristotle and more recently by Flyvbjerg and Frank Fischer, is the mode of reasoning which is practical in that it is integrative; but the integration is possible only because the focus is on the immediate context and problem, not a universal solution, not a ‘best practice.’ However, even if phronesis is the primary form of reasoning used to synthesize and implement urban policy, the differentiation of political reason triggers a further question: what is the relationship of sovereign political reason to biopolitical reason within urban planning?

The remainder of this study will focus on the relationship between the two rationalities that constitute political reason, and the ways that their interaction can manifest as very different modes of planning. Perhaps there are myriad ways that these two political rationalities can combine, but in Kabul I observed three.

Formal planning (Concrete)

The ideal-type of urban planning is a direct expression of biopolitics. Infrastructure gets built and maintained; care is taken to listen and respond to the interests of the whole population, including the least powerful; economic development is focused on promoting the general welfare; and plans are designed to optimize long-term biological survival through principles of sustainability.

This ideal-type is a fair characterization of what planners regard as the purpose, if not all the practices of the profession of urban planning. However it ignores the role of sovereign politics in planning. Even under conditions of strong social cohesion and low levels of internal political conflict, more powerful factions within a local urban regime exert their asymmetrical advantage in how discourse is shaped through public media. Denmark in the late twentieth century could be considered the paradigmatic example of peaceful democratic politics, where sovereign power is ‘tame.’ Flyvbjerg’s study of the planning of a bus station in Ålborg is therefore particularly valuable, because he shows how asymmetrical power-politics shapes the ostensibly neutral and rational public discourse even in Denmark.⁵³ Meanwhile, in the much more conflicted society of Israel, Oren Yiftachel began to trace how formal urban planning procedures could also be used to comprehensively harm a population. Initially Yiftachel described this as ‘the dark side of planning.’⁵⁴

Upon further reflection, Yiftachel now argues that this is a component of standard planning practice: the same technologies of rule that can benefit an entire population can also be withheld or directed in ways that harm whole populations, or deliver benefits very unequally. Ananya Roy points out that this more sober analysis of planning is consistent with well-documented practices of systematic deprivation, such as Drake and Cayton’s vivid account of the politics of life in ‘the Black Belt’ of Chicago in the 1940s,⁵⁵ or the planned spatial segregation of Apartheid in South Africa.⁵⁶

Government-controlled internment camps and prisons are (hopefully) the extreme expression of planned spaces where the political regime is concerned with the biological ‘welfare’ of the population. Giorgio Agamben focused on the way that biopower and sovereign power intersect in the Nazi concentration camp. The governing regime systematically stripped away political personhood of the inmates in a very planned fashion, leaving only the ‘bare life’ (*zoe*) to be experimented upon or eliminated without political consequence for the ruling regime.⁵⁷ Derek Gregory also theorizes the Global War Prison as an intersection of sovereign power and biopower, carefully arguing how spaces such as Guantanamo prison are construed as legal as a necessary function of

53 Flyvbjerg, Bent. 1998. *Rationality and power: Democracy in practice*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

54 Yiftachel, Oren. 1995. “The dark side of modernism: Planning as control of an ethnic minority.” in *Postmodern cities and spaces*, edited by Sophie Watson and Katherine Gibson. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell.

55 Drake, St. Clair, and Horace Cayton. 1945. *Black Metropolis: A study of Negro life in a northern city*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company.

56 Robinson, Jennifer. 1996. “Continuity, control, and the construction of state power: Professional discourses in urban government.” Pp. 58-80 in *The power of Apartheid: State, power and space in South African cities*. Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann.

57 Agamben, Giorgio. 1998. *Homo sacer: Sovereign power and bare life*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press.

democratic politics.⁵⁸ Pul-e Charkhi Prison in eastern Kabul, and the American detention facility at Bagram Air Base are also part of this Global War Prison; thus this extreme mode of spatial formation and rights-deprivation directly affects Kabul itself. One example of care for the biological welfare of the *homo sacer* within these American spaces is the blood-oxygen monitor used on prisoners being interrogated using the partial-drowning technique euphemized as “waterboarding.” ‘Simulated drowning’ is a misleading understatement because the risk of death by water-induced asphyxiation is real—hence the need for the blood-oxygen monitor. The survival of American political prisoners—ideally without visible evidence of torture—is necessary for maintaining the legitimacy of American sovereign political power.

What this range of policies shares in common is a particular type of interaction between sovereign power and biopower. In each case, from the milder ‘message control’ in Denmark to the coercive practices of the Global War on Terror, a political regime is capable of exercising *coherent spatial governing*. Even if the extreme examples are disturbing, they are recognizable as *planning*. The coherence of the political regime is sufficient to permit some personification of the regime as an intentional entity, a ‘state’ which ‘intends’ to help (or harm) a whole population through spatialized technologies of rule. This is my working definition of formal planning. The formal mode of planning in Kabul is the subject of Chapter Three.

Informal planning (Clay)

If the ideal of urban planning is for the regime to care for and promote the general welfare of the whole population, then a succinct way of describing urban informality is the condition in which the urban regime decides to limit the population, and the space, that it governs in this biopolitical way.

The specific ways that urban informality emerges are as diverse as the cities in which it occurs; but a few consistent themes pertain to Kabul. Many regions of Asia and Africa were colonized during what I call the era of ‘Industrializing Empire’ after 1830. European powers often experimented with new techniques of urban government in the colonies first, and then applied successful techniques back to the metropole. As Nezar Alsayyad argues in *Forms of Dominance*, urban modernity was used as a powerful rhetorical justification for colonization through the development of new, modern adjacent to existing cities.⁵⁹ The dramatic transformation of political economies under conditions of colonization transformed the existing cities as well: through rapid in-migration and restrictions on further growth of the ‘native’ quarters, the non-European quarters were often transformed rapidly into crowded slums. Newly-independent Asian and African regimes often kept development restrictions in place, in an effort towards self-modernization. Thus, as Alsayyad argues in *Urban Informality*, what had once been typical processes of urbanization became denigrated as un-modern, as “backward” in opposition to the “forward” progress of urban modernization.⁶⁰ Though the British never

58 Gregory, Derek. 2007. “Vanishing points: Law, violence and exception in the global war prison.” P. Chapter 11 in *Violent geographies: Fear, terror, and political violence*, edited by Allan Pred. New York: Routledge.

59 Alsayyad, Nezar. 1992. *Forms of dominance: On the architecture and urbanism of the colonial enterprise*. Brookfield, Vt.: Avebury.

60 Alsayyad, Nezar. 2004. “Urban informality as a ‘new’ way of life.” in *Urban informality: transnational*

governed urban modernization in Kabul, the political imperative of urban modernization was expressed vividly in the regime of King Amanullah from 1919 to 1928. Amanullah began to build a modern capital ten kilometers southwest of the extant city of Kabul in 1922.⁶¹ This new city was not called ‘new Kabul’ (*Kabul-e Naw*), but *modern* Kabul (*Kabul-e Jadid*). Contrapuntally, the existing city became known not as the ‘old city’ (*Shahr-e Qadimi*), but the ‘used, worn, dog-eared city’ (*Shahr-e Kona*). Any subsequent urban development that was not planned as regular, orthogonal urban space was considered backward, and after the implementation of comprehensive master plans began in 1962, un-planned settlements were classified as ‘outside the plan’ in the sense of violation (*ghair-e Plan*). The municipality did not recognize right of tenure; did not grade the roads for paving and drainage; did not provide street-lighting or piped water. In political-theory terms, the sovereign authority of the urban regime was used to bound the limits of biopolitical care. Spatial sovereignty is often recognized in the establishment and enforcement of boundaries; in urban space, sovereign political rationality is used to establish a ‘jurisdictional limit’ to the regime of care, the regime of formal urban planning. Sovereign power continues to extend beyond this: the police (and the military) can exert coercive governing rule throughout the urban space, including spaces which are not recognized for purposes formal urban governing. Thus, both as a site of deliberate exclusion from biopolitical rule and as a site that remains governed by sovereign rule, spaces of urban informality are very much *governed space*. In this respect they are planned spaces, even if the method of planning amounts to calculated neglect.

Once urban informality emerges, it is also an efficient strategy for urban regimes to maintain for three reasons. First, biopolitical care is resource-intensive. Care that ranges from enforcement of building and traffic safety, through comprehensive infrastructure and services, to regional economic planning, can only be seen as worthwhile by a regime that expects to benefit politically from long-term returns on urban investment. Justifying such heavy investments in people and places is difficult in a transnational political environment in which deregulated markets are repeatedly presented as the most efficient ways of allocating *every* good and service, including municipal water, primary education, and security.

This laissez-faire ideology, extended to practices of urban government, reveals a second reason for allowing urban informality. Extending care for the biological welfare of a whole urban population exposes the urban regime to greater political accountability. By ‘not counting’ poorer urban households, any harm that comes to such households is ‘not counted’ against the urban regime. Ferguson and Gupta identify this as a process of “self-responsibilization” of governed populations.⁶² By “allowing” poorer urban households to settle on flood plains and unstable hillsides; any consequent harm to that household becomes ‘their own responsibility.’ The most remarkable example of this political logic was expressed in January of 2010 when 250,000 Haitians in Port-au-Prince and Leogane died when buildings collapsed upon them in a moderate earthquake. The

perspectives from the Middle East, Latin America, and South Asia. Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books.

61 Wild, Roland. 1982[1932]. *Amanullah: Ex-King of Afghanistan*. Quetta: Nisa traders.

62 Ferguson, James, and Akhil Gupta. 2002. “Spatializing states: Toward an ethnography of neoliberal governmentality.” *American Ethnologist* 29:981-1002.

preventability of these deaths was demonstrated one month later when an earthquake, fifty-eight times more powerful, killed only 507 people in Chile. The deaths in Haiti were caused by poor concrete construction under a regime that is almost completely informalized. In this context, the politics of self-responsibilization were stunningly effective in protecting the political regime of René Préval. Demands for accountability by the Haitian regime were almost completely absent.

The third benefit which urban regimes enjoy by maintaining spaces of urban informality is inexpensive voter clientilism. This strategy has been observed in Latin America for decades.⁶³ But one of the most vivid accounts is Ananya Roy's analysis of clientilism in southeast Kolkata.⁶⁴ Autocratic regimes in Latin America 'bought legitimacy' by allowing squatting; but Roy shows how a democratically-elected, avowedly Leftist regime used the same strategies to maintain electoral dominance in West Bengal. Furthermore, this tactic was attractive enough to the regime that she observed a deliberate expansion of informal urban space through a process she calls "unmapping."

The informal mode of planning in Kabul is the subject of Chapter Four.

Exceptionalist planning (Mirrorglass)

Beginning with the work of Peter Ward and Alan Gilbert,⁶⁵ the 'regularity of the irregular' in urbanization has been identified as a common mode of urbanization; and since the publication of *Urban informality*, this mode of urbanization is increasingly recognized as planned. However a third process—exceptionalism—has thus far been grouped together with urban informality, because both processes are extralegal. However exceptionalist urbanization looks profoundly different when viewed through a bifocal political lens that distinguishes sovereign politics and biopolitics. Whereas poorer households are more or less compelled to "quietly encroach" upon legal space in order to secure urban livelihoods, politically powerful households and groups can flagrantly violate the law because they are more powerful than the urban regime itself. In this mode of urban planning, sovereign power and biopower intersect very differently. In the process of *taking care* of themselves, urban elites take overt actions that compromise the legitimacy and effectiveness of the local regime, eroding its sovereignty. Repeated, systematic violations by urban elites produce both physical and political spaces of impunity.

Teresa Caldeira describes this process in detail in *City of walls*, where argues that the wealth of an urban community in São Paulo bears little association to its legal status.⁶⁶ Many working-class communities are entirely (or almost entirely) legal, whereas many upper-class developments are in violation of a zoning ordinance or irregular property

63 Soto, Hernando de, and Instituto Libertad y Democracia (Lima Peru). 1989. *The other path: The invisible revolution in the Third World*. New York: Harper & Row.

64 Roy, Ananya. 2003. *City requiem, Calcutta: Gender and the politics of poverty*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

65 Ward, Peter M. 1982. *Self-help housing: A critique*. Bronx, N.Y.: Mansell; Gilbert, Alan, and Peter M Ward. 1985. *Housing, the state, and the poor: policy and practice in three Latin American cities*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

66 Caldeira, Teresa Pires do Rio. 2000. *City of walls: crime, segregation, and citizenship in São Paulo*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

documentation. The vital difference is that poorer illegal settlements suffer constant threat of eviction or violent incursion by the militarized police (sovereign power), whereas upper-class illegal developments suffer no such threats. Likewise, since 2005 Oren Yiftachel has recognized the production of urban 'gray spaces' by political regimes, and now distinguishes 'gray spacing from above' from 'gray spacing from below.'⁶⁷ However, if Assef Bayat's "quiet encroachment of the ordinary" characterizes the politics of urban informality, it completely fails to explain the flagrant impunity of urban elites.⁶⁸

Aihwa Ong⁶⁹ and Giorgio Agamben both cite Carl Schmitt's definition of sovereign power as the 'power to declare the exception' to a legal regime.⁷⁰ In some cities, urban exceptionalism may follow this principle and therefore function as a perverse kind of 'formal' planning, where the local regime retains sovereign control over both legal and extralegal processes. In Kabul, however, the 'spaces of exception' are spaces in which local sovereignty begins to fragment through the practices of agencies beyond its control. Part of the challenge for the urban regime in any national capital is the relationship between the local urban government and the national government. But in Kabul this is compounded by the presence of at least three other agents: commanders who have not yet accepted the legitimacy of the Karzai regime; foreign militaries and the foreign diplomatic community; and transnational aid organizations ranging from little NGOs up to the United Nations Group of programs. Geopolitics plays a messy and intrusive role in the governing and transformation of urban space in Kabul. Furthermore, consistent with the arguments earlier in this chapter, geopolitics has also differentiated into a complex interactions between sovereign power and biopower. The particular manifestations of this exceptionalist mode of planning in Kabul are the subject of Chapter Five.

67 Yiftachel, Oren. 2009. "Critical theory and 'gray space': Mobilization of the colonized." *City* 13:246-263.

68 Bayat, Assef. 2000. "From 'dangerous classes' to 'quiet rebels': Politics of the urban subaltern in the global South." *International sociology* 15:539-557.

69 Ong, Aihwa. 2006. *Neoliberalism as exception: Mutations in citizenship and sovereignty*. Durham N.C.: Duke University Press.

70 Schmitt, Carl. 1985. *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press.

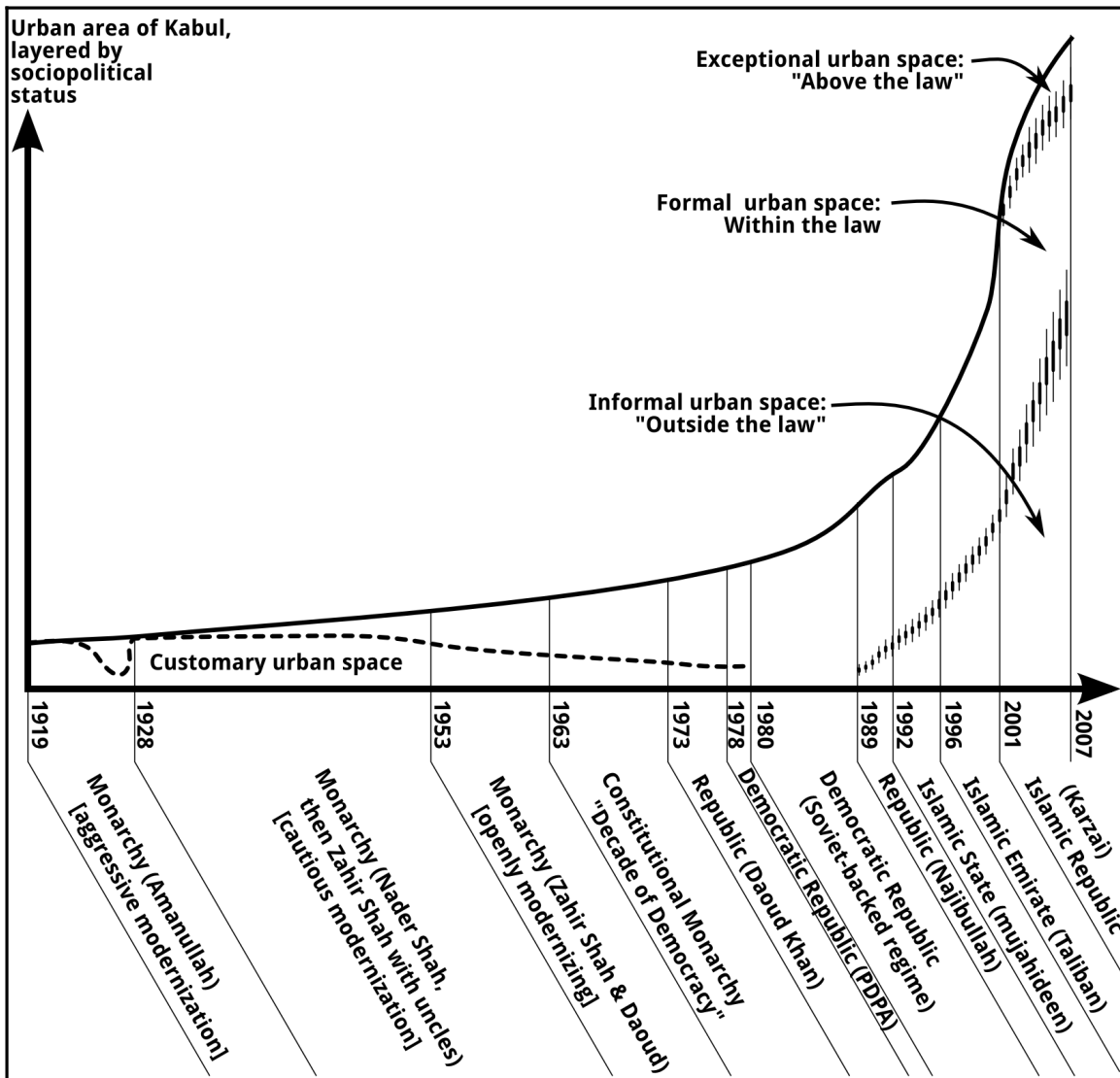


Figure 3.1. Modes of planning in Kabul, graphed by time against relative built area (Author 2010).

Graphing the pluralization of planning in Kabul

Figure 3.1 maps the arguments of this chapter to a graph of the development of Kabul since 1919. The structure of this graph was inspired by James Ferguson's essay, "Decomposing modernity" in *Global shadows*, his brilliant and disturbing analysis of Africa as a constituted object of development.⁷¹ In a similar fashion I began by graphing Time against Sociopolitical Status. However because I am studying a single city, I realized that I could add considerably more detail. I layered higher-status modes of urban development on top of lower-status ones, and I marked off major political events in the history of Kabul since the year that King Amanullah won full political independence from the British Raj in 1919. At first I drew a square graph, which only showed the

⁷¹ Ferguson, James. 2006. *Global Shadows: Africa in the Neoliberal World Order*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, p.178.

relative proportion of formal urban space to customary, informal, and exceptionalist urban spaces. However, to get a better sense of how these modes have governed urban development over time, it is also important to understand both the slow and (relatively) steady formalization of the city from 1930 to 1990, and the subsequent dramatic growth of both informal and exceptionalist urban space since about 1990. I rescaled the graph to show a rough approximation of the built area of the city over this ninety-year period.

The graph remains diagrammatic because it is a representation of the *political meaning* of space in Kabul. A visual analysis of satellite maps of the city would not reveal this political division of space. Not only is exceptionalist development difficult to distinguish from formally-planned space, but in a number of areas formal and informal spaces would be confused for each other. The historic Chindawol neighborhood in the southwestern quadrant of the Old City looks like many informal spaces across the city; and yet it is fully documented and recognized as an historic district. Several villages have also been absorbed into the expanding city, such as Deh Bibi Mahro. Their status is ambiguous. They are not shown on the Master Plan and are, by implication, scheduled to be erased through modernization. However several Municipal Planners charged with the implementation of the Master Plan described them as historic areas that they had no intention of rebuilding. Conversely, some areas were platted with great regularity, and yet they were developed in violation of the Master Plan. These ambiguities will be explored in detail in Chapters Three and Four, but the issue needs to be raised here to warn against a reductionist characterization of Figure 3.1.

This graph implies a continuity, in contrast to Ferguson's central argument that the promise of progress through time has 'decomposed' with the general failure of development. Ferguson argues that once progress, and belief in progress is removed, the graph reorganizes into a permanent hierarchical stratification in which 'tradition' equates to low status, and 'modernity' equates to high status. Ferguson's grim prognosis applies to Kabul as well, especially in how representations of the country are produced and propagated through transnational discourse. Numerous Western accounts of Kabul since 2001 begin by portraying the country as non-modern, and this is a very interested discourse that profoundly shapes the scope and terms of funding for both humanitarian aid and longer-term development.

I agree with Ferguson's argument that hierarchical difference is reaffirmed and performed through transnational discourse. Ferguson's argument pertains to Afghanistan as much as countries in sub-Saharan Africa. At the same time Kabul *has* been modernizing very explicitly since 1919. Several books, such as Iqbal Ali Shah's *Modern Afghanistan* (1939) and Vartan Gregorian's *The emergence of modern Afghanistan* (1969) directly contradict the tone of contemporary American discourse, which relies on the assumption that Afghanistan is not, and has never been modern. The devastating civil war of 1992-1996 can be misinterpreted as 'a step backward' or 'de-modernization,' when in fact it was a product of very contemporary geopolitics. Not only was this the site of the last proxy war between Western and Eastern Bloc countries in the Cold War, but the overthrow of the Najibullah regime in 1992 was part of an ongoing process of shifting governmentality away from welfare regimes and toward 'lean government' in regimes

across the globe. The civil war that ‘rolled back’ the Afghan welfare state from 1992 to 1996 happened at exactly the same time as reductions in welfare and entitlements in Western countries. Not only is Afghanistan modern, but it experiences neoliberalization at the same time as other regimes across the world.

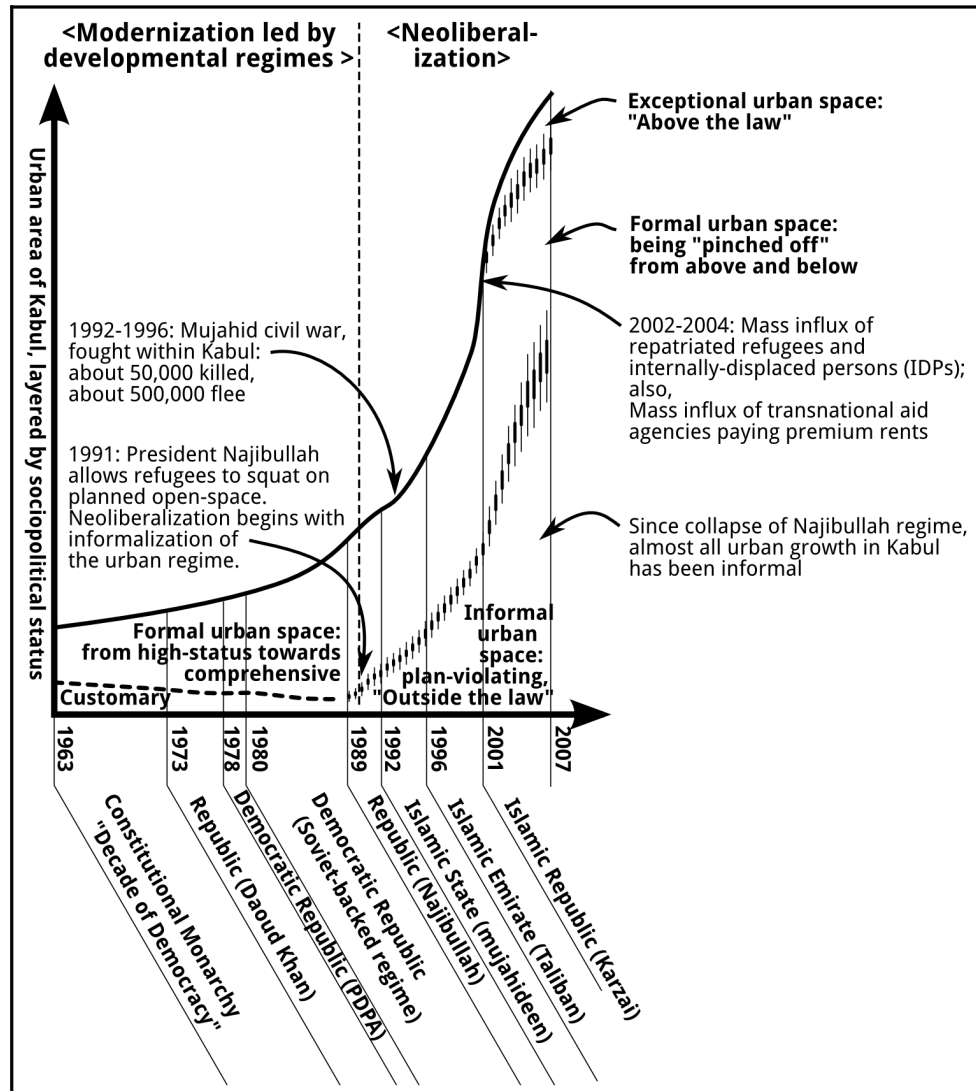


Figure 3.2. Modes of planning in Kabul after 1962 (Author 2010).

Figure 3.2 shows the latter part of the same graph shown in figure 2.1, focusing on the period of comprehensive planning and subsequent fragmentations of sovereignty. During the ‘developmentalist’ period, customary urban development was disparaged as ‘substandard.’ With the adoption of the 1964 Kabul Master Plan, the municipal government began to modernize the entire city, rather than develop new neighborhoods in a piecemeal fashion as it had been doing since 1935.⁷² New, planned developments continued to be regarded as higher-status, but the Plan was to move the entire city up to

72 Arez, Ghulam Jailani, and Andreas Dittmann. 2005. *Kabul: Aspects of urban geography*. Peshawar.

this preferred condition.⁷³

A survey map of the city in 1976 shows both formally-planned and irregular settlements. By that year, only about ten per cent of the city remained irregular. The third Master Plan continued to govern the modernization of the city until 1990, when President Najibullah began to violate the plan by allowing internally-displaced refugees to squat on public land slated for planned development. In figure 3.2, this moment is shown as a vertical dashed line that distinguishes the era of comprehensive modernization from the subsequent era of neoliberalization.

After 1991, almost all urban growth in Kabul was in violation of the third Master Plan. Thus, this new development becomes informal (rather than customary) as a political condition. *Technically* it is illegal; but the distinction of rationalities discussed at the beginning of this chapter is useful here. Insisting on the legality or illegality of any given development tends to be a political tactic in Kabul, deferring the fact that this condition emerges from urban politics in which legality is an effect, more than a cause. By 2003, Plan-violating irregular settlements comprised almost sixty per cent of the built area of the city. The distinction between formal development and irregular/informal/Plan-violating is increasingly unclear. This uncertain distinction is represented graphically in figures 3.1 and 3.2 by a change from a simple dashed line to vertical hachures between formal and informal urban development.

After 2001, a small but growing portion of Kabul began to be developed by agents whom the Municipality cannot control. Only Afghan citizens can purchase land in Kabul, with the important *exception* of foreign embassies. Afghan security forces control the territory of the nation (*zamin watani*), *except* for areas directly controlled by the Coalition Forces and ISAF. Afghans have the right to access all of the same spaces as foreigners, *except* for spaces in which alcohol is served. The Municipality maintains governing control over all documented property in Kabul, *except* for properties grabbed by commanders in the United Islamic Front (“Northern Alliance”) when it Liberated Kabul in November 2001. In a case that involves both informalization and exceptionalism, the politically embarrassing distribution of land in Shir Pur to political elites in 2003 was in fact a distribution of military land by Muhammad Qasim Fahim, who was Minister of Defense at the time. I was surprised when Ramazan Bashardost—reputedly one of the most ethical and honest politicians in Afghanistan—insisted that the land-distribution in Shir Pur was *legal*. His point, though, was that the technical legality of this land-transfer discredited the political regime of Hamid Karzai and his cabinet.

Formal urban planning continues in Kabul, as Chapter Three will show. However, informalization and exceptionalism are two political processes which encroach on this formally-governed terrain. Like Oren Yiftachel, I use the spatial expression “from above” and “from below;” but in this formulation, the effect is a “pinching-off” of the formally-planned space in Kabul. This parallels the erosion of sovereignty by the Municipal government as its role in the overall urban regime of the city is infringed by the national government, foreign forces, and transnational development agencies.

73 Nemat, Abdul Khaliq. 1976. “A strategy for restructuring of the central business district of Kabul.” School of Planning and Architecture.

Making sense out of a fractured planning process

This argument proposes several extensions to planning theory, and development theory related to urbanization. First, cities are planned insofar as urbanization is governed by an urban regime. Second: though political regimes use the moral individual as the metaphor for good government, the metaphor is misleading because urban planning does not meet the same criteria as personal intentionality. Normative propaganda notwithstanding, the multiple agencies that constitute the urban regime operate with widely-varying degrees of coherence. The Deleuzian concept of *assemblage* is a better descriptor for the loosely-aggregated character of urban regimes; and rather than a coherent intentionality, the techniques of rule by urban regimes can be better understood as an array of *rationalities*. These include technical, epistemological, and aesthetic rationalities, but the most important is practical political reason, or *phronesis*.

But wait: there is more. Political rationality itself has differentiated into sovereign political reason and biopolitical reason. The normative ideal of planning, within the profession, corresponds only to biopolitical reason: it directly corresponds to our origin-story. In practice, many different modes of planning manifest different intersections of sovereign and biopolitical reason.

The differentiation of these two political rationalities, as presently understood, emerged under very specific conditions in Europe. Their relationship to each other continues to change under conditions of transnational neoliberalization. In Muslim-governed spaces, aspects of biopower have co-operated with sovereign power since the seventh century. This includes both hygienic practices, and since at least the eleventh century, a well-articulated role of the public inspector (*muhtasib*). In Kabul under the present Islamic Republic, intersections of sovereign power and biopower manifest as three different modes of urban planning: formal, informalizing, and exceptionalist. Each respective mode will be analyzed in detail in the following three chapters.

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Chapter Four: Concrete



Figure 4.1. Staff engineers of the City Office of Plan Implementation (Author, 2006). The portraits mounted on the wall behind the engineers are of Mayors of Kabul dating back to the 1920s.

In this chapter I examine the formal urban planning of Kabul that begins in the 1920s. Within this overall analysis, formal planning is only one of the three modes shaping Kabul. Therefore, this chapter is only a partial answer to the question of how the city is being planned. Formal planning is analyzed first, though, because this is the expected form of planning. The informal and exceptional modes are defined largely by this historically-based expectation of how planning *should* work.

There are two government agencies officially tasked with the planning of Kabul. One is the national-level Ministry of Urban Development, which is responsible for urban policy across the country. The second is the Plan Implementation Office within the local municipal government of Kabul. A comprehensive master plan has been adopted to govern the pattern of urban development, land uses, and transportation. This is in fact the third in a sequence of comprehensive master plans, which began in 1964. The current plan builds upon the successes and lessons learned through the implementation of the first two.

From the above description, it might appear that the formal mode of planning in Kabul can be explained in a straightforward and succinct manner. However the Ministry of Urban Development¹ and the Office of Plan Implementation in Kabul Municipality² have been locked in conflict since early 2002, with the Ministry actively opposing the implementation of the master plan. At the request of Minister Pashtun, the Third Kabul

1 *Wezirat-e Inkeshaf-e Shahri*, which was *Wezirat-e Shahr-sazi-e Maskan* (housing) from 2002 to 2005.

2 *Daftar-e Plan-Sazi-e Shahrwali-e Kabul*. The verb *sokhtan* (with its noun-form *sazi*) means 'to build'. The title of this office could be translated as Plan Implementation, or more literally as Plan-Making.

Master Plan was formally suspended by presidential decree in 2005. Nor is there any apparent effort to replace that third plan with a fourth comprehensive plan to govern the development of the whole city. The Ministry repeatedly promised such a plan to the Municipality; I heard about this from municipal staff as early as 2006. In 2009, the Ministry issued a much-anticipated plan that turned out to be only for a massive urban expansion *outside* of the existing municipal area. Formally, the way to govern the development within the existing city would remain unresolved. Tacitly, the Ministry surrendered that control to the Municipality, which continues to be guided by the Third Master Plan. The Ministry's ex-urban expansion plan is called "Modern Kabul" (*Kabul Jadid*), and represents the desire to start with 'blank ground' to plan a proper new city, rather than struggle with the intractable politics of the existing one. In this chapter we will see that the very term *jadid* marks an underlying struggle to assert what it means to modernize a city, and most critically, what it means to be modern.

The name of this chapter, 'Concrete' is a metaphor for the meaning of formal planning in Kabul. Planners in the Municipality clearly expressed a strong belief that the nature of formal planning was to govern urban development through forecasting and direct control. However, interviews with developers and conversations with Afghans across the city reveal a different understanding among the urban population. They value the Master Plan as an official declaration of governmental intent. It reduces uncertainty in an otherwise uncertain urban environment—not because it is an accurate forecast of what the city will be like, but because it indicates where they can invest in specific locations, with the least likelihood of future conflict with the government.

This sense of lowered risk is dramatically expressed by greater investment in durable building materials. In areas where Kabulis feel that they have built in conformance with the Master Plan, they build in reinforced concrete, or fired brick that is plastered over to appear like concrete. Investment in these more expensive building materials marks an expectation of secure tenure. The use of concrete as a building material is therefore a direct indicator of greater investment in place, and a reasonably accurate indicator of the condition of urban formality.

In search of the urban regime

The protracted conflict between the Ministry of Urban Development and the Municipal Plan-Building Office reveals an important question: How do we identify the 'urban regime' of Kabul? How is the ongoing development of the city actually governed? In North American scholarship, a well known pair of studies of urban government in New Haven addresses this question from two contrasting perspectives: Liberal-pluralist and Marxist, respectively. Robert Dahl's *Who governs?* (1961) argues that New Haven's governing has become pluralized and democratized, no longer dominated by an elite class even in the most diffuse sense.³ William Domhoff critiques Dahl's work in *Who really rules?* and argues that urban change is indeed still governed by elite institutions (among them, Yale University) and an informal association of social, political, and economic

³ Dahl, Robert Alan. 2005. *Who governs? Democracy and power in an American city*. 2nd ed. New Haven: Yale University Press.

elites in New Haven.⁴

However this pair of studies presents a false dichotomy: that the question of an urban regime is answered only by either disproving or demonstrating the presence of an elite governing *structure*. In *Regime politics: Governing Atlanta 1946-1988*, Clarence Stone rejects both positions because they share an assumption that the issue is “social control:”

My argument is that social control is not a helpful lens through which to view power and that its unchallenged acceptance has caused *both* the pluralist and elitist schools of thought to misunderstand the character of power *as it operates in modern societies*.⁵
[emphases in the original]

Instead of social control, Stone proposes the concept of “social production” emerging from actual practices. Stone draws on Charles Tilly’s argument that modern ‘society’ is not bound together by a coherent ideology, but rather functions through a “loose network of institutional arrangements” in which different stakeholders struggle, compete and negotiate. John Friedmann was developing a very similar argument in that same time (1987),⁶ rejecting the positivist idealism of technical-rational planning in favor of planning as engaged practices of ‘social learning’ and ‘social mobilization’. This focus on practices, and the re-sequencing of practice before theoretical understanding, corresponds to what Foucault meant by distinguishing political rationalities from hegemonic paradigms. A political rationality is a way of getting things done, operating much more at the level of assumptions and habits than at the level of ideals, ideologies, and worldviews.

What is so striking about formal planning in Kabul is not that there are ideological differences between factions who shape the city. In their respective ways, Mouffe,⁷ Mollenkopf,⁸ Stone, and Tilly⁹ have all argued that politics are inherently contentious, including urban politics. What I observed in Kabul was not just these ideational-level disagreements, but also fundamentally different habits and assumptions about how policies would be implemented. Using the distinctions described in Chapter Three, ways-of-getting-things-done are expressions of differing *techne*, in this case what Foucault calls ‘technologies of rule.’ The very different experiences of Afghans educated in the Soviet planning system and exiles who learned policy in the West can be described as differing *sophia* or in Bourdieu’s sense, differing *habitus*.¹⁰ Pulling these together into decisions based on situated judgments (*phronesis*), planners at the two agencies arrive at sharply contrasting policy recommendations. To implement the Master Plan, or to abandon it and upgrade existing informal settlements, are not merely two options in a debate about urban policy. They are expressions of fundamentally different political rationalities, different ways of understanding the meaning of planning itself. Unlike

4 Domhoff, G. William. 1978. *Who Really Rules? New Haven and Community Power Reexamined*. Santa Monica, Calif: Goodyear Pub. Co.

5 Stone, Clarence N. 1989. *Regime Politics: Governing Atlanta, 1946-1988*. Lawrence, Kan: University Press of Kansas, p. 220.

6 Friedmann 1987.

7 Mouffe, Chantal. 2005. *The return of the political*. London: Verso.

8 Mollenkopf, John H. 1983. *The contested city*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.

9 Tilly, Charles, and Sidney G Tarrow. 2007. *Contentious politics*. Boulder, Colo.: Paradigm Publishers.

10 Bourdieu, Pierre. 1977. *Outline of a theory of practice*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Dahl's plurality, this disagreement more closely resembles Yiftachel's characterization of a 'deeply divided' society in which evaluative criteria for policy success or failure has diverged.

This schism compounds the operation of formal planning, but also opens up the space in which both informal and exceptionalist planning have emerged. One way to read this fracturing of planning into multiple modes is that formal planning occurs where either the Ministry or the Municipality governs. By implication, then, urban informality and exceptionalism would emerge in ungoverned spaces, or where the urban regime fails to govern. But researchers from Perlman¹¹ to Fawaz¹² have argued that informal urban development is very much governed; and as Caldeira¹³ and Yiftachel¹⁴ have shown, so is elite-exceptionalist urbanization.

In Chapter Three I briefly describe the distinct political rationalities of formal, informal, and exceptionalist planning. In Chapters Five and Six I will develop the latter two arguments in greater detail. This argument—that fundamentally different modes of planning govern the shaping of spaces across Kabul—indicates that the regime which governs the city is also fragmented. What Tilly and Stone call “loose networks” and Ong and Collier¹⁵ call “assemblages” continue to govern Kabul even as they fragment from each other. All of the agencies mentioned thus far constitute the urban regime of Kabul: the national and local governments, the diplomatic community, the U.S.-led foreign military presence, multilateral development agencies, international aid agencies, and security contractors. I will continue to use the term ‘urban regime’ throughout this text, but with caution: it is difficult to overstate how incoherent that regime appears in practice in Kabul.

To identify planning processes in the city, I began by observing how different agents and agencies shaped, used, and understood urban space. This is a narrower focus than trying to identify the whole urban regime, and the way that ‘it’ acts. I distinguished the modes of planning described in this text through field observation of actual urban transformations, and inquiries about the rules and methods under which they occurred. Thus, the three case-study chapters are named for different building materials that stand as a proxy and a metaphor for different modes of planning. “Concrete,” in English, implies certainty and definitiveness. As a mode of planning, it represents explicit governmental declarations of intent, and thus lowered risk to local builders and rebuilders. “Clay” in English represents plasticity; and as a mode of planning the uncertainty and negotiability of informalized relations between the urban regime, builders, and residents. In Dari, the term for clay used in bricks is *gil*, which translates as “dirt,” with the same pejorative connotations as in English.

11 Perlman, Janice E. 1976. *The myth of marginality: Urban poverty and politics in Rio de Janeiro*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

12 Fawaz, Mona. 2009. “Hezbollah as urban planner? Questions from and to planning theory.” *Planning Theory* 8:323-334.

13 Caldeira, Teresa Pires do Rio. 2000. *City of walls: crime, segregation, and citizenship in São Paulo*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

14 Yiftachel, Oren. 2009. “Critical theory and 'gray space': Mobilization of the colonized.” *City* 13:246-263.

15 Ong, Aihwa, and Stephen J Collier, eds. 2005. *Global assemblages: Technology, politics, and ethics as anthropological problems*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.

“Mirrorglass” is a term that I had to develop for that which dares not speak its own name: imperial practices of both local and foreign elites in the planning of the city. Mirrorglass implies a surreal, ephemeral quality to the presence of elites, who at times seem like astronauts attempting to colonize an alien planet. By definition, the security measures that envelop ‘transnationals’ in Kabul make it very difficult elites and regular Kabulis to have any direct contact at all. Thus, regardless of what foreigners and Afghan expatriates *intend* to do as individuals or whole agencies, the political rationality of risk-mitigation governs the way they are encountered in urban space, and a large part of how they allocate resources to shape that space.

As discussed in Chapter Three, the ways that urban resources get allocated cannot be easily correlated with individual intentions, nor with explicitly-stated institutional policies. However, resource-allocations *do* tend to be consistent with overall political rationalities. The distinction may seem subtle. ‘Developmentalist’ planning, for example, is often characterized as a worldview, not just a set of assumptions and ingrained habits about how to get planning done. But embedded in the developmentalist approach are an array of assumptions about the role and capacity of the government in the planning of the city. The full implementation of the Master Plan, as it was originally conceived, presumes three things. First, that the urban regime is powerful enough and coherent enough to enforce the implementation. Second, that the government should be actively involved in transforming not just the material form of the city, but also the urban economy and the psyche of the population. Third, that the role of the planner is as a technical expert who implements this vanguardist approach to modernization.

Likewise, the neoliberalizing approach to formal planning is rarely seen by its proponents as an ideological approach. In fact most of the proponents of communicative, participatory planning would angrily object to it being classified as ‘neoliberalizing.’ I do not make that characterization based on ideological positions. Most of the urban planners I know oppose policies that have damaged economic growth through both structural-adjustment conditionalities and financial deregulation. But at the level of practice, communicative planners and equity planners seek to increase the *choices* of stakeholders, and counter the top-down tendency of centralized, technocratic planning. Transnationally, the corresponding movement is towards more nimble, context-responsive NGOs rather than cumbersome local bureaucracies and multilateral organizations. The sentiment of this nongovernmental movement was captured most vividly by Keck and Sikkink in their edited 1998 volume, *Activists beyond borders*.¹⁶ My own choices to get involved with planning in Kabul were to approach the nongovernmental Afghan Coalition in Fremont. Only by the choice of Afghan-Americans did I end up working for the Ministry of Urban Development; and only through that incidental situation did I encounter the staff at the World Bank who would later support my field research. In *practice*, my own initial choices fit a neoliberal political rationality.

16 Keck, Margaret E, and Kathryn Sikkink. 1998. *Activists beyond borders: Advocacy networks in international politics*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press.

Legitimacy through the image of modernity

In a previous draft of this text I dedicated an entire chapter to questioning understandings of modernity. Upon rewriting this text, I have been threading that question through the respective stories of theory (Chapter 3) and each mode of planning (Chapters 4 through 6). Modernity *as an image* plays an important role in both understandings and disagreements about urban modernization. In the following section I will describe Amanullah's effort to create a *Kabul Jadid* in the 1920s, which relied heavily on the outward form of urban transformation. Urban modernization was one of several visible strategies used by Amanullah; he also required that Afghans in the Kabul wear European-style clothes, to push them into modernity quite literally through embodied practice. An English journalist, Roland Wild, reacted with derisive condescension towards this policy in 1932:

The secret was in the clothes.

He had found it. You cannot rule by law and order, by precept and principle, if you dress in the style of the jungle and the hills. You can attain dignity by the pulling on of a pair of trousers. You can tie up your impressiveness every morning as you lace up your boots.¹⁷

However, only decade later, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry turned this condescension on its head by mocking the belief among Europeans that credible knowledge can only be produced by those who were dressed in properly European clothes:

I have serious reasons to believe that the planet from which the little prince came is the asteroid known as B 612. This asteroid has only been seen one time through the telescope, in 1909, by a Turkish astronomer.

He thence made a grand presentation of his discovery to the International Astronomical Congress. But no one believed him because of his clothing. Grown-ups are like that.

Fortunately for the reputation of Asteroid B 612, a Turkish dictator insisted that his people, under pain of death, dress themselves in European clothing. In 1920 the astronomer gave his demonstration all over again, dressed in a very elegant suit. And this time everybody accepted his report.¹⁸

In Saint Exupéry's passage, the Turkish astronomer *is* in fact competent to make an astronomical observation that Europeans failed to do, *and* the Europeans are unwilling to accept modern technical competence from someone who appears to be non-modern.

Saint Exupéry's characterization of Europeans in 1943 corresponds to the Western presumption that Afghans are not modern—a perception that persists from Wild's 1932 account up through comments by congressman Lee Hamilton in 2009 and Ambassador-General Karl Eikenberry in 2010. Inherent to the nature of modernity itself is a certain degree of condescension towards previous efforts at modernization; American planners, for example, cringe at the thought that they are associated with the top-down imperiousness of Robert Moses' projects. But to ignore the fact that Afghans have been engaged in active projects of modernization since 1920 says much more about the people who are in a position to ignore this history. Nine years after American forces helped take

17 Wild, Roland. 1982. *Amanullah: Ex-King of Afghanistan*. Quetta: Nisa traders, p. 167.

18 Saint Exupéry, Antoine de. 1943. *Le Petit prince*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovitch, pp. 15-16. Author's translation.

over Kabul, they have not bothered to find out some of the most basic facts about the city which they occupy and shape.

Name	Era	Comments
Amanullah Khan	1919-1929	Gains full independence from British; starts Kabul Jadid, 1923; founds Kabul City gvt, 1924; convokes Parliament, 1928.
Habibullah II (perjoratively called 'Bacha Saqaw')	1929	Forces Amanullah to abdicate and rules for nine months. Overthrown by Nader Shah.
Nadir Shah Musahiban	1930-1933	Abandoned Amanullah's overt modernization projects, including Kabul Jadid; but proceeds with many 'quieter modernizations.'
Zahir Shah, with uncles: M.Hashim Khan as PM Shah Mahmud Khan as PM	1933-1953 1933-1946 1946-1953	Remains neutral in WWII despite popular pref for Germany, Turkey. Modernization of urban core begins, 1949.
Zahir Shah, with Daoud Khan (cousin) as Prime Minister and Defence Minister	1953-1963	State-led development. Modernizing of military. Major, planned, urban expansions. 1953: US overthrows Mossadegh in Iran; 1953: Khrushchev succeeds Stalin in USSR
Zahir Shah, with PMs: Dr.M.Yusuf, Maiwandwal, Nur Ahmad Ettemadi, M. Zahir	1963-1973	"Decade of Democracy" was constitutional Monarchy. First and Second Master-Plans of Kabul, 1964 and 1970.
Daoud Khan (deposes cousin, Zahir Shah)	1973-1978	Developmental-state dictatorship. Third Master Plan for Two Million, 1978

Source: Wali Ahmadi, 2006.

II. Beaux-Arts urban modernization: Amanullah and the *Kabul Jadid* plan, 1919-1929

To understand the long trajectory of modern urban planning in Kabul we need to return to Amanullah Khan's program of aggressive modernization in the 1920s. Initially, Amanullah sought to build an entirely new capital in the Chahr Dehi basin, seven kilometers southwest of the city of Kabul as it existed in 1920. He created the Kabul Jadid agency in 1923 to implement the construction of the new capital. *Jadid* is a term which translates as 'modern', in contrast to *naw*, the Indo-European cognate that translates as 'new'. Brinkley Messick¹⁹ explains that the term *nizam jadid* was used by the Ottoman regime in the late nineteenth century to describe their programs of modernization. Though it can be translated as 'new order,' a more accurate translation would be 'modernizing order'. Amanullah was a close follower of Turkey's recent history through his father-in-law, Mahmud Tarzi. Tarzi had grown up in exile in Ottoman Damascus, and then become a disciple of Sayed Jamalluddin al-Afghani in Cairo. Amanullah's father, Habibullah, had pardoned the Tarzi family and Mahmud had returned to Afghanistan in 1902. Fluent in Turkish, Arabic, and French, Tarzi had served

¹⁹ Messick, 1993.

as a translator to King Habibullah. His favor in the royal court was confirmed when Amanullah married his daughter Soraya. She, like her father, was deeply committed to modernization. With Amanullah, they made this the central project of his regime.

To concretize his modernizing order, Amanullah hired a German architect, Albert Harten, to lay out Kabul Jadid in the Beaux-Arts style of urban design popularized by Daniel Burnham at the Chicago World's Fair in 1893. The central palace of government, the *Kasr-e Dar ul-Aman*, was designed with explicit references to the Reichstag in Berlin (Figure 4.2). Radial avenues physically and visually connected the Dar ul-Aman palace with the Forty Pillar (*Chehel Sotun*) palace and park to the east, an additional palace to the south (*Tapa-e Taj Beg*); and a circular plaza at Deh Mazang to the north. The visual centrality of Dar ul-Aman Palace was to reflect its administrative primacy, and serve as an anchor for District One of Kabul Jadid (Figure 4.3).



Figure 4.2. *Dar ul-Aman Palace, 1923-1928. (Author, 2003)*



Figure 4.3. *Kasr-e Dar ul-Aman as focal point of the urban design of Kabul Jadid. Note the irregular pattern of the urban development outside of the property directly owned by the government. (Google Earth, 2009)*

The First District was to include the government buildings of a growing bureaucracy.²⁰ The Second District was to be commercial, and subsequent numbered districts were to be residential quarters, built with modern infrastructure including wide, paved streets, drainage, and electricity.²¹

A more prosaic modernization under the Musahibans, 1930-1963

Amanullah's regime collapsed in the fall and winter of 1928-1929. In 1928 the king and his wife embarked on a seven-month tour of Europe, which was apparently a diplomatic success abroad but a disaster for his domestic legitimacy. Gregorian argues that Amanullah's acts of symbolic modernization offended the sensibilities of many Afghans, and were not compensated by rapid improvement in material living conditions for most of the population.²² When Amanullah was forced to abdicate, his former Army Chief, Nader Khan Musahiban, returned from a semi-exile in France to raise a force in southeast Afghanistan and restore order to the country. A tribal leader from the mountainous terrain north of Kabul had taken power and was considered unacceptable as king by the Pashtun elites (Table 3.1). By October of 1929 Nader had captured Kabul and was named king: Nader Shah.²³

From the beginning of his campaign to restore stable rule in Afghanistan, Nader Shah had relied heavily on socio-political bargaining with tribal leaders across the country. He continued this policy once in office. He affirmed demands for more transparency in government, giving a detailed public accounting of his sources of assistance during his campaign to reconquer the country, and explaining his relationship to foreign powers. He deregulated clothing—which is not to say that Afghans were free to wear whatever they wanted, but that clothing standards would be enforced socially, not by the state. In practice this meant women had to wear full *chaduris* again while in public in Kabul.²⁴ He also affirmed the importance of an elected Parliament; but rather than frame it as a break from the past, he framed it as a recovery of a lost practice.

While Nader Shah revoked many of Amanullah's *symbolic* acts of modernization, he proceeded to implement numerous institutional changes that Gregorian characterizes as modernizing.²⁵ Nader Shah reopened all the high schools (*lysa*) that Amanullah had founded, and established a Faculty of Medicine in 1932 that began the process of creating Kabul University. Although Nader Shah was assassinated in 1933, he set a tone of political continuity that served to stabilize the regime for the next forty years. Nader Shah's teen-age son Zahir Shah, was immediately King. For the next ten years Nader's brothers ran the government as a sort of collective regency. Each surviving brother took a key post: Hashim Khan as Prime Minister, Shah Wali Khan as Minister of War, and Shah

20 Wild, Roland. 1932. *Amanullah: Ex-King of Afghanistan*. Quetta: Nisa traders.

21 Nemat, Abdul Khaliq. 2007. Oral presentation to students of Kabul University. Kabul: Ministry of Urban Development.

22 Gregorian, Vartan. 1969. "Amanullah Khan, ill-fated champion of modernization." Chapter 9 in *The Emergence of Modern Afghanistan; Politics of Reform and Modernization, 1880-1946*. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press.

23 Gregorian, Vartan. 1969. *The Emergence of Modern Afghanistan; Politics of Reform and Modernization, 1880-1946*. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press.

24 *ibid.*, p. 265.

25 Gregorian, 1969:307.

Mahmud Khan as Minister of Interior.²⁶

Several of Nader Shah's reforms had particular impact on the pattern and process of urbanization of Kabul. First, he turned over the royal property of Afghanistan to the public treasury, to be administered by the Ministry of Finance. This has enabled government agencies to directly control the development of large tracts of land in Kabul.²⁷ Secondly, he abandoned the Kabul Jadid project, renaming Dar ul-Aman to "Dar ul-Fanun" as part of a program of suppressing the name of Amanullah and Mahmood Tarzi (Figure 4.4). Gregorian notes that in his own research, which began in 1960, he found no mention of Mahmood Tarzi in any government documents after 1930.

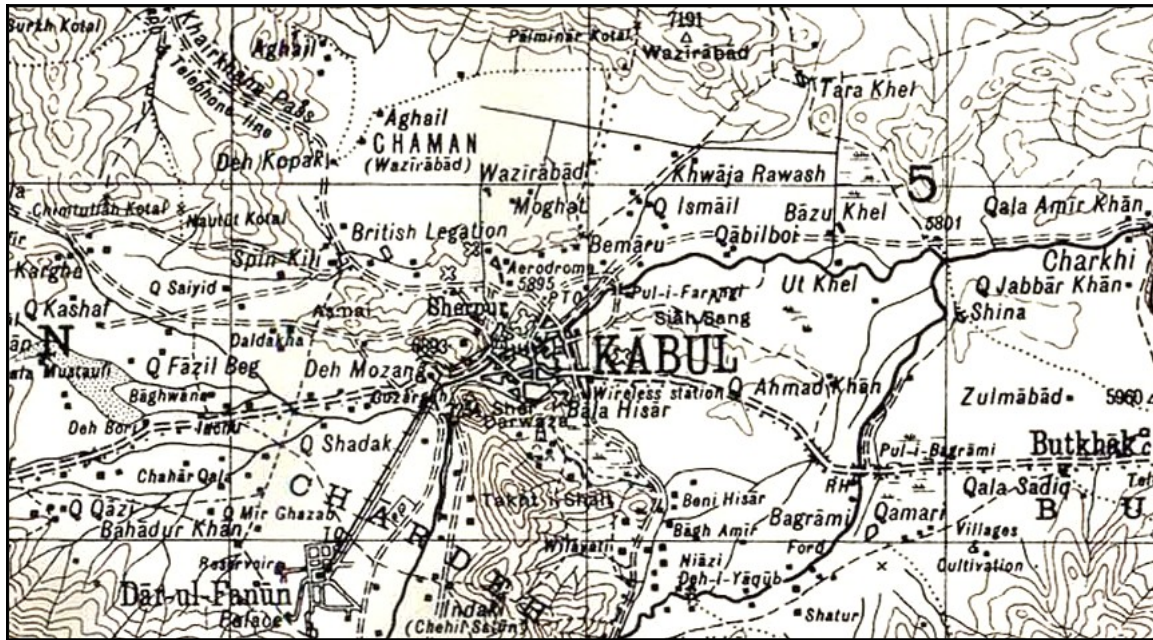


Figure 4.4. Kabul circa 1940 (U.S. Army Map Service 1942). Note that the railroad is still shown linking the center of the city with "Dār ul-Fanūn" (Dār ul-Amān) in the southwest. The name of the whole basin is shown as "CHARDEH" (four-villages). An aerodrome is indicated at the former site of the Sher Pur Cantonment, just above the center of the image.

Instead of expanding southwestwards, Nader Shah decided to enlarge Kabul northwestwards. This was a process begun by Sher Ali in the 1860s, with the construction of a large new military compound at the base of Bibi Mahro hill. The compound was called "Sher Pur." The British occupied the compound briefly during the Second Anglo-Afghan War (1868-1880), and renamed it *Shahr-e Naw*, or 'New City'.²⁸ Once Nader Shah was established in the Arg, he promoted the urbanization of the adjacent gardens and revived the name 'Shahr-e Naw' for this new district. In reciprocal differentiation, the preexisting city became known as *Shahr-e Kona*, which can be translated simply as 'old city,' but *kona* has the sense of 'used' or 'worn,' such as a dog-eared book or a used car. Thus in a much quieter way, the historical rupture of modernity is performed

26 Gregorian 1969:294.

27 Shah, Iqbal Ali. 1939. *Modern Afghanistan*. London: S. Low, Marston & Co., Ltd., p. 218.

28 Tarzi, Mahmud. 1998. *Reminiscences: a short history of an era (1869-1881)*. Afghanistan Forum, p. 11.

spatially and through nomenclature. Wealthier families moved out of the Old City and rented their old family homes to poorer families, increasing the density and rate of poverty among residents in the Old City. The New City was clean, uncrowded, and wealthier; the Old City became crowded and poorer. Rabinow traces a similar process in French-occupied Morocco, where the *médinas* became slums and the *villes nouvelles* became standing arguments for the preferability of modernity.²⁹ Timothy Mitchell describes how the Khedive of Egypt—still nominally an Ottoman viceroy—built orthogonal towns as part of a process of psychologically impacting the population.³⁰ The visual, perspectival order of orthogonal urban streets and blocks was used as a continuous representation of political order, a method of subject-formation at the scale of whole urban environments and societies. Mitchell emphasizes that this was a technology of rule used both by ‘local’ political entities and European colonial powers in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In Egypt the Khedive was using techniques of spatial ordering in model villages, military encampments, and primary schools several decades before the British occupied the country in 1882. Amanullah employed this strategy overtly in the layout of Kabul Jadid, whereas the Musahibans were much more understated in their creation of a visually modern urban order.

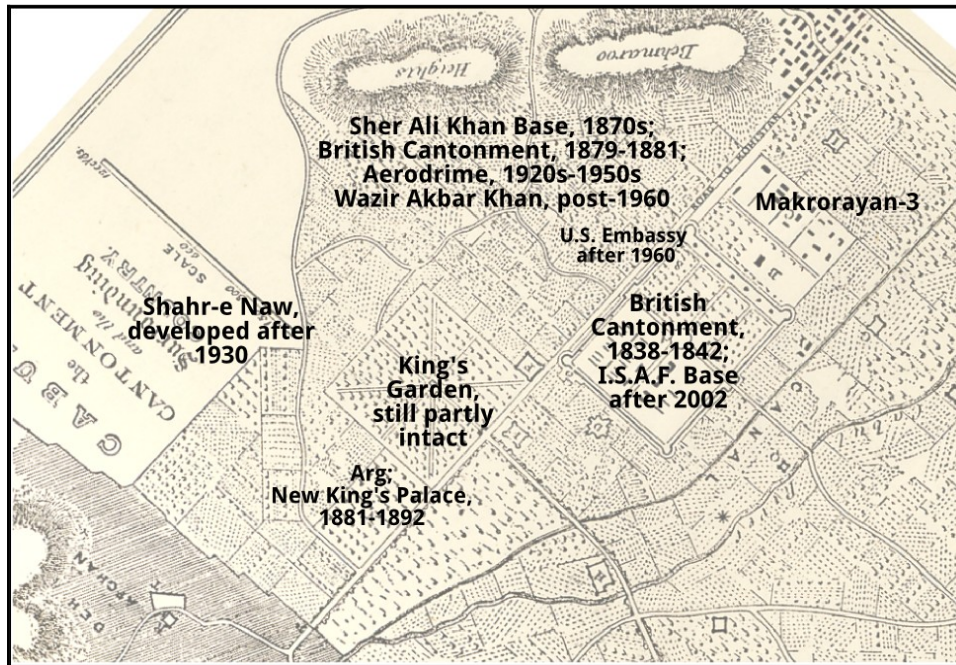


Figure 4.5: gardens northwest of Kabul city, 1842.

29 Rabinow, Paul. 1995. *French modern: Norms and forms of the social environment*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

30 Mitchell, Timothy. 1988. *Colonising Egypt*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

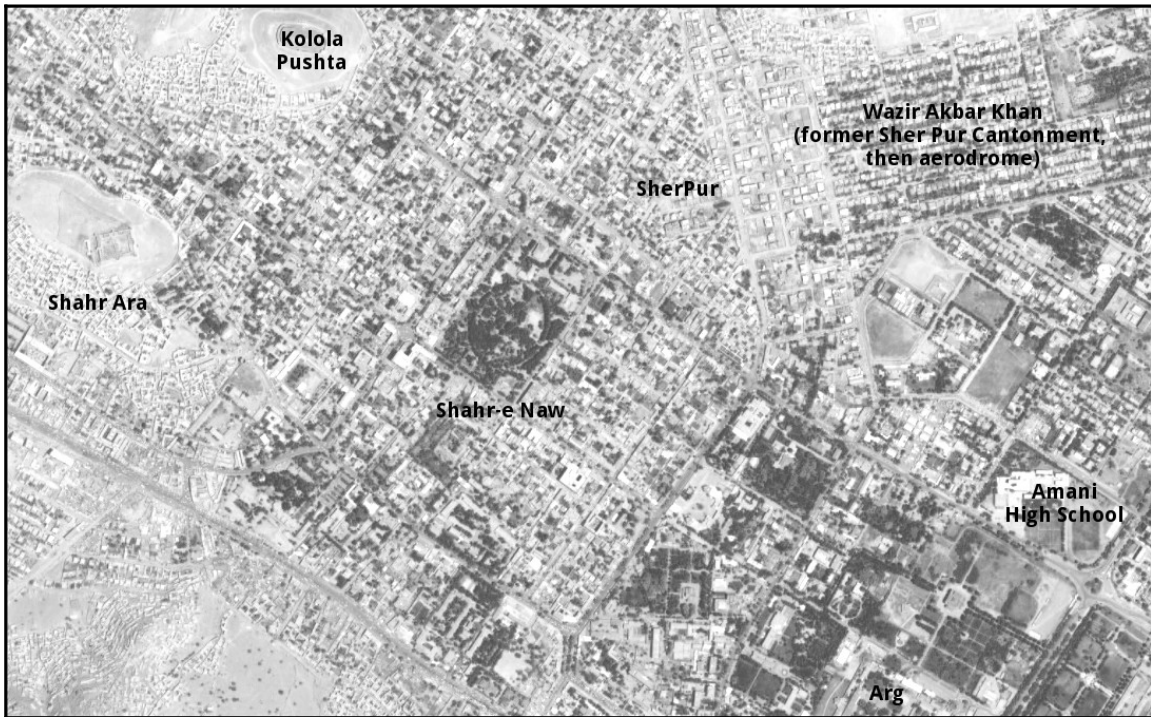


Figure 4.6: Shahr-e Naw, developed after 1935. (Google Earth, 2005)

The pattern of urban development in Shahr-e Naw was driven by the preexisting pattern of aristocratically-owned gardens in the area. The preexisting gardens defined the street and block pattern, including its distinctive 42-degree clockwise rotation. Retaining the garden pattern produced a number of very large blocks, with ‘flag’ lots linked to the street by long driveways (Figure 4.7).



Figure 4.7: Over-size blocks in Shahr-e Naw. Note parcels which are buried within the middle of blocks. (Google Earth, 2005)

In this process, the city planners of Kabul worked out a preferred lot and block size. Using these new norms they laid out several districts from 1942 to 1963 which followed regular gridded patterns. Subsequent districts were subdivided more efficiently, with the long axis of blocks tending to run east-west so that the long axis of rectangular lots tends to run north-south. Architects at the Polytechnic explained that this works particularly well for a common urban house type:

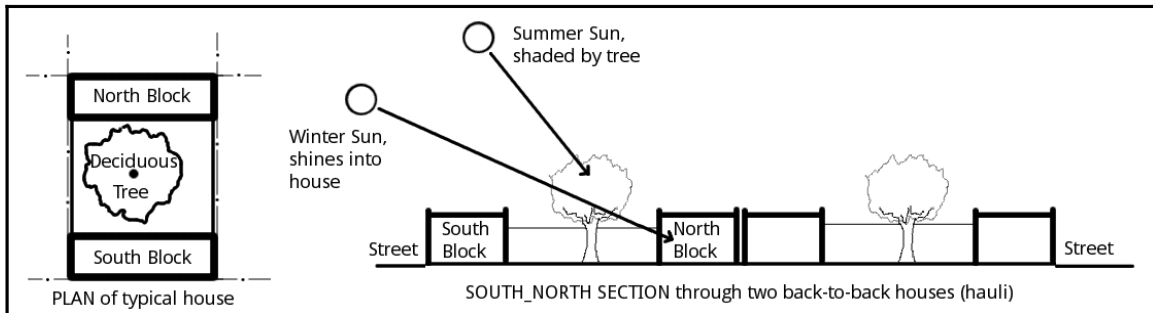


Figure 4.8. Plan and section of typical house as used by Afghan planners to decide lot and block configurations after 1940 (author).

In this typical plan, each house has a surrounding perimeter wall. Within this perimeter there is a north block of rooms, a central garden, and a south block of rooms. Windows face into this garden. During the hot summer, the south block remains cool because the windows face north, and the northern rooms remain cooler because the south-facing windows are shaded by trees in the garden (figure 4.8). During the winter Kabul gets very cold: often below -5 degrees Celsius. In the winter the lower noon sun shines through the leafless branches of the deciduous tree and into the northern rooms. The southern rooms would have to be heated if they were to be used at all.³¹

By the late 1950s, many Afghans were building ‘centered’ houses rather than ‘perimeter’ houses. ‘Centered’ houses, where all the rooms are incorporated into a single structure set back from the perimeter wall on all sides, fit within the same lot size and geometry as ‘perimeter’ houses; therefore this shift in typical house-type did not affect the lot and block geometry used by Kabul’s planners. This newer type relies entirely on artificial heating, rather than a combination of artificial and passive-solar heating. The ‘centered’ house style was and still is considered more modern; it is associated with the newer building materials of concrete, fired brick, and cement plaster, rather than the ‘traditional’ (read: pre-modern rupture) construction with clay-brick covered by mud plaster. In 2003 I had a lengthy debate with a young staff-member of the Ministry of Urban Development and Housing about the relative merits of clay-brick housing over concrete housing, especially the cost but also the thermal insulation of earth compared to thermally-conductive concrete and fired brick. Other Western scholars such as Bechhoeffer and Don Watts had raised the same questions in the late 1970s.³² However, my colleague at the Ministry was scandalized and offended that I was arguing the merits of earth architecture. Clay-brick houses in Kabul were associated with illegality, informality, and—worst of all—backward village culture. Ascriptions of modernity are deeply emotional, linked much more closely to questions of shame and the performances of class-difference than to technology itself. ‘Sophistication’ becomes a term associated with technologies that signify that historical break, the shift to the modern; whether the newer technology is actually more efficient or effective is entirely incidental.

In this case, the decision of public-sector urban planners to use a *typical* house-type as the basis for lot size and block orientation is distinctly modern. The fact that Afghan planners were recognizing a passive-solar urban housing type in the 1940s should provoke non-Afghans to reconsider the prevailing ‘capacity-building’ rhetoric which repeatedly implies that Afghans are not competent to plan their own cities. I am not arguing that ‘indigenous Afghan planning’ is inherently better than Western planning; indeed the evidence presented here refutes the assumption that a stable distinction between Western and non-Western planning exists. In the same years that urban planners in Kabul were gridding-out urban districts with typical lots, blocks, and street-sizes, they were also engaging in urban renewal of blighted inner-city districts—at the same time and in the same way as their contemporary American counterparts. Beginning in 1949, Mayor Ghulam Mohammed Farhad created the Jad-e Maiwand and Jad-e Nader Pashtun

31 Najimi, Abdul Wasay. 2007. Personal interview. Kabul.

32 Watts, Donald. 1360 Hijra Solar (1982 Anno Domini). “Kabul’s Old City: Implications for alternatives to ‘Western’ housing.” *Afghanistan Quarterly* 34:4.

as wide, straight avenues that cut through the core of the Old City (figure 4.9).³³ International-style concrete buildings were built along both avenues, and the Mosque of the Brick Bridge—and the bridge itself—were rebuilt by 1954 (figure 4.10).

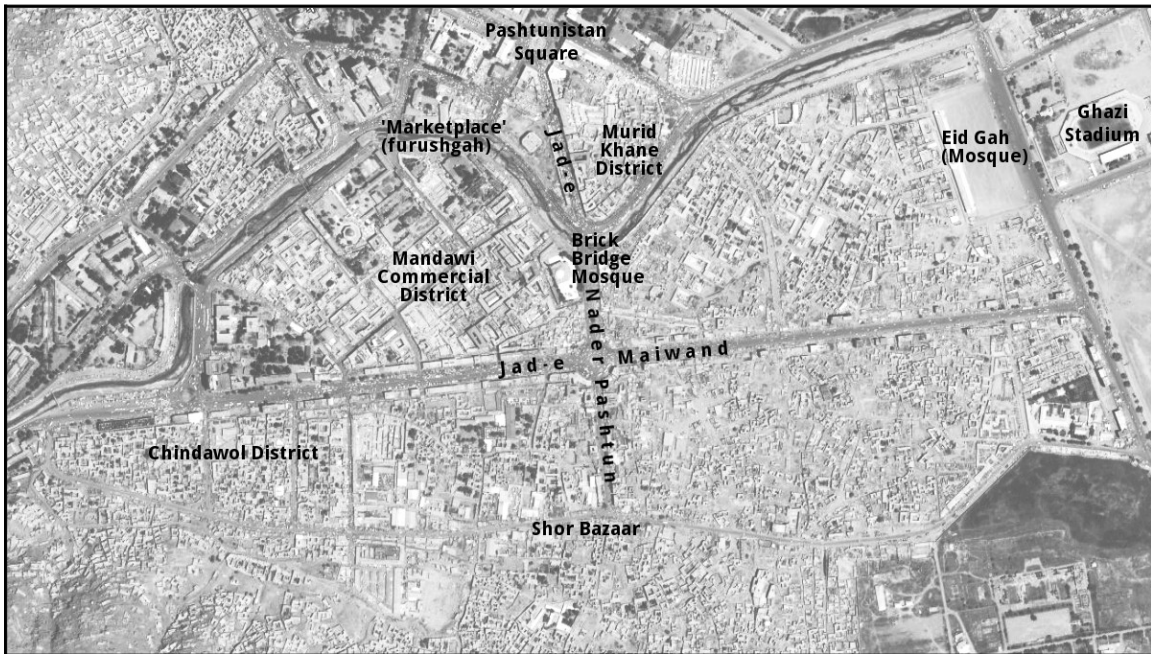


Figure 4.9. Old Kabul, 2008. The intersecting streets of Jad-e Maiwand and Jad-e Nader Pashtun are clearly visible, cutting through the old urban core. The area northwest of this intersection was developed in the early twentieth century, and substantially redeveloped after 1949. The areas to the east of Jad-e Nader Pashtun were substantially destroyed during the mujahid civil war of 1992-1996. (Google Earth)



Figure 4.10. Brick Bridge Mosque (Masjid-e Pul-e Khishti), rebuilt in 1954. (Author, 2007)

33 Arez, Ghulam Jailani, and Andreas Dittmann. 2005. *Kabul: Aspects of urban geography*. Peshawar, PK: self-published, p.30.

The urban renewal of the Old City was an economic success: motorized traffic could gain access, supplying both goods and customers to the merchants in the urban core.³⁴

A number of foreign planners have expressed sharp regret at the destruction of historic urban fabric in Kabul through urban renewal, but several counterarguments need to be considered. First of all, most of the ‘Old City’ of Kabul was not very old. Kabul had shrunk to a minor town by the late Mughal period; it only regained significance and size when Timur Shah made it the capital of Afghanistan in 1776. Second, the two historic sites in the Old City that *did* predate Timur Shah were destroyed by the British in the nineteenth century: the Mughal-era Chahar Chata Bazar in 1842, and the sixth-century Bala Hesar in 1880. Two more recent landmarks—Timur Shah’s mausoleum and the Eid Gah mosque—were unaffected by the 1949-1954 redevelopment. Third, assignation of ‘historic’ status to and the imposition of a regime of preservation upon urban districts was an expression of colonial domination in both North Africa and South Asia. To declare an urban district ‘historic’ was to declare that it had been produced by social institutions that had been superseded by the historic rupture into modernity, which in these regions was the imposition of European domination. *Medina* had meant city in Arabic; but in French West Africa it came to mean the old, dominated, space-of-otherness. The modern city is translated spatially, politically, and linguistically to the *ville nouvelle*. Urban conservation under conditions of colonization was another technology of rule, one that Ananya Roy calls ‘management of difference.’ In contrast to this process, the Kabul City government’s decision to cut through the core of Old Kabul is a mark of the sovereignty of the urban regime at that time.

Sadly, any debate about maintaining an intact historic city center were rendered irrelevant by the civil war between the mujahid factions from 1992 to 1994. While the majority of the city was only scarred by the fighting, the neighborhoods in the eastern half of the Old City were shelled flat. Wood and metal hardware were scavenged from the ruins over the following decade. By the time I visited the area with Ministry surveyors in June of 2003, most of the area had been reduced to featureless humps of clay (figure 4.9, right-hand side).

34 Nemat, 1976.

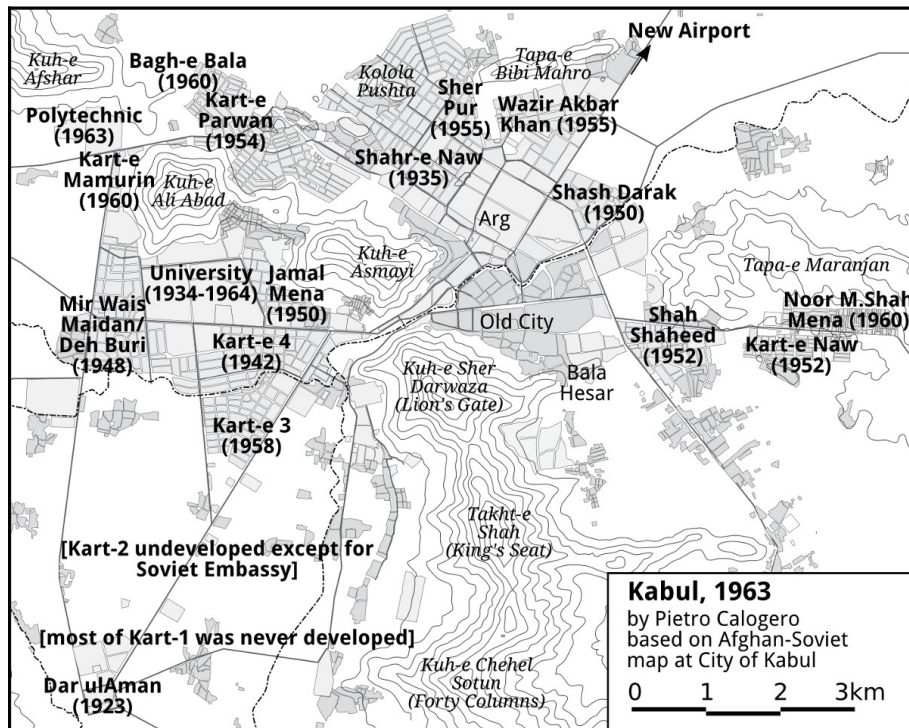


Figure 4.11: Urban districts of Kabul developed between 1923 and 1963 (author).

Figure 4.11 shows the extent of Kabul in 1963. It shows, furthermore, how Amanullah's plan for Kabul Jadid was partially acknowledged and incorporated into subsequent plans. Amanullah had planned out concentric districts (*kart*) with the Dar ul-Aman Palace as the focal point. Kart-1 was to be administrative, Kart-2 was to be commercial, and Karts 3 and above were to be residential. When a new residential neighborhood was laid out across from the University in 1942, it was initially called Sher Shah Mena; but it later became known by the name Amanullah had given to that area: Kart 4. When Kart-3 was developed in 1958, the City planners openly acknowledged its relationship to the Amanullah plan by name. furthermore, although Kart-1 was never developed according to Amanullah's plans, the national government has retained title to the land. In 2007, one of the most influential ministries—the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development—moved to the area just north of the Dar ul-Aman palace, adjacent to the restored Kabul National Museum. Northeast of the ruined palace, USAID began developing the American University of Kabul in 2005. Seventy years after it was formally abandoned, Amanullah's plan for Kabul Jadid still influences land uses in southwest Kabul.

I have sketched the history of these two eras of formal planning to demonstrate that the legacy of modern planning in Kabul predates Soviet technical assistance by almost four decades. In the discourse I have encountered since 2002 there is a tendency to contrast newer, transnational planning with an ostensibly outdated Soviet-style developmentalist planning. This dialectic masks prior Afghan experience with modern planning and the lasting influence of these prior projects on the pattern of urban

development in Kabul to this day. Furthermore, the Soviet:transnational planning dialectic implies that urban planning in Afghanistan is at best derivative of Western models. In 1986 Partha Chatterjee challenged the implication that nationalist thought among colonized peoples is a derivative discourse.³⁵ I argue that Amanullah's Beaux-Arts planning might have explicitly emulated Western models, but the socio-political bargaining of the Musahibans produced an urban modernity which was distinctly Afghan.

The map shown as figure 4.11 marks the moment of transition to yet a third method of formal, Concrete planning in Kabul. The map itself shows the extent of urban development achieved under the Beaux-Arts and district-by-district methods up to 1963. However, the original version of this map was produced by Soviet planners as a basis for producing the First Master Plan of Kabul in 1964. After this point, Kabul was no longer developed district-by-district as discrete projects. Instead, Kabul began to be conceived of and planned as a whole city within both a natural landscape and within a broader scheme of integrated economic development.

Cold War geopolitics and developmental regimes: A new socio-political bargain

Geopolitical realignments after the Second World War impacted Afghan politics immediately, and by 1963 affected the method and pattern of urban planning in Kabul. As the new dominant power in a Western Bloc of nation-states, the United States pressured its European allies to decolonize Asia and Africa. This was due, in part, to geopolitical competition with the Soviet Union. The USSR regarded Communist revolutions as liberations; anti-imperialism was a core political rhetoric of the Soviet regime. And indeed, most Communist movements in Africa and Asia were in opposition to European colonial regimes.³⁶ Afghanistan was one of the few Asian states with full political sovereignty in the 1920s, and both Amanullah and the Musahibans strongly endorsed the principle of national independence. The rhetoric of independence is inscribed on the urban landscape of Kabul as the Independence Monument near Deh Mazang; the Monument to the Unknown Soldier at the crossroads of Jad-e Maiwand and Jad-e Nader Pashtun in the center of the Old City; the French-language Independence High School adjacent to the Arg; and in the Independence Day celebrations each year at the Eid Gah—the place from which Amanullah proclaimed the war against the British in 1919 which won Afghanistan full independence. To protect their sovereignty the Musahibans strongly endorsed the idea of an international organization for diplomacy and mediation. They joined the League of Nations in 1934 and the United Nations in 1946.

However, Afghanistan was immediately entangled in the binary logic of the Cold War. As India gained independence, Afghans regarded the Durand treaty of 1893 as voided by the abolition of the British Raj government. The Musahibans argued that the ethnically Pashtun regions of the Northwest Frontier, the Tribal Areas, and northeastern Baluchistan should become part of the Afghan state. Meanwhile, Jinnah and the All-India

35 Chatterjee, Partha. 1986. *Nationalist thought and the colonial world: A derivative discourse?* Totowa, N.J.: Zed Books for the United Nations University.

36 Crow, Ben, Henry Bernstein, and Hazel Johnson. 1985. *Third World Development*. New York: Grosvenor Press, p.86.

Muslim Congress formed a new homeland of West Pakistan that incorporated these areas, through the extremely violent partition with the Republic of India. Afghanistan was the only country which voted against the recognition and admittance of Pakistan into the United Nations. Afghanistan's 'Pashtunistan' policy brought the two countries to the brink of war in the 1950s, and remains a source of tension to this day. However, Pakistan's far greater concern was India, and India aligned loosely with the USSR. Though Nehru preferred to be seen as a leader of the Non-Aligned Movement, President Eisenhower (1953-1961) and his Secretary of State John Foster Dulles saw India's refusal to conform to the Western Bloc as a firm indicator that India must be Eastern Bloc. Using this simplistic logic, Pakistani leaders were able to secure military and political affiliation with the US as a geopolitical ally in the Cold War. For instance, Pakistan became an original member of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization in 1954, although this organization was ostensibly intended to prevent the expansion of communist political control in Southeast Asia. This new split within South Asia effectively blocked Afghanistan's ability to balance the interests of powers in South Asia against the Soviets to the north, as previous Afghan leaders had done for nearly a century.

On the other hand, the geopolitical competition to win the loyalty of leaders and peoples around the world lent a powerful impetus to developmental assistance. Scholars of development rightly point out that many of the practices of development had been developed earlier, but the inaugural speech of Harry Truman on January 20, 1949 is important because his declaration to turn the 'New Deal' for America into a 'Fair Deal' for the rest of the world marked the beginning of a concerted effort to support developmental regimes—a commitment which was matched by the Soviets in their foreign technical and developmental assistance. The United States had emerged from the Depression only through very substantial state intervention in the economy financed by a sharply progressive income tax regime; the highest American earners were taxed for seventy per cent of their income. European countries adopted political-economic strategies ranging from Keynesianism to Socialism, which the United States tolerated so long as they remained opposed to Soviet political interests. Only a small minority of free-market economists regarded this strategy of state-developmentalism as a mistake, a position articulated by Friedrich von Hayek as *The road to serfdom* in his seminal work in 1944.³⁷

A series of events in 1953 consolidated the transitions of the immediate postwar years. In the United States, Eisenhower was elected, and adopted a more *reapolitik* strategy in the geopolitical competition with the USSR. Eisenhower decided to reinstate the Shah of Iran by discrediting and overthrowing the democratically-elected Prime Minister Mohammed Mossadegh, in order to ensure a 'reliable ally' in this critical nation on the Persian Gulf.³⁸ Prime Minister Shah Mahmoud Khan lost credibility within Afghanistan after he failed to develop cordial relations with the United States; this enabled his nephew (King Zahir's cousin) Daoud Khan to succeed Shah Mahmoud as Prime Minister. Thus began a decade of much more aggressive modernization under this

37 Hayek, 1944.

38 Kinzer, Stephen. 2003. *All the Shah's men: An American coup and the roots of Middle East terror*. Hoboken, N.J: John Wiley & Sons.

second-generation Musahiban. In the wake of American indifference toward Afghanistan, Daoud sought greater developmental assistance from the Soviets. In that same year Josef Stalin died, and Nikita Khrushchev began to consolidate power as his successor. Khrushchev's urban development strategies would define the character of Soviet technical assistance to the urban planning of Kabul from 1961 to 1992, and continues to have a strong effect to this day.

Khrushchev's Soviet urban planning

Khrushchev identified planned urban development as a crucial strategy for the Soviet Union from the beginning of his tenure as General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Stalin had focused on rapid industrialization, and largely ignored the urbanization associated with that industrialization. The resulting urban growth in many Soviet cities was comparable with informal settlements in many cities of the global South today: irregular, dense, and entirely lacking in urban services.³⁹ Khrushchev sought to address this through massive urban development programs, beginning with the Sixth Five-Year Plan for the National Economy of the USSR, 1956-1960. To develop an urban strategy, Khrushchev revived the theorizations for a 'City of Socialist Man' from the 1920s and began incorporating these ideas into massive urban housing programs in the Sixth Five-Year Plan for the National Economy of the USSR, 1956-1960.

One of the key influences on early theorization of urban planning in the Soviet Union was Ebenezer Howard, who published *To-morrow: a peaceful path to real reform* (1898) and a revised edition retitled as *Garden cities of to-morrow* (1902).⁴⁰ Howard presented his ideas in the Soviet Union, and was well-known among Socialists and social-justice reformers in Britain at the time. Soviet theorists adopted several of Howard's key ideas.⁴¹ First was the idea of comprehensive urban planning, which fit well with the Marxist-Leninist idea of comprehensive economic planning. Howard argued that new, planned, economically self-sustaining communities should be planned that were large enough to support an industrial base, but small enough to avoid the social and physiological ills of large industrial cities such as Birmingham, Liverpool, and Glasgow. Early Soviet planners regarded their circumstances as unprecedented, because they were preparing to transform an agrarian-peasant society directly into an industrial proletarian society. Fundamental questions of property relations, urban and regional form, and the urban-rural relationship had to be addressed. The anarchist Peter Kropotkin pointed out that the very form and location of nineteenth-century industrial cities in Western Europe and North America were a result of capitalism. The establishment of socially just property relations was likely to trigger substantial shifts in population location and distribution.⁴² In the mid 1920s, Soviet constructivists actively debated the appropriate pattern, size, and form of the socialist city. Howard's recommended that the size be limited to 30,000 to 35,000 residents. Soviet planners considered this too small, but they also considered

39 French, R. Antony. 1994. *Plans, pragmatism and people: the legacy of Soviet planning for today's cities*. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press; p. 75.

40 Howard, Ebenezer. 1902. *Garden Cities of to-morrow (being the Second Edition of "To-morrow: A peaceful path to real reform")*. London: S. Sonnenschein & Co., Ltd.

41 French, 1994:31.

42 Kropotkin, Petr Alekseevich. 1967. *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*. Gloucester, Mass: P. Smith.

Moscow and Leningrad to be too large—a normative position that derives from Howard.⁴³ The belief that there is an appropriate size to cities seems to have been passed on to Afghan planners as well. Their common complaint that Kabul had grown “too large” might only reflect an objection to change; but planners holding widely divergent views on other issues expressed a shared assumption that new urban districts (shahraks) should be designed for a fixed number of people, typically a population of five thousand.

Howard’s advocacy for urban green space was also adopted by the Soviets, and in turn, by Afghans. For Howard, urban green space was part of his idea of ‘marrying the best traits of city and country together’ to optimize the health of the population. As discussed in Chapter Three, one of the primary impulses for engaging in urban planning in Great Britain was to manage the health of the entire urban population. This political impulse is an expression of the distinctively modern biopolitical rationality. Soviets embraced this Garden City principle, developing extensive urban parks and green spaces in cities across the USSR. In late Soviet planning, green-space design became increasingly associated with urban environmentalism. This movement affected Afghan planners most directly, through the 1980-1989 Soviet occupation. When I first reviewed the Master Plans of Kabul I was confused about the large proportion of the city that was set aside as “green space.” Without intensive irrigation, most of these “green spaces” would remain barren clay, salt-pan, or mountainous bedrock. I came to understand the genealogy of this desire for green space through an appeal by Kabul Municipality to the Dutch government for funding in 2008. The Mayor of Kabul described the need to create these green spaces as ‘lungs of the city’ that would reduce airborne pollution and dust. The term ‘lungs of the city’ is a key phrase from the Garden Cities movement. Although the actual implementation of extensive parkland in most of Kabul seems infeasible due both to lack of water and to the desperate need for housing, the *ideal* of green spaces as urban lungs seems to derive from Soviet planning principles shared through technical assistance from 1960 to 1989.

In addition to their concern for both regional planning and healthy urban open-space, Soviet planners in the 1920s were also very concerned about the severe shortage of urban housing in Soviet cities. Both the biopolitical and sovereign political imperatives intersected here: they needed a healthy, productive population as part of a rapidly-expanding industrial workforce. Not only would an effective housing program affirm the legitimacy of the Communist regime, but it would provide the capacity for that regime to support itself economically and defend itself militarily. The work of Chadwick, Snow, and the housing reformers in Berlin, London, and New York had made clear the linkage between housing conditions and population health.⁴⁴

To address their housing crisis the Soviets looked to European efforts to apply principles of mass-production to housing. This included the industrial-style housing designs emerging from the Bauhaus,⁴⁵ Le Corbusier’s advocacy of high-rise housing,⁴⁶

43 French, 1994.

44 Hall, Peter Geoffrey. 1988. *Cities of tomorrow: An intellectual history of urban planning and design in the twentieth century*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell, Chapter Two.

45 Sherwood, Roger. 1978. *Modern Housing Prototypes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

46 Le Corbusier, 1927.

and the concept of integrated super-blocks (*zielenbau*) in the Netherlands and Germany.⁴⁷ The Soviets synthesized these respective needs into the concepts of urban regions (*rayon*) and their subunits (*microrayon*). Microregions were intended to be integrated urban units containing mass-produced apartment blocks, shops, schools, playgrounds, and shared infrastructure such as steam heat. Consistent with socialist ideals, open space was to be shared and enjoyed by the people as a whole in an open layout (figures 4.12 and 4.13).

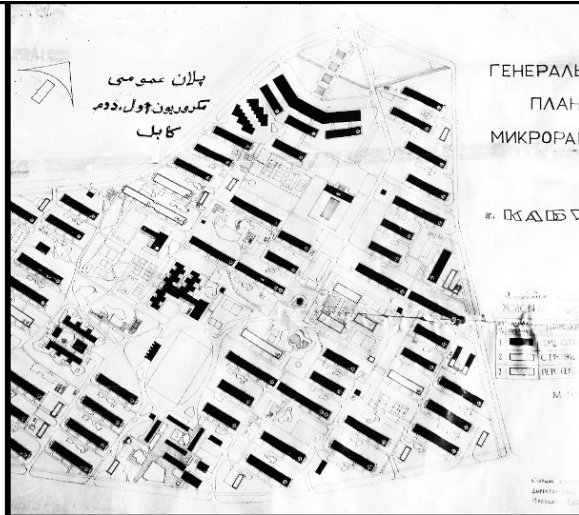
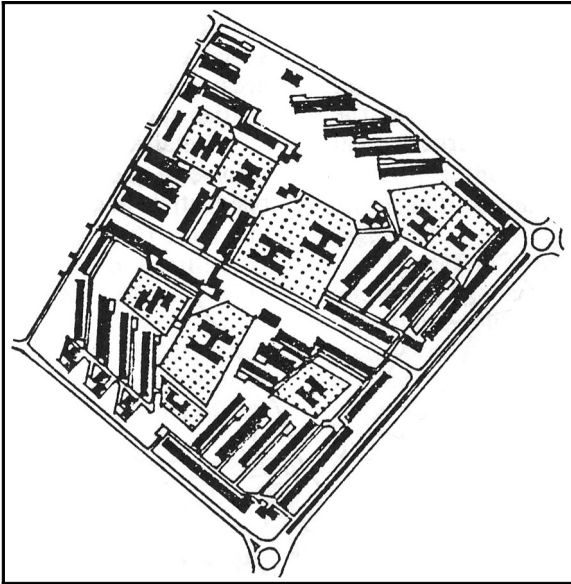


Figure 4.12. Figure-ground plan illustration of typical microregion in V. Krogus' 1987 article.

Figure 4.13: plan of Microregions One and Two, Kabul (courtesy House Construction Unit, 2007)

As in the USSR, the quality of construction in microregion apartment blocks improved over time. Early versions from the late 1950s and early 1960s are pejoratively called “Khrushchovska” by Russians, and are known for their shoddy workmanship. The Microregion-1 in Kabul, built in 1964, is called *makrorayan-e kona* in Dari. *Kona*, as mentioned earlier, does not just mean ‘old;’ it also connotes a used, worn quality. Figure 4.14 shows a typical block in Microregion-3, which has held up well over the last thirty years.

47 Bauer, Catherine. 1934. *Modern Housing*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.



Figure 4.14. Apartment block in Microregion-3 (author, 2003).

Far more significant than the structures themselves, though, is that Microregions 1 through 4 include integrated infrastructure. Kabul is at 1900 meters in altitude; thus sub-freezing temperatures are typical in winter. As I mentioned in the Preface, several children freeze to death each winter *inside* houses in Kabul because the poorest households cannot afford fuel. Staff at the AREU and UN-HABITAT also mentioned that during the winter they see a rise in serious respiratory problems as poorer households burn plastic bags and other refuse in poorly-ventilated houses. I encountered this in the fall of 2007 when our neighbors—the family that lived in a hut behind a UN guesthouse—began burning plastics for heat. Given the intensity of the smoke that filled the yard between our houses, I cringe to think of the breathing conditions inside their house. Residents of the microregions, in contrast, have steam heat. In figure 4.15, one of the staff of the House-Building Unit is showing me the plans of the district heating system for Microregions 2 through 4.



Figure 4.15. Staff of Housing Building Unit showing me the integrated heat, water, and drainage systems diagram for Microregion 3 and 4 (author, 2007).

A totalizing concept of urban planning

For the Soviets, urban planning was considered the material-spatial component of their effort at revolutionary social transformation. In many respects this parallels contemporary attempts to use outward spatial transformations to induce collective psychological shifts, from the orthogonal new towns described by Mitchell in Egypt to the flowing open spaces described by Holston in Brasilia, and including the Kabul-Jadid project of King Amanullah. This parallel helps explain the cordial relations between the early Soviets and Amanullah: though he was a King, the Soviets called him the ‘Red Prince’ because his efforts to modernize Afghan society were seen as a significant hastening of Afghanistan down the inevitable path towards proletarian communism.

Khrushchev took the Soviet urban concepts described above and put them into practice, beginning with the Sixth Five-Year Plan in 1956. He developed a prototype microregion in southwestern Moscow in 1957, and promoted the scaling-up of systematized construction to deploy this prototype as a model across the Union. By the beginning of the Seventh Five-Year Plan in 1961, Soviet planners began assisting Afghan planners, and the first Microregion in Kabul was built only seven years after the first prototype in Moscow. By the late Soviet period, the ideal of integrated, comprehensive urban planning had become embedded in bureaucratic practice. In his article on “The management of town planning processes in the USSR,” V. Krogus explains how urban planning policies have become an integral element of an overall Soviet developmental program by the 1980s:

In the USSR the policy for urban and regional development is an organic part of the general process of state management of the economic and social development of society. The long-term aims of this development are formulated in the programmes and directive documents of the

Communist Party and the Soviet Government, and are more precisely defined in the *Integrated Programme for Scientific and Technical Progress in the USSR*. This is worked out every five years by the USSR Academy of Sciences and the State Committee for Construction for the subsequent 20-year period. The Programme includes a section entitled, 'The socio-economic problems of settlement, town planning, and state and housing construction', which contains general aims, quantitative indicators of development, and a calculation of necessary resources, and as a whole is co-ordinated with all other branches in the programme. On the basis of the Integrated Programme for Scientific and Technical Progress, the General Scheme for the Allocation of Productive Forces and the General Scheme of Settlement for the next 15 years are worked out in close co-ordination.⁴⁸

Krogius' description epitomizes the Soviet understanding of rational-comprehensive planning. As Clarence Stein argues, this model is predicated on the assumption of effective social control and a deep capacity for governmental enforcement.

Furthermore, this model assumes that urban planning is primarily a physical-spatial urban design problem. After articulating national policies in ten-year, five-year, and one-year plans broken down by jurisdiction, "the spatial framework of this development is elaborated in the process of urban planning design, in schemes and projects for regional planning, as well as general and detailed projects for the planning of individual towns."⁴⁹ Towns, in turn, are designed as urban *rayon* and *microrayon* within the same general policy framework:

Detailed planning and construction projects aim to *resolve all questions* concerning the distribution of various residential and communal buildings, as well as the provision of services, utilities and parks, co-ordinated both functionally as well as in terms of architectural composition. The construction project is worked out in sufficient detail to allow an estimate of the costs to be drawn up, and for the working drawings to be given to the contractor by the building organisation.⁵⁰ [emphasis mine]

Krogius' description of integrated coordination from the most general Union-wide development priorities down to "detailed projects for the planning of individual towns" is the expression of an ideal that was not entirely reflected in practice. A group of American planners in 1976 noted that Soviet planners were not able to control the rate of growth of the USSR's largest cities, let alone limit their size. "One area in which the Soviets have had relatively little success has been in containing city growth," Underhill writes. "Often industrial and city officials simply circumvent the law and the professional city planners have no choice but to go along with them".⁵¹ However, that ideal of a coordinated, comprehensive planning was very compelling. That ideal structured many of the assumptions and practices of urban planning in the USSR. Through thirty years of technical assistance, many of these practices and their embedded assumptions were also passed on to Afghans. Afghans were willing partners in that transmission, at least from the 1950s through the 1970s, and it built on Afghans' own efforts at modernization from 1919 onward.

48 Krogius, V. 1989 [Russian original, 1987]. "The management of town planning processes in the USSR." in *Soviet planning in the 1980s: A collection of original planning papers from the Soviet Union*, edited by Patrick Whitehead. Berwick-on-Tweed: How & Blackhall; p.9.

49 Krogius, p.9.

50 Krogius, p.13.

51 Underhill, Jack A. 1976. *Soviet new towns: Housing and national urban growth policy*. Washington: U.S. Dept. of Housing and Urban Development, Office of International Affairs, p. 35.

Master-Planning Kabul, 1964-1992

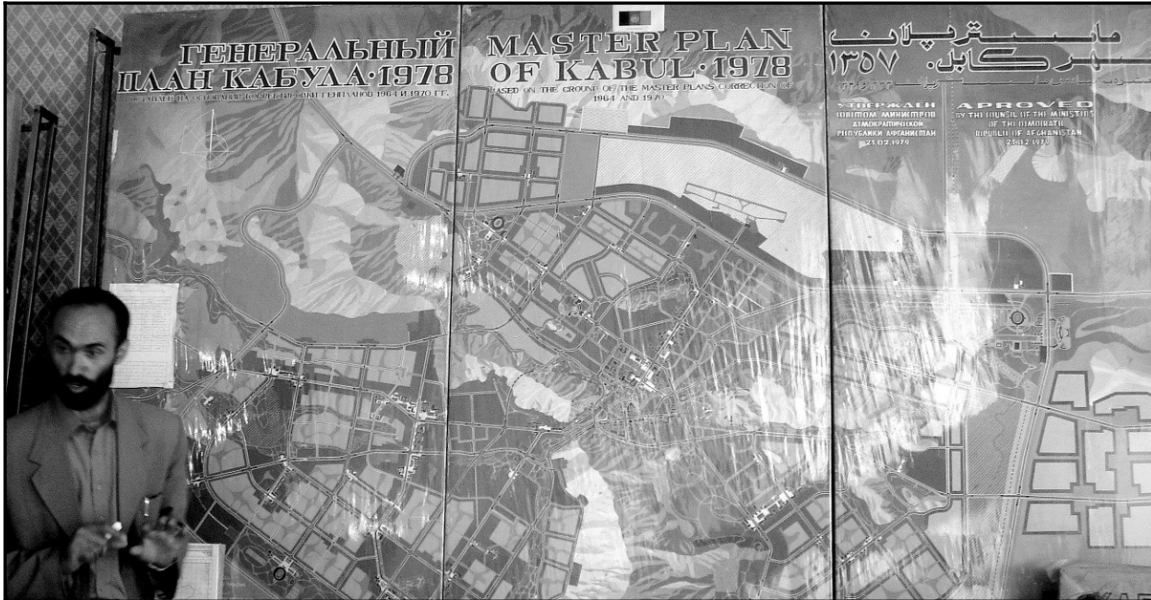


Figure 4.16. City staff planner presenting the 1978 Master Plan to students of Kabul University, June 2006 (author). The title of each panel reads, respectively:

ГЕНЕРАЛЬНЫЙ ПЛАН КАБУЛА 1978

Составлен на основании корректировки ГенПланов 1964 и 1970 гг.

MASTER PLAN OF KABUL 1978

Based on the ground of the Master Plans correction of 1964 and 1970

ماستر پلان شهر نابل. ۱۳۵۷ شده به اساس ماستر پلان ۱۳۲۳ و ۱۳۴۹

Staff-members at the City Plan-Making Office are careful to emphasize that the first and second Master Plans of Kabul were developed with international teams coordinated by the United Nations. Other Afghans outside of the City government warn that the Soviet-trained staff may be trying to downplay the significance of the Soviet role in urban technical assistance. There is extremely little available documentation on the development of the first two plans to judge this one way or the other. What evidence does survive all points to the dominant role of the Soviets in the methods and assumptions about how master-planning was done.

Master Plan No.	Year (AH/AD)	Projected Population	Allowed Floors	Participants
First	1343/1964	800,000	-	French-led team of 15 expatriates
Second	1346/1970	1,200,000	6	UNDP-led team from 35 countries
Third	1357-8/1978	2,000,000	16	USSR-led team from CZ, GDR, IN, AU

Source: Ghulam Dastagir, senior planner, Plan Implementation Office, City of Kabul (May 2007).

First of all, in the 1950s Afghanistan began producing five-year plans of national economic development. These began in synchrony with the Sixth Soviet Five-Year Plan

(1956-1960), the first to be done under Khrushchev. Secondly, the survey map of Kabul in 1963, used as a basis for the first Kabul Master Plan, was compiled in Moscow. Third, the Soviets built and educated the staff of both the Polytechnic (1963) and the Housing Construction Unit (1965). Fourth, the major urban project that was built in accordance with the 1964 Master Plan was Microregion-1. Although a French planner may have led the team who produced the first Master Plan, the production of a Microregion in conjunction with the Master Plan indicates that Soviet urban planning principles were governing the development of the master-planning process from the outset.

On the following pages I present all three plans at the same scale, using the same graphic conventions. The sequence of figures 4.17 (1964), 4.18 (1970), and 4.19 (1978) shows the clear continuity between the Master Plans, and the growing sophistication of the planners with each revision.

On Figure 4.16 I have marked Microregions One through Four with circled numbers. Microregion One was completed in the 1960s; Two in the 1970s; and Three in the 1980s. Microregion Four was begun in the late 1980s, but construction was abruptly abandoned in 1992 when the Najibullah regime was overthrown.

On Figure 4.16 I have also marked key sites with letters. The 1964 Master Plan proposed replacing most of the Old City (A) with public uses. The Arg (B), Shahr-e Naw (C), Kabul University (D), and Dar ul-Aman Palace (E) remain. The staff at the House Construction Unit confirmed that future growth was to be a series of Microregions assembled into four Regions in the north (Wazir Abad); east; southeast (Rahman Mena/Kart-e Naw); and southwest (Chahr-Dehi). The model did not show dedicated green space, but the undeveloped mountainous areas and the belt along the Kabul River appear to be dedicated open space, and on the subsequent two plans they are shown explicitly so.

The Second Master Plan, shown in Figure 4.18, was designed to guide the growth of Kabul from 500,000 to about 800,000 people (Table 4.2). As with contemporaneous Soviet master plans, substantial urban areas were set aside explicitly for both green space and for industry. In contrast to the First Master Plan, where all new residential development appeared to be microregions, this plan also included single-family housing districts similar to what Afghan planners had been doing themselves from 1930 to 1961. Khair Khana (A) and Khushhal Khan Mena (B) were developed according to this plan in the 1970s, as districts of single-family houses on the extreme northwest and west of Kabul.

The Third Master Plan, shown in figure 4.19, was designed to guide the growth of Kabul to a population of two million over a twenty-five year period, from 1978 to 2003. Former Mayor Ghulam Sakhi Noorzad states that “It’s a perfect plan made by top engineers from Germany, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Bulgaria and India”,⁵² but most of the planners I encountered only mentioned Soviet cooperation in developing this plan. Three new features on this plan are important. First, it promotes much higher residential densities as a way of doubling the population of the city without increasing the gross developed land area. Mid-rise densification only began in a few areas of Kabul after 2002, but only in the form of private apartment districts or *shahraks*. Second, most of the Logar riverway and part of the Kabul riverway are reserved as undeveloped aquifer-recharge areas. To this day, the areas designated as aquifer recharge areas in the 1978 plan remain the primary sources from which the City pumps its urban water supply. Potable water is a critical resource in Kabul: as a public health student explained, many children in Kabul exhibit symptoms of chronic underhydration such as kidney stones. In 2003 the Ministry noted that in various parts of the city, aquifers are threatened with depletion, salt infiltration, and sewage contamination. The emphasis on protecting water-quality in the 1978 plan formalized this ecological concern.

52 Cloud, David. 2005. “Rebuilding Kabul: Reprising his role as mayor, Noorzad has big plans.” *Wall Street Journal*, March 3, Eastern edition, A1.

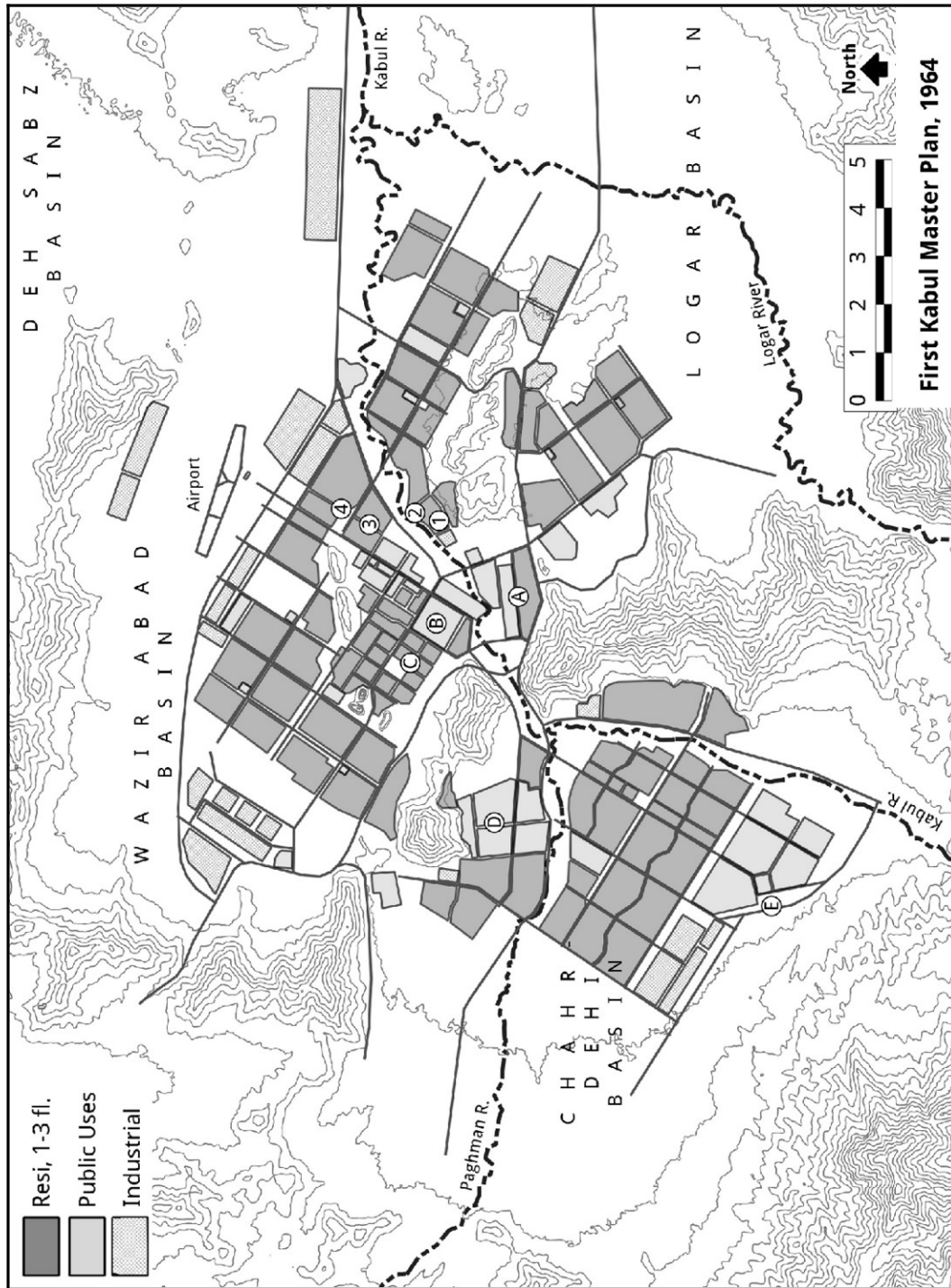


Figure 4.17. First Master Plan of Kabul, 1964. Reconstructed by the author from a photograph of a model kept in the Plan-Making Office of the City of Kabul. Microregions 1, 2, and 3 were fully built from 1964 to 1987. One sector of Microregion 4 was built before construction was abruptly abandoned in 1992.

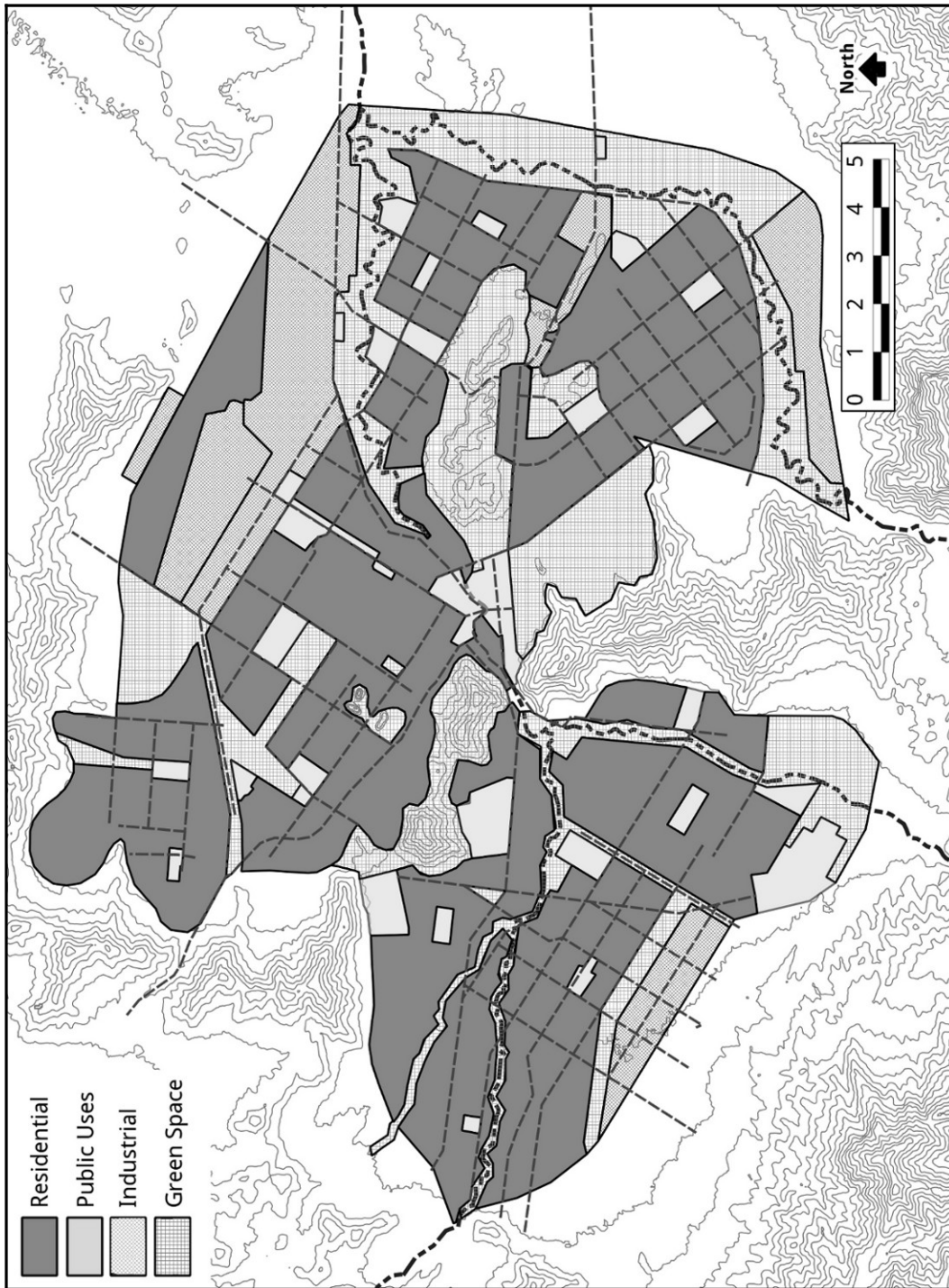
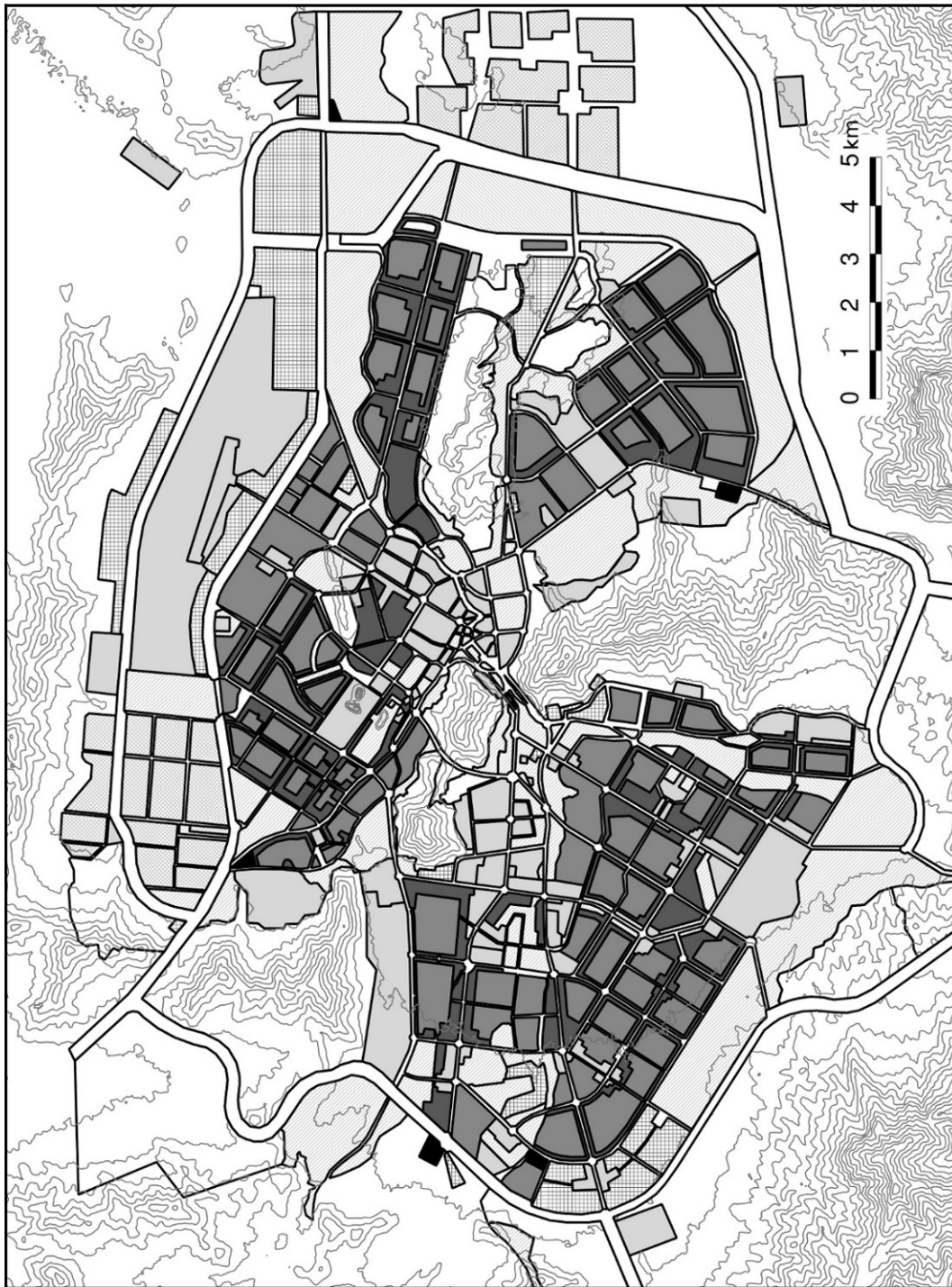


Figure 4.18. Second Master Plan of Kabul, 1970. Reconstructed by the author from a Canadian water management study in the UN-Habitat library, Taimani District, Kabul. Substantially more land area is reserved for industry in this plan. Khair Khana (A) and Khushhal Khan Mena (B) were developed according to this plan after 1972 and 1975 respectively.



*Figure 4.19. Kabul Master Plan for Two Million, 1978.
For visual clarity, all public uses have been grouped (author).
Public uses include education, health, government, airport, police/security, and cemeteries.
(courtesy of Plan-Making Office, City of Kabul, 2007).*

Negotiating access to information

I gained limited access to the Office of Plan Implementation in 2003 purely by accident. I had participated in hosting the City Economic Planning Director, AbdurRashid Janbaz, when he visited San Francisco in January 2003. While I was in Kabul in June, Janbaz asked the Planning staff to meet with me. I briefly visited the Plan Implementation Office in Kabul for several remarkably sullen meetings. I learned very little because the staff within the Planning Office did not speak English and I understood neither Farsi nor Pashto (by 2007 I understood enough Farsi to note that the City staff usually conversed in Pashto). More importantly, I did not learn because I was not asking productive questions either of myself or of the City planners. It appeared to me that the 1978 Master Plan was literally a graphic diagram of how the city should be developed: a design for a Modernist city similar to an older style of American technocratic plans. The city staff regarded the peaceful stability of 2002 and 2003 as a chance to resume implementation of the Plan.

Implementing the 1978 Master Plan would require demolishing most of the informal housing in Kabul, to replace it with mid-rise apartment buildings, parks, and the roadways of a Soviet-era Modernist city (figure 4.31). Janbaz explained that the City intended to relocate informal residents to temporary housing outside of Kabul; clear and rebuild informal areas according to the Master Plan; and then resettle the people back in the new housing. Based on comparative experience, Ministry staff and transnational consultants were worried that ‘temporary’ relocation would become very long-term, if not permanent. Several million Afghans had already lived for twenty-five years in the ‘temporary’ refugee camps set up in Pakistan in 1980. Palestinians have been living for sixty years in ‘temporary’ camps in the West Bank and southern Lebanon.

Janice Perlman's follow-up study in Rio de Janeiro⁵³ raised another concern. Rio Municipality *did* build new social housing, and many of the slum-dwellers she had first interviewed in the late 1960s were relocated to those formal housing sites. The city built the new housing on land that it could afford, on the northern and western peripheries of Rio. These sites were far from the jobs and social networks of the relocatees. Perlman observed a real loss in quality of life among these families. One resident summarized their former condition by saying that before relocation, there had “always been fruit in a bowl on the table,” symbolizing both an intact family life and sufficiency within poverty. Even when social-housing programs are successfully implemented, the net outcome can be a degradation in living conditions.

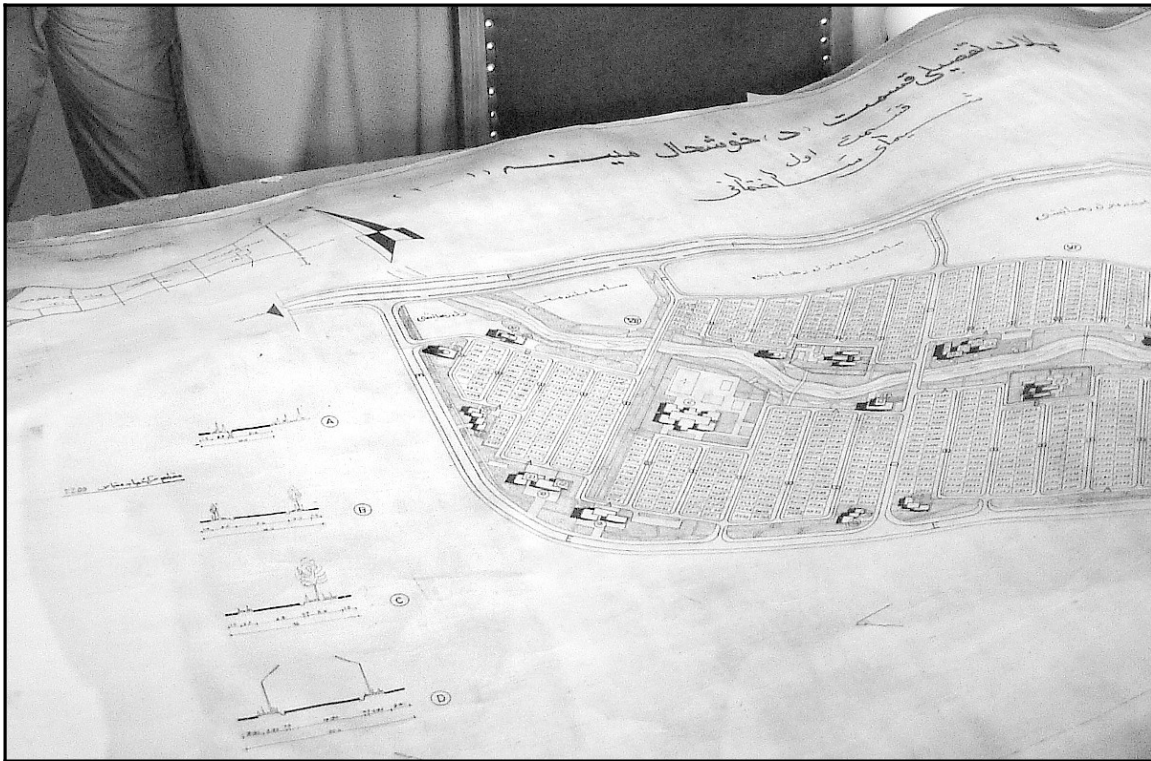
Furthermore, despite the evident desire of the Plan Implementation staff to modernize Kabul, the actual implementation of the Plan remained subject to urban politics. The Mayor, the four Deputy Mayors, and well-connected land developers within Kabul did not necessarily want to implement the *whole* Plan, or perhaps they wanted to direct the timing and sequence of its implementation towards their personal benefit. The Plan Implementation Office was unambiguous in its distinction between compliant and non-compliant, illegal urban development. But the urban regime as a whole maintained an

53 Perlman, Janice. 2004. “Marginality: From Myth to Reality in the Favelas of Rio de Janeiro, 1969-2002.” in *Urban informality*, edited by Ananya Roy and Nezar Alsayyad.

ambiguous position. As a governing assemblage, that urban regime also includes the Ministry of Urban Development and several other national-level agencies that repeatedly undercut the clear position of the Office of Plan Implementation, as did the Mayor's office within the Municipality in the case of Shir Pur. In effect, the urban regime produces the condition of urban informality through these internal conflicts and contradictions. This process will be examined further in Chapter Five.

Visualizing the Master-Planned Kabul

Consistent with Krogus' conception of Soviet urban planning, the master-planning of Kabul focused on physical planning, from the whole city to municipal regions, microregions, and specific plans; to streets, public spaces, and specific buildings.



*Figure 4.20. Specific plan of section D, Khushhal Khan Mena. (Author, 2007)
Typical street-types (A) through (D) are shown in sections on the left.*

Figure 4.20 shows a specific plan developed by the City to complete Khushhal Khan Mena, a district in western Kabul first shown in the Second Master Plan. Most of the district is comprised of individual lots to be developed as private houses; but the general massing of major public buildings is also clearly visible in the photograph. The major roadway across the north edge of the plan is a proposed enlargement of the existing road from Kabul to the Qargha Reservoir. The serpentine green-way through the middle of the site borders the Qargha River. On the left side of the plan are a series of street-sections, specifying four different street types in this specific plan. Standard roads used by the Municipality are sixteen, forty, and sixty meters wide, respectively serving as residential streets, arterials, and surface highways. However the specific plan above shows at least

three sections smaller than sixteen meters, indicating a more nuanced and site-responsive design than foreign planners have assumed of the Municipal planner-engineers. Nevertheless it is a complete design, with only the private houses left for private individuals to resolve.

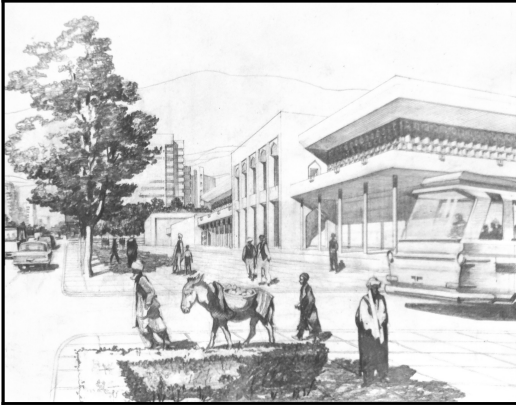


Figure 4.21. Concept sketch of modern downtown, 1981. (courtesy of House Building Unit, 2007)



Figure 4.22. Main classroom building, plaza, and fountain, Kabul Polytechnic, 1963. (author 2007)

Architectural renderings developed with the Third Master Plan show a realistic presentation of the city, given what was actually built. In the following two pages I juxtapose three pairs of images to show the relationship between what the government proposed and what has been built. Figure 4.21 shows a sketch in a book from 1981, promoting the Third Master Plan. Figure 4.22 shows the plaza and main classroom building of the Polytechnic, built by the Soviets in 1963. Both images express what architects call the high-Modernist style. Modernism as a formal style is one expression of modernity; but another dimension of modernity as a condition of urban political economy is expressed by the informal housing climbing up the slope of the mountain behind the Polytechnic in figure 4.22. Urban informality will be analyzed in Chapter Five; for the moment it is worth noting that it is also a signifier of modernity, as is the Modernist building in the foreground.

Figure 4.23 shows a typical apartment building that was proposed for a future Microregion between the village of Bibi Mahro and the airport. Figure 4.24 shows the Ministry of Education building, that was built in the 1960s. The materials, proportions, and overall composition of existing and intended buildings is visually consistent.

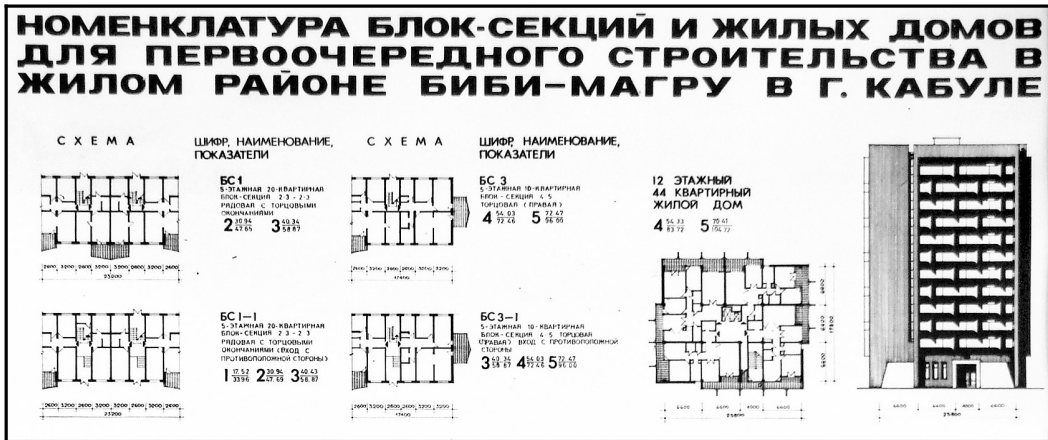


Figure 4.23. Plans and the elevation of twelve-story apartment block intended for a new Microregion at Bibi Mahro, 1981. This Microregion was not built. (courtesy House Construction Unit, 2007)



Figure 4.24. Ministry of Education, June 2006. By April of 2007 a large barrier wall was built in front of the ground-floor arcade to protect the entry area from vehicle-borne explosive attacks (author).

The last juxtaposed pair shows a future microregion and a completed, six-story apartment block in Microregion 4. As in the drawing, landscaping is quite dense in the built microregions, and most of the interior of each microregion is a pedestrian environment.

For planning historians it is worth noting that the superblock used in microregion development are adapted from the *zielenbau* developed by the Germans and Dutch from about 1905 to 1935. Catherine Bauer argues that the superblocks were designed to address two issues: assurance of natural light and air to each housing unit, and restriction of the movement of automobiles in residential areas.⁵⁴ By the 1920s, high rates of traffic deaths had become a major concern, so rather than admit traffic through all blocks, streets

⁵⁴ Bauer, Catherine. 1934. *Modern Housing*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.

entering the superblock terminate in parking lots.

I mention this because superblocks have been sharply disparaged by Western critics. Marshall Berman argued that the *superquadra* contributed to the sterility and social failure of Brasilia,⁵⁵ and Oscar Newman argued that the superblock layout contributed to the ‘indefensible space’ of American public housing projects.⁵⁶ The HOPE-VI project that I worked on immediately before working in Afghanistan was in fact a New-Urbanist replacement of three mid-rise concrete towers with row-houses that re-created the ‘perimeter-block’ configuration typical of most of San Francisco. Every resident enters their own apartment directly off the sidewalk; back yards are separated by high fences; there is almost no public space in need of defense.

But is this the ideal condition in all times and places? Is the superblock a ‘universal’ failure regardless of culture and context? In international policy, there is a constant temptation to find universal, acultural solutions. In the development trade, these are called ‘best practices’ that can be replicated again and again. Timothy Mitchell dedicates an entire chapter of *Rule of experts* to critiquing the idea of “principles true in every country.” Johnson and Leslie observe that same disturbing pattern and devote an entire chapter of their book to “One size fits all—Afghanistan in the new world order.” The same tendency toward universal principles occurs in physical planning as well. Often this is deliberate. While working as an urban designer in San Francisco, I designed parts of a new mall in Makati City, Philippines, where the client requested that we use American building codes. Numerous assumptions, and standardized dimensions, are embedded in that code. The dimensions work well together, but produce a consistent set of proportions that contributes to the homogenization of transnationally-designed and built spaces. As for the superblock layout of American public housing, Katharine Bristol makes a compelling argument that political factors played a far greater role than design in the failure of Pruitt-Igoe, the housing project that was demolished in 1972 and used ever since as a paradigmatic example of the failure of Modernist design. The myth that Bristol identifies is the emergence of Yamasaki’s design as the failure. This is the flip-side of the physical-determinist argument: not only should ‘good design result in good people,’ but ‘bad design produces bad people.’

55 Berman, Marshall. 1988. *All that is solid melts into air: The experience of modernity*. New York: Viking Penguin.

56 Newman, Oscar. 1972. *Defensible space; crime prevention through urban design*. New York: Macmillan.

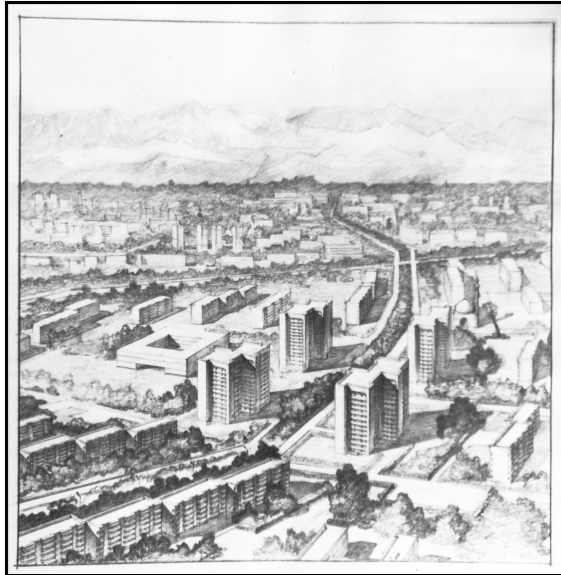


Figure 4.25. Perspective view of proposed microregion, 1981. (courtesy House Building Unit)



Figure 4.26. Typical six-story apartment building, Microregion 4 (author, 2007).

What the design debate misses is the political impetus behind the production of modern housing. When le Corbusier was advocating ‘light and air’ and ‘towers in parks’ as urban design, he was reacting to the dark, cramped, poorly-ventilated speculative apartments that had been developed as part of urban densification in nineteenth-century European cities.⁵⁷ Whether Modernist designs reflected the Abstract Expressionist movement in the fine arts is entirely secondary to the fact that it reflected recent findings in public health, and recent successes in the enforcement of minimum housing standards in cities.⁵⁸ For urban regimes, the enforcement of regulations to ensure the healthiness of rental housing was a major incursion into the sovereign right of the (liberal) individual landlord to dispose of his property as he sees fit. That incursion could only be justified by demonstrable harm caused by poor conditions, and demonstrable benefit through specific interventions. Initially the studies were empirical, such as Chadwick’s 1842 *Report* and John Snow’s spatial-epidemiological analysis of the cholera outbreak around the Broad Street water pump in 1854. However, after Robert Koch made a solid argument for the germ theory of disease in 1890, public health reform could be enforced on the basis of rigorous theory. As discussed in Chapter Three, this is the emergence of a new politics: the politics of promoting and maintaining the biological well-being of whole subject populations. This is biopower.

Developmentalist regimes and Modernist urbanization

Thus far I have shown that Kabul has developed under a series of explicitly modernizing programs from 1919 to 1992. In 1919, Amanullah won full sovereignty for

57 Le Corbusier. 1927. *Towards a New Architecture*. New York: Payson & Clarke, Ltd.

58 Hall, Peter Geoffrey. 1988. *Cities of tomorrow: An intellectual history of urban planning and design in the twentieth century*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell.

Afghanistan in the Third Anglo-Afghan war, and began modernizing Kabul in parallel with the efforts of the Young Turks. In 1989 the Soviet military withdrew from Afghanistan, but the Najibullah regime that was left in place remained viable for three more years. Though Najibullah openly admitted a public place for Islam in Afghan society, his regime remained a ‘developmentalist’ regime that continued building microregions in Kabul as part of the ongoing effort of both urban and national social-economic development.

Formal urban planning, up to this point, fits Foucault’s description of an expression of biopower under conditions of coherent sovereign power. Whether under independent Afghanistan or Soviet-occupied Afghanistan, sovereign power over the entire population appeared to be comprehensive. Under conditions of comprehensive control, the regime legitimizes itself through its expression of care for the welfare of the entire subject population through various improvements collectively classified as ‘development.’ At times, modernization policies might seem clumsy or misguided; Roland Wild repeatedly mocked Amanullah’s decision to require Kabulis to wear European-style clothing. But as Lefebvre⁵⁹ and de Certeau⁶⁰ have pointed out, the condition of modernity is an accretion of myriad embodied experiences in everyday life. It is a psychological condition, but mostly not at the conscious-intentional level of ideologies; rather, it operates as much at the level of assumptions, habits, and subtle conditions that constitute modern subjectivity as a whole. In *Colonising Egypt*, Mitchell called this process ‘enframing,’ and showed how the ostensibly-Ottoman Khedive employed various strategies of modernization through military and education reform, as well as model-town development, *before* the British actually colonized the country in 1882.⁶¹ Saint-Exupéry’s gentle satire also reveals much: his Turkish astronomer may have had both the knowledge and the technology to identify an obscure asteroid, but his knowledge-production would only be regarded as legitimate by Westerners if he dressed and played the part of a ‘modern.’

The continuity of both modern political rationalities—sovereign power and biopower—meant that Kabul continued to be modernized over this 73-year period despite significant interruptions in political power. Though Nader Shah (king, 1930-1933) and Zahir Shah (king, 1933-1973) regarded Amanullah’s policies as excessive and unbalanced, they always acknowledged that it was Amanullah who secured full national sovereignty. As both Shah⁶² and Gregorian⁶³ point out, the Musahiban rulers also immediately proceeded with modernization programs of their own in the 1930s. By the mid 1950s, Zahir’s cousin Daoud felt confident enough to engage in military reform with Soviet assistance, and to promote a much more public role for women in urban society by the late 1950s. The Soviets, likewise, actively promoted modernization, including urban modernization. Stalin’s aggressive industrialization in the 1930s and 1940s expressed both political rationalities, though it was applied more to defending national sovereignty against the Nazis in the 1940s. Khrushchev’s massive urban development programs in the

59 Lefebvre, Henri. 2008. *Critique of everyday life*. London: Verso.

60 Certeau, Michel de. 1984. *The practice of everyday life*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

61 Mitchell, Timothy. 1988. *Colonising Egypt*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

62 Shah, Iqbal Ali. 1939. *Modern Afghanistan*. London: S. Low, Marston & co., ltd.

63 Gregorian 1969.

1950s and 1960s expressed the biopolitical rationality of justifying his regime through the tangible improvement of living conditions for Soviet citizens, and citizens of Eastern Bloc allies.

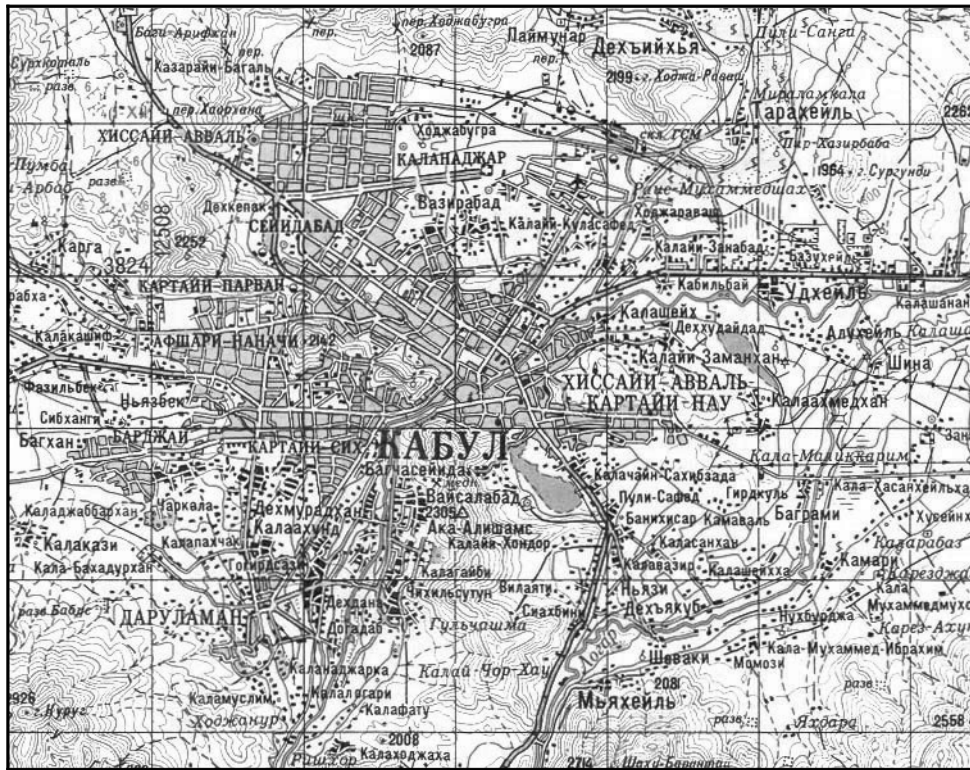


Figure 4.25. Kabul, 1985. Note the development of Khair Khana in the northwest, and Khushal Khan Mena in the west.

Both during the two decades of invited technical assistance and the one decade of occupation, the Soviets applied the same approach to urban modernization in Kabul as they did in Soviet cities. Assuming full sovereignty and centralized control, urban planning could be conceived in a ‘totalizing’ way, treating the city as part of a region and each portion of the city as part of an integrated whole. Furthermore, under such direct sovereign control, various policies could be embedded into physical plans, such as projected total populations; projected ratios of public to private space and land use; projected school sizes, retail areas, and numbers of medical clinics. In 2007, when I had established good relations with the planners in Kabul Municipality, they showed me these projection-ratios, which the municipal economic department used to project the building needs in planned new developments such as the Khushal Khan Mena specific plan, shown above in Figure 4.18. What they wanted from me were updated refinements to these projection-ratios. As the successor modern power in the region, they expected that Americans plan in much the same way—and perhaps they observed the U.S. military still planning under this condition of near-total sovereign control. In terms of political rationalities, I think they saw modern urban planning as a direct congruence between the logics of sovereign and biopower.

As part of urban modernization, Kabulis sought to phase out ‘traditional’ housing. Figure 4.25 shows the expansion of formal development in Kabul, especially the northwestern expansion known as Khair Khana. As Alsayyad (2004) argues, longstanding practices of customary ownership and construction with local materials were reinscribed as ‘traditional’ by the assertion of a new regime of publicly-planned urbanization. In his 1976 Masters Thesis, Abdul Khaliq Nemat traces the reduction in both the absolute number and proportion of ‘informal’ houses in Kabul in the late 1960s and early 1970s.⁶⁴ The hope at the time was that the sphere of Concrete planning would expand to encompass and govern all urbanization in Kabul, providing well-lit, durable, modern housing for the total urban population.

Through the destruction of half of the Old City in the civil war of 1992-1996, the remaining “traditional” urban fabric in Kabul has become small indeed. Any new development that failed to conform to the orthogonal street and lot layout of the Master Plans, or failed to use ‘modern’ building materials, is disparaged as illegal or backward, in some way failing to be modern. As I found out through interviews of residents who were building in clay-brick in 2003, they wanted to build out of fired brick and concrete, but they could not afford those materials. Their preferences were not ‘backward,’ rather, they were too poor to afford concrete and fired brick. Nor is that poverty a merely incidental condition. Concrete in Kabul is expensive now because the concrete-production factories in the region were destroyed either by the 1992-1996 mujahid civil war of the Coalition bombing of industrial facilities in the fall of 2001. Concrete would have been more affordable if an intact developmental regime had continued after 1992; and households may have been in a better position to afford permanent building materials if some form of developmental regime had persisted.

Furthermore, full sovereignty over both the space and the population of Kabul is no longer taken for granted. Though the Municipality would love to reassert this condition, a large proportion of the urban population knowingly violates the Master Plan through informal developments, in a collective effort to secure urban livelihoods. As Assef Bayat points out, these households are not ‘dangerous classes’ trying to threaten the urban regime—if anything, they may want it to resume its prior developmental capacity.⁶⁵ But for the meantime, they ‘quietly encroach’ as necessary to survive, since the urban regime is no longer providing the means to afford modernizing, formal urban development of the entire city.

⁶⁴ Nemat, 1976.

⁶⁵ Bayat, Assef. 2000. “From ‘dangerous classes’ to ‘quiet rebels’: Politics of the urban subaltern in the global South.” *International sociology* 15:539-557.

III. Formal planning under fragmenting sovereignty

The old imperialism—exploitation for foreign profit—has no place in our plans. What we envisage is a program of development based on the concepts of democratic fair-dealing.

—Harry Truman, US Presidential inaugural speech, 20 January 1949

In Chapter Three I argued that urban planning is shaped by two political rationalities: sovereign political reason and biopolitical reason. These two political rationalities operate in tandem and in tension, in relationships that can be understood as bargains between different regime interests. Since the emergence of this distinctive relationship between biopower and sovereign power, these ‘bargains’ have taken several different forms, each lasting for decades. In contrast to the modern sense that the world is in constant flux, these successive configurations have felt very stable, if they are sensed at all. The transition to a regime of neoliberalization was a recent shift, and Ronald Reagan’s first inaugural address is often cited as a marker for this shift. Walpen⁶⁶ and Harvey⁶⁷ trace the much longer history of neoliberalism as an idea and movement back to the 1930s, perhaps even the 1920s. But this movement was only translated into a shift in political rationality once political leaders found it effective as way of maintaining legitimacy.

The quote from Harry Truman that opens this section marked a shift into an era promoting government-led national development. Truman proposed to translate the internal developmentalist policies of the New Deal into an international developmentalist policy of ‘democratic fair-dealing,’ to compete with the Soviet Union. Biopolitical policies of development would be deployed in the geopolitical competition for sovereign dominance. The era spanning roughly from 1946 to 1991 is described as either the ‘era of development’ or the Cold War. I propose that each label reflects the interpretation of the observer, focusing either on the biopolitics or the sovereign politics of that period.

Core aspects of the profession of urban planning were defined during this developmentalist period. These aspects include not just the technical-rational approach to modernization in the 1940s and 1950s, but also the social-justice and environmental-sustainability movements that shaped planning beginning in the 1960s. Part of the purpose of this research is to explore how the practice of planning has changed, in response to a shift in the underlying relationship of sovereign and biopower.

In this last section of Chapter Four I focus on specific ways that this shift in political rationalities affected formal urban planning in Kabul. Some theorists have described the reconfiguration of regimes under neoliberalization as a ‘parcelization’ of sovereignty.⁶⁸ In Kabul I find Barnett Rubin’s term ‘fragmentation’ more descriptive. Though Rubin used this term to describe the political breakdown he observed in Kabul in 1995,⁶⁹ the condition of fragmented sovereignty persists in the planning of Kabul under the US-

66 Walpen, Bernhard. 2005. *The plan to end planning: A short history of neoliberalism*. International center for advanced studies: New York University.

67 Harvey, David. 2005. *A brief history of neoliberalism*. New York: Oxford University Press.

68 Cutler, A. Claire. 1999. “Locating ‘authority’ in the global political economy.” *International Studies Quarterly*, 43:59-81.

Anderson, Perry. 1974. *Passages from Antiquity to Feudalism*. London: Verso Editions.

69 Rubin, Barnett R. 2002. *The fragmentation of Afghanistan: State formation and collapse in the international system*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

backed Islamic Republic.

Breaking the 'fair deal'

The notion that government controls, central planning, and bureaucracy can provide cost-free prosperity has now come and gone the way of the hula-hoop, the Nehru jackets, and the all-asparagus diet. Throughout the world the failure of socialism is evident.⁷⁰

—Ronald Reagan, address to CPAC, 20 February 1987

The collapse of the Najibullah regime in 1992, four months after the dissolution of the USSR, marks a significant shift in the political rationalities that shape Kabul. At both the geopolitical and the urban level, the Cold War era competition between the US and the USSR was expressed as a political bargain. Rhetorically, both superpowers promoted political sovereignty as 'the right of national self-determination.' Both superpowers also based their political legitimacy on the capacity of their respective political-economic systems to improve the material living conditions—the biological welfare—of individuals.

Post-colonial theorists argue that the era of development had many continuities with the preceding era of industrial empire, from about 1870 to 1945.⁷¹ Indeed, colonial powers had invested in the construction of infrastructure and built whole cities in order to extract raw materials from colonized territories. Lopsided trade agreements negotiated after decolonization often echoed prior colonial relationships, with 'independent' former colonies selling inexpensive raw materials and labor to their former colonizers.⁷² Thus, dependency theorists such as Arturo Escobar point to Truman's speech as the moment when the colonizer/colonized relationship was merely reinterpreted into the developed/developing relationship, or "the development of underdevelopment."⁷³

For the planning of Kabul, however, that shift into Cold-War competition meant that the USSR and US competed for the allegiance of Afghan regimes by promoting their own respective capacities of systematic caring for the biological welfare of Afghans. The Soviets built the Salang Tunnel, linking Eastern and Southern Afghanistan to the plain on the north slope of the Hindu Kush. Americans built the Kajaki Dam and the Helmand River Project to develop the arid southern part of the country.⁷⁴ Within Kabul, the US and West Germany developed much of the Kabul University campus in the 1960s. The Soviets, in direct competition, built the Polytechnic.

Soviet technical assistance in planning and urban development is a particularly clear example of a superpower extending its *regime of care* as a geopolitical strategy. As discussed in Chapter Three, such an application of biopolitical reason operates in relationship to sovereign political reason; one type of political rationality does not supersede nor exclude the other. During the Cold War, these two political rationalities

70 Reagan, Ronald. 1987. "A future that works." Conservative Political Action Conference, Washington, D.C. <http://www.conservative.org/cpac/archives/cpac-1987-ronald-reagan/>

71 Hutabarat Lo, Ria. 2010. "The city as a mirror: Transport, land use and social change in Jakarta." *Urban studies* 47(3):529-555.

72 Amin, Samir. 1977. *Imperialism and unequal development*. New York: Monthly Review Press.

73 Escobar, Arturo. 1995. *Encountering development : the making and unmaking of the Third World*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.

74 Ansary, Tamim. 2002. *West of Kabul, east of New York: An Afghan American story*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

were deployed internationally in a bargain of development in exchange for political loyalty.



Figure 4.26. Children playing among abandoned construction equipment, Microregion 4 (author, 2007).

That particular bargain was broken in 1992. Figure 4.26 indicates the suddenness of this shift: in the background is a not-quite-finished apartment block. The cranes that were being used to lift precast building panels were abandoned in place, and then damaged by rocket-fire in the fighting from 1992 to 1996. Too large to be dismantled and sold off as scrap-metal, these cranes have been 're-purposed' as posts supporting laundry-lines. Up to 1992, this was a site where the urban regime had been engaged in providing housing with integrated infrastructure in a planned modernization of the City. Under the three regimes since 1992—including the present Islamic Republic—this is a site where households occupy partially completed buildings, and children play among war-damaged heavy equipment. Developmentalist regimes certainly used force and threat as (sovereign) political instruments; but they also used their efforts to care for whole populations as a basis for political legitimacy. Neoliberalizing regimes, in contrast, argue that they liberate whole populations from oppressive, interventionist regimes. The 'regime of care' is expressed as governmental restraint to allow room for personal freedoms and private-sector opportunities. In practice, the effect in Afghanistan has been strongly reminiscent

of the damage done by the ‘austerity measures’ of structural-adjustment programs in sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America. Nuttall and Mbembe's vivid imagery of Cameroon after structural adjustment⁷⁵ is echoed by the de-industrialization and de-development of Afghanistan under the Mujahideen, Mullah Omar, and Hamid Karzai.



Figure 4.27. Woman and girl walk past concrete panels of incomplete building, Microregion-4. Panels were temporarily secured in place before construction was abandoned in 1992. On the lower left, the clay-brick infill wall indicates informal occupation of this unfinished building (author, 2007).

However, the dismantling of developmental regimes does not mean total de-modernization. This is not a shift ‘backward in time.’ Quite the opposite: the immiseration of so many Afghans is an expression of an effective ‘forward’ shift of political rationalities from developmentalism to neoliberalism. This cannot be stressed strongly enough: American politicians of both parties worked very hard during the 1980s to promote a far more hard-line, intolerant, anti-Soviet Islamist movement in Afghanistan. Ronald Reagan, CIA Director George Casey, and Democratic Congressman Charlie Wilson were not particularly secretive about this effort. Ahmed Rashid,⁷⁶ George Crile,⁷⁷ and Stephen Coll⁷⁸ all retell this story from non-classified sources. As in the Preface, ‘what is wrong with this picture’ is the remarkable political amnesia among Westerners who argue that “Afghan Islamists want to turn the country back to the seventh century.” Even Derek Gregory, a much more careful and critical theorist of this present

75 Mbembé, Achille, and Janet Roitman. 2002. “Figures of the subject in times of crisis.” in *Under siege: Four African cities—Freetown, Johannesburg, Kinshasa, Lagos Documenta 11, Platform 4*, edited by Okwui Enwezor. Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz.

76 Rashid, Ahmed. 2000. *Taliban: militant Islam, oil, and fundamentalism in Central Asia*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

77 Crile, George. 2003. *Charlie Wilson’s war: The extraordinary story of the largest covert operation in history*. New York: Atlantic Monthly Press.

78 Coll, Steve. 2004. *Ghost wars: The secret history of the CIA, Afghanistan, and bin Laden, from the Soviet invasion to September 10, 2001*. New York: Penguin Press.

geopolitical conflict, uses a term—demodernization—that can inadvertently abet this political amnesia. What Gregory means is that powerful political regimes (notably the United States and Israel) use targeted attacks on civilian institutions that produce an *image* of backwardness. If targeted populations appear backward—better yet, if it appears that they have never been modern—interventions are easier to justify.⁷⁹ It is a very different thing, for example, to say that an American contractor is trying to develop a stable electrical supply for Baghdad, than to say that the contractor is trying to restore the electric supply of Baghdad to the level of reliability that had existed before the American invasion in 2003. The first version, using political amnesia, suggests that Americans are helping develop Iraq. The second version acknowledges that Americans have not yet managed to restore a fundamental element of urban infrastructure that was damaged in the process of the The US-led invasion, occupation, and civil war that happened under American care.

What is at stake in Kabul is the entire argument of this study. If Westerners—and more crucially, if Afghans believe that Afghanistan has become ‘demodernized,’ then it is possible to imagine that the urban development of Kabul is ‘unplanned.’ However the collapse of the Najibullah regime in 1992 was more than a closing chapter in Soviet-American geopolitics. Supporting the mujahideen was consistent with “ideas that stress freedom for the individual and respect for the humane and decent values of family, God and neighborhood,” to quote Reagan.⁸⁰ Promoting personal piety, and self-regulation, in lieu of the interventionist ‘nanny state,’ was part of the positive project of neoliberalization, what Peck and Tickell call the ‘roll-out’ program of social reforms that complemented the ‘roll-back’ of the social services of the welfare state.⁸¹ The point, for our understanding of Kabul, is that the conditions of damage, and the fragmentation of the urban regime in the early twenty-first century, reflect contemporary, emergent modern politics. In contemporary political rhetoric, modernity is often equated with progress; so political ‘progress’ that leads to worsened material living conditions may seem like a logical contradiction. In fact it is the political rhetoric that is contradictory. Figures 4.26 and 4.27 are very much the images of a modern, neoliberalizing, twenty-first century city.

To gain some perspective on political modernity it is worth returning (briefly) to the arguments in Chapter Three. In “The Birth of Biopolitics”, Foucault argues that modern governments developed regimes of care for whole populations through particular ‘technologies of rule’, including urban infrastructure. But he also argues that Liberal regimes seek to rule through an economy of means. To some degree, this corresponds to explicit Liberal political arguments for restraining the authority and capacity of states to intervene in the lives of individuals. There is also a practical logic here: totalizing control costs too much.

This tension between a biopolitical ‘regime of care’ and political limits on resource allocation was clearly expressed in modern urban development policy even in the 1840s. Thomas Osborne’s analysis of “drains, liberalism and power” reveals Edwin Chadwick’s

79 Gregory, Derek. 2004. *The colonial present: Afghanistan, Palestine, Iraq*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.

80 Reagan, 1987.

81 Peck, Jamie, and Adam Tickell. 2002. “Neoliberalizing space.” *Antipode* 34:380-404.

work as a political compromise between fine-grained caring for whole populations and efficient, minimal expenditure of public resources. At the time, Chadwick was criticized as Britain's "Prussian Minister" for public health reforms which were considered top-down and authoritarian by Liberal critics. But Osborne points out that Chadwick's "sanitary empiricism" was far more restrained than the totalizing "state medicine" programs proposed contemporary reform advocates such as Henry W. Ramsey.⁸² Public intervention within the private space of the dwelling—requirements for minimum daylight, ventilation, and plumbing—came later, from about 1860 to 1910.⁸³ These new interventions into private-property development rights were only established after systematic spatial analyses of cholera and tuberculosis established a (politically) strong link between housing conditions and public health.⁸⁴ These, too, were re-articulations of the relationship between biopower and sovereign power, predating the Cold War/development-era relationship by half a century. These earlier 'bargains' were also politically modern, and also expressed in the shaping of urban space. The task now is to understand the nature of political modernity as it shapes urban space after the Cold-War era political bargains broke down.

The return of the Master Plan, post-2005

In terms of political rationality, formal planning in Kabul is fragmenting, reflecting the fragmentation of political sovereignty itself within the city. The national regime—the Islamic Republic—has never quite gained political legitimacy at the local level, even in Kabul. One example of this was that the national Ministry of Urban Development lost the struggle for planning control over the existing city. The Municipality prevailed in its assertion over developmental control; not just through its continuing authority to expropriate land for development projects, but because those projects gained widespread legitimacy among the urban population. Figures 4.28 and 4.29 show two examples of urban modernization being conducted by the Municipality in 2007: the construction of a grade-separated, "cloverleaf" intersection in the southwestern part of the city, and the demolition of informal housing as part of a process of road-widening near the city center.

82 Osborne, Thomas. 1996. "Security and vitality: Drains, liberalism and power in the nineteenth century." Pp. 99-121 in *Foucault and political reason: Liberalism, neo-liberalism and rationalities of government*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

83 Plunz, Richard. 1990. *A history of housing in New York City: Dwelling type and social change in the American metropolis*. New York: Columbia University Press.

84 De Forest, Robert W, and Lawrence Veiller, eds. 1903. *The Tenement House Problem, Including the Report of the New York State Tenement House Commission of 1900*. New York: The Macmillan company.



Figure 4.28. Cloverleaf overpass design overlaid on satphoto of Kota-e Sangi intersection, western Kabul (author, 2007). Road-widening and demolition work for this urban freeway interchange was already being implemented by the Municipality in 2007.

I chose these images specifically for two reasons. First, they do express the resurgent power of the Municipality to proceed with modernizing the city. Second, these are paradigmatic examples of the kinds of modernization that Western aid and development workers in Kabul objected to. At first glance in 2003, the aspirations of the Municipality seemed to me like a reprise of Robert Moses-style technocratic, top-down modernization. As a Western planner dutifully faithful to the critique by Jane Jacobs and the ‘communicative turn’ in urban planning, this looked like potentially disastrous backsliding. At the time I was still assuming modernity to mean progress, and thus equated these heavy-duty infrastructure developments as tantamount to an attempt to travel backwards in time.



Figure 4.29. Widening of Chehel Sotun Road, the primary connection between the city center and the urban districts due south of the Lion's Gate. Residents quietly watched the demolition of the lowest line of rooms from the buildings and building remnants above (author, 2007).

Subsequent field research confirmed the critique of post-colonial theorists, who argue for a de-linking of the facile association of modernity with 'progress,' and therefore implicitly with an inevitable forward movement through time toward a better future. Again, this is also an argument against a dystopian pessimism as well. The future *might* be better, or it might be worse. Neither outcome is inevitable; rather, both good and bad outcomes are subject to political choices made by the many agents who are influencing urban development today.

In 2004, Hamid Karzai appointed Ghulam Sakhi Noorzad as Mayor of Kabul. He succeeded Anwar Jigdalik, who had been serving as Mayor when I first worked in Kabul in 2003. Jigdalik was removed after he was implicated in the land-allocation scandal in the Shir Pur neighborhood, which will be discussed in Chapter Five. Noorzad had been Mayor in 1978, when the third Master Plan was ratified. When he returned from Toronto to Kabul in 2004, his clear intention was to implement the Plan. Like the staff in the Office of Plan Implementation whom I first met in 2003, Noorzad saw plan-implementation as a way of restoring functioning government in Kabul, and perhaps 'resetting' Kabul to the orderly condition that he and so many expatriates remembered.

In March of 2005 Noorzad was profiled in the Wall Street Journal. The following quote reveals the degree to which the planning history, described above, was unknown and misunderstood:

A Soviet invasion the following year [1979] drove him from office and into exile in Toronto. Afghanistan fell into two decades of war and lawlessness, and the plan was forgotten—except by Mr. Noorzad. Returning to Afghanistan after the U.S. invasion in 2001 toppled the Taliban, he reclaimed his old job, dug out the plan and resumed work on his long-deferred dream.⁸⁵

In Western discourse, the entire twenty-three years of conflict between 1978 and 2001 were often collapsed together as one, undifferentiated struggle. The ongoing construction and Master Plan implementation from 1978 to 1992 gets suppressed through such discourse, even though the abandoned construction cranes and partially-finished buildings of Microregion 4 are clearly visible along the main road from the airport into the city center. They are a vast, disturbing monument to the fact that modernization was continuing in Kabul right through the Soviet occupation and for three years beyond it, all the way to 1992. Yet from the end of 2001 until about 2006, the framing narrative in Western discourse was that the ‘fall of the Taliban’ was the primary watershed moment, in which the ‘time of troubles’ was ended.

Noorzad did not need to ‘dig out’ the Master Plan that remained on display as a three-by-five meter painting in the Office of Plan Implementation (Figure 4.16). However he did struggle to convince the Ministry that Plan Implementation should be resumed, even if that meant the eventual removal of most of the existing informal housing in the city. The Ministry pushed back hard; Minister Pashtun appealed to President Karzai and had the 1978 Master Plan officially suspended in 2005. In frustration, Noorzad resigned and returned to Canada. Karzai, meanwhile, continues to defer democratic elections of the Mayor. I interviewed a potential mayoral candidate in 2006, who expected to run for the office in the following year. Instead, Karzai has continued to appoint new mayors about once every fourteen months, in an attempt to get a compliant Municipal government.

Instead, that municipal government has been slowly gaining strength as the U.S.-backed national regime has been losing credibility. Officially, the Master Plan remains suspended, and officially the Plan Implementation Office awaits further direction from the Ministry of Urban Development.

In practice, the Municipality has resumed implementation of the road framework component of the Master Plan, as shown in Figures 4.27 through 4.30. Kabul Municipality finances road construction through value-capture of expropriated urban properties.⁸⁶ The Municipality sets the price of expropriation, and then re-sells the land at as much as ten times the price after the adjacent road has been built. The Municipality asserts its autonomy from Ministerial domination based on a Municipal Law enacted in 1990 (under Najibullah), as amended in 2000 (under Mullah Omar).⁸⁷ The Municipal Law was based on Article 130 of the 1990 Constitution of Afghanistan, and asserts that Kabul Municipality is part of the national government. This means that the Mayor of Kabul reports directly to the President. All other municipal governments in Afghanistan must report to provincial governors, who in turn report to the Interior Minister. Kabul’s privileged position has been inadvertently affirmed by President Karzai, who has repeatedly appointed and replaced the mayor of Kabul, in an effort to compel the

⁸⁵ Cloud, 2005:A1

⁸⁶ Technical Deputy Mayor Abdullahi, interview, 2007.

⁸⁷ Afghanistan, Islamic Emirate. 2000. *Municipal Law of Afghanistan*. Kabul.

Municipality into compliance. Other mayors are appointed by the Interior Minister.

Pushpa Pathak, an urban planner who has worked with the municipal government since 2002, points out that under existing law, the Municipality has direct authority to collect its own revenue and expend it through payroll and procurements; and the annual municipal budget is reviewed and approved by the Ministry of Finance, just as are other Ministries. With this authority, the Municipality has been able to proceed with the implementation of the 1978 Master Plan. The Municipality deploys a remarkable logic of institutional continuity by invoking laws that were developed and revised under radically different national regimes, demonstrating through its own actions that the local regime has remained very much in place during those violent political transitions.

In his 1989 article on the shift from urban managerialism to urban entrepreneurialism, David Harvey describes how local political authorities become proactive in attracting businesses as the national political regime withdraws support.⁸⁸ Thus one of the contradictory aspects of neoliberalization is that local regimes react to the imposition of 'market logic' by promoting economic development in an entrepreneurial reinterpretation of a developmental regime. Kabul Municipality's adaptive strategies echo this pattern; not in competition with other Afghan cities, but in competition with the new national regime in how the city's path and process of development would be governed. Kabul Municipality continues to reinterpret and re-articulate its practices in order to continue governing the development of the city. A primary tool they have used to reassert their effective role is the Master Plan itself. In a city where extreme economic and political uncertainty dominate local discourse, the public commitment to a definite plan has won over the support of a surprisingly wide spectrum of the population.

Despite the fact that the Municipality had been very cagey towards foreigners and ostensibly secretive with the Master Plan, one of the most effective tools in its defense is that the Plan is an uncharacteristically blunt declaration of regime-intentionality, under conditions where most of the agencies in the urban regime are deliberately opaque and vague. While foreigners and Afghan-Americans were unfamiliar with the geometry of the 1978 Plan, I found that many local taxi-drivers understood it intimately. During my fieldwork, the road toward the Polytechnic was being widened by twenty meters (figures 4.30 and 4.31). While caught in traffic one morning I pointed out two blocks of housing—visible in figure 4.31—that would have to be demolished to complete the road project. The taxi-driver responded:

Yes, they will have to be demolished. But those houses were in violation of the Master Plan. They should not be there, and the people who built them knew this. Najibullah gave them numbers [building permits] but he should not have. This road was already planned.

Kabuli taxi-drivers, as a group, were especially biased in favor of completing the roadway component of the Master Plan. But they are also a numerous, well-informed, and vocal group within the urban population. One of the major developers in Afghanistan commented that he had considered buying a Corolla and becoming a taxi-driver for several months, to overhear what was being discussed in the city. I found that taxi-drivers

88 Harvey, David. 1989. "From managerialism to urban entrepreneurship: the transformation in urban governance in late capitalism." *Geografiska annaler* 7:3-17.

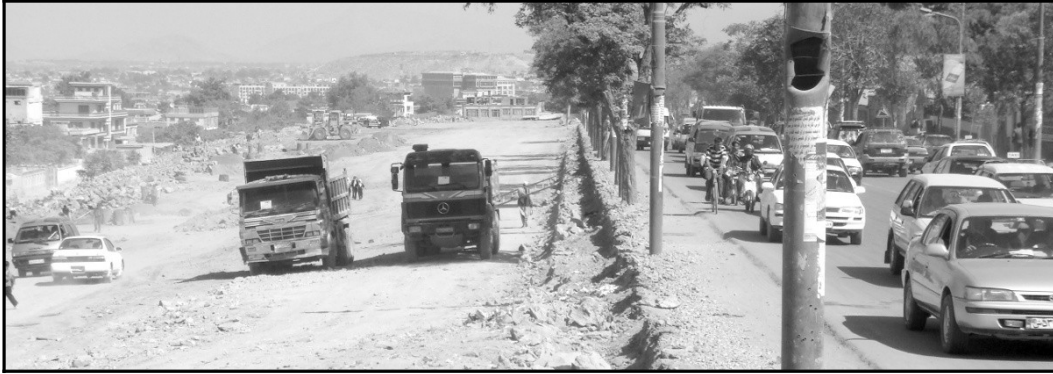


Figure 4.30. Widening of the roadway from Kart-e Parwan to the Polytechnic, 2007 (author).

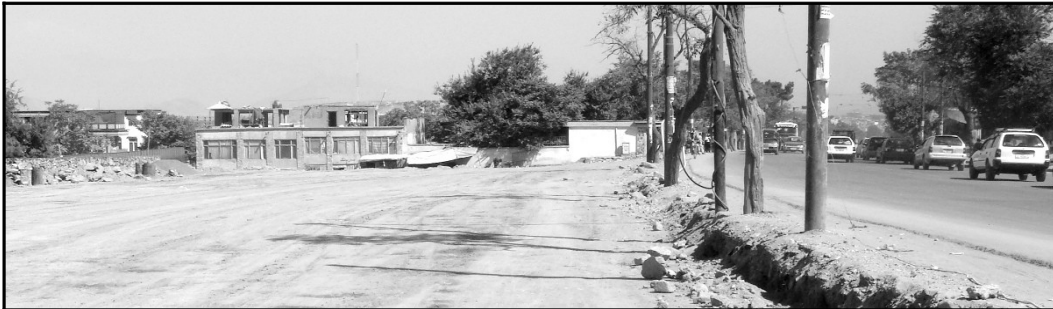


Figure 4.31. Same project as in Figure 4.30, showing condemned houses (author, 2007).



*Figure 4.32. Sixty-meter roadway under construction near Kart-e Parwan (author, 2007).
Note both the new office building and the informal housing in the background.*

did not just listen; they expressed and relayed much of the current public discourse of the city. The mobile cabins of taxis across the space of Kabul constitute the primary loci in which the ‘public sphere’ is performed. In responding to the demands of this group, the City has inverted the politics of Master Plan implementation from a top-down, expert-centered imposition to bottom-up, grass-roots support from at least this faction. The road

network is a definite, public, Concrete plan.

I found further confirmation of the reassertion of the Master Plan when I researched two new project sites in Kabul. Shahrak-e Tillayi—the “Golden City” development—is a group of sixteen luxury houses and eight hundred luxury apartments in twelve high-rise towers built on the southern slope of Maranjan Hill, in the southeastern part of the city. The property broker explained that all the luxury houses had already been sold for three hundred to four hundred thousand dollars; but apartments were still available for \$85,000. He explained that most of the people interested in the apartments were Afghan expatriates in Europe and the United States who wanted to invest in a secure foothold, a second home in Kabul. The development was gated, and would include an English-language school staffed by Indian teachers. He also pointed out where the City plans to build a roadway over Maranjan Hill that would link the development directly to the airport. I asked about City approval, and the property broker stressed that ‘the complex was fully approved in accordance with the Master Plan.’ He also assured me that the neighborhood of informal housing adjacent to the development was going to be cleared away in accordance with the Master Plan.

I also interviewed the developer of Shahrak-e Estiqlal (Independence City) who explained that the City had not only approved his development scheme, but retained ownership of the land. His firm had built and sold the apartments as a revenue-sharing equity partner with the City. Through this form of public-private partnership, the City has found a method of proceeding with the much higher-density development called for in the 1978 Plan.

Institutional continuities and discontinuities in an urban regime

During my research it became clear that the three successive Kabul Master Plans were developed through national-level technical assistance, meaning that it was the precursor agencies to the Ministry—not the Municipality—which had been the Afghan partner in the process of Master Plan development. However the national regime was so severely disrupted in the 1990s that affinity with the entire process of Master Plan development and implementation had been lost at the national level. In a reversal, it was now the Municipality that was defending the implementation of the Plan, while the Ministry was trying to block the continued implementation of a plan which its own institutional precursors had developed.

This raises a more general question about the institutional logic of urban plan development and implementation, especially in capital cities. For better or worse, local regimes often have both greater continuity and a higher degree of social embeddedness within their urban context. From 1929 to 1960, the district-by-district planning of Kabul appears to have been done by the City government. The most direct evidence is the attribution of the urban renewal of the Old City to Mayor Ghulam Farhad, who served from 1949 to 1953. However, with the beginning of Soviet technical assistance in planning, a new department was set up within the Ministry of Public Works—at the national level. Table 4.4 traces the history of this national agency from 1961 to 2007:

Table 4.3. National urban planning agencies; reorganizations and related events	
1961	Urbanization and Housing Unit created within Ministry of Public Works (MoPW)
	1963: King Zahir pressures Daoud Khan to resign as both Prime Minister and Minister of Defense. Zahir convenes constitutional commission, begins ‘decade of democracy’.
	1964: First Master Plan adopted.
1965	Unit is upgraded to the Bureau of Urbanization, within MoPW.
1967	Bureau upgraded to Directorate of Urbanization and Housing within MoPW.
	1970: Second Master Plan adopted.
	1973: King Zahir deposed by his cousin Daoud Khan; Republic of Afghanistan proclaimed.
	1978: Daoud Khan assassinated by a faction of the Peoples Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), who proclaim the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan.
	1978: Third Master Plan adopted.
1978	Directorate becomes an ‘independent non-profit government enterprise’: the Institute of Urban and Structural Projects Creation (<i>sazi</i>), abbreviated as ShTaPa from the full Pashto name.
1984	ShTaPa becomes the Central Institute for Project Creation, abbreviated as PAMA.
1989	PAMA becomes the Central Administration of Urbanization.
1992	Najibullah resigns; mujahideen factions proclaim the Islamic State of Afghanistan. PAMA is upgraded to the Ministry of Urban Development and Housing (MUDH).
1996	The Taliban capture Kabul and proclaim the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. MUDH is downgraded again to PAMA and is placed under the Ministry of Public Works again.
2001	PAMA upgraded again to Ministry of Urban Development and Housing.
2005	“Housing” is dropped from the name and the mission of the Ministry, which becomes the Ministry of Urban Development (MoUD).

Source: Ahmad Shah Hemat, MoUD.

As the second row in Table 4.3 shows, national political instability in Afghanistan dates back to 1963, spanning almost the entire period of Afghan-Soviet cooperation. Furthermore the national-level authority for urban planning has been promoted, demoted, and re-purposed seven times since the most recent Master Plan was adopted. In contrast, the municipal Plan-Making Office—which was charged with implementing the 1978 Plan—has remained in place for decades. Adapting a term from Karl Polanyi, I call the municipal Plan-Making Office a *socially-embedded* institution, whereas the frequent political disruptions of the national-level urban planning agency have made the MoUD a *socially disembedded* institution. While the Ministry could interface with donor agencies and multilateral organizations, its local power remains weak. The Ministry struggled to formulate project proposals that would meet the strict accountability standards of foreign

donors, slowly and carefully forming the Kabul Urban Reconstruction Project (KURP) in 2006, which finally began a few pilot-upgrading projects in 2007. Though the work of KURP is context-sensitive and appears well-implemented, the slow pace and small scale of the entire KURP program cannot address the sustained high growth rate of the city.

Exurban formal planning by the Ministry of Urban Development

The issuance of the Kabul Jadid/Dih Sabz plan by the Ministry of Urban Development in 2009 revealed the way that the Ministry was adjusting to the intractability of the Municipality. The Ministry will also proceed to implement formal planning, but in areas *outside* of Municipal control. During my fieldwork in 2007, Municipal staff told me that eighteen *shahraks* were under development in and around Kabul. Several were within the city, such as Shahrak-e Tillayi and Shahrak-e Istiqlal discussed above. However others such as Chehel Dokhtara were apparently being developed by the Office of the President. I was unable to confirm whether these were projects being developed by Mahmood Karzai, brother of the President. A cynical reading of this situation would be that the national regime has decided to cash in on lucrative real-estate development deals at the edges of urban growth. Another reading is that the national regime has given up trying to guide development within the municipal area included within the 1978 Master Plan.

In early 2007, Ministry planner Wahid Ahad showed me a map of the city and complained about the confusion of terminology and maps. Political subdivisions of the city were called ‘districts’ or, if pressed, ‘police districts;’ but subdivisions of the provinces were also called districts. Furthermore he had difficulty getting agreement on the political boundaries, and subdivisions, of the Municipal area.

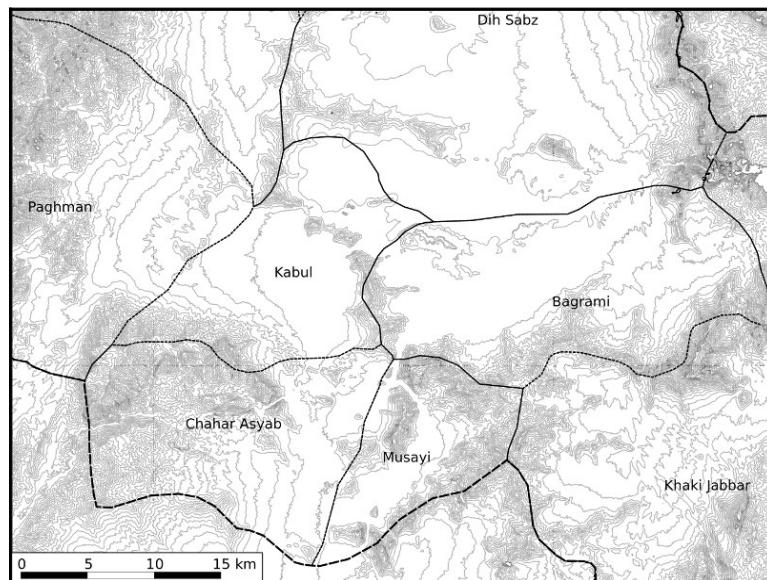


Figure 4.33. Sub-provincial districts (*wolaswalei*) in Kabul Province.

Part of the confusion was clumsy translation. Both provincial subdivisions (*wolaswalei*) and urban subdivisions (*nahya*) are translated in English as ‘district.’ In this

study I have revived the older English term ‘ward’ as a more precise translation of *nahya*. The distinction is unambiguous in Pashto (and borrowed over into Dari), where *wolaswalei* is a cognate of *wolayat*, the word for a national province. I did not recognize the underlying controversy until a municipal planner explained that the Municipality had expanded the city and its wards twice over the previous four years; and the Ministry was rejecting the second expansion, from 18 to 22 wards (figures 4.34, 4.35, 4.36).

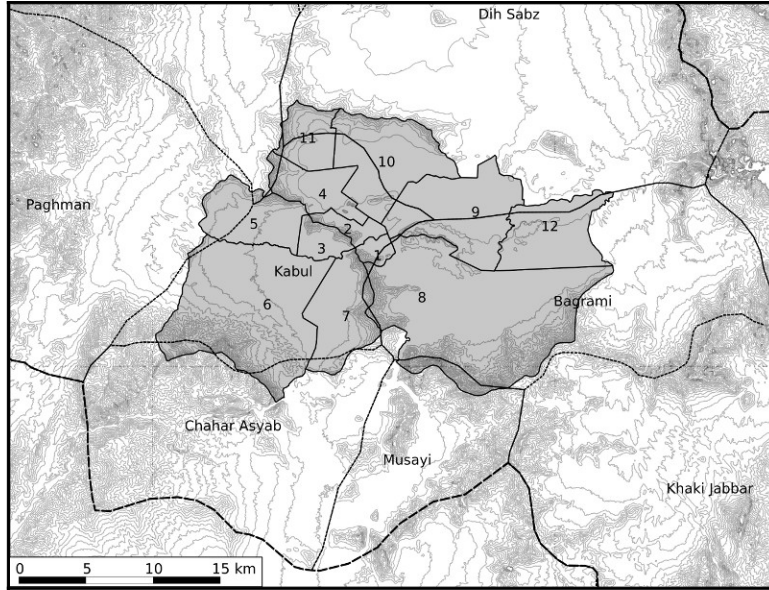


Figure 4.34. Municipal wards (*nahya*) as of 2001.

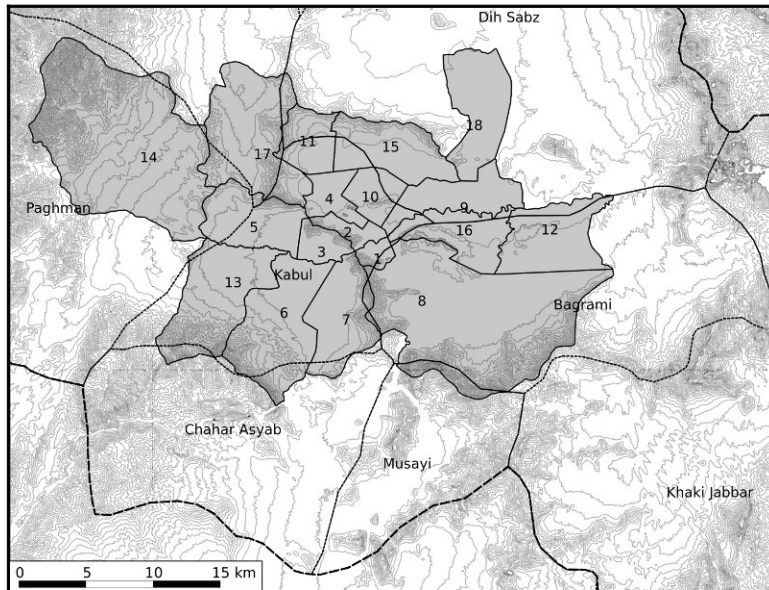


Figure 4.35. Municipal wards, 2003. Note the expansions of the urban boundary towards the northwest (wards 14 and 17) and north (ward 18).

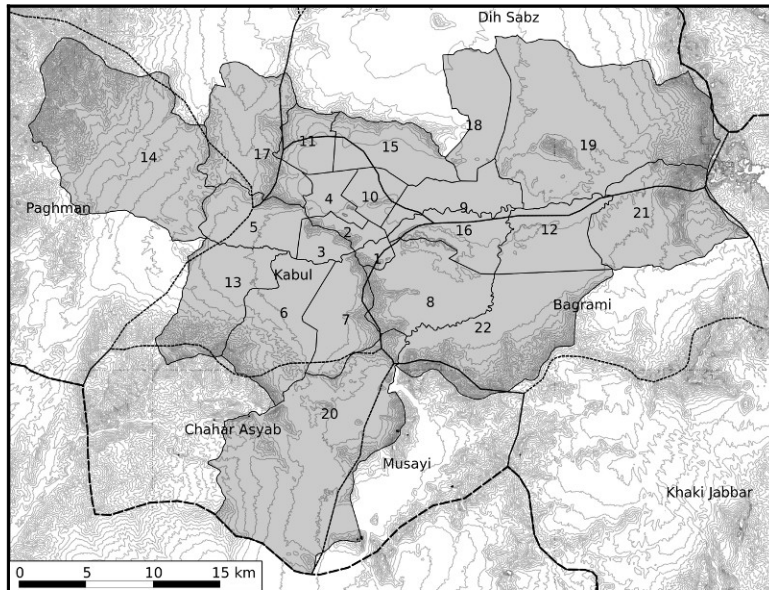


Figure 4.36. Municipal wards, 2005. This expansion of the urban area is not recognized by the Ministry of Urban Development. In its portrayal of this information, the Afghanistan Information Management Service credits the International Security Assistance Force as the source of the data.

Once the Ministry issued its Kabul Jadid plan in 2009, the source of their objection became more clear: the Ministry intends to control the northward expansion of Kabul into the Dih Sabz basin, and therefore does not want the city to create Ward 19. In fact, the Ministry and politically-connected commanders were actively developing areas northwest of the city, in what is shown as Ward 17 on both figures 4.35 and 4.36. My guess is that the Ministry will resist Municipal control in this area as well.

What this means, overall, is that both planning agencies are proceeding with formal planning of urban development. Technically, the Municipality should be subordinate to the Ministry. In practice, the national regime has not ‘taken root’ sufficiently to suborn the much older local bureaucracy into a coherent administrative hierarchy. The way that Afghans explained this failure is that the national regime itself is not sovereign; it is subordinate to and dependent upon the United States. Both Afghans and Afghan-Americans repeatedly reminded me of the way the United States and the whole international order abandoned Afghanistan in 1990. They expect that the moment it is no longer expedient, the Westerners, Afghan-expatriates, and elite commanders will fly from the country like birds. During the 2005 electoral campaign for seats in the Parliament, local commanders insisted that every candidate must surrender their foreign passports in order to be eligible to stand for election, or to serve as a Minister. Mohammed Qayoumi, President of California State University East Bay, confirmed this in an interview in 2008. He also added that he was quite confident that expatriate Afghans would flee, and be able to recover foreign or dual citizenship, if the political situation in Afghanistan forced them to flee once again.

The cost of political disruption to actual management of urban development

The protracted standoff between the Ministry and the Municipality has strongly interfered with investment in Kabul since 2002. In 2007 an Afghan businessman explained to me:

I come from Logar province; I do not have a family house in Kabul. I have money—my company is doing well—and I want to build a house in Kabul. Where do I build it? I can afford the land, but how do I find out if I am buying land that is in the path of a planned roadway? I don't want to build a house and then have the government expropriate the land at a fraction of the price I spent for it.

For this businessman, Karzai's formal suspension of the 1978 Master Plan of Kabul produced a condition of uncertainty, because it is no longer clear who has authority to plan, and on what basis. If he does not have confidence that he can invest in a place, he will not commit resources to its construction, nor to its future maintenance. This calculation about whether or not to invest in place is iterated hundreds of thousands of times by households across Kabul, with multiplier effects in the construction of both the physical fabric of the city and the fabric of its social relations.

Secondly, this interagency power struggle had distracted both agencies from managing urban growth in the years when more than two million refugees moved into the city. The Ministry chose not to develop the long-awaited successor to the Third Master Plan. The issuance of the Kabul Jadid plan, marks an abandonment of whole-city, comprehensive planning. However this is not a return to the district-by-district incremental planning of the 1940s and 1950s described earlier in this chapter. Rather, it represents the fragmentary efforts of an urban regime that has failed to gain political and administrative coherence.

Thirdly, the Municipality has resumed implementation of parts of the Master Plan, but it is unclear when—or whether—the Municipality will engage in wholesale replacement of informal development with formal development. This greatly increases the uncertainty of urban areas that were developed in violation of that plan. Figure 4.37 vividly illustrates this point: I have overlaid the 1978 Plan on the map of irregular settlements as of 2006. This is a literal illustration of one way in which the assertion of the formal regime *produces* informality. It is not that out-of-plan (*ghair-e Plan*) development is automatically *condemned*; rather, its status becomes ambiguous. It is subject to particular administrative decisions about how and when redevelopment in that area might occur. The municipal planners assert that through all the years of rapid, informal development, they have tracked every property transaction, legal or illegal. They made this assertion as part of their objection to the presumptiveness of expatriate and foreign technical experts coming in and telling them how they should plan. However, with that assertion, the municipal planners also admit that all of the informal urban development in the city is known to this formal planning agency. Refusing to legalize informal developments is a planned act. They also understand well the distressed conditions under which households built and occupied informal houses, and the cost that these households bear in the form of continuously elevated risk of loss of this precious spatial asset. What figure 4.37 shows, then, is a graphic representation of the production

of informal urban space, *through the formal planning process*. This is a discrete mode of planning, which will be examined in the following chapter.

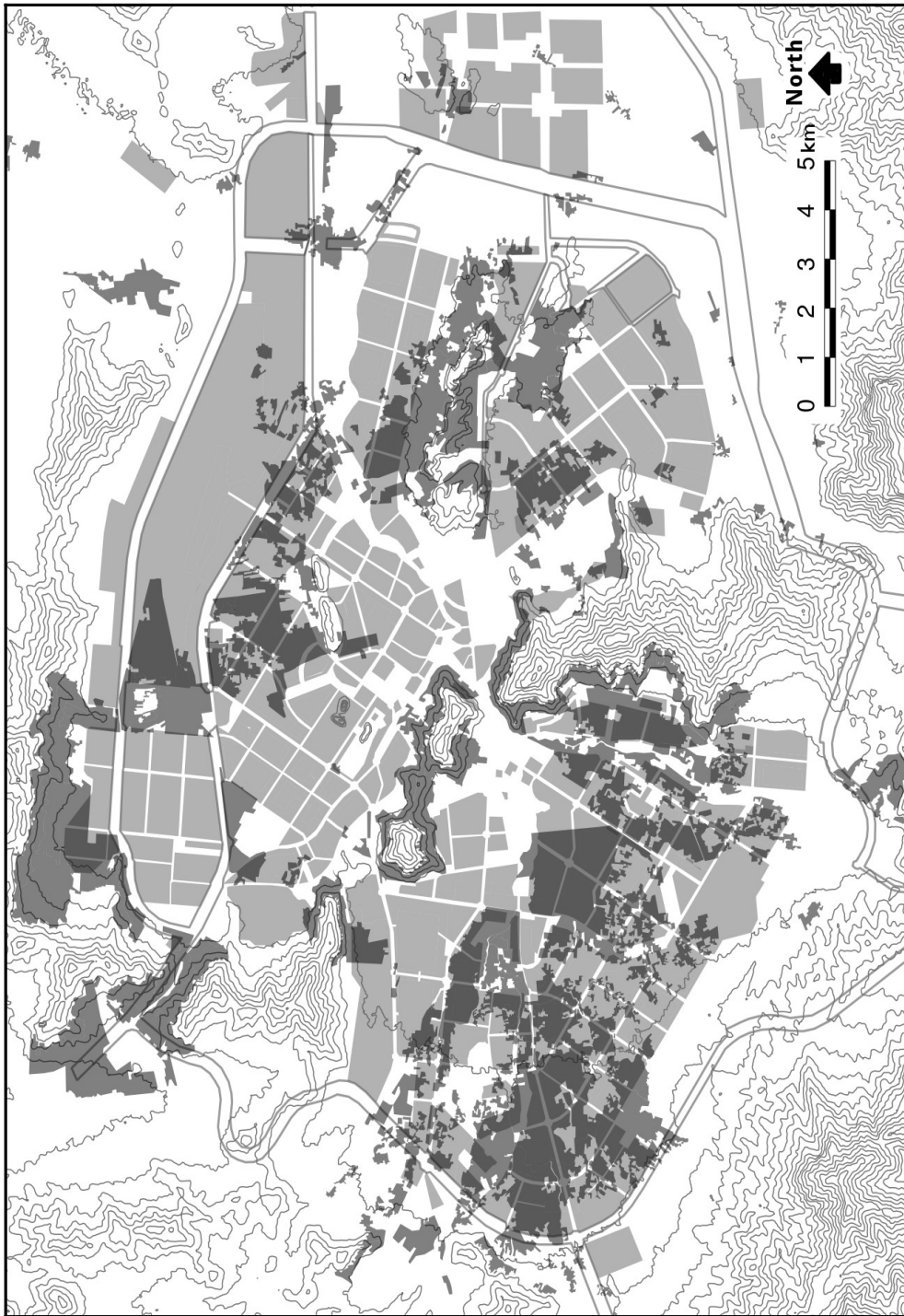


Figure 4.37. Formally-planned residential areas of 1978 Master Plan (lightest gray), overlaid on areas of irregular urbanization as of 2006 (middle gray). Overlapping areas are darkest gray (author, 2009).

Chapter Five: Clay

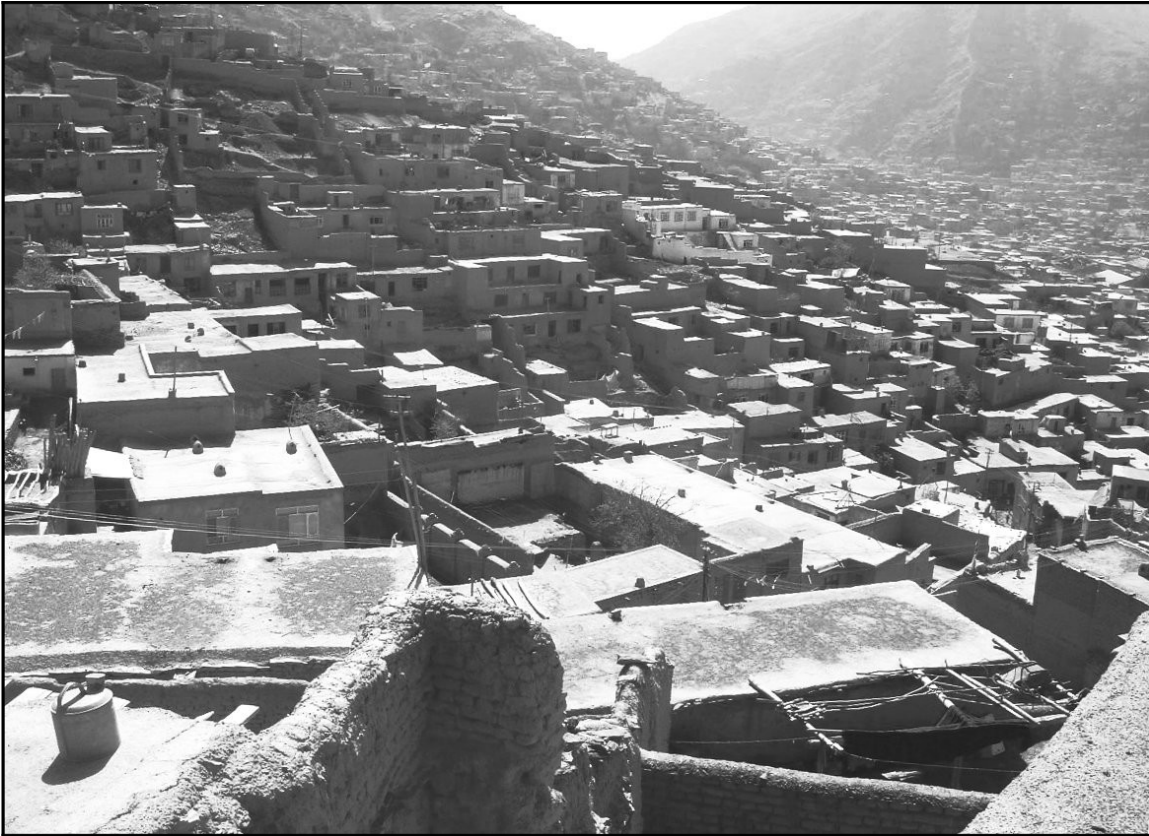


Figure 5.1. Extensive informal urbanization on the south slope of Asmayi Mountain, central Kabul (Author, 2007).

In this chapter I analyze the policies and processes of urban informality in Kabul. I argue that informality is part of the overall process of planning the city; but it is a very different mode of urban planning than explicit, formal planning. Informality can be understood in some respects as an inversion of the formal process: the governing of urban development through the omission or withholding of explicit commitments by the urban regime. Because of its contingency, its negotiable plasticity, and its characteristic material expression in the form of clay-brick houses, I call this mode of urban planning Clay.

Informal urbanization in Kabul is frequently mis-read as evidence that there is no planning in Kabul. Furthermore it is read as evidence that Kabul is not, or is no longer, modern. Most informal housing in Kabul is made out of sun-dried bricks called either ‘earth brick’ (*khisht-e gil*) or ‘clay brick’ (*khisht-e khom*), in contrast to fired or ‘cooked’ brick (*khisht-e pokhta*). Flat, clay-surfaced roofs are used as workspaces for drying clothes, fruits, and vegetables. Large assemblages of informal housing in Kabul superficially resemble much older settlements across the Middle East, North Africa, and the Pueblo cultures of the American Southwest (figure 5.1). There have been important,

recent innovations in the construction of clay-brick houses. Because of deforestation, builders have switched from a post-and-nogging wall assembly to a thicker, “gravity-wall” assembly that uses no wood. Commercially-produced, rot-resistant reed ceiling mats are rolled out over roof-beams, rather than the older method of individually placed slats. 0.3 mm polyethylene sheeting is then placed as a waterproofing layer before the final top layers of sand and clay. However all of these modern innovations are hidden by the outermost protective layers of clay plaster on both the walls and roofs. The soft edges of these houses, together with their irregular layout, are frequently mis-read as indicators that this pattern of urban development has not changed over many centuries.

During my first visit to Kabul I reviewed the 1976 Geodetic Survey map that was used as a baseline to prepare the 1978 Master Plan. The map showed that in 1976, about ten per cent of the built-up area of Kabul was irregular, or ‘traditional.’ This irregular development was clearly marked, and documents from the time revealed a concern for eliminating ‘traditional’ housing through urban modernization.¹ Based on this evidence, it appears that over ninety per cent of the current informal housing in Kabul postdates 1976. Furthermore, interviews with civil servants from the Najibullah government (1987-1992) indicate that most of the informal housing postdates 1992. In which case, most of these irregular assemblages of earthen houses—mis-read as signs of a culture stuck in the past—date from the neoliberalization of the regime, from the rollback of the socialist welfare state during the 1990s. Most of these ancient-looking houses were no more than eleven years old when I surveyed them in 2003.

This new clay-brick housing is not just chronologically modern, nor merely a modern reflection of resource exhaustion. It also represents a new mode of urbanization. This new mode functions in counterpoint to the regime of formal urban planning that was established with the Kabul Jadid plan of 1923. As Nezar Alsayyad points out, the assertion of a formal, regulatory urban regime does not simply replace or supersede older practices of urban development.² Rather, it transforms non-formalized practices into a differentiated, typically deprecated category that serves as a negative referent for defining modernity against ‘backward tradition.’ Ascribing ‘backwardness’ to informal urban development asserts the superiority of modernity as not just ‘forward’ progress, but also as an historic rupture away from a non-modern past. As the defining counterpoint, the informal plays a vital role in affirming the modernity of spaces that are ascribed formal status by the urban regime.

This tension governs informal urbanization in Kabul, as figure 4.31 vividly illustrates. Even if it is in tension, this governing of the informal means that in some way it is *planned*, even if most of the actors involved do not recognize their practices as planning. In this chapter I argue that the vast informal urban landscape of Kabul—approaching three quarters of the built area of the city by now—is not informality in itself, but rather a signifier of the informalization of the urban regime which governs this terrain.

1 Nemat, 1976; and:
Bechhoefer, William. 1977. “The role of squatter housing in the urbanization of Kabul.” *Afghanistan Journal*.
Kabul: unknown publisher.

2 AlSayyad, 2004.

From customary to informal

Below are four excerpts of a satellite photo of Kabul taken on September 7, 2000. Each image shows a different process of non-formal urbanization shaping the urban space of Kabul.



Figure 5.2. Urbanization of agricultural terrain, Wazir Abad Plain, Kabul, 2000 (courtesy Spaceimaging.com).

Figure 5.2 shows a pattern of ‘customary’ urbanization. Small vegetable-garden farms are steadily being subdivided and developed into city. Given the mixed uses of many Kabuli houses as residences, as small factories, and sometimes as shops, it would be an understatement to simply call this ‘residential growth’. This is urban growth. It does not involve the extension of infrastructure networks such as paving, drainage, or piped water, but that is also true of many of the formal areas of Kabul as well. Furthermore, both formal and informal areas are electrified, as is the area shown in Figure 5.2. As farmers subdivide their fields for their families or urban in-migrants, the paths between the fields become the street system. Spiro Kostof noted that in the central blocks of Naples, one can still discern the pattern of Greek fields that were subdivided into urbanizing blocks twenty-three centuries ago.³ I call this pattern of urbanization customary not just because it reflects practices that existed before formal regimes and plans were promulgated in Kabul, but also because the customary ownership of these fields is recognized by the City government of Kabul. This is not land invasion, nor is it squatting; it is extralegal only

³ Kostof, Spiro. 1991. *The city shaped: Urban patterns and meanings through history*. Boston, MA: Little Brown and Co.

because the pattern of conversion from agricultural to urban uses does not match the pattern set forth in the Master Plan. This process does not produce four- to sixteen-story apartment blocks, surrounded by the open space of a micro-region design. Based on the Soviet map of 1985 (figure 4.25), only the small, knotted area visible at upper left in Figure 5.2 predates the mid-1980s.



Figure 5.3. Orthogonal superimposition: incomplete regularization of customary urbanization pattern, Taymani neighborhood, Kabul, 2000 (courtesy Spaceimaging.com).

The area shown in Figure 5.3 is called Taymani. The Taymani neighborhood is immediately northwest of the center of the city. The small garden-farms in the lower right of this image were already beginning to be urbanized in the late 1950s according to the Soviet survey map of 1961. Several abortive attempts were made to regularize the pattern of development at the lower right and in the center. By the early 1970s, under the Second Master Plan, the area to the northwest (upper left in the image) was regularized, leaving traces of the superimposition of this orthogonal pattern upon the terrain-responsive pattern of irrigated garden-farms that predated it. As best I can tell, *all* of the houses visible in this image are formalized, meaning their property titles are recorded in the City Title Office (*daftar-e imlak*). This should remind us not to rigidly equate irregular settlement patterns and clay-brick construction with informality. The urban ideal for Kabul's modernization was straight streets and orthogonal lots, but in a few areas regularization happened without rectification. Clay may symbolize informality, but there is some slippage in this correlation.



Figure 5.4. Informal development beginning where the formal leaves off: Khair Khana (left) and Naw Abad-e Khwaja Bughra, right, 2000 (courtesy Spaceimaging.com).

In contrast to the pattern in Taymani shown in Figure 5.3, the irregular settlement on the right half of figure 5.4 is quite recent. It postdates the formal pattern on the left, which is the eastern edge of Phase Three of the Khair Khana planned area. Khair Khana was first proposed in the Second Master Plan of 1970 (Figure 4.15, Chapter 4). Formal development began after 1972, and the Phase Three area visible on the left side of figure 4.4 was the last to be developed. The construction of roads in this area made it desirable for further settlement. Across the bottom of the image is the sixty meter wide right-of-way of the road linking Kabul International Airport to the Khair Khana Pass, and thence to the Shomali Plain, Salang Tunnel, and northern Afghanistan; it was paved in 2004. The square lot at lower right is a major power station, and the north-south road in the center of the image has become a major commercial street. Out of view to the upper right is the historic village of Khwaja Bughra. Since the mid-1980s the barren plain between the old village and Khair Khana has been urbanized. In this case the difference in settlement pattern is starkly obvious, and corresponds to a difference in legal status and security.



Figure 5.5. Informal mimics the formal, central Kabul, 2000 (courtesy Spaceimaging.com). The campuses on the lower left are the Ministry of Agriculture, Ali Abad Medical School, and Kabul University. The formal area just to the east of these campuses is Jemal Mena, or Kart-5 from the 1923 Plan of Kabul Jadid; the Sakhi Shrine and cemetery are the open space at bottom center-right. All of the seemingly regular development north of these areas, across the center of the image, is actually informal.

Figure 5.5 shows a fourth pattern of informal development, where the informal mimicks the formal. The swath of houses extending from right to left across this image are informal. However this area was developed under the control of an army general. Insofar as the terrain allowed, it was laid out orthogonally. In extremely steep areas at lower right, top center, and on the left, the terrain is so steep that settlement could only follow the contours of the terrain.

These four images show a variety of patterns that have been produced in ways that do not correspond to the formal. To underscore this point: when my students presented their final urban designs for an area in southwest Kabul, all of the designs but one were orthogonal. The one design that broke from this pattern included some regular blocks, but as it interfaced with existing informal development in the area, new streets were ‘stitched into’ the adjacent irregular urban fabric. Several students protested that this was not a design, it was not planning, because the streets were not straight. Only at this point did I become aware of how embedded was the equation of planning with rectilinear space among my students. Several of the presentation reviewers began to object that irregular

spaces in other cities were often intensely designed, planned and formally regulated. I simply opened the question by reviewing the requirements of the assignment I had given all of them, and pointed out that this design that wove regular and irregular areas together fulfilled the requirements I had given them.

Re-reading the informal landscape

Consider two very different possible readings of this informal urban landscape if we recognize it as entirely modern. From a Californian perspective, these new houses built of local, naturally insulating materials represent cutting-edge sustainable urban development. At the same time, using Derek Gregory's perspective, this landscape can be read as evidence of de-modernization.⁴ As I discussed in Chapter Three, I sympathize with Gregory's ethical position, but to support his overall point, I argue that the deprivation of political security in Kabul reveals *exactly* what modernity means today. Regardless of its visual regularity or irregularity, informal urbanization is the product of very contemporary shifts in *technologies of rule* that link cities and urban politics across the world at this moment. This emergent mode of governmentality involves increasing use of exceptionalism in both policy practices and the production of spaces, from the Special Economic Zones that Ong studies in China,⁵ to the 'vanishing points' of the global war prison studied by Gregory,⁶ to the informal urbanization that is occurring under the watchful eye of neoliberalizing urban regimes across the planet.

The Western presence in Kabul asserts authoritative influence, and thus a strong bond of accountability between the West and Kabul. Through the directional pressure of transnational donor policies, through American political influence in the creation of the Karzai Administration at Bonn in 2001, and through the perfusion of a Western cultural and discursive regime across Afghanistan, Westerners play both a direct and indirect role in all modes of planning in Kabul, including Clay. Those linkages fundamentally corrupt the world-division we still euphemize as First/Third, North/South, Developed/Developing, and so on. The hegemony of belief in a divisible world is, itself, a profound self-deception. It blocks our understanding of how we as a species are urbanizing, and the various ways in which we are planning that urbanization. Corrupting and violating any assertions of generic difference is an important ethical project in this moment of globalization, because it keeps visible a set of linkages and collective accountabilities across terrains of radical inequality. As I discussed in Chapter Two, this recognition entails the ethical problem of empire. At the same time, this recognition also evokes the inverse: the deferred, unnamed, unbounded responsibility for the poverty we produce through a globalizing political economy.

Interestingly, the current discourse which praises globalization claims what seems to be the same ideal of a harmonized, integrated world of equalized opportunities. This is

4 Gregory, 2004.

5 Ong, 2006.

6 Gregory, Derek. 2007. "Vanishing points: Law, violence and exception in the global war prison." Chapter 11 in *Violent geographies: Fear, terror, and political violence*, edited by Allan Pred. New York: Routledge.

what Thomas Friedman means by ‘flatness.’ Yet Friedman,⁷ Baghwati,⁸ and Wolf⁹ argue this dissolution of difference through an assimilation to Western terms. The index of ‘arriving’ at an equitable world is when other peoples assimilate to the particular habits and expectations of the West. Caveats within this ideal are most revealing: the ‘not-yet’ status of whole planetary regions (almost always sub-Saharan Africa) replicate the normative discourse of developed/developing, industrialized/industrializing, deficient/sufficient. A very different way of disputing a binary divisibility of the world is to examine the ways in which actors across space and class are engaged in reproducing the asymmetries that supposedly divide the world. Gereffi’s work in analyzing industrial commodity-chains is a classic example of this,¹⁰ and more recent research on the feminization of transnational labor reveals the disturbingly subtle distinction between live-in domestics and international sex trafficking.¹¹ Ananya Roy’s research on women who commute from surrounding villages to work in Kolkata shows that these linkages also happen at the local scale, where an urban regime may ‘unmap’ the presence of a crucial segment in its labor force, enabling that regime to disregard any potential accountability it may have for infrastructure provision, wage and contract enforcement, and recourse for human rights abuses.¹² A third, and very different example of under-considered linkages is the circuit of high-end human development involved in transnational aid work, an issue that will be explored in Chapter Six.

In terms more directly relevant to urban planning, consider another mis-reading that is embodied in the term *lack*, in contrast to the term *deprivation*. In English-language media about Afghanistan, the country is often represented in a negative comparative way, as a place defined by *lack*: lack of sophistication, lack of innovation, lack of modernity. Post-colonial theorists argue that this rhetorical use of *lack* in discourse marks off non-Westerners as lesser Others, as subaltern.¹³ As it has been used by South Asian social theorists, ‘subalterity’ is the condition in which a population is deprived of recognition, voice, and agency. Although coercive domination is usually a precondition for producing subalterity, these deprivations are implemented through regimes of knowledge (“Pietro, you are an *expert* on Afghanistan, *you* tell us about it...”) and discursive framing (“As naïve, non-modern tribal peoples, Afghans wouldn’t even know what to say on their own behalf...”). The discursive framing of Afghanistan enables Westerners to declare that Afghans are not modern. The hegemonic force of this discursive framing is indicated by public statements by Western political leaders which rely on the presumption that their audience agrees, *without question*, that Afghanistan is not modern.

This rhetorical move is subtle: *lack* is a curiously passive term implying that the

7 Friedman, Thomas. 2005. *The world is flat: A brief history of the twenty-first century*. New York: Farrar Straus and Giroux.

8 Bhagwati, Jagdish. 2004. *In defense of globalization*. New York: Oxford University Press.

9 Wolf, Martin. 2004. *Why globalization works*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

10 Gereffi, Gary, and Miguel Korzeniewicz, eds. 1994. *Commodity chains and global capitalism*. Westport, CT: Praeger.

11 UNIFEM, the UNDP, and UNHCR have all recently focused on this issue, as have rights organizations; for a specific reference see: Limoncelli, Stephanie. 2009. “The trouble with trafficking: Conceptualizing women’s sexual labor and economic human rights.” *Women’s Studies International Forum* doi:10.1016/j.wsif.2009.05.002.

12 Roy, 2003.

13 Subaltern is a Gramscian term adopted by post-colonial theorists, initially in South Asia in the 1970s.

absence of modernity is natural—a cue that some sort of hegemonic ideology might be at play in this misrepresentation. Deprivation is another term that also indicates poverty, but deprivation evokes poverty as an active condition of *having possession negated*. Deprivation reveals the political dimensions of poverty as a social condition that is produced and sustained. This does not mean that poverty is intentionally maintained by the conscious mendacity of individual social leaders. But deprivation does suggest some political accountability, a shift from the more economistic passive-voice to a more socially critical active-voice description of poverty.¹⁴ In Kabul the political dimension of deprivation is readily apparent in many forms, beginning with the Cold War geopolitical conflict in the late 1970s. The price Afghans have paid for defeating and demoralizing the Soviets has been extremely high. It manifests as the collective loss of wealth of the entire society, through the flight of its professionally-trained classes, the disruption of networks of kin and friends, and the replacement of more tolerant leaderships with hardened Islamist commanders. As Olivier Roy, Ahmed Rashid, Barnett Rubin, and Stephen Coll all make clear, the rise of a hardened, intolerant form of political Islam in Afghanistan was promoted by the United States in the 1980s.¹⁵ CIA director William Casey sought to create a ‘Green Belt’ of Islamism to block the ‘Red Advance’ of the Soviets towards the Arabian Sea. Afghans were so disgusted with this group that even Kabulis accepted the Taliban as a better alternative. However the Bush administration brought most of these commanders back into the current government by inviting them to the Bonn conference in November-December 2001.¹⁶ That recognition, and the tens of millions in ‘cooperation-funding’ that was paid to them in the first two years of the Global War on Terror established a precedent of corruption and impunity that the Islamic Republic may be unable to reverse.

Clay as a mode of urban planning

If deprivation can occur and be sustained without the deliberate malice of individual actors, it is reasonable to question whether informal urbanization should be considered planned. Many of the actors in Kabul believe it is not: the term for informal development in Kabul is “*ghair-e plan*” which literally translates as ‘outside of the plan’—in this case, the 1978 Kabul Master Plan for Two Million, discussed in Chapter Four. However there are two ways that development can end up ‘outside of a plan.’ Either new urbanization is totally unexpected and invisible to *all* of the actors in an urban regime, in which case the regime cannot respond to it. Or, some faction within the urban regime recognizes urbanization pressures and responds to them in a way that violates the explicit planning regime. Although the first condition is possible, I have yet to discover an instance of informal urbanization occurring entirely outside of the collusion of some faction of the local urban regime. As we saw in Chapter Four, Kabul is perhaps the extreme case of a formal urban regime persisting under conditions of repeated, violent political disruption. Even in the midst of the mujahid civil war, in which more than ten thousand civilians

14 For a detailed refutation of economism, see: Hart, Gillian. 2002. *Disabling globalization: places of power in post-apartheid South Africa*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

15 Roy 1990; Rashid 2000; Rubin 2002; and Coll 2004.

16 Mani, Rama. 2003. *Ending impunity and building justice in Afghanistan*. Kabul: Afghanistan Research Evaluation Unit.

were slaughtered each year within Kabul, both property-relations and the 1978 Master Plan remained in effect. Though the City could not prevent informal settlement at the time, City planner-engineers told me several times that they remained aware of every violation and every property transfer in the city. The detailed knowledge of the taxi driver I described in Chapter Four corroborates this assertion. Even in the midst of what one might call an apocalypse, the urban regime with its institutionalized assumptions, expectations, and practices persists. The rapid and total de-institutionalization that is portrayed in popular American dystopian fiction seems to reflect an American desire for catharsis from the contradiction of a myth of individualism and a deeply-institutionalized lived reality.¹⁷ But this perverse desire distorts our perception of actual social catastrophes, for instance when we summarize the situation in Afghanistan as “Twenty-three years of war has systematically destroyed the social and economic infrastructure of Afghanistan.”¹⁸ To the contrary: the *local regime* of institutionalized practices and their embedded assumptions has persisted as four *national leaderships* have been overthrown in fairly rapid succession.

Explicit urban plans, whatever their form, establish a secured terrain which the urban regime commits to protect, through enforcement of the law. If any component of the regime allows that terrain to be exceeded in response to urbanization pressures, the urban regime itself is becoming informalized. Poorer, more vulnerable families may choose to exchange the security of formality for the opportunity to access urban space that they otherwise cannot afford. This condition of violation is rarely, if ever, possible without the collusion and tacit permission of some faction within an urban regime. In the case of Shir Pur discussed in this chapter, the Ministry of Defense has given permission for urbanization in violation of the City Plan-Making Office at least twice over the past thirty years. As a major owner of property within central Kabul, the Ministry of Defense is as much a part of the urban regime as the City Plan-Making Office, the Ministry of Urban Development, and the public works agencies.

In other words, neither ‘the state’ in general, nor the ‘urban regime’ in particular, should be considered monolithic entities. Drawing on the analytical methodology of Foucault, it is more useful to regard these political regimes as more-or-less coherent assemblages of practices and discourses, performed by myriad agents, in pursuit of multiple agendas.¹⁹ To the degree that practices and discourses of a regime appear coherent, they can produce the *effect* of a Weberian, rational-bureaucratic state. However this is a conception of regimes which explicitly rejects the idea that a regime is an autonomous entity; something which can be anthropomorphized; some thing to which we could ascribe discrete agency. Whereas in classic social theory, structure and agency could be conceived of as discrete poles on an axis, this more Foucauldian conception of regimes is of an assemblage of discourses and practices. Speech-acts and practices *perform* the institutional structures we observe, and monumental buildings are created to

17 consider the popular *Terminator* film franchise.

18 2001. “NGO appeal for Afghanistan reconstruction.” *Relief Web*. Tokyo: Japan Platform, December 13. <http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/db900SID/OCHA-64CJQ9?OpenDocument>

19 Foucault, Michel. 2003. “Questions of method”. *The essential Foucault: Selections from essential works of Foucault, 1954-1984*. edited by Paul Rabinow and Nikolas S Rose. New York: New Press, pp. 251-252.

give the sense that the structures themselves are persistent and autonomous entities. Yet the buildings—and the signals they send through monumental-style visual proportions—are no more than signs. The frequent reassignment of their functions should betray the implication that durable building materials represent durable institutions. The monumentality which buildings perform, designed to produce an effect of permanence, fits Foucault's conception. The public is the audience to these elaborate performances of stateness, and the state's primary existence as an entity is in the collective effect produced in the consciousness and habits of intended subjects. Differentiating structure from agency within this conception of regime-as-performance becomes irrelevant.

This more disaggregated conception provides a workable model of how regimes operate under conditions of formal 'coherence' and informalizing 'contradiction'. The multiple agents and factions within an urban regime all play a role in policy formation and implementation, such that the outcomes of formal development rarely reflect the intentions of any one actor. In which case, the distinction between formal and informal urban development is not a question of intentionality. Informal urbanization may even indicate a *higher* degree of intentionality than formally planned urbanization. By denying explicit legal recognition to known development, by acting to constrain the terrain of the legal to be less than the terrain of the city as a whole, various agencies and individuals within an urban regime gain some form of advantage, some form of privilege. Individuals may benefit from bribes, political vote-buying, or the accumulation of obligations—non-monetized debts—with the expectation that they will call in these favors at some future moment. Collective benefits include political coalition-building, epitomized by the Tammany Hall political machine in New York City, or a form of land-banking in which violations are knowingly allowed, pending the redevelopment of the area 'according to plan' at some future date. Many of these practices are familiar, interpreted as forms of corruption in urban studies literature about urban regimes in Western cities. As Robinson points out, there is likely to be overlap between urban theory (focused on Western cities) and development theory (focused on cities of the South). However through the lens of neoliberalization, all of these actions are some form of political exception consistent with what Ong describes. In each case, it is the regime itself that is corrupting.²⁰

AbdulRashid Janbaz, the Economic Planning Director of Kabul in 2002-2004, described an instance of exceptionalism that suggests the variety of unexpected ways it might occur. A commander had built his house so that it projected well out into an existing roadway, blocking half of it. In 2002 Janbaz accompanied the police chief to the site, to notify the commander that he would have to demolish the projecting part of his house, or have it demolished by the city. The police chief suddenly recognized the commander as a fellow *mujahid*; they had fought alongside each other against the Soviets in the 1980s. The police chief was then unwilling to insist that the commander demolish the projecting part of his house. Janbaz was convinced that no bribery had taken place; rather, this was an act of exception for the sake of loyalty. As with formal planning, this outcome is unexpected, but it is not a problem of lack of recognition. The exception is recognized, and thus it becomes a collective decision. Insofar as planning is a set of

²⁰ Ong, 2006.

collective decisions to commit present urban resources towards anticipated future benefits, informal urbanization is a mode of planning.

Part of the challenge of recognizing this process as planning is that ‘planning’ implies intentionality, to Dari and Pashto-speakers as much as to English-speakers. Deliberate, calculated action is involved in urban planning, but these are the traits of individual actors, not the regime itself. Anthropomorphizing whole regimes as if they are conscious actors is an effect of the misconception of regimes as discrete entities. In that idealistic misconception, the regime only intends to do the things we recognize as the formal; the informal is simply an accidental product of unintended consequences.

This ‘incidental’ conception of informality is implicit in Hernando de Soto’s work. A central assertion in *The other path* is that poorer Peruvians simply could not afford the permits, documentation, and formal recognition of their place in the city.²¹ De Soto does not explain how these barriers to formality are erected, though he strongly implies that they are an inadvertent byproduct of inherently inefficient governmental bureaucracy. The particular way he framed ‘the problem of informality’ was a powerful argument for neoliberalizing reform. De Soto implied that if administrative procedure is recognized as inherently excessive and burdensome, we would understand that it needs to be either reduced or removed as a barrier to formalization. In his second book *The mystery of capital*, de Soto goes on to argue that if these barriers to formality are simply removed, an enormous amount of wealth would be granted to the poor by converting their ‘dead assets’ into ‘live capital’ to be used as investment collateral.²² De Soto has been given the opportunity to implement his own recommendations in Peru as senior advisor to several Peruvian governments since the mid-1990s. The benefits from formalizing illegal housing and businesses has been far more limited than the panacea he proposed it would be.^{23, 24}

Based on my field research and the recent work of Roy²⁵ and Yiftachel,²⁶ I suggest that de Soto misconceived of the nature of informality by mistaking the sign—informalized urban activity—for what it signifies: informalization of the urban regime itself. In other words, he focused on the economic effect, avoiding conflict with powerful leaderships by politely ignoring the underlying political cause. This foreclosure of political considerations leads, in turn, to a misconception of poverty as a lack of capital, rather than the condition of elevated risk that accompanies lack of political protection. What I found was that families who have sufficient access to socio-political leverage within an urban regime can negotiate their security. Families who lack this socio-political leverage cannot. In short, poverty *is* the condition of risk. Presence or absence of material wealth is an effect of this sociopolitical condition, not a cause of it.

21 Soto, Hernando de, and Instituto Libertad y Democracia (Lima Peru). 1989. *The other path: The invisible revolution in the Third World*. New York: Harper & Row.

22 Soto, Hernando de. 2000. *The mystery of capital: why capitalism triumphs in the West and fails everywhere else*. New York: Basic Books.

23 Daley, Elizabeth and Mary Hobley. 2005. “Land: changing contexts, changing relationships, changing rights”. London: Rural-urban exchange team, Department for International Development.

24 Varley, Ann. 2007. Gender and property formalization: Conventional and alternative approaches”. *World Development* Vol. 35, No. 10, pp. 1739–1753.

25 Roy, Ananya. 2009. “Why India cannot plan its cities.” *Planning Theory* 8:7-11.

26 Yiftachel, 2008.

Karl Polanyi's explanation of the social dangers of 'disembedding fictive commodities' helps explain de Soto's conceptual error. Polanyi warned that the fundamental resources of land, labor, and money should not be treated as pure commodities.²⁷ These three resources were not initially produced for the purpose of economic exchange. If they are treated as commodities with no regard to their social context, the consequences tend to be socially disruptive. Land, especially urban space, is a non-substitutable resource because it is our place within a geography of resources ranging from networks of friends and professional contacts, to education, health, and spiritual community. In Marxian terms, land has use-value which cannot be abstracted as exchange-value. Labor, Polanyi reminds us, is inalienable from the humans who perform it. Full commodification of labor is slavery, which was considered morally repellent at the time that he wrote (1944). Money, although it is central to the act of exchange, was not itself intended to be an object of speculation. Furthermore, money is in fact a debt-instrument; a series of promissory notes of agreed-upon value.

Numerous examples can illustrate how the social disembedding of any one of these resources is socially destabilizing. Once we recognize that the resource Polanyi calls *money* can be more generally understood as *debt*, the worldwide financial panic of 2008-2009 becomes the most recent confirmation of Polanyi's thesis. Mortgage debts were bundled into abstract 'mortgage-backed securities' whose relationship to actual value was deliberately obscured by unregulated securities traders. This scheme crumpled in September 2008 when the inability of mortgage-holders to repay their loans became apparent, but the relationship of actual mortgages to 'securities' was so obscure that the risk of investment firms could not be evaluated. In Polanyi's terms, the non-commodity of debt-instruments was treated as a fictive commodity, disembedding mortgages from their social context. The consequences threatened the social order through widespread foreclosures and family bankruptcies. This threatening 'movement' triggered a 'counter-movement' in which society reacted by demanding social protections.

Polanyi's theory of fictive commodities seems to provide a general refutation of de Soto's entire argument. If formalization of houses and businesses is done so that these resources can be treated as investment collateral, de Soto is implicitly arguing for the full commodification of urban space. He is also arguing rather explicitly for much more widespread indebtedness of the poor, without mentioning *to whom* they would be indebted. The poor become indebted to the rich: defined in this case as those who can afford to lend and invest. In an apolitical world this might benefit everyone. However the lenders in an urban environment are the social elite, with strong linkages to, if not direct overlap with the political elite. Though most cities are not closed environments like company towns, the elite lenders do play an influential role in the prevailing local interest rates; or in Muslim countries, the service-fees on debts. Those same elites are also employers and financiers of employers, influencing the prevailing wages in the city. Meanwhile the poor who have just been given the opportunity to indebt themselves still have lower earnings-potentials and less chance of being able to repay such loans. If they default, they lose the house; an asset which they used to be able to occupy without

²⁷ Polanyi, Karl. 2001[1944]. *The great transformation: The political and economic origins of our time*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

ownership. In other words, the poor assume more of the real financial risk of loss. Furthermore, formalization of urban land brings it more easily within range of gentrification. Whereas social activists might be able to raise a politically embarrassing scandal about the clearance of informal houses, gentrification evicts whole populations by entirely legal means. Application of the law, in this case, strips people of their effective urban rights.

An urban genealogy of rights

In place of de Soto's theorization of informality I want to suggest a very different conception before presenting the case of Shir Pur. Though I have argued that Clay is a mode of planning involving the informalization of the urban regime itself, thus far I have simply assumed that there are 'urbanization pressures' which are sufficiently strong that whole populations are willing to negotiate a violation of the constricted formal terrain in order to gain access to a place in the city. The responses we received to the survey in 2003 indicate that the role of informal settlers is not so passive, nor functionally determined. In general, Afghan families are very extended. The family-units we encountered tended to be one arm of a larger whole, sent into Kabul to explore the feasibility of moving more of the family to the city. When the surveyors asked, "Why did you move to Kabul?" respondents often became defensive and hostile, interpreting the question as a challenge for them to justify their decision to settle in Kabul.

In this respect, informal urban settlement is a claim on urban space, an expression of demand of the 'right to the city' articulated by Henri Lefebvre in 1968.²⁸ Castells alluded to this demand in *The city and the grassroots*,²⁹ and Don Mitchell brought the idea in to Western planning-theory discourse.³⁰ More recently, James Holston linked the demand for the right to the city to urban informality as a central component of 'insurgent citizenship'.³¹ Here I would like to extend Holston's usage of the concept by examining the tension between rights-demands and the regime of law.

Since 1923, Afghan constitutions have drawn from European models. However the present Constitution of Afghanistan was developed with legal consultation from the Center for International Cooperation at New York University, and ratified in early 2004, establishing the Islamic Republic.³² Chapter Two of the Constitution describes the 'fundamental rights and duties of citizens,' and draws heavily on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This is not to suggest that the Afghan Constitution is derivative: Afghanistan was an original signatory to the Universal Declaration in 1948, as a sovereign nation well before most of Africa and Asia were decolonized. But it *is* an argument that the Afghan Constitution, including its explicit recognition of Shari'a jurisprudence in civil procedure, is a Liberal constitution. As in most Liberal constitutions, the rights which are codified in the Afghan Constitution are mostly

28 Lefebvre, Henri. 1996[1968]. "The right to the city," in *Writings on cities*. Cambridge, Mass: Blackwell, pp. 63-181.

29 Castells, 1983.

30 Mitchell, 2003.

31 Holston, 2008.

32 Loya Jirga, Constitutional. 1382 Hijra-Solar (2004 Anno Domini). *Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan*. Kabul: Government of Afghanistan Printing Office.

negative rights: rights which protect the citizen by constraining state power. For instance, Article Thirty-Four guarantees freedom of expression, constraining the state's power to censure. Article Twenty-Four guarantees the liberty and dignity of the individual; rights which provide no protection for claim against the state when the state itself is playing a role in constricting the terrain of legality in Kabul. Likewise, the freedom of movement guaranteed by Article Thirty-Nine is not the right that so many Afghans desire; they demand *the right to stay in Kabul*.

Within modern Liberal political discourse, rights and law are often treated as harmonious, if not synonymous. Rarely are they treated as contradictory; and yet this is the tension that is revealed through the informalization of urban regimes. Giorgio Agamben provides a key to understanding this tension by contrasting Hellenic and ancient Roman conceptions of politics. Agamben focuses on a Roman legal innovation that violates Greek political ideals: *homo sacer*, the body stripped of all claim to rights.³³ Drawing on the political theories of Karl Schmitt, Agamben argues that this expression of the sovereign exception explains the peculiar modern intersection of sovereign power and biopower, the two modes of social power distinguished by Foucault. Unlike the Hellenic ideal of the virtuous urban life as *bios politikos*, Agamben argues that bare life (*zoë*) enters the political sphere through the exceptional figure of the *homo sacer*.

In his analysis Agamben is referencing an Italian discourse about the Roman Constitution which has fallen out of circulation in English.³⁴ For our purposes, what is most important to understand is that in the republican city of Rome, the enforcement of law and the struggle for rights were in sharp tension. Roman patricians asserted laws (*lex*) which were ostensibly universal and even-handed, but in practice most beneficial to the patricians. The free urban population (plebs) made demands against the established patrician urban regime for guarantees and entitlements known collectively as *ius* or *ius civile*. These rights ranged from price-controls and subsidies on grain to the powerful office of the Tribunes—the model of popularly-based judicial power. Though the Oxford English Dictionary translates *ius civile* as “The law of Roman citizens; thence, the Roman law as a whole,”³⁵ in fact the word *ius* meant *rights*, in tension with or opposition to the laws (*lex*).

It is a modern political innovation to codify rights *as* law. Though political historians sometimes explain this as the implementation of the ideas of Locke, Rousseau and Paine, in practice this move was more of a strategic improvisation. In 1789, a vulnerable Continental Congress agreed to accept a package of ten Amendments—a Bill of Rights—in order to get states to ratify their original seven Articles as a Constitution.³⁶ This move, and the subsequent codification of Rights by Napoleon, has confounded our modern understanding of how rights emerged out of the situated urban practices of class conflict

33 Agamben, 1998, p.1.

34 For English-language discussion of the Roman ‘constitution’ see:
Ihne, Wilhelm. 1853. *Researches Into the History of the Roman Constitution*. William Pickering.
Tighe, Ambrose. 1886. *The Development of the Roman Constitution*. D. Apple & Co.
Lintott, A. 1999. *The Constitution of the Roman Republic*. Oxford University Press.

35 Oxford English Dictionary, second edition. 1989.

36 Bruns, Roger. 1986. *A more perfect union: The creation of the United States Constitution*. Washington, DC: National Archives and Records Administration.

in the ancient world. Codification of rights renders them static, unresponsive to the changing needs of the disprivileged as those codified rights are protected and enforced by the privileged. Yet the needs of the poor do not suddenly vanish through this political maneuver. The knowing violation of the formal rules of urban planning (*lex*) is the re-manifestation of people needing access to the social networks, health care, education, and other life-opportunities which they claim as a right (*ius*). Thus the ‘right’ articulated by Lefebvre is the much more ancient, persistent demand that predates the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the French Rights of Man, and the American Bill of Rights—the three Liberal models for the rights codified in the current Constitution of Afghanistan. That ‘right to the city,’ to spatial access regardless of technical legal status in relation to a state, is the *ius*-logic that drives urbanization in tension with *lex*.

Insofar as the urban terrain established by law is smaller than the urban terrain demanded by right, urban informality emerges. The constriction of the legal terrain might begin unknowingly, but it cannot be sustained without deliberate denial of legal protections and securities to the disprivileged. In the United States, this is done by planned and rhetorical distancing: *planned* in the sense of urban segregations that render the poor invisible to the rich; *rhetorical* in the discourses of racism and xenophobia that render ‘the darkie’ and ‘the illegal’ less-than-human, unfit to claim rights. In Kabul, urban informality is harder to ignore because there is minimal spatial segregation. Informal settlements cling to the steep mountainsides that loom over the center of the city as figure 5.1 illustrates. Informality is also interwoven into the fabric of the formally-developed areas in the form of mud dwellings built behind the formal houses that line the street. Sometimes these second units are indeed “in-law” units, as poor cousins of an established Kabuli family are moved into the back yard and treated as servants. This intimate familial relationship between the formal and informal also means that rhetorical distancing is not possible in Kabul. As varied as Afghans may be by language and region, that differentiation does not correspond easily to the class differences between the few that stand within the legal terrain and the majority that are held outside of that constricted space. I found Pashtuns, Tajiks, Hazara, and Uzbeks from across Afghanistan represented in large numbers among informal residents. In an area east of the city center called God-given village (*Deh Khuda-e Dad*) I found all of these groups living together and cooperating in the same neighborhood council (*shura*). Unlike the sectarian difference that Baviskar identifies in Delhi,³⁷ or the racial difference that even de Soto admits in Lima,³⁸ urban informality in Kabul cuts across all social variables except class. As we will see in the case of Shir Pur in this chapter, even the relationship of class and formality/informality is not simple.

In summary, two processes operate in tension. These are propagation of *deprivation* through sustained constriction of the urban legal terrain, and the situated urban *rights-demands* of thousands of Afghan families seeking purchase in Kabul. Together these two processes shape the vast majority of the urban space of Kabul. Together they form the mode of planning I call Clay.

37 Baviskar, Amita. 2006. “Demolishing Delhi: World-class city in the making.” *Mute* 2:88-95.

38 De Soto and ILD, 1989.

II. The case of Shir Pur



Figure 5.6. Two informal houses in Shir Pur (author, 2007). Foreground: an older, clay-brick house veneered in mud plaster. Background: an aid palace.

On the morning of Thursday, September 4, 2003, the chief of police for the city of Kabul led a team of officers and bulldozers to a cluster of informal houses on Ministry of Defense land in the Shir Pur neighborhood of central Kabul. The officers began evicting residents, and the bulldozers began demolishing their houses.³⁹ Members of an international NGO contacted Miloon Kothari, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Adequate Housing, who was visiting Kabul for two weeks at the invitation of Hamid Karzai. Mr. Kothari arrived at the site and held a press conference. The incident was picked up immediately by the international press, to the great embarrassment of the Karzai's Transitional Administration.⁴⁰ Police Chief Salangyi lost his job, the evictions were stopped, and so far as I could tell from interviews four years after the fact, none of the informal residents were forced to leave. The fact that several public agencies attempted this eviction in the very same fortnight that Kothari had been invited to visit Afghanistan indicates at least a lack of administrative coherence, and at most the substantial inter-agency conflict within the urban regime governing Kabul.

In the days following this attempted eviction, staff-members of several international

³⁹ _____ 2003. "Police violently evict Kabul residents." *United Nations Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN)*, September 4.

⁴⁰ Constable, Pamela. 2003. "Land grab in Kabul embarrasses government." *Washington Post*, September 16, A-13.

NGOs voluntarily patrolled the area to prevent any surprise attempts to proceed with the eviction. Blocking this eviction was considered especially important to both aid organizations and the Ministry of Urban Development and Housing. By 2003, at least sixty per cent of the residential fabric of Kabul was informal. Clearing this area would set a precedent of tenure-insecurity for the poorest residents of the city in the middle of an extreme housing shortage.⁴¹ As it turned out, the high exposure of this scandal seemed to discourage agents of the urban regime from repeating this tactic over the next several years. The demolition of informal housing seems to be restricted to road-widening projects consistent with the 1978 Master Plan. As I described in Chapter Four, these selective demolitions seemed to have strong popular support. However informal residents in Kabul suffer subtler insecurities. Rents in Kabul remain entirely unregulated, and no tenants' rights are being enforced. Unlike in Latin America, a large proportion of informal residents in Kabul are renters. Whereas James Holston still uses the term 'auto-construction' in 2009, implying that the occupants of informal houses in Brazil built those houses, we found up to seventy per cent of the families in two neighborhoods of Kabul were renters. This seemed to be the result of the sudden massive influx of refugees after December 2001, as families doubled and tripled-up in houses that were built on land still owned in customary but recognized fashion by the farmer whose field it once was. The rights of these residents are extremely tenuous and negotiable, depending to a large degree on acts of recognition. Nonetheless, their need for housing produces a large and increasing proportion of the built environment of Kabul. In 2003 it was estimated at about sixty per cent of the area of the city; by 2007 it was estimated at about seventy per cent of a substantially larger city. Although a significant amount of formal, Concrete urbanization is proceeding, this contingent, plastic, Clay mode outpaces it.

41 Constable, Pamela. 2002. "Kabul swamped by tide of returnees." *Dawn*, May 23, Internet edition: <http://www.dawn.com/2002/05/23/int15.htm>

Some historical perspective on Shir Pur

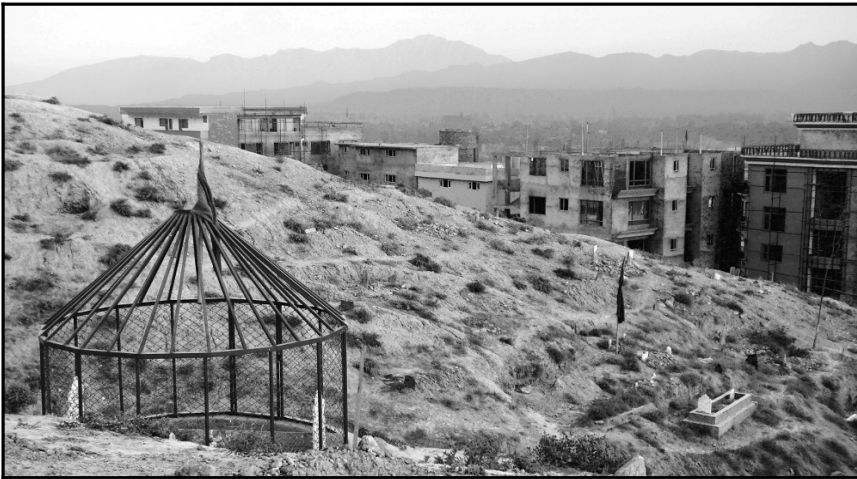


Figure 5.7. Shir Pur with mansions under construction (Author, 2007). View from the west end of Bibi Mahro Hill, southeastward towards Maranjan Hill. Image is left-aligned so that position of distant mountains matches position with figure 5.8 below.

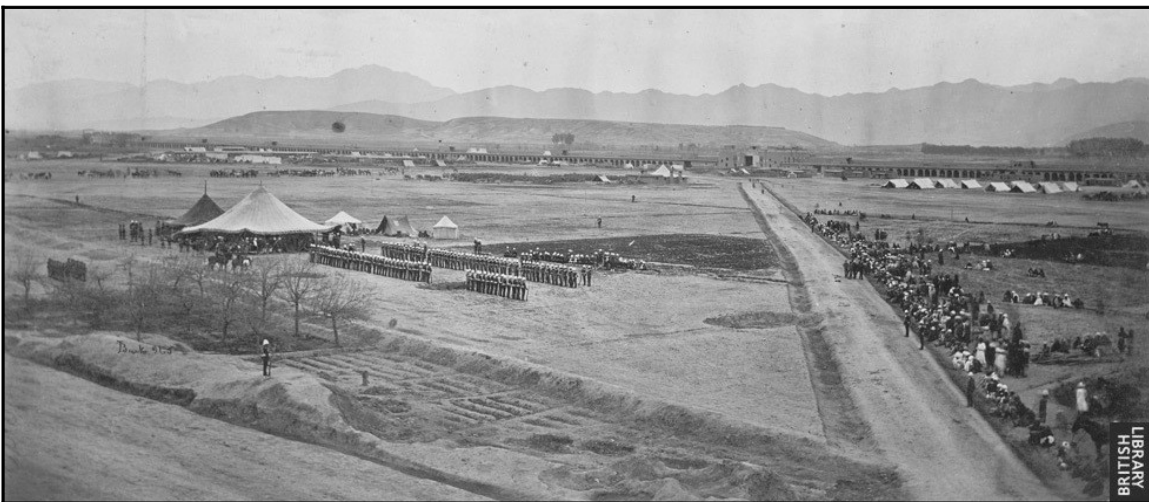


Figure 5.8. Sher Pur Cantonment, 1879 (courtesy British Library). This image was taken from about fifty meters to the right (south), and thus about ten meters downhill of the image above.

Shir Pur is a site that has been mentioned several times in previous chapters. To review quickly: the area got its name from Sher Ali Khan, the King of Afghanistan who made a significant attempt at modernization in the 1870s. He cleared and created a cantonment at the base of Bibi Mahro hill in which to drill a newly-organized Afghan Army. When the British invaded Afghanistan a second time in 1878 and drove Sher Ali out, they occupied “Sher Pur” as their own cantonment (figure 5.8). As in 1841, this was a poor choice for the British, because the cantonment was at the base of a long, low hill. When Afghan opponents occupied any point on that ridge-top they had a commanding position from which to snipe into the entire cantonment. Unlike in 1841, the British were able to repel a major attack on the cantonment in 1880. However while the British forces

in Kabul were able to hold their ground, the British force in Kandahar was badly defeated near the village of Maiwand, strengthening the morale of anti-British Afghans. The British commander in Kabul recognised that their preferred Afghan had lost legitimacy, and they hastily named Abdur Rahman Khan as Emir. However Abdur Rahman made it clear that he was no puppet, ignoring British requests to an inaugural *durbar* until he had established his own authority in Kabul. Despite their deteriorating strategic position the British were forced to wait. Immediately after holding their *durbar*, the British abandoned the cantonment and withdrew from Afghanistan.

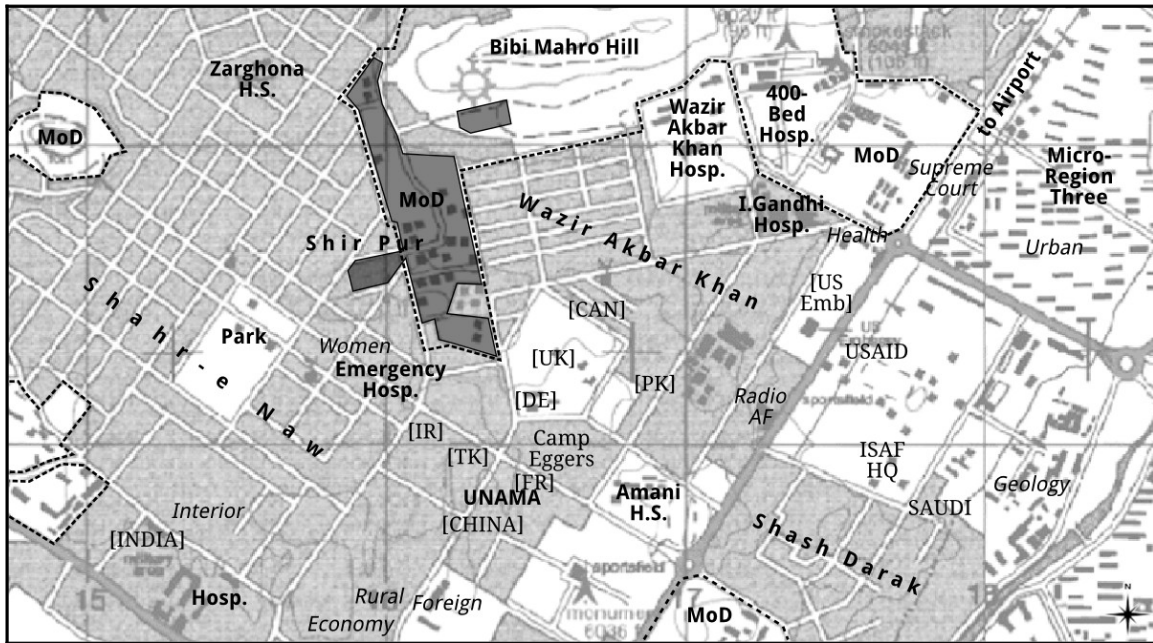


Figure 5.9. Urban context of Shir Pur (author). Redeveloped land shaded dark gray. Ministry of Defense land is bounded by dashes. Ministries and agencies of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan in italics. Foreign organizations in serif font; Embassies in brackets. The grid squares are 1 kilometer (courtesy DGIA).

I have found no record of the use of the cantonment from 1880 to 1920. In the 1920s it had become the first airport of Kabul (figure 4.4). In the 1950s a new, much larger airport was built further north on the Wazir Abad plain, with a new airport terminal building centered on the existing Kohistan Road (now Great Massoud Road). The eastern end of Shir Pur was developed into several hospitals, including the Army Hospital and the Indira Gandhi Children's Hospital; the middle part of the cantonment was developed into the northern half of Wazir Akbar Khan neighborhood in the early 1960s; and a small north-south strip at the west end was retained as Ministry of Defense (MoD) land (figure 5.9). Just to the west of this MoD land, several blocks of urban development are called Shir Pur as well, although they were not part of the original cantonment and are difficult to distinguish from the adjacent Shahr-e Naw (New City) area to the south and west, which began to be urbanized in 1935.

The Wazir factor

By 2002, the Defense land had become extremely desirable for urban development. Immediately to its east, the Wazir Akbar Khan neighborhood had remained intact during the Mujahid civil war of 1992-1996 (figure 4.6). Despite its use by the Taliban leadership from 1996 to 2001, the area was not bombed by Coalition Forces and therefore remained fully intact, with tree-lined paved streets, when the diplomatic and aid communities returned in the winter of 2001-2002. The US Embassy bounds Wazir on the east, and a series of other embassies on the south: Britain, Germany, Iran, and Turkey among them. The main east-west road through Wazir marks the position of the southern bounding wall of the former Shir Pur cantonment, and that road connects directly to the present airport via Great Massoud Road. For a foreign community returning to a very uncertain environment, quick access and egress via the airport made the neighborhood especially appealing.

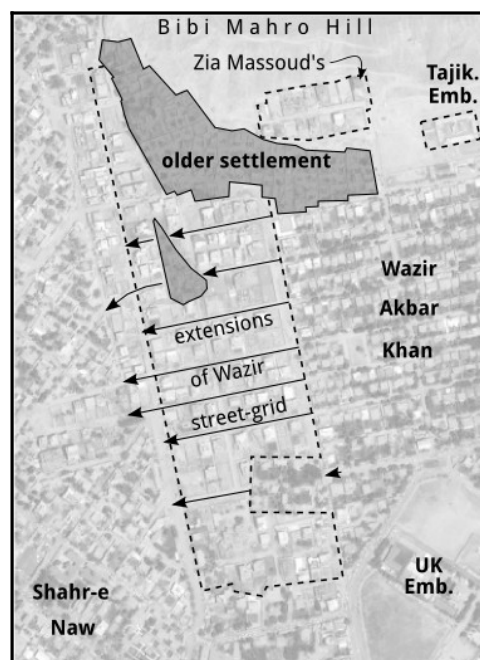


Figure 5.10. Diagram of the conversion of the Ministry of Defense land in Shir Pur after 4 Sept 2003 (Author). The new street pattern is an extension of the Wazir Akbar Khan neighborhood to the east.

Until the land-claims of the earlier squatters were resolved in 2007, their settlement patterns disrupted the new, Plan-compliant street pattern.

Wazir had been developed in the 1960s as a high-end residential neighborhood. Parcels and houses were relatively large, which enabled major organizations to move in and use the houses as national headquarter-offices, as dormitories for their international staff, or as a combination of the two. Diesel generator-sets were brought in to ensure electricity—and, as Graham and Marvin point out—to avoid the need to repair and maintain the city-wide electrical grid and generation facilities.⁴² Shipping containers were stacked in side and back yards as additional dormitory, office, and residential space.

⁴² Graham and Marvin, 2001.

Rents in Wazir rose from about \$200-500 per month to about \$5,000 per month in the spring of 2002.⁴³ This inflation prompted aid organizations to make a joint statement through the Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief (ACBAR), which was reported internationally in May 2002 (this was the news item that first alerted me to a housing crisis in Kabul).⁴⁴ Although senior planner Wahid Ahad begged for rent-caps in 2002 and several parties asked for the sudden rental windfall to be taxed, no action was taken until 2005 when an 8% tax was enacted. Rent levels continue to be entirely unregulated in Kabul, consistent with neoliberal arguments that market-logic should govern without regulatory intervention. Within that impersonal rhetoric, the fact that rents in Wazir forced up rents across the city was irrelevant; the capture of rents by a group of landowners who were already wealthy in the 1960s was irrelevant; and the fact that a large fraction of aid money intended to help vulnerable Afghans went instead to the enrichment of these landowners was also irrelevant.

Two laws governing property-relations are important to the political economy of Wazir. First of all, the current Constitution states that “Foreign individuals do not have the right to own immovable property in Afghanistan.”⁴⁵ Foreigners can rent, and the government can sell land to diplomatic missions; but this law may have prevented a privately-held enclave from being created beginning in 2002. Today, more than half the streets in Wazir remain public rights-of-way, which might not have been the case if this law did not exist.

The second law is actually a legal absence. There is no law of adverse possession, or squatters’ rights, in Afghanistan. Hernando de Soto pointed out that the American legal defense of squatters is unusual because the squatters on the American Western frontier were the Anglos backed by the US government. The invading squatters had the power to define and enforce law, while those who might have usufruct rights or claims of prior occupation were Native Americans groups. In the American case, squatting by the powerful was used as a legal instrument to dispossess land from the vulnerable prior occupants. When California was captured from Mexico in 1848, most formal legal ownership was land-grants held by Mexicans. The basis of Mexican claims against Native American groups was not questioned by the Anglos; rather the question was how to legitimize Anglo claims against the Mexican ones. One example that set the basis for Anglo ownership of the terrain where I write this is the first Anglo map of Oakland, California. The 1853 Squatter’s Map is the first establishment of Anglo property claims in the East Bay; it even defines the block geometries of Oakland’s present central business district. This is the beginning of the text that establishes the legal claim of the Anglos:

This is the Map of the plot of the Town of Oakland as surveyed by the Squatters referred to in the deed of partition between Joseph K. Irving of the first, John C. Hays & John Caperton of the second part, and Anna R. Poole, Joseph S. Lyons & Catherine S. his wife & Alexander H. Young

43 Massoud, Waheedullah. 2003. “Kabul property market booms as refugees shelter in bombed ruins.” *Agence France-Presse*, November 11.

44 Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief (ACBAR). 2002. “Concerns related to housing rents in Afghanistan.” Open letter to Ashraf Ghani, then head of the Afghanistan Aid Coordination Authority.

45 Afghanistan, Islamic Republic. 1382 Hijra Solar (2004 Anno Domini). *Constitution of the Islamic Republic*. Kabul, Article 41, section A.

& Serena S, his wife bearing date August 15th 1853.⁴⁶

By occupying land uncontested by the Mexican Peralta family for five years, the Anglos were able to claim full legal title. In contrast, if an Afghan family was forced to flee Kabul after 1978, or after 1980, or after 1992, they retain ownership of their house indefinitely. Most of the wealthier families living in Wazir were forced to flee at some point or another, so in several cases houses were occupied by squatters for years, even decades. Some families continued to pay rent to the formal owners when this was possible, eliminating any question of ownership. Once the Taliban had secured Kabul in 1996 and established the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, they invited expatriate Afghans to return, reclaim their property, and invest in the economic recovery of Kabul. In sharp contrast to the post-apocalyptic portrayal of a devastated city shorn of institutions under the Taliban, in fact the Taliban enforced property-relations in a market-friendly manner. By the time aid agencies returned to Kabul in early 2002, the Afghan families who had legal documentation of ownership in Wazir had secured their claims. Many of these families did not return to Kabul, however. When I was preparing for my fieldwork in 2006 I was approached by an Afghan-American at a fund-raiser in San Francisco who wanted to rent out her family house in Wazir to me for three thousand dollars per month. Afghan-Americans can generally claim Afghan citizenship and thus the right to own land under Article 41 of the Afghan Constitution.

The political factor

The role of the urban regime in this process is directly linked to Afghan national politics and the geopolitics of transnational aid. First, a brief overview of the factional politics within the Afghan government. During the fall of 2001, the United Islamic Front (UIF, known to Western supporters as the “Northern Alliance”) occupied Kabul after the Taliban retreated. A key faction within the UIF was the Islamic League⁴⁷ of Afghanistan (*Jamiat-e Islami-ye Afghanistan, or “Jamiat”*), led by Ahmad Shah Massoud until his assassination on September 9, 2001. During the late 1990s, the UIF was recognized internationally as the legitimate government of Afghanistan because Massoud had been the Minister of Defense for President Rabbani; and Rabbani's government-in-exile retained the seat at the United Nations from 1996 to 2001.

After Massoud's assassination, three men took control of the UIF: Mohammed Qasim Fahim, Yunus Qanuni, and Dr. Abdullah. Once the UIF occupied Kabul in November 2001 it became the de facto interim government, with Jamiat in the dominant position. This was crucial during the negotiations in Bonn and the Accord of 5 December 2001 which established the Transitional Administration of Afghanistan. Fahim became Minister of Defense, Qanuni became Interior Minister, and Abdullah became Foreign Minister. Already by June of 2003 there were reports of corruption including violent land-grabs and coercive sales of land throughout Kabul, and Fahim was often implicated. Among aid workers I heard that Karzai was trying to dismantle Jamiat's control of the

46 Kellersberger, J. 1853. “A complete map of Oakland respectfully dedicated to the citizens of Oakland.” Oakland, CA: Alameda County recorder, September 2.

47 I translate “*Jamiat*” as “League” to differentiate it from the Islamic Party [of Afghanistan], or *Hezb-e Islami*, led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar.

government, a rumor that was confirmed by subsequent reappointments and dismissals from the government in 2004. Fahim sought to consolidate his political position by granting favors to other leaders within the new government by subdividing the Defense land within Shir Pur into streets and lots, which he essentially gave to other Afghan leaders for a nominal fee.



Figure 5.11. Construction in Shir Pur, April 2007 (author).

Twenty-eight of the thirty-two cabinet ministers accepted land in Shir Pur in 2003. The Mayor of Kabul, a Deputy Mayor, the Governor of Kabul Province, relatives of Ahmad Shah Massoud and Abdul Rashid Dostum, twenty generals, and fifty other senior commanders were also given lots.⁴⁸ Of the hundred officials who were given lots, the vast majority were associated with the Jamiat faction within the United Islamic Front. One of the recipients was Habibullah Ashgary, a Deputy Mayor of Kabul, who explained: “The land in Sherpur belongs to the Afghan Defense Ministry. According to the ownership law in Afghanistan, every government institution has the right to do with its land whatever it wants. The Defense Ministry distributed the land to its commanders and high-ranking officials who defended our country and freedom.”⁴⁹

Normally in case studies of urban regimes we must speak tactfully and indirectly about an urban elite. This case is paradigmatic because the beneficiaries were actually identified by name and by their role within the government. Since the case became so public, we also gain unusual insight into its details. Most importantly, the beneficiaries believe that they are legally *and* ethically entitled to the land, as Mr. Ashgary expressed above. Another minister explained that she thought the area was being developed as a

48 Gall, Carlotta. 2003. “Housing plan for top aides in Afghanistan draws rebuke.” *New York Times*, September 21.

49 Synovitz, Ron. 2003. “Afghanistan: Land-grab scandal in Kabul rocks the government.” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty* <http://www.rferl.org/content/Article/1104367.html> (Accessed August 30, 2008).

more secure compound for senior governmental leaders. Her concern was justified by several assassinations over the previous eighteen months, including one of the vice presidents.⁵⁰

However, Mr. Kothari's public criticism was seconded by the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) which issued a report that also named names on September 7. In response, two beneficiaries convened a press conference on September 8. Anwar Ahady, the Governor of the Central Bank, affirmed his belief in human rights and described the scandal as "political terrorism".⁵¹ Yunus Qanuni, who was then the Minister of Education⁵², demanded an apology from Mr. Kothari and the AIHRC.

"There is a difference between those who are given land by the current rulers under current laws and those who take land by force in Sherpur," Qanooni said. "I was also given land there."

Qanooni said the land had been legally transferred to him on Karzai's orders.⁵³

Within the day, Hamid Karzai denied that he had approved the land distribution and promised an investigation. Four years later, the land distribution has not been nullified, and most of the beneficiaries have built large structures on their lots (figure 5.11).

Clearly the beneficiaries felt entitled to their land. Although they paid a small, unspecified sum for their lots, note that in the quote above, Qanuni states that he was "given" the land. In the news reports of September 2003, many of the beneficiaries expressed surprise that this would be considered scandalous, whereas poorer Afghans from adjacent neighborhoods expressed deep resentment at this exceptional treatment.⁵⁴ One way of evaluating the benefit given to the elites is financial: real estate brokers at the time estimated that the lots ranged in value from USD\$70,000 to \$170,000. But another measure is purely spatial: as described in Chapter One, the influx of refugees to Kabul had caused extreme overcrowding in most of the city by the summer of 2003. In some neighborhoods the *average* occupant-density of single-family houses was as high as eighteen people in perhaps four rooms. The elites who received land in Shir Pur built structures that typically have twenty rooms with floor areas of one thousand square meters (10,000 square feet). Legal or not, this gross consumption of potential housing area in the center of Kabul is considered deeply unethical by many of the Afghans I spoke to, as well as staff-members of foreign organizations.

50 Constable, Pamela. 2002. "Afghan vice president slain: Assassination of ethnic Pashtun in Kabul shakes new government." *Washington Post*, July 7.

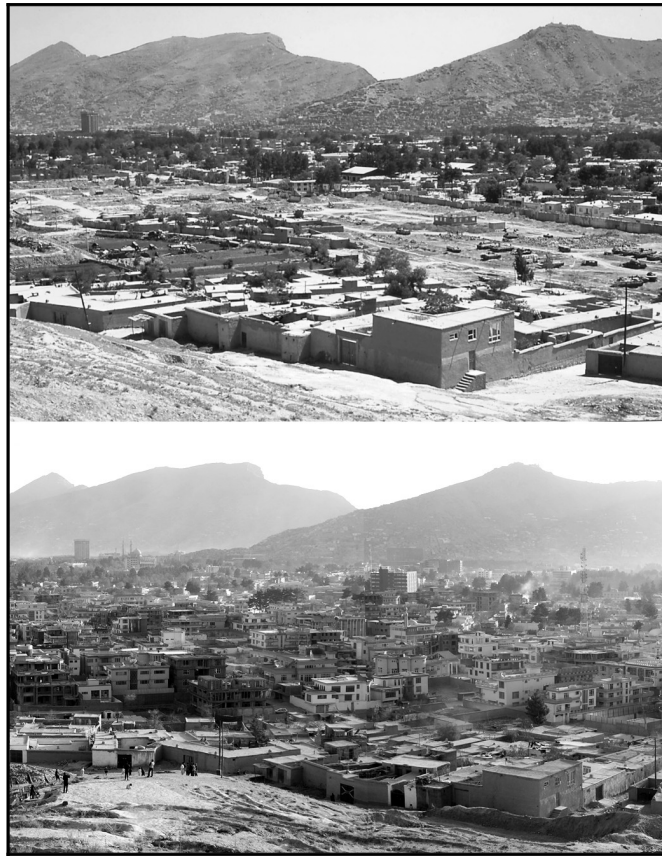
51 Constable, 2003. "Land grab."

52 After placing second in the presidential election in 2004, Mr. Qanuni was elected to the Parliament in 2005 and is now the leader of the House of the People (Wolesi Jirga).

53 Synovitz, 2003.

54 Gannon, Kathy. 2006. "Post-Taliban Kabul blossoms for the rich." *The Washington Post*, November 11.

A peculiar collusion



Figures 5.12 and 5.13. Shir Pur, looking south from Bibi Mahro hill (author).
5.12 (upper): 2 June 2003; 5.13 (lower): 1 November 2007.

Thus far this telling of the story of Shir Pur closely matches the interpretation of the international media and Ajmal Maiwandi's powerful description in *Evil paradises*. I was particularly interested in Shir Pur because it is one of the only places in Kabul where *overt* demolition began and was prevented. This was a topic of intense concern at the Ministry of Urban Development when I visited briefly at the end of September 2003. Nasir Saberi, then senior-most advisor to the Minister, expressed concern that this scandal would disgrace Afghanistan in the eyes of the international donor community—a fear which has been borne out in subsequent years. Furthermore it revealed the inter-agency chaos in Kabul, where the Minister of Defense was unilaterally implementing unplanned urban development as a process of gaining political favors. Furthermore the Ministry and the City government could not agree on a coherent reaction to this scandal, because they fundamentally disagreed about policy towards squatters.

On our second field trip to view patterns of development across Kabul, I led the class through the former Ministry of Defense land of Shir Pur. I had walked through the base in early June of 2003, when it was an open field with a few gardens, the informal village at one edge, and a row of wrecked Soviet armored personnel carriers left in the middle of an otherwise empty space. The transformation was astounding (figures 5.12 & 5.13).

Almost the entire area was built up with four-story palaces clad in decorative plaster, wrought iron, and mosaics of tiny cut mirrors. It was a fantasy-scape of luxury as envisioned by Afghan elites. Some of the students laughed uncomfortably, pointing out the mansion of Ahmad Shah Massoud's younger brother, Zia Massoud, now Senior Vice-President of Afghanistan.

Yet, down the hill from Zia's mansion, we also found low mud-brick houses that resembled what I remembered from four years before. Close to Zia's mansion were a bakery and a general store, both of which looked at least ten years old. We stopped for lunch and water, and as we ate two men came down from the mansion, bought bread and a few other items, and headed back up. We proceeded through the older, informal housing, and came upon another store where my students engaged in a long conversation with the proprietor. While they chatted, several security guards from the neighboring palaces came in, bought food, and headed back to their posts.

Afterward, my students explained that the shop-owner was a spokesman for the squatters in Shir Pur. Since the aborted attempt to remove them from the site in September 2003, they had been engaged in a long fight with the City government to gain formal recognition of their right to stay in the neighborhood. All of the families had served in the military, and had been given permission to squat on the MoD land by their superiors 'more than twenty years ago.' The shop-owner was vague about exactly when that had occurred, apparently out caution about persistent factional animosities in Kabul. If it had been between 1980 and 1987, then they had served in the Soviet-backed Afghan Army against mujahideen including their uphill neighbor Massoud. If it had been before 1978, they had been allowed to squat during Daoud's regime, which might or might not be controversial with City officials they were encountering. The shop-owner said that 160 families had been living on the MoD land, and though some houses were damaged in the aborted eviction, all of the families had managed to remain thus far (figures 5.14 & 5.15). I asked about the relationship between the older squatters and the new arrivals. He said is was friendly, and pointed out that the new residents and their staff were the main customers for his store and the stores of his neighbors.



Figure 5.14: Ministry of Defense land in Shir Pur, 2000 (SpaceImaging.com).



Figure 5.15: same site, 2006. All the informal areas extant in 2000 remain (Google Earth).

I realized two things right away from this encounter. First, given the way that the squatters had been portrayed as helpless, surprised victims in the international press, I was surprised that relations between the older squatters and the new mansion-builders really appeared to be so cordial. The second realization seemed to provide some explanation of the first: the claim on land by the new mansion-builders and the older, long-time squatters was almost identical. Both groups had been given permission by the Ministry of Defense to squat on the land in violation of the policies of other branches of the Afghan government. This corresponds with Teresa Caldeira's observations in São Paulo: urban informality occurs at all levels of class.⁵⁵ Vulnerability to eviction, therefore, often does not correlate with the degree of legality of the development, but with the ability of owners to prevent evictions and demolitions through their social connections within the urban regime. As both Caldeira and Roy argue, the informality of urban developments should be taken as a sign, signifying the informalization of the urban regime itself. It is a mistake to think that 'irregular' development can occur in some way 'outside' of the scope of urban power and property-relations. In this case I had direct testimony of how a form of authorization had been given by the Ministry of Defense on two different occasions under very different political regimes.

Without my prompting the shop-owner made several more interesting points. The older houses were still densely-packed, in an irregular layout. He stressed that in their campaign to gain legal recognition for their land-claims, the older squatters wanted to

⁵⁵ Caldeira, 2000.

demolish their own houses and rebuild in accordance with the Master Plan of 1978. He made no mention of the Ministry of Urban Development, nor of in-situ site-upgrading. By the spring of 2007, the City government was assumed to be the sole governor of formalization in Kabul, and the 1978 Master Plan was the referent within the discursive framework of rights-claims to urban space.

I suggested to my students that we consider this as an urban design studio project, but they sensed the political volatility of taking sides on this issue. However, I gave the shop-owner my contact information, and on two occasions over the next month he invited me to attend public hearings at the City offices where I would show up as the foreign University Instructor interested in the welfare of squatters. Arguments were made in legally-formal Dari and Pashto which I could not follow, but several things were clear. First, the older squatters were very well-organized and informed; the first time I arrived they were dressed in their Friday best, and the shop-owner was reviewing his copy of the Afghan Constitution to make sure he could cite the relevant Articles during the hearing. Second, the wealthier squatters did not show up, and were making no arguments that the poorer squatters should go. I never found solid evidence that the mansion-builders actively abetted the poorer squatters, but the co-incidence of their interests was clear. If the poorer squatters could persuade the city of the rightness of their cause, the wealthier new residents could make essentially the same claim to secure their properties. In both cases, the Ministry of Defense had acted improperly, probably illegally. But in both cases, the recipients of land could argue that they had received the land in good faith and sought to develop the land in accordance with the Master Plan.



Figure 5.16. Petitioners from Shir Pur outside the offices of the Municipality, May, 2007 (author). After reviewing the relevant articles in the 2004 Constitution, they were rehearsing how they were going to present their documentation for their appeal.

I did not hear from the shop-owner for several months. However, shortly before I left Kabul in November of 2007, I was walking through the area and found him demolishing his small shop. The City had granted the claims of the older squatters, and gave them permission to demolish, reconfigure, and rebuild their buildings in rectilinear blocks according to the Master Plan, up to four storeys high. The shop-owner was preparing to

rebuild in concrete, and already in negotiations with potential tenants. Literally and metaphorically, he and his community were transitioning from Clay to Concrete.

An innovative building type: aid-palaces



Figure 5.17. Aid Palace, Shir Pur (author, 2007).
A sign on the front of the lower curved railing reads “FOR RENT” in English only.



Figure 5.18. Another Aid Palace, Shir Pur (author, 2007). The contractor has applied sample colors to the wall, visible at bottom center.

In her article “Why India cannot plan its cities,” Ananya Roy argues that informalization of the urban regime creates new conditions and “makes possible new frontiers of development.”⁵⁶ This profoundly disrupts urban planning as we—in this case Indians as much as North Americans and Europeans—expect to function. It prevents a hoped-for ‘future-proofing’ of cities, and what Indians might think of as planning their cities; yet Roy argues that “While this idiom seems to be antithetical to planning, and indeed seems to be anti-planning, it can and must be understood as a planning regime.”⁵⁷ In the terminology I use in this study, Clay is indeed urban planning, but in a different mode: present urban resources are committed towards anticipated future benefit, and mediated by the urban regime. The anticipated benefit is not what one would expect from mid-twentieth-century style planning, with its ideals of collective benefit. In an era of neoliberalization, benefits are increasingly privatized and individualized. Yet this Clay mode of planning can produce innovations in building type, in addition to a very substantial proportion of the urban fabric of many cities. Whereas most of the urban fabric produced through the Clay mode of planning is indeed clay, the concrete-glass-and-ironwork confections of Shir Pur seem to be a significant new building type: the aid-palace.

Anna Soave, the urban specialist at Aga Khan Trust for Culture, strongly encouraged me to take a tour of one of the mansions of Shir Pur to see what they are like on the interior. “Twenty-five rooms, ten bathrooms often poorly laid out, and they often cover the maximum area on the lot, with only a 50 cm set-back from the property-line. Since most of the mansions are built this way, the rooms in the back can be awfully dark;

⁵⁶ Roy, 2009.

⁵⁷ *ibid.*

almost no daylight reaches them.” Since I speak English with an American accent, I could just approach someone at the gate and say that I was interested in renting the house.

I had noticed several ‘for rent’ signs on these buildings, only in English. Anna’s suggestion, and several articles about Shir Pur in the international press, began to alert me to another mis-reading of the site. Other than Zia Massoud and his entourage, very few elites are actually inhabiting these mansions. After visiting several, it became clear that these mansions were designed and intended for foreign aid agencies to rent. Afghan land-owners had observed the behavior of aid organizations and realized that:

1. To satisfy their own security requirements, each organization wanted their own building.
2. Ideally, the most secure arrangement was to have international staff live on-site. Thus, the building had to be designed as both offices on the ground floor and dormitories above; hence the high ratio of bathrooms.
3. Aid agencies preferred to be close together, and as close to Wazir as possible.
4. Aid agencies liked to throw parties, and rented the most luxurious houses available in the city.

The mansions in Shir Pur were not, therefore, an elite-Afghan expression of how they themselves wanted to live. They were an elite-Afghan expression of how they thought *foreign aid workers* wanted to live. The combination of residence and workplace at this scale reminds me of the fifteenth-century *palazzi* in Florence; but also of Olsen’s description of the luxurious apartment-buildings built on the Ringstrasse of Vienna in the late nineteenth century.⁵⁸ The extremely rapid pace of production, and the enormous mobilization of capital that made these buildings possible are both expressions of distinctly modern capitalist investments in the urban landscape. The Viennese luxury apartments were called ‘rent-palaces’;⁵⁹ in Kabul, in honor of their intended occupants, I will call this new building type the ‘aid-palace’—complete with razor-wire fencing, a guardhouse, and a generator-set placed in front for easy refueling.

One of the aid-palaces I visited was nearing completion, and the two young men who gave me the tour were very forthcoming to my questions. The house would cost a little more than \$300,000 to complete, which was slightly below average construction costs in the new neighborhood. Since 2005 and especially 2006, the general perception among both Afghans and foreigners was that security in Kabul was deteriorating. With rising insecurity, property values and rents were plummeting. Real estate brokers and developers I spoke with estimated that purchase-values in central Kabul had dropped by 50% from 2004 to 2007, and rental rates in central Kabul had dropped by 40%. Perhaps the owner of this property was already responding to this deflation by reducing his budget on finishes. Nonetheless the house was still enormous. With a substantial penthouse on the fifth floor, and a two-story guest-house in the back, I estimate that it was nearly ten thousand square feet (1000 square meters) in area. My guides said that the owner—a

58 Olsen, Donald J. 1986. “The Vienna of Franz Joseph,” in *The city as a work of art: London, Paris, Vienna*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

59 Wilson, Elizabeth. 1992. “Architecture and consciousness in Central Europe”. in *The Sphinx in the city: urban life, the control of disorder, and women*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, p. 92.

senior manager of the health services in the Afghan National Army—was going to offer the house for \$5,000 per month. Two years earlier, he could have charged about \$12,000 per month for such a palace and recovered his investment in just over two years. Even in this deflated market he could expect to recover the investment in five years. My guides also informed me that the owner lived in a flat in one of the Soviet-designed Microregions, and had no plans to live in this building.

III. Re-thinking urban informality

One of the jokes circulating in the Ministry of Urban Development is to call Shir Pur “Chur Pur.” Whereas “Shir” in this case means “lion” and derives from the name of King Sher Ali, “chur” means ‘grab’ and implies that this is grabbed land. “Chur Pur” can thus be translated as ‘city of theft’. A number of Afghans referred resentfully to this area as the paradigmatic symbol of corruption of the Afghan regime. If, in fact, these mansions had been built as displays of status-assertion, I would agree with that reading; but for most of the owners who built in this area, the mansions are capital investments, not acts of consumption or personal display. Rather than what Veblen called the ‘conspicuous consumption’ of the American robber-barons of the late nineteenth century,⁶⁰ the design of these aid palaces reflects a best-guess reflection of what foreign aid organizations might want to rent. These palaces were intended for the *transnational* elite. The extremely negative perception of their garishness among transnationals suggests that the local elites who built them miscalculated; as of November 2007 the only two foreign organizations I know of that rented in the area were USAID and the Spanish Embassy.

In other parts of this study I argue that transnationals often misread the situation in Kabul. This is a case of the reverse: local elites misreading the transnationals, expecting that the foreigners would want to rent accommodations that were not only luxurious, but obviously so. It was also a miscalculation in the signal that the elites are transmitting to the Afghan public. On the crest of Bibi Mahro hill, just above this collection of aid palaces, is an enormous billboard with an image of Ahmad Shah Massoud, the hero and martyr of the Jamiat-e Islami. This billboard is a reminder to all Kabulis that the Jamiat seized Kabul and its Ministries; and that his successor, M. Qasim Fahim, was the Minister of Defense who gave away the land below the sign in what appears to have been an act of buying political favor. Since the Jamiat also controlled the Interior Ministry (where they hung a ten meter high picture of Massoud over the entrance), they also controlled the police. In 2003 several taxi drivers explained that this was why they kept large photos of Massoud on their dashboards; if they did not, the police would stop them, harass them, and sometimes ask for bribes to let them go. Now, that billboard on Bibi Mahro hill is accompanied by a new collection of signs. Thousands of Kabulis pass Shir Pur every day as they commute in and out of central Kabul. Regardless of why the elites built these palaces, their effect is a negative form of monumentality—*dysmonumentality*—because they serve as continuous reminders of a system that is somehow corrupt, a regime in which resources are badly maldistributed.

Indirectly, the brazenness of this development may have compromised its own value

⁶⁰ Veblen, Thorstein. 1899. *The theory of the leisure class: an economic study in the evolution of institutions*. New York: The Macmillan company.

as a site of capital formation and accumulation. Urban security in Kabul has declined in tandem with the loss of legitimacy of the Karzai regime since 2005. As insecurity has increased the value of land in central Kabul has dropped by half. During my fieldwork in 2007 I heard about several individuals and organizations negotiating much lower rents in both Wazir and Shahr-e Naw. Most of the recently-completed aid-palaces in Shir Pur remained unrented, and there was sharp criticism among aid workers about the Spanish Embassy for renting a house in Shir Pur. Although the local elite received the land at a very low price, most had invested hundreds of thousands of dollars into the construction of the aid-palaces on that land. By the fall of 2007 it was unclear whether they would ever see a return on this speculative investment. By producing durable markers of impunity in urban space, the elite of Kabul may have touched the limits of their own exceptionalist status.

I discussed the development of Shir Pur with Senator Ramazan Bashardost, a politician who is reputed to be one of the most scrupulous public figures in Afghanistan. He cautioned against my hasty first interpretation of the area as “Chur Pur”. As of 2007, the land-distribution by the Ministry of Defense in the summer of 2003 was still under litigation, and thus far it had not been declared illegal. Given the successful bid of the poorer squatters on the site to gain security of tenure in late 2007, I expect that the case will be found in favor of the wealthier land-recipients as well. Bashardost was not happy about the aid-palaces either, and he is nationally famous for driving by himself around Kabul in his own Toyota Corolla, rather than being driven in a Toyota Land Cruiser by a chauffeur. But as a strong proponent of due process, he wants to be very careful not to prejudge an issue and give the courts time and space to make a legal discernment.

Lex, ius, and the politics of urban informality

Bashardost’s commitment to legal due process reveals a contradiction in the Clay mode of planning. In Kabul—and in many cities with substantial informal urban development—the members of the urban regime use the term ‘illegal’ to describe informal urbanization. As in American and European debates about immigration, ‘illegal’ is a label that is in itself a rhetorical justification for denying rights-claims and citizenship to peoples who clearly desire it. But in this case the informal development might be legal. This apparent contradiction in terms is only possible because it is the regime itself that is becoming informalized. In which case, *legality* no longer remains a basis for distinguishing formal from informal urbanization. In terms of *justice*, law itself has become corrupted.

Using Ong’s argument that exception has become a central strategy of neoliberalization, we can link informalization of an urban regime to other recent acts of corruption through the law. Derek Gregory argues that the Bush Administration was very careful to make sure that its acts of abduction, rendition, and torture were *legal*; hence the reliance on the opinions of UC Berkeley Law Professor John Yoo about what was possible within international treaties and how they could be legally circumvented.⁶¹

However the use of the law as an instrument of disprivilege has long been recognized. Here is Engels’ evaluation of the rule of law in Manchester in 1844.

⁶¹ Gregory, 2007.

True, the law is sacred to the bourgeois, for it is his own composition, enacted with his consent, and for his benefit and protection. He knows that, even if an individual law should injure him, the whole fabric protects his interests; and more than all, the sanctity of the law, the sacredness of order as established by the active will of one part of society, and the passive acceptance of the other, is the strongest support of his social position.⁶²

While eighteenth-century moral philosophers spoke of ‘consent of the governed’, Engels points out that it is really the consent of the bourgeois that is relevant in 1844. Since the mid-1990s planning theorists have recognized this as a limitation of using Habermas’ ideal of communicative rationality as a basis for equitable planning. ‘Having a voice’ is insufficient to gain either recognition or rights; the key is to be *listened to*. Touching back to the previous discussion of the Roman Constitution, it is worth noting that the plebian:patrician struggles over rights and law was not at all inclusive. Women, slaves, and urban inhabitants who were considered non-Roman did not get heard as the plebs did. Perhaps the historical anomaly in this respect was the mid-twentieth-century, when Western capitalist regimes faced a real threat from expansionist Communism. Response to this threat included an array of explicit and implicit sociopolitical bargains, from very high degrees of unionization, to massive welfare programs, to an unwritten rule that the salaries of corporate executives were rarely greater than forty times the median salaries of their employees. Overall, these practices resulted in the “Great Compression” of wealth-disparities from 1947 to 1973.⁶³ In political respects, exceptionalism was frequently and publicly challenged through the desegregation of institutional access, both for women and for ethnic and religious minorities. Though the Civil Rights movement of the late 1950s and early 1960s is the most visible mark of this shift, no less important were the granting of American citizenship to Native Americans (1948), admission of women and Jews to universities, and acceptance of Roman Catholics to public office. Absent a continuous moral challenge from the Soviets since 1991, the United States has been steadily retreating from a culture of meritocracy and accountability; and yet this may be a return to the historical norm as indicated by Engels’ observations more than a century ago.

As elites corrupt law itself to serve their purposes, that tension between *lex* and *ius* as understood by Roman citizens becomes more apparent. *Lex* is the mode of power in which the urban leadership create rules that might seem fair insofar as they protect property-rights for everyone in the same way.⁶⁴ Using the distinction understood in Republican Rome, laws can be grotesquely *unjust*. What Bayat calls the ‘creeping encroachment’ of law-violations by the poorer urban majority in Kabul is neither a willful flaunting of the law, nor an appropriation of the legal system itself to secure personal advantage.⁶⁵ Rather, it is the ongoing pressure of need, what Agamben calls the entry of *zoë* into urban politics: *ius* is the biopolitics or urban informality.

In the modern state, where rights are codified, the distinction between *lex* and *ius* is blurred. Thus the outcome of Bashardost’s insistence on legal (or is it juridical?) due

62 Engels, Friedrich. 1999 [1844]. *The condition of the working class in England*. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 234-5.

63 Goldin and Margo, 1992.

64 Chatterjee, Partha. 2004. *The politics of the governed: Reflections on popular politics in most of the world*. New York: Columbia University Press.

65 Bayat, 2000.

process is unclear. As Roy points out in Bangalore, poorer people in Karnataka State are able to claim rights via the courts and block urbanization plans that would displace them.⁶⁶ In this case, the *judicial* system defends rights. But in Kabul, it appears that the *legal* system defends laws—in other words, elite interests—rather than the rights of the majority of poorer, disprivileged people. In modern English usage the words ‘judicial’ and ‘legal’ are interchangeable descriptors for the same system. Hopefully I have made clear a distinction with very serious consequences to vulnerable urban populations. This uncertainty, this contingency of meaning of the courts as either *legal* or *judicial* in relation to the urban regime is one of the ways in which the metaphor of Clay is relevant to this mode of planning: it is plastic and reformable through the application of social and discursive force. Will the more vulnerable parties prevail through savvy usage of the international media and the occasional sympathetic Westerner? The question is not resolved on the grounds of factuality and positivist certainty: it is fought on the terrain of biopolitics, the struggle for life itself within the city.

The role of the aid community in this biopolitics in Kabul is complex. Aid agencies helped expose the attempted demolition and eviction of poorer squatters from Shir Pur in September 2003, and made the attempt into an international scandal. The continued presence of those aid agencies may have played a role in suppressing informal demolitions across Kabul after this incident. The only demolitions I saw in 2007 were for road-widenings; and as discussed in Chapter Four, these selected demolitions had substantial popular support. On the other hand, the pressure to develop Shir Pur in the way that it was developed was a direct result of the presence and economic practices of those same aid agencies.

Shir Pur, then, offers a glimpse into informalization as a process within the urban regime itself. Insofar as that informalization governs the patterns and processes of urban development in Kabul, Clay is the dominant mode of planning in the city, governing seventy per cent of the built area of Kabul as of 2007. Because Shir Pur is one of the few places within Kabul where the problems of urban informality have gained international attention, it needed to be addressed here. However, it is not typical of the vast majority of informal urban development, because both the poor and rich squatters on the site seem to have gained security of tenure of their urban space. Across most of Kabul this is not the case at all.

Roy’s recognition that urban regimes themselves are the locus of informalization helps explain both how informality operates, and why there is administrative resistance to releasing poorer people from their condition of violation, their condition of insecurity. Promulgation of laws is a core function of an urban regime, and part of that function is to declare what is extralegal. Consistent with Engels’ argument quoted above, Partha Chatterjee points out that more privileged social groups can operate within the rules as they agitate for change, hence they can be a ‘civil’ society. Disprivileged social groups, on the other hand, are forced to transgress the law in ‘uncivil’ ways as they agitate for change.⁶⁷ Chatterjee explains that being ‘extralegal’ is an aspect of their disprivilege, and rejects the idea of externalization by calling this political society—which contrasts with

⁶⁶ Roy, Ananya. 2009.

⁶⁷ Chatterjee, 2004.

civil society, but is not somehow ‘outside’ of the regime of politics and urban power.

However Chatterjee does not closely examine how whole populations are held outside of the terrain of the legal by planned constrictions of the legal terrain. Whenever an urban agency declares that legal houses must be made of permanent (*pukka*) materials for the safety and benefit of its own inhabitants, it makes a dual move: it declares the right to *safe* housing, and at the same time declares that safety—for which the regime is accountable—trumps the right to housing itself—for which the regime is *not* accountable. Thus the constriction of the legal terrain is deliberate, and may well reflect a good-faith effort by city officials to improve the material living conditions of urban residents. Furthermore the accountabilities for safety are not incidental. Both urban and national regimes have been badly weakened by failures to protect urban populations, such as the Soviets after the Yerevan Earthquake (1988), the Turks after the Izmit earthquake (1999), and the Americans after Hurricane Katrina (2005). To retain their legitimacy, governing regimes are compelled to declare their commitment to public safety and to demand that their populations comply with uniform standards. By delimiting the legal terrain, regimes limit the extent of their accountability while also demonstrating their care for the (deserving) populations they protect. In this paradoxical way, the United States can govern a very safe regime while leaving homeless people in the most abject state of disregard and vulnerability; whereas regimes with fewer resources and less capacity for enforcement may allow far more violation, but better conditions for the excluded. A student of mine who grew up in Tijuana, Mexico expressed his shock at the condition of the homeless in Berkeley and San Francisco; he had never seen such total vulnerability in the squatter settlements of Mexican cities.

The productivity of urban informality

One of the unspoken assumptions in the literature of urban informality is that it is a dysfunctional condition: either as a violation of Liberal ideals, or a betrayal of Liberalism’s actual nature. Theorists of urban informality differ widely in how they conceive of the phenomenon: de Soto expresses a neoliberal view by locating informality in the site of the undocumented house or business, whereas Roy expresses a more critical view by locating informalization as a process within the urban regime. From these two conceptions arise very different evaluations of how informality might be addressed. De Soto proposes formalization, without addressing the reasons why there might be resistance to this, nor the (possibly related!) reason why informality emerges in the first place, and is sustained through the practices of many urban regimes. For de Soto and neoliberals who follow his argument, formalization is an end in itself, inducting the urban poor into what George Bush called ‘the ownership society.’ In this model, property ownership is equated with security of tenure, and thus as a comprehensive, permanent solution to ‘the problem’ of informality.

In contrast, Roy is concerned that informalization is an attractive political tactic for a whole spectrum of urban regimes. During her fieldwork in the late 1990s, such a range could be observed in India itself, from the conservative demagogues of the Bharatiya Janata Party ruling Delhi,⁶⁸ to the Left Front coalition ruling Kolkata at the same time. In

68 see Baviskar, 2006.

recent work, Roy sees some hope in the way that disprivileged people can invoke rights and laws to block the abuses of urban regimes, such as in the legal challenges to road-widening between central Bangalore and its airport.⁶⁹ Within the literature on informality, Roy and de Soto are perhaps the farthest apart politically. Yet both treat informality as a dysfunctional process, as either an indictment of neoliberalization or a flaw that must be corrected to extend the benefits of Liberalism.

For urban planners, an overall moral evaluation of Liberalism is important; but we also must operate much closer to the ground in actual practice. Whether or not informality is dysfunctional in our general moral framework, we also need to recognize that in many respects it also works. In Kabul, hundreds of thousands of families are living, raising their children, caring for their elderly, and accessing urban resources in ways that they would not be able to afford through obedience to formal rules and formal market prices. Formality is an ideal condition that others can afford through the power to defer costs: through deficit-spending, unequal trade terms, and the reliance on labor performed *outside* of the formal sphere. At one scale, that is North America in relation to Latin America and East Asia; at another scale, that is the urban elite in Kabul relying on labor and local services that can only be delivered at their current cost because the humans who do that labor live in conditions below what the formal market would admit. While I was staying at an NGO guest-house near Kabul University, I helped fix the road in front of the guest-house when the spring rains turned it into deep mud. A neighbor approached me and suggested that I hire a laborer to level the road and spread gravel on it. It would take only two days' labor; and in 2007, that would cost 400 Afs (US\$8.07). If I provided him lunch, it would only cost 360 Afs. I did not yet have the gall to hire someone to perform heavy labor for such a pittance, and I knew that I would get grief from the neighbors if I overpaid. Later that year I would recognize the value of even a short job at 200 Afs a day for an Afghan laborer, and marvel at the fact that they could deliver such hard work at such a low price and still live.

Thus I face a paradox: how to argue for the productivity of informality, without somehow legitimizing it? Abdoumalik Simone manages to do this, but only in writing against planning, policy, and the developmental project.⁷⁰ A denouncement of the entire developmental project may be justified, and recommending the withdrawal of the aid industry from the global South may be a valid condition. My concern is that this must not be used as an excuse for a half-withdrawal: so long as the United States exerts geopolitical influence, so long as we determine terms of trade and liquidity of debt, we are very present in even the most remote sites across the world. At the other end of the political spectrum from Simone, Dambisa Moyo recommends the scheduled phasing-out of foreign aid to all of Africa.⁷¹ From her position as an investment banker at Goldman Sachs, the implicit assumption is that the market and personal initiative will be enabled and encouraged by such a cutoff; but the myth of sovereignty that stands behind this

69 Roy, Ananya, 2009.

70 see especially: Simone, AbdouMalik. 2004. "People as infrastructure: Intersecting fragments in Johannesburg." *Public Culture* 16:407-429.

71 Moyo, Dambisa. 2009. *Dead aid: Why aid is not working and how there is a better way for Africa*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux.

argument is an ideal that does not exist in practice: Goldman Sachs itself is a firm which benefits directly from this tension between the myth of sovereignty and the reality of an enmeshed worldwide political economy. Again: what remains incongruous from these two principled, but radically disparate positions is the third location in which the planner is committed to providing tangible benefits to the welfare of urban populations regardless of potential ideal political conditions.



Figure 5.19. Informal vending along the Kabul River Embankment just north of the Mosque and Shrine to the Shah of the Two Flaming Swords (Author, 2007).

Here, again, I try to use images to support my point. Figure 5.19 shows informal shopping along the street between the Pamir Cinema and the Public Garden Bridge (*pul-e bagh-e omumi*). This is a section of embankment along the Kabul River that was redeveloped by Amanullah as an urban beautification program in the 1920s. In the center background you can see the Mosque of the Shah of the Two Flaming Swords, rebuilt in Beaux-Arts style by Amanullah to look very much like the Dolmabace Mosque of Istanbul. This is one of the most central spaces of the entire city: Pamir Cinema is the transit hub for all points south and west in the city, and just beyond the Public Garden Bridge is the transit hub for all points north and east. In the middle of the image, a woman in a burqa is bargaining with a shoe-vendor for sandals. This is one of the main markets where Kabulis buy their basic household goods, from toiletries to clothes to appliances. The business owners renting the formal shops that line this street benefit from the prodigious foot-traffic, and sell more valuable items that can cover rental costs. But the informal vendors do not pay rent nor, apparently, any protection-money: they are frequently driven from this site by police officer wielding electric cables as whips. This vending-service, so necessary to Kabulis, exists only in that breach between the legal and the real.



Figure 5.20. Apprentice blacksmith, Mandawi district of Old Kabul (Author, 2007).

Or consider this image of a boy who is an apprentice blacksmith (figure 5.20). This photo was taken at his request. We might interpret this image as Jacob Riis intended in his photographic exposé of adverse living conditions in New York City in the 1880s;⁷² certainly this is a case of unregulated child labor. But this is *his* photograph: his solemn affect is typical of many Kabulis, an expression of dignity and pride. He is employed, learning a skill, and making a potential business contact with a transnational researcher as the shutter button is being pressed.

As Keith Hart pointed out in his early description of informality in Ghana, “denied success by the formal opportunity structure, these members of the urban sub-proletariat seek informal means of increasing their incomes.”⁷³ Together with Janice Perlman,⁷⁴ Hart was arguing the agency of people using informal means to secure their livelihoods against a prevalent view that they were simply struggling at the margins. Thirty years later, Perlman tempered this argument for the agency of people forced to live outside of the formal sphere based on new fieldwork in Rio de Janeiro in the late 1990s, even though popular movements had not only brought about the return of civilian government in the mid-1980s and the ratification of a remarkable national Constitution, but even after the Worker’s Party had won national elections. Poorer Kabulis, likewise, live in an odd space of disempowerment and agency. They do not have the right to the city, nor is there any indication that they will ever gain the political confidence, cohesion, and leverage

72 Riis, Jacob A. 2005 [1890]. *How the other half lives: Studies among the tenements of New York*. Stilwell, KS: Digireads.com Pub.

73 Hart, Keith. 1973. “Informal income opportunities and urban employment in Ghana.” *Journal of modern African studies* 11:61-89.

74 Perlman, 1976.

necessary to secure that citizenship in the way that Jim Holston observes in São Paulo.⁷⁵

In eastern Kabul I encountered one informal community that had worked with the grandson of King Zahir to to successfully petition for the closure of brick-kilns adjacent to their houses. Fueled by used tires, the soot-rich smoke from these kilns had been causing severe respiratory problems in the community (figure 5.21).



Figure 5.21. Brick kiln fueled by burning tires, Naw Abad-e Deh Khuda-e Dad (New district of God-given Village), eastern Kabul (Author, 2006).

This community mobilized to address this specific threat; and there were other indications of significant self-organization. The extraordinary map they had made of their own community (Figure 5.22) reminded me of the self-enumeration described by Arjun Appadurai in the slums of Mumbai.⁷⁶ But if the council of God-given Village in eastern Kabul is a lesson in ‘deep democracy’, that lesson is not being heeded by the urban regime of Kabul. Effective authority in the urban government remains strictly top-down. Ward Chiefs are still appointed by the Mayor; the Mayor is still appointed by President Karzai; and the President was appointed by the Americans at Bonn in 2001. There is no space within this imperial politics for a grassroots urban activism that would give Kabulis an experience of entitlement, an identity of citizenship. Rather, they are making do by negotiating as best they can for the resources and protections necessary to continue living where they are, to simply remain in place.

⁷⁵ Holston, 2008.

⁷⁶ Appadurai, Arjun. 2002. “Deep democracy: Urban governmentality and the horizon of politics.” *Public culture* 14:21-47.

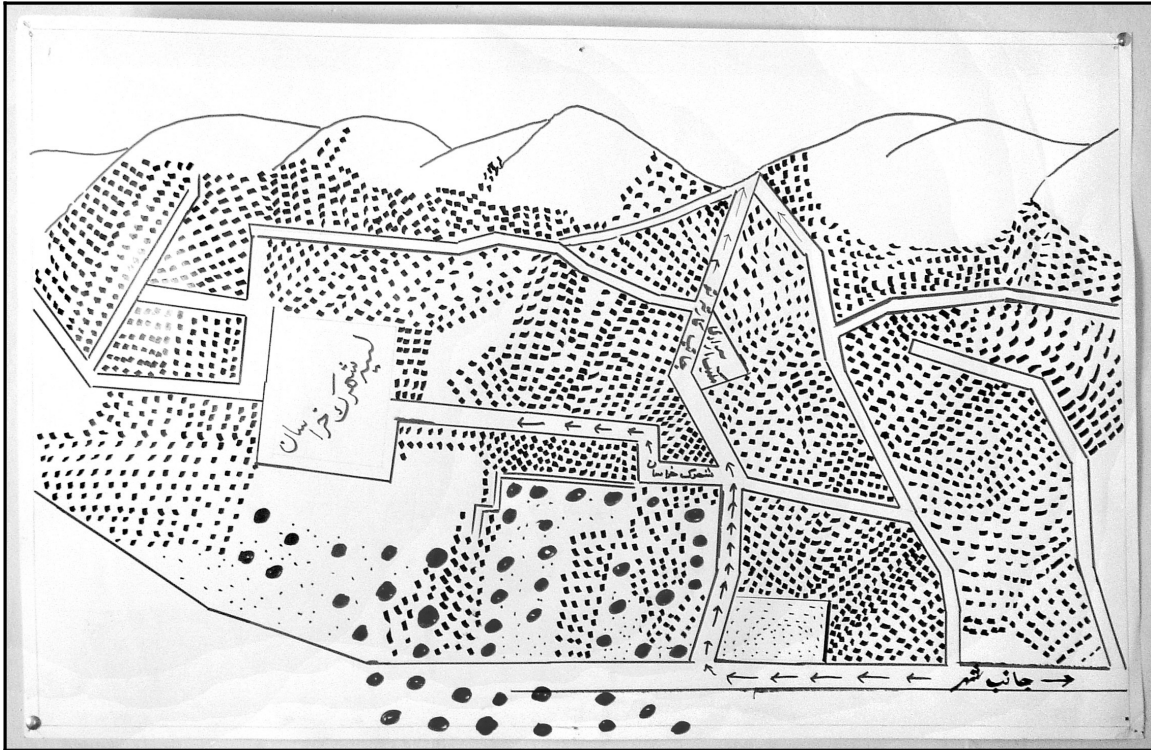


Figure 5.22. Hand-made map of Naw Abad-e Deh Khuda-e Dad and Qala-e Zaman Khan mounted in the community meeting room (author, 2006). South is towards the top. The large dots at lower center are the brick kilns that were being decommissioned at the time.

Here, I think, is the moral terrain which planners have yet to recognize as a place we need to enter. Working in this terrain is an explicit violation of our most fundamental Liberal principles: this is a place where equal opportunity and equal protection under the law do not exist *by definition*. And yet this terrain—created in that breach between an ungenerously constricted sphere of legality and a far greater sphere of desire—is an astoundingly productive urban space. Millions of Kabulis, the vast majority of the urban population, labor and live and love in this space. We planners don't want it to exist. My description of the formal Kabuli planners in Chapter Four should make it clear that I am including the professional planners of Kabul as part of this 'we'; and urban planners want to regulate the development of cities for the public welfare, however we conceive of benefit and welfare.

What planners have thus far been unable to reconcile is that this terrain of violation is produced and managed by the urban regime just as much as the formal terrain. This terrain of desire, that exceeds our normative ideals of what the city should be, is an ethical and professional dilemma. If we recognize Clay as a mode of planning, what are our professional and theoretical responsibilities to this terrain? When there is no realistic prospect of 'regularization,' can we operate in this terrain without corrupting our own legitimacy as planners, and our self-identifying mission to regulate and improve legal-space? We want this problem to be solved. Problem-solving is perhaps the most foundational component of the planner's identity, and the belief that we *can* solve urban

problems through policy interventions is the fundamental optimism that drives our profession. Can we work in a space where there is no realistic prospect that the most basic condition of legality will be resolved? For activists who are not urban planners, this might seem easy: World Food Program, Action Contre le Faim, and Red Crescent do not hesitate to operate throughout the informal spaces of Kabul. I saw signs of their work in the remotest places we surveyed in 2003. But imagine that you are working for a human rights organization, and you find that you must work with a group of people who not only have their rights denied, but face no realistic prospect of ever having their rights recognized. As you help them, are you acting as an enabler for the regime that denies recognition of their rights? Do you prolong their condition of oppression as you work to ameliorate their more immediate living circumstances? Is your work an apology for grotesque inequality, a conditional patch over a contradiction which should instead be exposed, in the hope that exposure will force change?

For planners and the residents of this informal terrain these are no mere allegorical questions. For millions of Kabulis, and more than one billion people worldwide, the question of urban rights is a question of human rights. Within the Liberal paradigm as we understand it, the right to safe, healthy housing trumps the right to housing itself. Stated more generally, Liberal government guarantees equal protection under the law, but does not guarantee that law extends to all the people under its sphere of domination. When Americans made the universalist claim that “We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal,” not only did this exclude women, but many male humans who were not considered men at the time and place of that Declaration.⁷⁷ Readers might object that I am citing a very specifically American articulation of Liberal ideals here, when numerous political entities—including Afghan leaders dating back to Amanullah—have articulated their own visions of Liberal government. I do so for two reasons: first as a reminder that *claims* might be universal, but Liberalism actually emerged under the peculiar conditions of specific times and places. The claim of universality slips too often into an assumption that Liberal rights, laws, and norms actually *are* universal.⁷⁸ Second, I want to remind us that the peculiarly American version of Liberalism is being imposed upon Afghans by our military presence, our political interventions, and our donation policies and earmarks.

⁷⁷ Jefferson, Thomas. 1776. *Declaration of Independence*. Philadelphia: Continental Congress.

⁷⁸ Chakrabarty, Dipesh. 2000. *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial thought and historical difference*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Formal and informal planning through the lens of biopolitics

The ethical dilemma of planners in relation to urban informality remains intractable within the prevailing conception of Liberal democracy, sovereignty, and a conflation of rights with law. A more promising angle of inquiry may lie in Foucault's conception of sovereign power and biopower as discrete modes of governing power. Giorgio Agamben and Derek Gregory have theorized the intersection of these two modes of power in the concentration camp and the global war prison, respectively.⁷⁹ In *The history of sexuality, volume 1* Foucault implies that the older mode of sovereign power was superseded by the distinctly modern mode of biopower in the following passage:

One might say that the ancient right [of the sovereign] to *take* life or to *let* live was replaced by a power to *foster* life or to *disallow* it to the point of death.⁸⁰

I agree with Agamben and Gregory that *both* modes continue to operate; and the ways in which these two modes intersect and interact reveal the nature of governing power in a new way. However I think that their intersection often occurs in the much more prosaic practices of urban planning, not just in the extreme sites of the death-camp and the secret prison. Foucault's expression to 'foster life' refers to what he previously called the 'pastoral power' of modern regimes to care simultaneously for the whole population and for the individual.⁸¹ The model for this pastoral power was the Christian pastoral concern for the spiritual welfare of the whole flock, including the least among that flock.⁸² Modern regimes adapted this model into a new technology of rule. In "The birth of biopolitics" Foucault explains biopolitics as

the endeavor, begun in the eighteenth century, to rationalize the problems presented to governmental practice by the phenomena characteristic of a group of living human beings constituted as a population: health, sanitation, birthrate, longevity, race... We are aware of the expanding place these problems have occupied since the nineteenth century, and of the political and economic issues they have constituted up to the present day.⁸³

Foucault's brief listing of five items—health, sanitation, birthrate, longevity, and race—touches on the entire spectrum of concerns in both urban planning and development discourse. Here we see the collective recognition of aggregate behavior in populations, proposed by Henri Saint-Simon's disciple Auguste Comte in 1822 as a 'new science of humanity'.⁸⁴ John Friedmann traces the ideological roots of modern planning as we know it to Comte,⁸⁵ while Timothy Mitchell traces many of the managerial practices of colonialism to Saint-Simonists experimenting in early nineteenth-century Egypt.⁸⁶

The overlap between emergent practices of population management in Western and colonized cities reveals the shared genealogy of urban planning and international development. Jennifer Robinson predicted that the mutual extension of urban theory and

79 Agamben, 1998 and Gregory, 2006.

80 Foucault, Michel. 1980. *The history of sexuality, volume 1: An introduction*. New York: Vintage Books, p. 138.

81 Foucault, 1979.

82 Christian New Testament: John, Chapter 10; and Luke, Chapter 15.

83 Foucault, 2003.

84 Comte, 1998 [1822].

85 Friedmann, 1987, p. 21 et seq.

86 Mitchell, Timothy. 1988.

development theory into each others' respective domains would strengthen both bodies of scholarship. This project of cross-discipline theory-extension is facilitated by the fact that both disciplines, and both sets of professional practices, are strongly defined by the modern political rationality of biopower.

Furthermore, the differences between planning and development—and the differences between the three modes of planning described in this analysis—can be explained as different ways in which biopower and sovereign power intersect. When ruling and caring for “one’s own” body-politic in Western cities, it is called planning; when caring for other bodies outside of one’s own jurisdiction it is called development. Ostensibly the sovereign power drops out in the name of saving the vulnerable innocents in these ‘other’ spaces. But in practice, the discursive power of Westerners to disregard the sovereign power in spaces of development is in itself an expression of imperial power.

At the scale of the city-space, biopower and sovereign power intersect in different ways to produce the Concrete, Clay, and Mirrorglass modes of planning. In Concrete, the attempt to produce a modern, healthy city overlaps with the coercive power of the regime both to demolish illegal settlements, and to enforce planning and building standards. Whereas the entire terrain of Clay exists within the condition of sovereign exception; but both sovereign power and biopower are certainly still present. The main reason why so many Afghans moved to Kabul after 2001 was encapsulated in the one-word survey response “*amniyat*” (security). The biologically-protective shield held over Kabul, that non-excludable public good which Afghans could share with the foreigners for whom it was provided, is a vivid expression of biopower. In Mirrorglass we will further explore the radically asymmetrical forms of both sovereign and biopower in relation to the transnational regime in Kabul.

Recognizing biopower as a discrete mode of power enables us to re-think urban informality, especially its productivity. Even if urban informality indicates some sort of inversion or perversion of sovereign governance, the living presence of hundreds of thousands of families in this procedural breach testifies to the fact that at some level, urbanization is still working. Looking back at the evidence I have provided in this chapter, Shir Pur is the exception to the exception: the happy case where informal squatters gain recognition and tenure security. In this unique case the urban elite were caught and exposed by the international media as they granted themselves a very similar exception to the one given years before to the poorer squatters on the same site. If sovereignty is defined as the sovereign power to declare the exception, this case revealed a limit to the sovereign power of Kabul’s urban elite. However this does not mean that sovereignty has been simply and entirely appropriated by the transnational regime; only that it is compromised, *parcelized* between various agents of the local, national, and transnational regimes.

Parcelization of sovereignty seems to be a strategy for *efficient* domination. The United States may be the most powerful political-military entity in the space of Kabul, but if it exercised the option of full sovereignty and explicit colonization, the US would have to answer to international objections and a full spectrum of local decisionmaking responsibilities. However by *not* exercising this option when it has the power to do so,

the US has caused substantial confusion in expectations of government throughout the city. One indicator of this was the rhetorical but oft-repeated question by Afghans, ‘Whose country is this?’ Another indicator was the bewilderment of many aid workers about the lack of coordination across agencies that had persisted from 2001 to 2007. In the spring of 2007 I attended an interagency data-sharing conference where lack of coordination was still the central concern. Standard data formats were possible, but no agency had either the authority or the will to impose those standards.

In terms of urban informality, in most cases the urban regime *does* have sovereignty. In fact the urban regime of Kabul had the power to grant legitimation to the poorer squatters in Shir Pur in 2007. For most of the residents of Kabul—since most reside under conditions of informality—the tension between the formal ideal of the 1978 Master Plan and the informalized reality of their lived environment remains a source of great uncertainty and risk, and therefore deprivation. As with sovereign power, the Clay mode of urban planning involves the efficient use of biopower as well: life is fostered by the local regime, but not much. Local public resources are minimized in the neoliberalizing logic of ‘lean government.’ In fact the greater effort is expended by the transnational regime, as biopolitics jumps to a global scale. Here we see a reiteration of what I call “Chadwick’s bargain”: the health of the entire global population must be looked after, because contagious diseases among any population could quickly spread and infect us all.

In this jump of scale we see transnational biopower trump local sovereign power. Often this is rhetorically framed as ‘basic human needs,’ or the medical imperative, or most recently, the transnational call for the “Responsibility to Protect” subject populations, as both a test of legitimate sovereignty or a justification for armed intervention. As the R2P website states plainly,

The term Responsibility to Protect was first presented in the report of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS) in December 2001. The Commission had been formed in response to Kofi Annan’s question of when the international community must intervene for human protection purposes. Building on Francis Deng’s idea of Sovereignty as Responsibility, the Commission addressed the question of when sovereignty, a fundamental principle of international law, must yield to the protection against the most egregious violations of humanitarian and international law, including genocide, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity.⁸⁷

Perhaps in the interfaces of sovereign power and biopower, planners can find ways to operate in the spaces of the informal while still working to recover, or establish, an ideal of equal life-opportunities. But I close this chapter with a cautionary anecdote: while I was writing this, my son’s kindergarten class took swabs of various objects in their classroom and grew cultures to see which objects had the most germs. The toys, which were rarely washed, were rich with bacteria. However the water in the toilet bowl was utterly sterile. It struck me that only perhaps one in one thousand Afghans has access to water as clean as the water in the toilet of my son’s kindergarten class. The sterility of that water, and even more so the ‘game’ of looking for bacteria on classroom objects, is part of a vigorous, ramified biopolitical regime in the United States. Meanwhile, foreign

⁸⁷ Responsibility to Protect (R2P) website. <http://www.responsibilitytoprotect.org/index.php/about-rtop> (Accessed, August 31, 2009).

donors have funded thousands of shallow tube-wells in Kabul so that the urban population does not actually suffer from thirst, but there is no movement to improve and extend the piped municipal water supply. Airborne respiratory diseases are a great concern, because multi-drug-resistant tuberculosis or a new mutation of the influenza *H1N1* virus could infect Western soldiers, diplomats, or aid workers and spread to Western populations.

Water-borne diseases, on the other hand, are not nearly so transmissible nor dangerous to the transnational community in Kabul. Many Afghans die of easily-preventable water-borne diseases, a major factor in the 20-25% death rate of Afghan children five and under. Of those who survive, many lose educational opportunities because they spend so much of their time and strength hauling water to their homes every day. From what I observed in the hillside settlements in Kabul I argue that the most important contribution to girls' education in the city would be a comprehensive piped water system. This is not an intentional omission, not an act of malice. It is an absence: an absence of a call for the public provision of a comprehensive system of physical infrastructure. That silence on the question of the public provision of public goods is the silence of an ideology locked into the belief that all goods should be delivered by the market. This is a set of expectations that are not 'natural' nor 'self-evident;' this non-arbitrary ideology of what Stiglitz⁸⁸ calls 'market fundamentalism' directly shapes the city of Kabul. Though we share a biopolitical space with all human beings at this moment, even the recognition of that connection has no inherent mitigating effect on the most profound conditions of inequality.

88 Stiglitz, 2002.

Chapter Six: Mirroerglass



Figure 6.1. Foreigners in SUV with high-gain antenna; Kabulis on foot and bicycle (Author, 2007).

The Mirroerglass mode

This chapter focuses on the third mode of urban planning in Kabul: Mirroerglass, the exceptionalist mode by which local and transnational elites govern development. The term ‘Mirroerglass’ refers to the widespread use of reflective glazing in high-value construction since 2001, as well as the use of tinted and reflective glass in the vehicles of designated elites. In both usages, Mirroerglass signals impunity and anonymity maintained by opacity.

Practices of bodily segregation that characterize the Mirroerglass mode reveal the strong role of *economies of risk* in the (bio)political rationality that underlies this mode. Westerners’ fears of local Afghans have played a major role in the allocation of resources and the securing of elite spaces in Kabul. Security measures intended to minimize biological risks to elites define the character of many of the public spaces and whole

neighborhoods in central Kabul.

The agents whom I have grouped together under *Mirrorglass* include foreign diplomats, transnational aid workers, foreign militaries, and private security contractors. But I also include elite Afghans because they can access circuits of capital from outside of the region, and because they can quickly and easily flee the country if necessary. *Mirrorglass* is not simply a mode of planning imposed by foreigners upon Afghans. Such a division would be misleadingly simplistic, and it would implicitly reinforce an assumption that Afghans are essentially Other, even when they happen to be well-off, culturally assimilated American citizens. Rather, ***Mirrorglass is a series of urban spatial interventions that are driven primarily by decisions to mitigate biological risk to socio-political elites.*** Elite Afghans inhabit the same risk-mitigated, segregated environments as foreign diplomats and the international staff of aid agencies.

Where this categorization blurs is that elite Afghans span a range: from commanders¹ who have only spent brief periods outside of the country, to those whose cultural identity is more Californian, Virginian, or Londoner than Kabuli. Afghan expatriates discuss the tensions and negotiations of insider/outsider identity politics at length in blogs, essays, and interviews. My concern is more specific: How do radically unequal valuations of different bodies in Kabul translate into changes in the form and meaning of urban spaces in the city? Using the value of bodies as a singular distinguishing variable, the classification of elite/non-elite is less ambiguous. It is expressed, for example, in the split pay scales between ‘nationals’ and ‘internationals’ in NGOs and multilateral agencies. Like (other) foreigners, they collectively set themselves apart from the majority of the urban population by practices of security and risk-suppression which place them (us) all in a radically different environment within the same city.

Militarized humanitarianism: the biopolitics of American hegemony

Since the end of the Cold War, American leaders have been articulating a new geopolitical doctrine of “militarized humanitarianism” which relies increasingly on biopolitics rather than sovereign politics to justify warfare. An early use of this rationality was George H.W. Bush's citation of an Amnesty International report describing “Kuwaiti babies pulled from incubators and left to die” by the occupying Iraqi Army. This human-rights abuse was used explicitly as a part of his justification for the Persian Gulf War of 1991.² Opponents of that first Iraq War point out that the incident was later shown to be a fabrication, and that Amnesty International retracted the report. However the subsequent discrediting of the ‘babies and incubators’ story does not diminish the (bio)political significance of its usage for two reasons. First, though the story was fabricated by Kuwaiti propagandists, it appears that both the US Administration and Amnesty International believed it at the time that the military decision was made. Secondly, the rhetorical force of this story rests on the fate of Kuwaiti babies. The political imperative, therefore, is to protect the most vulnerable of human lives. In contrast, the younger

1 Many foreign commentators use the term 'warlord' to refer to semi-military local leaders. I use the English equivalent of the Dari term *kommandan* to avoid misleading connotations. See Chapters 1 and 2 for further discussion of this.

2 Jamieson, Kathleen Hall, and Paul Waldman. 2003. *The press effect: politicians, journalists, and the stories that shape the political world*. New York: Oxford University Press, p. 17.

Bush's concern over Hussein's weapons-capability invoked sovereign political imperatives at least as much as biopolitical imperatives.

Bill Clinton, haunted by his failure to intervene in Rwanda and Bosnia, further articulated a doctrine of humanitarian intervention in the attack on Serbian forces in Kosovo 1999. Within two years, George W. Bush invoked that same doctrine in characterizing the intervention in Afghanistan. Despite his stated skepticism about the feasibility and utility of 'nation-building,' Bush promised Afghans that the American-led occupation would be modeled on the 'constructive occupation' of Japan and Germany after the Second World War.³

After US-led Coalition Forces assisted the UIF in overthrowing the Islamic Emirate in November 2001, the Bush Administration immediately faced the problem of how to stabilize Afghanistan politically. The UIF was a direct descendant of the Rabbani government of 1993-1996, one which had demonstrably failed to govern Afghanistan. The Bush Administration decided to try to set up a more representative, more acceptable transitional administration at a conference in Bonn, Germany in the last week of November and first week of December 2001. However the United States was constrained by its limited knowledge of locally-legitimate Afghans, and with its own history of involvement in the anti-Soviet insurgency of the 1980s. What surviving contacts the US had were the same pool of commanders who had been ousted by the Taliban in 1996. Personal interviews in Kabul confirmed what a number of authors have pointed out: most Afghans view this group of commanders as irredeemably corrupt, and unlikely to maintain a coherent government on their own. Therefore the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) was also created at the Bonn Conference, to protect the Transitional Administration led by Hamid Karzai.

ISAF is in many ways the paradigmatic transnational biopolitical force. Similar to the police practices which Foucault cited in his research, the mission of ISAF is "to protect and serve" the Afghan regime. Unlike a police force within its 'own' city, though, ISAF's *scope of protection* is partial. As mentioned earlier in this research, one of the remarkable unintended consequences of the installment of ISAF in Kabul was to make the city into a haven for "local" Afghans, who recognized that spatial security over a whole city is a non-excludable public good, enjoyed by everyone who can manage to squeeze into the urban space under its shield.

The other foreign military force in Afghanistan—the Coalition Forces led by the United States—are *also* pursuing a biopolitical agenda. The purpose of their mission, Operation Enduring Freedom, is to prevent (or at least suppress the risk of) terrorist attacks on civilian populations in Western countries. In this case the partiality of the biopolitical agenda is even more pronounced than with ISAF. The Coalition Forces are in Afghanistan, but their core mission is to protect populations in Western countries. In this transnational application of biopower, the protection of one population is achieved by a *spatial deferral of risk* in which military conflict is moved into a region inhabited by another civilian population.

In the context of geopolitical conflict, then, biopolitics takes on an important new

3 Kahn, Joseph. 2001. "The World; Rebuilding What War Has Destroyed." *The New York Times*, Oct 14.

dimension: the governing of a people who fall outside of the scope of biological protection. They fall ‘outside’ because they are not part of the political *demos* to which a regime regards itself as politically accountable. During the first years of the Global War on Terror, the scope of population-protection was sharply circumscribed, and Afghans lay unambiguously outside of that scope. Among Americans, the exoticization of Afghans described throughout this text suppressed the political question of protecting Afghan civilians for several years. So long as Afghans remained the *Muslim Other* in American public consciousness, the question of including Afghan civilians within the same biopolitical envelope as Americans remained *foreclosed*; suppressed before it was even asked.

However the contradiction between a boundaryless ‘global’ war to protect ‘the innocent’ from terrorists, and the repeated killing of civilians in Afghanistan eventually provoked political feedback. Hamid Karzai complained with increasing indignation about civilian casualties. Both in terms of sovereign politics and biopolitics, the sacrifice of non-militant Afghans for the sake of Western security undermined his legitimacy. After a scandalous massacre at Spin Pul in March of 2007, the US became more responsive to Karzai’s concerns. Up to that point, most of the civilian killings had occurred in remote areas, where it was difficult for reporters to even reach the grieving relatives and friends after the incident. But at Spin Pul on March 4, 2007, suicidal insurgent used a ‘vehicle-borne improvised explosive device’ (VBIED) to attack a convoy of US Marines. The attack only injured one soldier and killed none; but the Marines panicked. As they fled along the busy main highway between Jalalabad and Kabul, the Marines fired indiscriminately at passing vehicles and farmworkers in fields adjacent to the road.⁴ When American military investigators began to secure the scene of the incident, Afghan and foreign reporters also began to photograph and film the dead and injured civilians. A reporter for Tolo Television, one of the main news agencies in Afghanistan, was confronted by an American soldier while taking digital photographs. The soldier warned, “Delete them, or we will delete you.”⁵ However the accessibility of Spin Pul, on the main highway from Jalalabad to Kabul, meant that international reporters for the Associated Press also showed up, and also were forced to delete images and video footage. This triggered an international protest within the day.⁶ *[nonmodern/Muslim/backward]* Afghan witnesses to numerous previous incidents could be *discounted*; but the objections of Western journalists to what they perceived as an attempt to cover up a war crime could not be ignored, even by the Bush Administration.⁷

In the follow-up investigation into this incident, the US military apologized to the families of the civilian victims and compensated them.⁸ In the three years since this

4 Gall, Carlotta. 2007. “Marines’ actions in Afghanistan called excessive.” *The New York Times*, April 15.

5 Dietz, Robert. 2007. “In Afghanistan, U.S. troops confiscate pictures after attack.” *Committee to Protect Journalists*. New York, March 5.

6 Sifton, John. 2007. “Afghanistan: US should investigate civilian deaths” *Human Rights Watch*. New York, March 6.

7 Cloud, David S. 2007. “U.S. Military Opens Inquiry Into Whether Marines Killed 10 Afghans After Attack on Convoy.” *The New York Times*, March 24.

Leithead, Alastair. 2007. “Media drawn into Afghan conflict.” *British Broadcasting Corporation*. Kabul, March 11.

8 Cloud, David S. 2007. “U.S. pays and apologizes to kin of Afghans killed by Marines.” *The New York Times*, May 9.

incident the US military has become increasingly sensitive to Afghan and international concerns about civilian casualties. Or, based on my interviews with several soldiers, the change has been one of political and senior military leadership: ground troops have been acutely aware of the contradictions of their situation for many years, but have limited ability to change the overall framing of the orders they are given. On March 15, 2010, General Stanley McChrystal announced two restructurings of American military operations in Afghanistan which can be summarized as a shift from sovereign political rationality to biopolitical rationality. First, he has taken most of the Special Operations Forces (SOF) under his direct command. For the previous nine years, SOF in Afghanistan reported directly to the Pentagon, bypassing both the field command structure within Afghanistan and the regional command for the Middle East, known as the US Central Command (CENTCOM). The Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission, the UN, and Afghan political leaders such as Mohammed Iqbal Safi have complained that a disproportionate number of civilian deaths are caused by SOF actions. The *New York Times* cites three recent, notorious incidents as examples of Special Forces behavior. In response to the killing of 27 civilians on February 21, 2010, McChrystal apologized personally to President Karzai, and publicly apologized on Afghan media; taking responsibility for operations that he did not actually control. The military denies that these incidents were the direct cause of the command-consolidation, but they represent a pattern of violence that was difficult to control with a fragmented command structure.⁹

The second part of the March 15 restructuring was the reassignment of all conventional US forces into ISAF. Not only does this mean that they must work within the NATO command structure, but that their fundamental mission has changed. This can either be interpreted as the quiet dismantling of Operation Enduring Freedom as a discrete project intended to protect only Westerners, or as an inclusion of Afghans into the OEF mission. In either case, all conventional US forces now operate within a strategic framework which explicitly considers the local political repercussions of combat actions. However, two operations were not put under ISAF: the Special Forces, and the US military detention operations in Afghanistan. McChrystal now commands all US *conventional* forces through the NATO structure, but commands SOF and the prisons directly, outside of that structure.¹⁰ These remain the sovereign exception: the SOF may be under the same field commander, but are not constrained by the same protective, defensive mission as the conventional forces. Furthermore the American prisons in Afghanistan remain part of the ‘global war prison’ that Derek Gregory identifies as the “vanishing point” of intersection between sovereign power and biopower.¹¹ Other NATO countries were unwilling to take responsibility for a set of prison practices that are politically unacceptable in their own countries.

Urban segregation as risk-segmentation

Thus far I have introduced Foucault’s theory of biopower; vital relationship of

9 Opiel, Richard, and Rod Nordland. 2010. “U.S. Is Reining In Special Operations Forces in Afghanistan.” *The New York Times*, March 16, p. A1.

10 The Associated Press. 2010. “Most US forces in Afghanistan to be under NATO.” *The New York Times*, March 16.

11 Gregory, Derek. 2006. “Vanishing points: Law, violence, and exception in the global war prison.” UC Berkeley Department of Geography <http://geography.berkeley.edu/events/pred.php>.

biopower to the practices and discourses of urban planning; and some of the disturbing aspects of biopolitics that appear in geopolitical relations between the political leadership of one national regime and the population of another country. In the present rhetorical framework of nation-states and international relations, political leaders may increasingly rely on biopolitical justifications for rule over their own *demos*, but they do not have to answer to populations who live outside of their electorate and outside of their mythical connection to a 'nation.' Exclusionary, communitarian politics within nation-states are similar, insofar as a population can be construed as 'outside of the body politic' through racism, denial of citizenship, and gendered politics. However the mythology of nation-states provides a substantial rhetorical framework, and increasingly a legal framework, in which to contest 'domestic' practices of bigotry. Here I touch on an issue whose particulars are a vast literature across a profoundly differentiated terrain. I do so to point out that any rhetorical basis for arguing that the political leadership of one country should care for the population of another country remains extremely weak, and opposed by the durable force of nation-state ideology—an ideology of sovereignty and sovereign power.

In this section I argue that the spatial deferral of risk is implemented through fine-grained security practices which divide the city quite literally into two worlds. The division is neither stable nor durable. Christopher Hitchens' metaphor of 'bubbles' is useful for describing the way that risk-segregated spaces can be established as flexible, temporary, dispersed enclaves. However I do not use 'bubbles' as the organizing metaphor for the whole chapter because the word suggests something benign, and something transparent. The brittle and opaque reflective glazing of Kabul also evokes a sense of ephemerality that expresses the uncertain commitment of Westerners to the long-term welfare of Afghans; but the shattering of a mirror also connotes something more menacing than the bursting of a bubble.

"Bubble" logic: inserting low-risk environments into Afghan cities

Christopher Hitchens reported on the first official election of Hamid Karzai for *Vanity Fair* magazine in the fall of 2004. At the time, most of Afghanistan was quite secure for Westerners, as I found out from my own work there and through later interviews. But the perception was that the country was very dangerous. To get a sense of the public mood, Hitchens traveled to Herat, which had a reputation of being one of the safest cities to visit. This is a double irony. The relative security of Herat was being enforced at the time by the commander Ismail Khan, who was acting as a self-appointed, unofficial *emir* of the city. And, on the very day that Hitchens was 'out in the street,' the Karzai regime moved (indirectly) to dislodge Khan from Herat by encouraging another commander to attack Khan's militia. The fighting on the outskirts of the city angered many residents who began to riot. Hitchens quickly sought shelter in a transnational compound:

An interlude of arduous phone-calling got me inside the "bubble" that is formed by the coalition forces, the United Nations teams, and the NGOs. I was able to spend a not-too-tense night inside the perimeter of the P.R.T., or Provisional[sic] Reconstruction Team: the system of decentralized mini-bases that some NATO contingents now wisely use to stay close to events. The HQ was right in the middle of town, and its compound contained several dozen armed Afghans. Many of them were awake and on guard while the bulk of the garrison was sleeping: a thing you would not see

inside the equivalent American base in Iraq. (“Yeah, they’re family,” said a central-casting farm-boy soldier from Wisconsin. “Buddies for life.”)

It was rather nice inside the bubble. I met some tough and smart guys, who had become good at collecting local intelligence and who mingle the job of collecting it with the job of distributing aid. One officer I met was carrying a briefcase with \$150,000 in cash—“for schools,” as he put it.¹²

Blunt descriptions of ‘the bubble’ are rare in Western media reports on Afghanistan; one of the few more recent examples is in the anonymous blog of “Harry Rud.”¹³ For Westerners, it seems that part of the challenge on reporting about ‘the bubble’ is *barriers to reflexivity*: international aid workers and journalists do not want to seem ungrateful to their employers, nor do they want to disparage the protection they receive in an environment reputed to be dangerous. The circumstance in which Hitchens wrote his pithy characterization is also important: it was a moment when a Westerner had been outside of the bubble, encountered actual danger, and was able to traverse into the bubble. Furthermore it was a moment of political optimism in which both Westerners and Afghans may have felt that this form of segregation-by-risk would only be temporary.

For most foreign staff, practices of segregation are perceived as a nuisance, which tends to obscure sensitivity to other consequences of segregation. The U.S. Embassy imposes some of the most strict security requirements, making it difficult for staff to experience the city of Kabul at all. Two weeks into my first visit to Kabul, I had seen much of the city through my work on the social-demographic survey described in Chapter Two. I managed to get a friend out of the Embassy, and another out of a UN compound, to give them a tour of the city where they had been posted (and largely confined) for four and six months, respectively. Less than a mile from their compounds, I walked them through new informal settlements on the spur of Asmayi Mountain with stunning views of the city. A group of young boys helped with the tour (and kept an eye on these strangers in their neighborhood), asking us questions and playing music on a radio for us, as if producing a live sound-track for our adventurous foray. This was a rare, face-to-face interaction; my friends wanted to get out into the city much more, but the security protocols of their agencies constrained them severely. My work for the Ministry might have exposed me to greater danger than that of Embassy and UN staff, but my freedom to move throughout the city was also a rare privilege which I will always appreciate.

What were the risks that I faced? As I mentioned in Chapter Two, during my fieldwork in 2007, ninety-nine people were killed in Kabul in terrorist attacks. This was after the ‘grace’ period of relative peacefulness in Kabul from 2002 to 2005. But in that same year, one hundred seven people were murdered in San Francisco. Although it has a reputation among American cities for low rates of violent crime, the population of San Francisco was about one quarter that of Kabul in 2007, making San Francisco about four times as dangerous by this available measure. Here is another measure: the following is a list of all of the Westerners kidnapped in Kabul between 2001 and 2008:

- Shqipe Hebib, Annetta Flanigan, and Angelito Nayan (kidnapped together),

¹² Hitchens, Christopher. 2004. “Afghanistan’s dangerous bet.” *Vanity Fair*.

¹³ <http://harryrud.wordpress.com/>

October 28, 2004;¹⁴

- Clementina Cantoni, May 16, 2005;¹⁵
- Christina Meier, August 18, 2007.¹⁶

Not only were all five of these Outsiders released unharmed; but these three incidents over seven years is a statistically insignificant sample. Meanwhile, the security measures that protected Westerners during this period were visible and expensive. Afghans often reminded me that funds intended to help rebuild Afghanistan were being spent on secured houses, guards, generators, and armored sport utility vehicles for shuttling foreign workers around town. If Kabul were as dangerous as, say, Mexico City or Tblisi, such costly precautions might have been justified. But by the data I cite above and my own experience traversing the city in 2003, 2006, and 2007, Kabul was quite safe for foreign aid workers. This was not at all true for foreign troops, who were frequently attacked; nor for Afghans civilians, who suffered a rising trend in child-kidnappings. Western civilians working in Kabul eventually did become targets of insurgent attacks, beginning with the Serena Hotel on January 14, 2008.¹⁷ Jean MacKenzie, Afghanistan country director of the Institute of War and Peace Reporting, suggests that rising resentment towards aid workers has played a role in making them into targets.¹⁸ Though the Taliban announced civilian-targeting as a new insurgent strategy, the ability to coordinate attacks in Kabul is facilitated by the overall sympathies of at least a fraction of its population. The most disturbing possibility is that the *security measures themselves* caused enough resentment over time to provoke an actual threat towards foreign aid workers.

Refuting that discourse is the purpose of chapter two. But on that first night, it was simple hunger that trumped my imported fears. Soon I would get to know Afghans and experience the hospitality of invitations, but in my first weeks in Kabul I had to find my own dinner. Walking back from the restaurant I was elated not just with the satisfaction of excellent *shami kebab* but also the liberation from fear. My hunch from meeting people on the street was that I was quite safe. What I sensed, and confirmed later when I had learned a little Farsi, is that Kabulis are *very* disciplined in the Foucauldian sense. In part this seems to be an effect of the practice of Islam, which itself means ‘submission (to the authority of God)’; and in part it is the urbane culture of Kabulis. Four years later, under considerably degraded security conditions, I would spend two hundred days in unsecured public space studying Kabul without incident: on foot, on bicycle, in taxis, on buses. What risk did I take? How do we evaluate risk?

The presence of war in Kabul could not be ignored. When I heard an explosion I would check the time. In 2003, scheduled destruction of unexploded ordnance (UXO) took place from 10AM to noon; in 2006 and 2007, it took place around 1PM. A detonation during morning commute hours was likely to be a terrorist attack. There was a remote chance that I would be nearby when such attacks occurred, but the targets of such

14 Gall, Carlotta. 2004. “Gunmen abduct 3 foreign election aides in Afghanistan.” *New York Times*, October 29.

15 Gall, Carlotta. 2005. “Gunmen in Afghan capital kidnap Italian CARE worker.” *New York Times*, May 17.

16 Rohde, David. 2007. “Afghan raid frees kidnapped German aid worker.” *New York Times*, August 20.

17 Wafa, Abdul Waheed. 2008. “4 arrests made in Kabul hotel attack.” *New York Times*, January 16.

18 Mackenzie, Jean. 2008. “In Kabul, shattered illusions.” *New York Times*, January 24.

attacks were the Afghan police and military, foreign militaries, and diplomatic sites. Most of my time was spent teaching at Kabul University and Kabul Polytechnic, several kilometers away from these targeted sites. As in American cities, I wasn't in the place of violence. During 2007, ninety-nine people were killed in terrorist attacks in Kabul, with a population approaching three million. In that same year 107 people were murdered in the city of San Francisco, with one quarter the population of Kabul and a reputation of safety relative to most American cities.

The problem with trying to evaluate risk in Kabul is that so few foreigners venture outside of the security bubble that there is insufficient data for risk-analysis. Hitchens' account of finding and entering 'the bubble' is not just rare in its description of a discrete secured terrain in Afghanistan, but also in its description of life outside that bubble. The extremely costly security practices protecting foreign NGO and multilateral-agency staff in Kabul is not based on a statistical projection of incident-probability in Kabul. It cannot be: too few incidents have occurred involving foreign civilians in Kabul to constitute a minimal statistical sample. Rather, a large portion of aid budgets are devoted to staff protection with the intention of *eliminating* risk, not managing it. This security-logic reveals one of the important limitations of non-governmental organizations and their role in development. Most NGOs fear that the violent death or even kidnapping of one of their international staff would incur civil liabilities in the home countries which they could not afford. The valuation of a Western aid worker—in whom perhaps one quarter of a million dollars in college tuition is already invested, and from whom perhaps several million dollars in earnings are expected—is too great to be placed into a regime of calculated risk.

The security of Western bodies in Afghanistan is an allocation of urban resources with significant spatial implications. It is quite deliberate; and in this sense is planning. As with the informalization of the urban regime in the mode of planning described as Clay, the relationship between intentionality and policy outcomes is problematic; for participants and scholars of development this might disqualify the process from being called planning. But as I have mentioned in previous chapters, the odd disjuncture between intentions and policy outcomes has been a central concern among planning practitioners and theorists in Western cities since at least Lindblom's 1958 essay about 'muddling through.'¹⁹ This is a failure of reflexivity, a tendency to see *through* the Mirrorglass while ignoring its more immediate reflections of our own practices back to us.

The biopolitics of Demographic Transitions

The differential valuation between Western bodies and those of Afghans has a profoundly biopolitical genealogy. The emergent technologies of rule that Foucault identified in nineteenth-century England produced the first of Warren Thompson described as a sequence of *Demographic Transitions*: the sudden drop in death rates in countries that developed effective public health regimes.²⁰ The effect was most pronounced in cities, where death rates historically had exceeded birth rates due to

19 Lindblom, Charles. 1959. "The science of 'muddling through'." *Public Administration Review* 19:79-88.

20 Thompson, Warren S. 1929. "Population". *American Journal of Sociology* 34(6): 959-975.

contagious proximity and bacteria in water, milk, and food. In Western cities, populations only began to replace themselves naturally in the first decade of the twentieth century. Up to that point, only continuous rural in-migration to sustained urban populations.

The lowered risk of early death opens up new possibilities for family resource-allocations: more can be invested in fewer children with a reasonable expectation that the investment will not be lost with (what we now think of as) premature death. This makes possible a second phase in the Demographic Transition, or what more recent authors call the Second Demographic Transition. Parents tend to have fewer children, although this varies by culture, ideology, levels of education, and life-opportunities. Amartya Sen and other development theorists focus on increased levels of education for girls and women as the primary factor, especially when this is linked with realizable career opportunities for women. Another factor seems to be increasing competitiveness in an ever more demanding labor market: it takes years to develop a child into a highly-productive, (self)-disciplined subject, what Robert Reich calls the ‘symbolic analyst.’²¹

Direct experience of the First and Second Demographic Transitions are important stories within my family; but such experiences seem so commonplace that the only times I have heard these Transitions discussed—outside of histories of public health—is in personal anecdotes; the margins to public discourse. During my field work, however, I was often confronted with personal stories that highlighted the interruptions of these two Transitions in Afghanistan. During the period of political stability and urban modernization from 1930 to 1978, Kabulis apparently experienced both the First and Second Transitions, although the majority of the rural population continued to experience historic death and birth rates. Then the mujahid civil war of 1992 to 1996 killed about fifty thousand Kabulis directly, and damaged much of the existing hard infrastructure.²² Now, the majority of new Kabulis live in informal settlements with no better infrastructure than in rural areas. Rough estimates of the life-expectancy of both male and female Afghans is in the mid forties;²³ child mortality is about twenty-five per cent; and about one in six Afghan mothers die in childbirth.²⁴ Among wealthier Kabulis death rates seem to be much lower; but they live in a society where high death and birth rates are a basic experience of daily life. Under conditions of high mortal risk, parents cannot risk investing too much in any one child—not for lack of affection, but because they must optimize the future prospects for the family as a whole. The commitment of limited resources to one child, who might die quite young, could hurt the life-chances of the other beloved children. Differing familial resource-allocations are therefore *reasonable*, but not *dispassionate*.

Some of the urban consequences of Demographic Transitions did not become apparent to me until I worked in Afghanistan. The financing of fine-grained urban

21 Reich, Robert B. 1991. *The work of nations: preparing ourselves for 21st-century capitalism*. New York: A.A. Knopf.

22 Human Rights Watch. 2005. *Blood-stained hands: past atrocities in Kabul and Afghanistan's legacy of impunity*. New York: Human Rights Watch.

23 United Nations. 2009. *UN World Population Prospects*, UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division.

24 UN International Children's Fund (UNICEF). 2010. "Afghanistan: Statistics." available at: http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/afghanistan_statistics.html

development in Kabul is hampered by the high death-rate. In the United States, the thirty-year home mortgage was first conceived—and first conceivable—during the Hoover Administration, in the same years that Thompson identified the Demographic Transition. In a country where the life-expectancy for both men and women is still in the forties, there is no market for long-term, low-interest financing. As economists studying poverty point out, money (as a debt instrument) costs more in risky environments. Subtler aspects of poverty also became apparent: I am committed to helping establish a postgraduate program in urban planning at Kabul University. Even at this point, however, postgraduate study for Afghans is difficult to justify. Investing additional time into education is a gamble against the very real possibility of a short career. My work in Kabul taught me to understand poverty as *life-risk*—rather than a lack of resources, or even a lack of access to resources *per se*. In this sense, war itself is directly impoverishing, as are subtler forms of political uncertainty. As a collective effort to lower risk, urban planning can be a direct generator of wealth, both in the sense of well-being and in the sense of cash value of urban space.

Ananya Roy argues that planning cannot 'future-proof' urban development in India,²⁵ and this argument seems even more applicable to Kabul. But as we saw at the end of Chapter Four, one reason why a 'technocratic grassroots' emerged in Kabul to support the implementation of the 1978 Master Plan was *not* because the Master Plan predicted nor guaranteed the entire urban future of Kabul. Rather, it was because the Master Plan was a public profession of governmental intent—a public promise—about much more specific things: where roads would go, and how areas would eventually be redeveloped.

Demographic Transitions as life-world schisms

In this research I have rejected many of the distinctions used to divide this world into developed and developing, First and Third, North and South—and most importantly, modern and non-modern. One of the flaws in this dichotomies is that they are too abstract, and based upon a vague cluster of variables. At the local level in Kabul, however, differential biological risk does divide the urban world very sharply. Westerners live in societies well into the Second Demographic Transition, with low death and low fertility rates. Parents can invest substantial resources into their one or two children because they reasonably expect their children to survive well into adulthood. At the policy level, Western societies want highly skilled and motivated aid workers to perform excellent work in Afghanistan. At the personal level, families do not want that individual to suddenly enter an environment of greatly elevated biological risk. Afghans have no choice: they live in a world made much more biologically risky by five consecutive wars over thirty years. Though Afghans may not be 'demodernized,' they do live (and die) under conditions that have shifted back toward the early phase of the First Demographic Transition. They have to respond to their life-risks by having more children. They also cannot invest too much into the education and development of individual children, partly because most Afghan families are poor; but also because the risk that any given child might not survive to adulthood is substantially higher.

²⁵ Roy, Ananya. 2009. "Why India cannot plan its cities." *Planning Theory* 8:7-11.

Amartya Sen and Mahbub ul Haq identified life-expectancy as one of three critical indicators of Human Development.²⁶ Not only is life-expectancy a widely-available statistic that can be compared between nations, but it captures many subtler, difficult-to-measure social phenomena such as health-damaging stress, the actual efficacy of a public health regime, and the actual availability of medical care to a whole population. Furthermore, the other two basic indicators—literacy and income—are contingent upon life-expectancy. Not only is it reasonable for a family to invest more in children who are likely to live longer, but when children actually do live longer and in better health, they acquire more skills and greater earning power over time. The combination of political stability and longevity alone may account for most of the difference between the United States and Afghanistan. Averages are coarse measures, because they do not capture patterns of spatial and class inequality; but let me begin with comparison of the IMF's National Gross Domestic Product in (Purchasing Power Parity corrected) Dollars Per Capita in 2008: for Americans, \$47,440; for Afghans, \$416.²⁷ This is a disparity exceeding two orders of magnitude.

Although numbers for Kabul are conspicuously absent, the disparities in urban development described in Chapter Five indicate a very unequal income distribution within the capital; so even an estimate of median household income—one that acknowledges the three-quarters of the urban population who live in informal settlements—has limited descriptive power. My rough estimate is that median household income in Kabul was about four thousand dollars. For a typical household of six to seven members, this figure, divided per capita, was not much higher than the national average. Middle-class households, in which one member might have work as a translator or engineer, earned perhaps twelve to fifteen thousand dollars. Meanwhile, individual aid workers earned sixty to one hundred thousand dollars; and their anticipated future earnings are even higher.

One way to summarize the biopolitics of difference in Kabul between 2002 and 2007 is as an encounter between an urban population of catastrophe survivors and a transnational wave of high-function, high-value, Western “symbolic analysts.” Western soldiers must pass proficiency tests and psychological evaluations to ensure that they do not become a threat to fellow soldiers; diplomatic staff must pass rigorous foreign service exams; and NGO staff must demonstrate a variety of skills from writing reports to effective social interaction with wealthy donors, strong-willed workmates, and Afghans ranging from the highly-functional to the highly-traumatized. All of these Western individuals represent at least one million dollars in future earnings potential; and they are usually one of either one or two children. Western families can, and must, minimize the risks that these intrepid subjects encounter in Afghanistan. Long-standing discourse about the courage of soldiers and the sacrifice of military families may partially shield political leaders who put young adults “into harm's way,” but in fact a driving political logic for American leaders since the Viet Nam conflict has been to reduce US military casualties as much as possible. For individual military families that is no comfort; and in terms of

26 Haq, Mahbub ul. 1995. *Reflections on human development*. New York: Oxford University Press.

27 International Monetary Fund. 2009. "World Economic Outlook Database" available at: <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/weo/2009/02/weodata/download.aspx>

the future welfare of that family, the death of one soldier does in fact cost far more today.

Diplomatic corps and multilateral agencies are not even partially shielded by the narrative of heroism; and the very survival of an NGO may depend upon avoiding any casualties of Western staff. Therefore while a whole diplomatic and developmental apparatus has arrived in Kabul with the best intentions to help long-suffering Afghans, the biopolitical imperative of Western agencies responsible for Western lives cuts sharply against any ideal of a shared, common humanity.

This distinction was most brutally demonstrated in March of 2007. During the very same month in which the Spin Pul massacre was unfolding into a scandal, another incident highlighted the differential valuation of Afghan and Western bodies. The Italian journalist Daniele Mastrogiacomo and the Afghan journalist Ajmal Naqshbandi were kidnapped by insurgents along with their driver, Sayed Agha, while attempting to interview a Taliban commander near Lashkar Gah in Helmand Province. Sayed Agha was beheaded early in their captivity, in front of the two journalists; but they continued to be held as hostages. The Italian government of Romano Prodi pressured Hamid Karzai into making a deal: he released five senior Taliban commanders in exchange for the release of Mastrogiacomo on March 19.²⁸ Concerned that this might set a disastrous precedent, Karzai then refused to bargain further for the release of Naqshbandi. Again, the Committee to Protect Journalists made an international appeal for his release, with a letter signed by Carlotta Gall and Christiane Amanpour.²⁹ On April 8, the kidnappers announced that they had executed Naqshbandi and on April 10 his corpse was delivered to a hospital in Kandahar.³⁰ I arrived in Kabul to begin my fieldwork two days later, and many Afghans I met expressed disgust towards Hamid Karzai. They knew that Western agencies valued Western lives more than those of Afghans, demonstrated by the use of Afghan staff for riskier assignments; but to have their own president betray this double standard was galling.³¹ Karzai himself, and all of the other Afghan political leaders, live in the same lowered-risk life-world as their Western backers and allies. In terms of biological risks, Karzai, too, is an Outsider.

28 Fisher, Ian. 2007. "Italy Swapped 5 Jailed Taliban for a Hostage." *The New York Times*, March 22.

29 Dietz, Robert. 2007. "Across the globe, journalists urge release of kidnapped colleague." *Committee to Protect Journalists*. New York: April 2.

30 Shah, Timoor. 2007. "Taliban release body of journalist seized in Afghanistan last month." *The New York Times*, April 11.

31 Wafa, Abdul Waheed. 2007. "Karzai assailed after burial of journalist killed by Taliban." *The New York Times*, April 12.

The urban mechanics of risk-segmentation



Figure 6.2. Checkpost for ministry, Kabul (author, 2007). American military and diplomatic installations in the center of Kabul have similar warnings, but only in English. No governing regulation is posted on these signs to justify the ban on photography; “security” becomes an unbounded basis for rule-by-fiat.

Figure 6.2 shows the security post at the entry to an Afghan ministry. Here I could use my exceptional privilege as a foreigner to get away with violating the rule posted on the sign. This image is critical to explain an important and very prevalent part of the urban landscape of central Kabul. The wired cylinders in the image are called Hesco barriers, and as the company announces rather humorously in an advertisement in an English-language journal called *Afghan Scene*, ‘Hesco has transformed the face of Kabul.’ Numerous sites where foreigners and Afghan leaders live and work are protected by Hesco barriers and razor-wire. Usually these barriers and guardposts are built in the sidewalk space, forcing pedestrians, wheelchairists, and pushcart-vendors out into vehicular traffic lanes. Drivers, who are already an upper class by definition of their ability to afford a car, resent the obstruction of their vehicular routes by pedestrians and pushcart-vendors. At their request, the Kabul Police regularly harass the vendors in particular. I witnessed vendors being whipped with electrical cables in 2007 to drive them off the edges of congested streets—a policy which Westerners normally attribute only to the Taliban. In this very specific appropriation of urban space, Outsiders defer risk to themselves onto Kabulis who are struggling to move and trade in public space.

The security landscape of Outsiders in Kabul at first seems like a bizarre, nightmarish inverse of the sidewalk ballet in Greenwich Village described by Jane Jacobs in 1961.³² And yet a consistent underlying logic of exclusion governs both Greenwich Village and

³² Jacobs, Jane. 1961. *The death and life of great American cities*. New York: Random House.

the Global Village in Kabul. Even by the late 1950s, Greenwich Village and other select urban spaces in American cities began to be gentrified. Initially it was a minor process of exclusion compared to the dominant method of segregation-by-distance through suburbanization. Center-city gentrification became increasingly significant in the late 1980s, as described by Neil Smith in *The new urban frontier*.³³ Betraying the contradiction between an ideal Jeffersonian democracy with open settlements and a reality of Americans who dwell in fear, the explicitly gated community had become another widespread practice as the space for segregation-by-distance has been exhausted.

In the compressed space of Kabul, exclusion-by-distance is not possible. The Hesco landscape of Kabul betrays the contradiction of an ideal of helping Afghans with a reality in which Afghans enjoy fewer effective human and citizen-rights than the foreigners who are living in their capital city. The architecture of exclusion is placed exactly in the site—the sidewalk—where a public might freely walk. Not only is that space of potential publicness being appropriated without the consent of the citizens of Kabul, but the photographic documentation of that appropriation is forbidden. This is the Mirrorglass mode of planning in Kabul: to assert sovereignty through spatial acts of exception and exclusion, while masking that assertion behind a discursive framework of fear.

For excluded local Afghans, this physical co-location implies that these disparate foreign agencies are part of a coordinated Western project. The association of transnational aid agencies with Western militaries has undermined any Afghan perception of their neutrality and nonviolence, progressively limiting the space in which aid agencies can operate. Likewise, the American diplomatic mission to Afghanistan is seen as an extension of the US military, a perception which the Obama Administration reinforced by naming former military commander Karl Eikenberry as the new US Ambassador to Afghanistan on January 30, 2009. Furthermore foreign security contractors prefer to seem like soldiers to enhance the authority of their presence; but this blurring of roles reinforces the perception among Afghans that there is no difference between mercenaries bound by civilian law and soldiers bound by treaties and rules of engagement. In addition, as Westerners complete short contracts in Kabul, they capitalize on their demonstrated field experience (or simply their willingness to rere-main in Kabul) to change jobs and roles. Discharged soldiers become security contractors for quadruple the salary; aid workers get hired by embassies and begin building government careers; Eikenberry's appointment shows that this happens at leadership levels as well. Thus despite the pronounced difference of purpose between, for example, Médecins Sans Frontières, the US Marine Corps, and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the aggregate behavior of Outsiders in Afghanistan presents an unexpectedly unified aspect to many local Afghans. This is especially demonstrated by the urban self-segregation of Outsiders in Kabul. In this case, elite Afghans and expatriate Afghan-Americans can be included: all these groups travel around Kabul from guarded compound to guarded compound in sport utility vehicles such as the one shown in figure 6.1.

At the start of this chapter I described ISAF's outermost layer of security over the

33 Smith, Neil. 1996. *The new urban frontier: gentrification and the revanchist city*. New York: Routledge.

whole city of Kabul, and its unintended effect as a strong incentive for urban immigration. Within Kabul, additional layers of security divide the city into what I call *segmented terrains of risk*. One segmentation is the division between formal and informal urban space, mediated through references to the 1978 Kabul Master Plan. In Chapter Five I argue that the distinctions between different types and degrees of informality are quite subtle. However in biopolitical terms, these particular distinctions of informality all fit along a spectrum of risk versus security. How secure is your tenure? Are the local police likely to protect you, or harass you for bribes, or even kidnap your children for ransom? The details of how this risk manifests in urban space are diverse, but they often occur together, reflecting the degree of social privilege or disprivilege of each household.

The Mirrorglass mode of transnational planning shares a core trait with the Clay mode of informal urban planning: both are processes of resource-allocation through which elites promote their own security at the expense of the urban majority. As we saw in Chapter Five, it is the informalization of the urban regime itself which produces the spatial condition of urban informality. This is why I have argued that informality is a mode of urban planning, in which elites secure their own access to resources by violating and corrupting the formal procedures of their own urban regime. The distinction between these two modes is the geography of the resources and expectations that define the way that Outsiders mitigate their own biological risks while in Kabul. That geographical difference produces sharply different urban consequences.

Risk-segmentation according to degrees of urban informality may be nuanced, but the distinction between the risk-environments of locals and those of Outsiders are sharply pronounced. Aid workers and diplomatic staff from OECD countries are members of families that experience and expect comparably low life-risks in their home countries. The early history of city planning in North America and Europe is, in many respects, a history of the First Demographic Transition in which the public health regimes and urban infrastructure, described above, suddenly lowered the death rate in dense cities. Two generations after this First Transition, Western societies experienced a Second Demographic Transition in which families choose to have fewer children, and population increase begins to level off. This change in long-term family decisionmaking reflects changing expectations from living in a regime of lowered biological risk. The far greater likelihood that children will survive into old age means that families can afford to invest far greater resources into one or two children and reasonably expect a 'life-return' on that investment. The thirty-year home mortgage, which has enabled more than one hundred million American households to buy homes since 1934, was only imaginable *after* American policymakers could reasonably expect the majority of male heads of households to work for thirty years. In Afghanistan, where the life-expectancy is only now rising into the mid-forties, households cannot be considered reliable candidates for long-term financing. Nor is extended education a wise investment for most households, since the length of a productive adult life of an adult Afghan is uncertain and generally short.

II. Kabul through the Mirrorglass: an elite schematic

The Citadel, the Global Village, and the Forbidden Forest

In this section I describe observable spatial transformations in form and meaning produced by Mirrorglass planning. From an Outsider perspective, Kabul divides fairly sharply into three zones which I call the Citadel, the Global Village, and the Forbidden Forest. Based on comments from aid workers, this tripartite division is similar in Khartoum, Tblisi, and other capital cities in which security is a concern. In proposing this connotation-laden schema I was inspired by Rajiv Chandrasekaran's description of life in the Green Zone of Baghdad as "Imperial life in the Emerald City."³⁴ However the division of Baghdad in the 2000s was very sharply *binary*, into Green and Red zones, in the midst of an urban civil war. The Outsider community-structure in Kabul seems more representative of a broader pattern; my hope is that subsequent researchers will affirm, amend, or refute this claim.

Of the three terms, "Citadel" is the most straightforward. The Citadel is the secured zone in the center of Kabul where admission of both Outsiders and local Afghans is restricted. This secured area replicates the role of a citadel in a medieval city; as a fortress that commands the city, serving both to protect the city and to keep the city in subjection.³⁵

The Global Village is comprised of guest-houses, office-houses, restaurant-houses, and other services operate out of houses that have been rented and adapted to serve the transnational community. Many of the leading agencies of this community were also co-signers of the letter of complaint drafted by the Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief (ACBAR) in May of 2002, because the rents that they were paying were rising so spectacularly.³⁶ During my first visit to Kabul in 2003 I was amazed by the size, vigor, and cosmopolitanism of this transnational community who had gathered in Kabul to try and 'do development differently.' The community expressed a new hope in a different type of international community, free of American leadership because of George W. Bush's professed skepticism about nation-building. Afghanistan was to be a test of whether this non-governmental community could successfully achieve culturally-sensitive post-conflict recovery and development.

From the Outsider perspective, most of the rest of the city of Kabul was considered a dangerous place, and the security protocols of most of the embassies, multilaterals, and NGOs forbade Outsiders from traveling openly in the bulk of the city. Because of the peculiar conditions of my first arrival in Kabul, my movements were entirely unrestricted; in fact I was tasked with traversing the entire city to evaluate housing, demographic, and infrastructural conditions. Thus for me there was always a dramatic tension between the way that agencies restricted foreigner-movement in the city and the actual experience of the city itself. The dramatic disparity between what security officers warned, and what I encountered, reminded me of the anxiety that Dorothy Gail expressed

34 Chandrasekaran, Rajiv. 2006. *Imperial life in the emerald city: inside Iraq's green zone*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

35 Oxford English Dictionary online edition, <http://dictionary.oed.com/>

36 Bearak, Barry. 2002. "Kabul Journal: In the Afghan Capital, Rents Go Through the Roof." *New York Times*, May 14.

towards the ‘creepy forest’ int eh Wizard of Oz—when in fact it was the open, intoxicating fields of poppies that were most dangerous for her.

I use fantasy-fiction nomenclature to describe this forbidden outer zone of Kabul because the anxieties that have created this urban phobotopia are not based on data-driven risk evaluations. They are based upon an Afghanistan that exists in the Western imagination, alongside the stories and myths that shape our understandings of the world. My hope is that this semi-facetious nomenclature will remind us to laugh a little at our own anxieties, and reflect upon the actual sources of our fears. One of the central moral hazards of Mirrorglass planning is that conditions of extreme asymmetry inhibit feedback of important signals from those who are so dominated. Furthermore, rigorous practices of segregation make is unclear whether we are planning based upon our own fears reflected back to us, or based upon something dimly seen through the mirrored glass.

One manifestation of the economy of fear that defines the Global Village in Kabul is the rent-captures by elite landowners. If the Global Village in Kabul is a representative example, an important component of the transnational aid regime is a series of rent-capture schemes by local elites in the capitals of distressed countries. This phenomenon seems to share many traits with enclave-gentrification, from gated communities and ‘urban pioneering’ in the United States to first-class urban developments such as Gurgaon, southwest of Delhi. Part of what makes Global Villages increasingly feasible are smaller, more self-contained systems of infrastructure as explained by Graham and Marvin.³⁷ But more importantly, there needs to be a discourse of fear that justifies more intimate, privatized security regimes *within* cities. Teresa Caldeira points out that in São Paulo, fear of crime enables these intimate segregations, producing a city of walls.³⁸ She also points out that this ‘talk of crime’ emerged in Brazil in the 1980s, as the military dictatorship was being dismantled and Brazil was becoming an open, Liberal democracy. Freedom, at least the Liberal-democratic conception of freedom, seems to have some relationship with an urban economy of fear.

37 Graham, Stephen, and Simon Marvin. 2001. *Splintering urbanism: networked infrastructures, technological mobilities, and the urban condition*. New York: Routledge.

38 Caldeira, Teresa Pires do Rio. 2000. *City of walls: crime, segregation, and citizenship in São Paulo*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Citadel as spatial and political assemblage

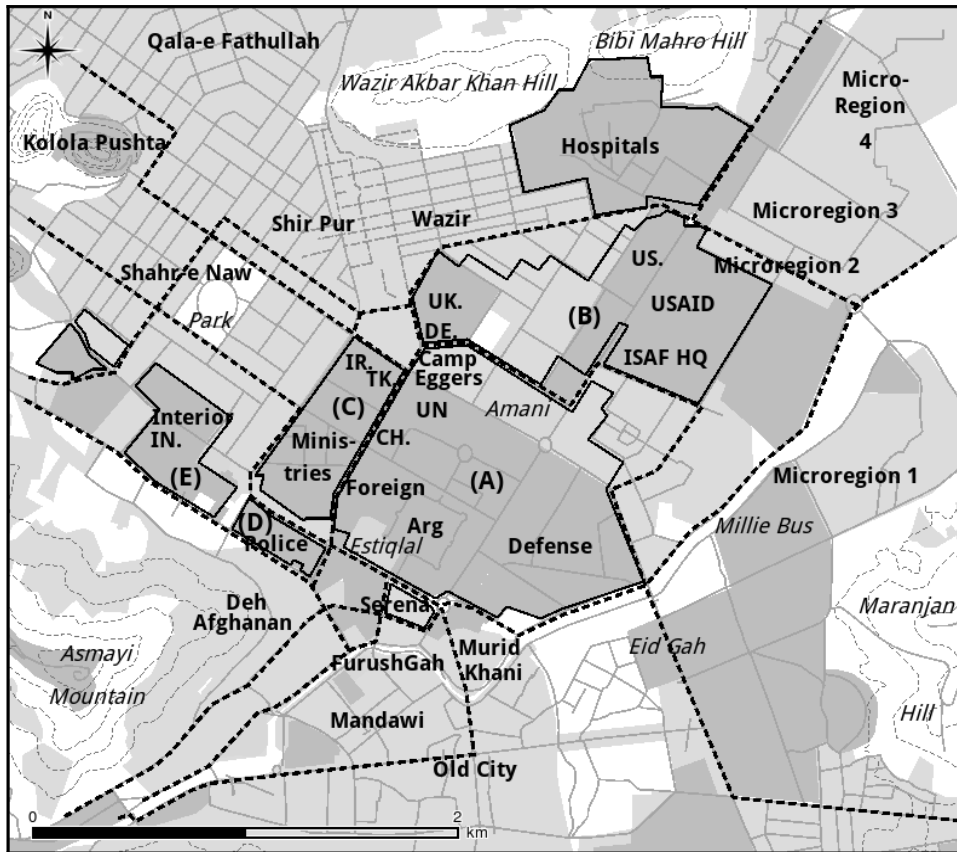


Figure 6.3. Central Kabul, showing key sites of the Citadel and the Global Village, 2007 (author). Secured areas are shaded dark gray; blockages are shown as double bars; highly-congested streets are shown as dashed lines.

Figure 6.3 shows the assemblage of secured compounds which occupy almost two hundred hectares in the center of Kabul. I have labeled five of those compounds (A) through (E), and listed the main uses of each compound on Table 6.1. This area began to develop in 1894 when Amir Abdur Rahman relocated the royal residence to the Arg, built on what had been the King's Garden. The new Arg faced onto Kohistan Road, which became Airport Road in the 1960s and was then formally named Great Massoud Road in 2005. That road has existed since the early nineteenth century, as shown in figure 6.3. In 1838, the British mission to Kabul drew the road in the foreground of an illustration of Kabul from the north.³⁹ In that image it was ruler-straight, as it was in the maps of Kabul included by Forbes in his account of the Afghan Wars in 1892.⁴⁰ Originally the road led from a gate in the north wall of the (old) city and ran northeast through Bibi Mahro, across the Wazir Abad Plain, and then on to the 'Mountain Territory' (*Kohistan*) which is now known as the Parwan and Panjshir provinces. From the records I have been able to find, this road seems to have established the distinctive 42-degree rotation that defined

39 Sale, Florentia Wynch. 1843. *A journal of the disasters in Affghanistan, 1841-2*. New York: Harper & Brothers.

40 Forbes, Archibald. 1892. *The Afghan Wars, 1839-42 and 1878-80*. New York: C. Scribner's Sons.

the future orientation of the street grids in Shar-e Naw and Taimani.

<p>COMPOUND (A) Arg (presidential Palace), Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Embassy of China, UNAMA headquarters, UNDP headquarters, Amani High School, and Camp Eggers (joint foreign military command)</p>
<p>Compound (B) Embassies of USA, UK, Germany, Canada, Pakistan, Bulgaria; USAID headquarters; ISAF headquarters; intelligence-gathering unit.</p>
<p>Compound (C) Ministry of Economy, Embassies of Iran and Turkey.</p>
<p>Compound (D) Kabul Municipal Police Commandery</p>
<p>Compound (E) Ministry of Interior and adjacent functions</p>

Table 6.1. Contents of the five compounds that form the Citadel of Kabul.

When the aerodrome was relocated from Wazir Akbar Khan northeastward to the Wazir Abad Plain, the terminal building of the new Kabul International Airport was centered on this road. As the center of the city was redeveloped in the late 1940s and early 1950s, the southwest terminus of this road was developed into Pashtunistan Square. This reflected political tensions between the Kingdom of Afghanistan and the new Republic of Pakistan at the time. With the end of the British Raj in 1947, the government of Afghanistan regarded the Durand Treaty of 1893 as voided. Sardar Muhammad Daoud Khan, powerful Prime Minister and cousin of King Zahir, sought to reclaim territory lost to the Sikh Confederacy in the nineteenth century. When Pakistan refused to negotiate over this territory, Daoud lobbied for renaming the North-West Frontier Province to Pashtunistan Province, consistent with Pakistani nomenclature for the Provinces of Punjab, Sind, Baluchistan, and (Free) Kashmir. Pakistan rejected this proposal as well; but this naming of the central public square of Kabul underscores the political significance of the Pashtunistan issue in the 1950s and 1960s.

Given the intense urban violence of the 1992-1996 mujahid civil war in Kabul, the United Islamic Front and the new Afghan Transitional Administration wanted to ensure that their position in the center of Kabul was very well defended. The Airport Road was blocked from Pashtunistan Square up to just south of Amani High School. In 2004-2005 the barrier was moved one block further northwest; and a segment of Shahr-e Naw road was blocked so that Camp Eggers was incorporated, forming Compound (A) as shown on figure 6.3.

Compound (B) coalesced as various embassies, the World Bank, and ISAF secured land between them. As of 2003, the Airport Road was still open between the U.S. Embassy and the large Afghan National Army compound on the southeast side of the road. As shown in Chapter Two, this Afghan Ministry of Defense land across from the present US Embassy was the site of the First British Cantonment in Kabul from 1838 to

1842; this is where the Army of India was encamped before it was forced into one of the most disastrous retreats in all of British military history. On the other side of the U.S. Embassy to the northwest is Wazir Akbar Khan, site of the Second British Cantonment of 1878-1881. This second expeditionary force managed, just barely, to repel a massive attack on its compound; after which the British hastily confirmed the appointment of Abdur Rahman as Emir and withdrew again from Afghanistan. I have often thought that this is an ill-omened location for a foreign legation in Kabul.

Shortly before I arrived at the end of May 2003, American guards at the Embassy had shot and killed four Afghan soldiers posted at the base across the street. The version of the incident I heard was that the Afghans were expressing a distinctly sense of humor by rolling grenades on the road to get a reaction from the nervous American guards. By the time I arrived, the mood at the US Embassy was very tense, and vehicular travel on segment of Airport Road in front of the Embassy was already being discouraged. When I went to meet a friend at the Embassy for lunch several weeks later, I was held in an outdoor corridor formed by gravel paving and chain-link fences topped with razor-wire, while a Marine in a sandbagged pillbox kept what looked like a heavy-caliber machine gun trained on me. I later realized that this public reception area at the US Embassy was the same design as the initial detention area at Camp X-Ray in the Guantanamo Bay prison.

By 2006 the US had blocked the segment of road—now renamed Great Massoud Road—that passes in front of the US Embassy. The Ministry of Defense land across this street had been vacated by the Afghan National Army and leased to USAID. This enclosure completed the assembly of Compound (B) as it existed in 2007. The northern edge of this compound is the “back side,” where it interdigitates with the residential fabric of the Wazir Akbar Khan neighborhood. NGOs, Embassies (Canada and Pakistan), and multilateral agencies have been tightening security in this residential area as well, following an attempted bomb attack on the US Embassy from this neighborhood side in the fall of 2007.

Most of Compound (C) has been a secured area for years, containing Ministries and the Embassies of Iran and Turkey. Compound (D), the Police Commandery, has also been a secured site; but security increased after an anti-government insurgent detonated himself on a police-trainer bus just outside of the compound in July of 2007. Compound (E) changed after my fieldwork. It contains the Ministry of Interior, which had been heavily guarded by the UIF since it recaptured the city in 2001; but Compound (E) also contains the Indian Embassy, which became a target of insurgents sympathetic to Pakistan. On the third anniversary of the bombing in London, a truck-bomb attack on the Indian Embassy on July 7, 2008.⁴¹ This was followed by a car bomb attack on October 8, 2009,⁴² and an attack on nearby Indian guesthouses on February 26, 2010.⁴³

41 Wafa, Abdul Waheed, and Alan Cowell. 2008. “Suicide Car Blast Kills 41 in Afghan Capital.” *The New York Times*, July 8.

42 Tavernise, Sabrina, and Abdul Waheed Wafa. 2009. “17 Die in Kabul Bomb Attack.” *The New York Times*, October 9.

43 Rubin, Alissa J. 2010. “Guesthouses Used by Foreigners in Kabul Hit in Deadly Attacks.” *The New York Times*, February 26.

This is only a partial list of the sequence of major attacks that have occurred against parts of the Citadel since the Islamic Republic was established. Furthermore, the United States has substantial reason to be concerned about attacks on its embassies. Al Qaeda's first explicit attack against the US was the simultaneous bombings near the US Embassies in Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania and Nairobi, Kenya on August 7, 1998. However the year 1979 was particularly difficult for the US Department of State in the region of Afghanistan. On February 21, US Ambassador to Afghanistan Adolph Dubs was killed in an attempt to rescue him from kidnappers in a hotel in central Kabul. On November 4, members of the hard-line Islamist faction among the revolutionaries in Iran stormed the US Embassy in Tehran, taking 66 hostages and seizing intelligence material.⁴⁴ On November 21, 1979, the US Embassy in Islamabad was burned to the ground by students. Apparently they had been incited by an Iranian accusation that the United States was responsible for the terrorist seizure of the Masjid al-Haram, the holy enclosure in Mecca, on November 20.⁴⁵ Based on this history the US State Department had more reason to expect attack than any other agency in Kabul. The decision in 2001 to re-open and rebuild the Embassy at that same location had a profound impact on the shaping of central Kabul over the next decade. This was a particularly difficult location to secure, situated near the center of the city and adjacent to several major circulation-routes. Indeed the present site of the US Embassy is sandwiched between the site of the ill-fated British Cantonment of 1838-1842, and the British Cantonment of 1879-1881. This area remains vulnerable to snipers, and now also to rockets launched from Wazir Akbar Khan Hill to the north.

Despite the two roads which remain open through this secured area, the Citadel wreaks havoc with traffic in central Kabul. The best indication I can provide for this traffic impact is an anecdotal field observation. During my first visit in 2003, I worked at the Ministry of Urban Development, located in the center of Microregion-3. I was housed in a guest-house just west of Shir Pur. Each day I took a van to the Ministry, and I began to notice a man in a wheelchair who navigated through the traffic from Shahr-e Naw towards the Microregions. He had lost both lower legs and his left hand, so he placed his left forearm-stump into a tiller to steer his wheelchair, and cranked a handle with his right hand to move. He could not move quickly; at best comparable to a walking pace. Traveling on the same roads as us, he usually got to Microregion-3 before us.

44 Sick, Gary. 1985. *All Fall Down: America's Tragic Encounter with Iran*. New York: Random House.

45 Coll, Steve. 2004. *Ghost wars: the secret history of the CIA, Afghanistan, and bin Laden, from the Soviet invasion to September 10, 2001*. New York: Penguin Press.

The Global Village

Take a right on the street just before the mosque. A cemetery will be on the left side, and our house is the third down on the right. It is the only one with barbed wire on top of the walls.
– excerpt from an invitation to a party at a house of transnational aid workers, Kabul, 2007
(received by email)

The Global Village is a mostly ironic reference to a belief that the end of the Cold War and the rise of communication technologies would *inevitably, naturally* usher in an era of peaceful global integration. This sentiment was embodied for a time in the brand name of a popular modem manufacturer in the 1990s, and the phrase was used as a signifier for advocacy of globalization—often without specifying what 'globalization' means. The significant rise of transnational activism during the 1990s was associated with this optimistic view of globalization enabled by communication technologies. At the same time, a rising skepticism about the effectiveness of large, bureaucratic, multilateral aid agencies meant that much of this new activism was expressed as a rising faith in smaller non-governmental organizations (NGOs) with focused missions. The text that is most often cited in capturing this sentiment is Keck and Sikkink's *Activism beyond borders*.⁴⁶ As the title of their book suggests, the model for this new form of activism was not the politically neutral Red Cross, nor the bureaucratic United Nations group; but the openly political Médecins Sans Frontières, known also as MSF or Doctors Without Borders. In the following year, MSF was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, affirming its prestige and symbolic leadership in this movement.

As the model for what Sidney Tarrow calls 'the new transnational activism,'⁴⁷ MSF has played a key role in shaping what I have called biopolitical empire. MSF was founded by French physicians who witnessed the brutality of the Biafra War of 1969-1972. They regarded the policy of the Nigerian government as morally indefensible: Nigeria blockaded the region and starved the entire population until the secessionists capitulated.⁴⁸ The French physicians directly witnessed this famine and saw no possibility of a viable neutral position in this conflict. The Red Cross continued to follow a century-old policy of political neutrality in order to gain access to spaces on both sides of the armed conflict; but this meant they only reported their concerns to the Nigerian government itself. This policy remains important: it is the reason why the Red Cross was the only humanitarian agency which Bush Administration permitted to visit "detainees" (not prisoners?) at Guantanamo Bay.

However the French physicians in Nigeria regarded the necessary silence of the Red Cross as, as best, accommodating the position of the Nigerian government. They believed that physicians should report the human rights abuses they witness, that humanitarianism is inevitably political, and ultimately partisan. The behavior of the Hutu-led regime in Rwanda, and the Serbian-nationalist regime in Bosnia was also considered morally indefensible by many Western observers, and set a template for transnational activism as it was gaining momentum in the early 1990s. As mentioned in the previous section, this

46 Keck, Margaret E, and Kathryn Sikkink. 1998. *Activists beyond borders: advocacy networks in international politics*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press.

47 Tarrow, Sidney G. 2005. *The new transnational activism*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

48 Saro-Wiwa, Ken. 1989. *On a Darkling Plain: An Account of the Nigerian Civil War*. Epsom: Saros.

public discourse gave rise to a belief in militarized humanitarianism, a doctrine which Bill Clinton articulated with increasing clarity in 1998 as the Milosevic regime prepared to ‘ethnically cleanse’ the Kosovo region of southern Serbia. By this time, none other than the leadership of MSF began to raise concern about the rise of this new doctrine, and the threat that it would pose to humanitarian agencies working in conflict zones.⁴⁹ However there is a broader political concern here as well: whereas in biopolitical terms “without borders” might refer to an ideal of universal humanity, in sovereign political terms it refers to global empire. Part of the threatening nature of universalist, pro-globalization discourse is the position from which it is uttered. The “without/beyond borders” ethic of transnational activists can also be read, much more darkly, as the privileged imperial assertion that one ostensibly universal (bio)politics of humanitarianism overrides morally inferior claims to local political sovereignty.

When nongovernmental organizations returned to Afghanistan en masse in the winter of 2001-2002, most established their country head-offices and guest-houses in the neighborhood called Wazir Akbar Khan, for a variety of reasons. First, Kabul had very little building stock designed as office-spaces, other than the public buildings of national-level ministries and local-level municipal agencies. Second, the change in business-technology and Western cultural norms about work-spaces had changed. Even very large organizations such as the World Bank could use houses as office spaces. When the Bank ran out of space, it could lease adjacent houses and lots; when it needed still more space, the Bank stacked modified shipping containers into back and side yards. Thirdly, each organization preferred to be responsible for its own security. Therefore there was no demand by foreign agencies for the construction of large, shared office-spaces. Over the next six years, Afghans built hundreds of thousands of square feet of commercial space; certainly they would have been able to respond to a demand for office space. However, the vast majority of built commercial space was leased by retailers; almost the entire remainder has been built and used as wedding-halls. The only building I found with dedicated, leasable private office space was at BurahKy Intersection (*ChahrRah-ye BurahKy/Shahr Ara*). Even in that structure, the majority of the floor area was devoted to wedding-halls. As I discussed in Chapter Five, Afghan developers did innovate a new building type in response to the NGO demand for separate, secured buildings could function as combined guest-house, office space, and reception hall; these are the Aid-Palaces of Shir Pur. Unfortunately for those speculative developers, the redevelopment of Shir Pur was so scandalous that most agencies would have been ashamed to rent one of these palaces. I heard considerable scorn among aid-workers for the Spanish Embassy, who did rent one of the palaces in Shir Pur. The general sentiment among Westerners was that this indicated the degree to which Spain was out of touch with sensitive local issues.

49 Tanguy, Joelle. 1999. “Controversies around humanitarian interventions and the authority to intervene.” In *Ethics and Post-Cold War Humanitarian Intervention*. University of California, Berkeley: Médecins Sans Frontières.

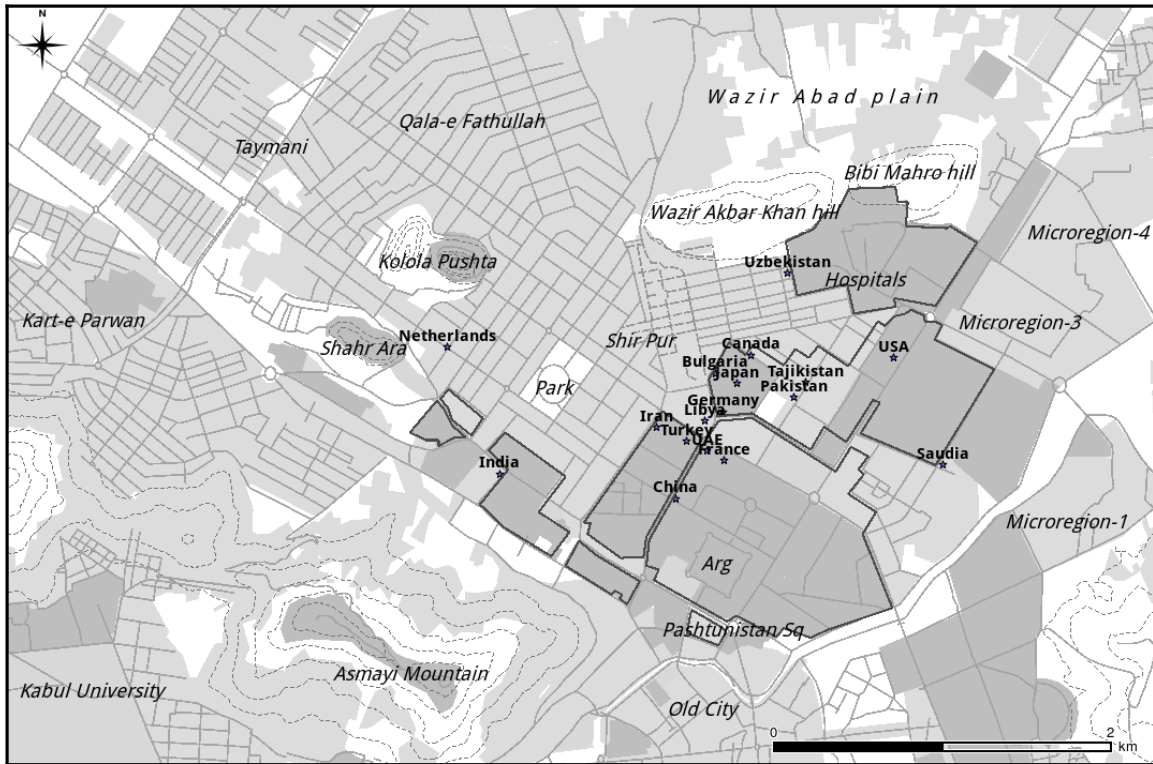


Figure 6.4. Embassies in central Kabul, 2007 (sources: AIMS/fieldwork; cartography: Author, 2009)

Given the particular preferences of NGOs and multilateral agencies, NGOs could have concentrated in one of a number of urban residential neighborhoods, or scattered throughout the city. The directions to the guest-house quoted at the beginning of this section is an example of some dispersal. The reason why it was the only house on the block with barbed wire was that it was the only house being rented by foreigners. However, most of the agencies concentrated in the Wazir Akbar Khan neighborhood — ‘Wazir’ for short.

The combination of factors which contributed to the location of the Global Village in Kabul may fit a general pattern of Global Villages in national capitals, especially in the poorest and most politically troubled countries in Asia and Africa. One compelling factor is proximity to the embassy district, the northern part of the Citadel (figure 6.4). In the Outsider's schematic, this echoes a medieval European pattern of settlement in which the Citadel is the “motte” and the Global Village is the “bailey,” snuggled up against the Citadel both for spatial security, and for access to key decisionmakers.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ AlSayyad, Nezar, and Ananya Roy. 2006. "Medieval modernity: on citizenship and urbanism in a global era." *Space and polity* 10:1, 1-20.

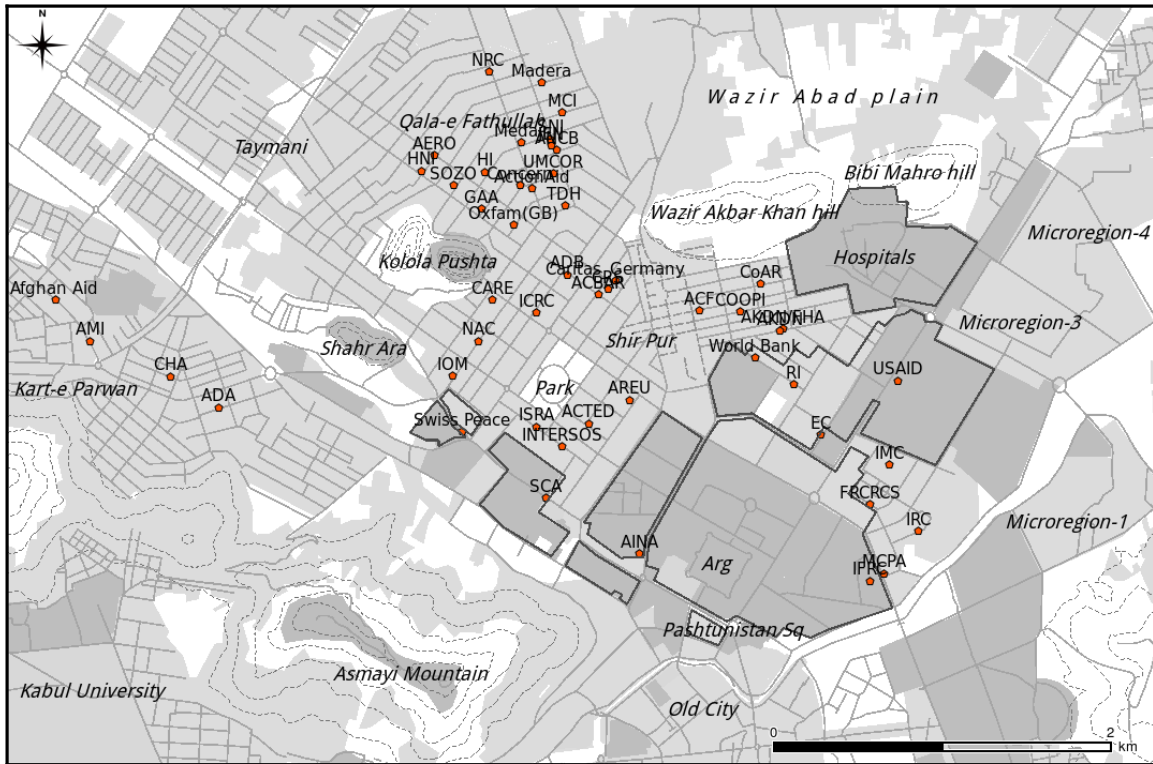


Figure 6.5. International non-governmental organizations, 2007 (AIMS/fieldwork)

The Global Village is also close to the exit-gate of the city — in this case, Kabul International Airport (figure 6.5). Wazir abuts the old Kohistan road, which was named Great Masoud road in 2004, and leads directly to the airport entrance, two kilometers to the northeast. In addition to a desire for quick escape, this locational factor for the Global Village also overlaps with the locational preferences for transnational corporations studied by Manuel Castells. In this respect, the concentration of transnational organizations, accessing circuits of global capital, information, and ‘valued bodies’ reveals some overlap between the location of this Global Village and the location of transnational business parks near airports.

Two events in the history of Kabul demonstrate the value of proximity to the airport. The more recent was in 1992, when former president Muhammad Najibullah attempted to leave the country shortly after resigning from office in April. Rashid Dostum's forces blocked his escape to the airport, so Najibullah took refuge in a UN compound throughout the mujahid civil war. When the Taliban captured Kabul in September of 1996, one of their first acts was to invade the UN compound, take Dr. Najibullah, and execute him. This act expressed a certain insensitivity to international law and conventions, and the United Nations in particular, just at the moment that the Taliban began to reimagine themselves as a national regime needing international recognition.⁵¹

An earlier example of the need for proximity to the airport was the evacuation of the

⁵¹ Rashid, Ahmed. 2000. *Taliban: militant Islam, oil, and fundamentalism in Central Asia*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

British Embassy of Kabul in February of 1929, as the regime of Amanullah Shah was collapsing. At the time, the future site of the Wazir Akbar Khan neighborhood was the aerodrome. As discussed in Chapter Five, the area was developed as a military base by Sher Ali Khan around 1870, then used by the British as their Second Cantonment in 1879-1880. Once the British hurriedly withdrew from Kabul in 1880 at the end of the Second Anglo-Afghan War, the area reverted to Afghan military land. Apparently Amanullah developed the land into an aerodrome in the early 1920s. As part of his modernization campaign, Amanullah sought technical assistance from the Soviet Union, including a small air force of Russian planes and pilots in 1924.⁵²

During the 1920s the British Legation obtained a site more than a mile west of the Aerodrome in what is now Kart-e Parwan. As insurgent forces led by Habibullah II besieged Kabul in the winter of 1928-1929, most Westerners in Kabul took shelter in the British Embassy. During one battle, the Embassy became the no-man's land between the insurgents and the King's forces. At this point, Ambassador Humphries decided to evacuate. As told in *Wings over Kabul*, he was able to orchestrate a remarkably successful airlifted evacuation; the primary challenge was negotiating a truce between the forces and getting the Westerners from the Embassy over to the Aerodrome.⁵³ Apparently the only fatality was one woman who slipped on the icy surface of the runway and was sucked into the propeller of the waiting plane. Considering the previous two withdrawals from Kabul, Humphries was regarded as a hero for the effectiveness of his evacuation.

Again, a new technological possibility had important biopolitical implications. While in Iraq, Dexter Filkins visited a British cemetery in Baghdad and noted that British subjects abroad were buried near where they died into the first decades of the twentieth century.⁵⁴ Now, with the mechanical technologies of airlifts and refrigeration, even the bodies of Westerners can be brought back to their families. Central Kabul is a crucial site in the development of these politics. In 1842, hundreds of Britons and tens of thousands of Bengali sepoys died in the retreat from Kabul, beginning at the First Cantonment, which is now the site of the ISAF headquarters and the office of USAID. Dozens died in the next British incursion, and are buried in the 'orderly cemetery' (*kabr-e gorah*) at the west end of Wazir Akbar Khan hill. When Humphries successfully evacuated the entire Western community out of Kabul in the middle of a regime-collapse, the plane took off almost directly over that cemetery.

American public reaction to the desecration of American bodies in Mogadishu in 1993 indicates, if anything, an intensification of the biopolitical imperative to protect every American body. Following a speech in which Bill Clinton proposed increasing troop levels to stabilize the political situation in Somalia, the New York Times noted that public opposition to the mission remained strong. The quote they chose to represent this sentiment underscores the sharp value-distinction discussed in this chapter:

If I have to choose between pictures of starving Somalian babies or dead American soldiers being dragged through the streets of Mogadishu, well, I don't want to see any more dead Americans.

52 Wild, Roland. 1932. *Amanullah: Ex-King of Afghanistan*. Quetta: Nisa traders.

53 Baker, Anne. 1975. *Wings Over Kabul: The First Airlift*. London: Kimber.

54 Filkins, Dexter. 2008. *The Forever War*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

Sorry. It's time to bring the boys home.⁵⁵
--Tony Bright, Cincinnati, Ohio, October 8, 1993

Another factor which contributed to the preferability of Wazir was that the neighborhood remained intact through the mujahid civil war. There seem to be two reasons for this. First, the neighborhood would have been difficult to defend from snipers or rocket-fire, because it is overlooked by the long, low ridge of Bibi Mahro and Wazir Akbar Khan hills. As the British discovered in 1841 and relearned in 1879, snipers only need to gain one part of this ridge for a brief time to wreak havoc on the flat, open areas below. During the mujahid civil war, the forces of Dostum, Hekmatyar, Mazari, and Massoud fought bitterly for control or destruction of several other parts of the central city; but Wazir was spared the heavy weapons-fire that flattened the eastern half of the Old City and most of the Fourth Quarter (*Kart-e Chahr*).

Second, Wazir had been occupied by Kabul's elites since it was developed in the mid-1960s. In the late 1950s, the Ministry of Defense relocated the Aerodrome further north, onto the broad playa of Wazir Abad, and site of the Aerodrome was subdivided for private development. I have no direct evidence of this: but it appears that even during the civil war, these families may have been able to exert enough influence to protect this enclave as waves of guerrillas and refugees swept back and forth across the city. However it happened, the result was that by 1996, Wazir's streets remained intact and lined with trees, and its large, modernist-style houses remained intact. At first glance in 2003, the streets of Wazir looked like Palo Alto to me. However by 2006, speed bumps, guardhouses, Hesco barriers, and gates dispelled that impression.

The 'found advantages' of Wazir as the site for the Global Village link the transformation of this site directly to the housing crisis I was concerned with in San Francisco from 1998 to 2002. As in San Francisco, this was a story of gentrification. While the beautiful neighborhoods of San Francisco had been seen as desirable since the 1970s, the sudden influx of venture-capital during the first major wave of commercial development of the internet—the "dot-com boom" triggered a rapid inflation of land-rents and shortage of housing that surprised even San Franciscans. The 'found advantage' of San Francisco was a city with a high density of technology-savvy visual artists and designers who could imagine entirely different cultural and commercial implications from the adoption of the hypertext markup language and related open-source protocols and software. Although landowners prefer scarcity in order to maximize rents, they sought aggressively to expand built area in response to this sudden, spatialized concentration of venture capital. I witnessed this process up close during my misguided efforts to help build our way out of an affordable-housing crisis: building and planning officials resigned from public employment to be hired as well-paid permit 'expeditors' who would push through commercial tenant-improvements and the construction of hundreds of new "artists' loft" buildings that passed through a loophole intended to promote the preservation and creation of affordable, mixed-use spaces for (presumably poor) artists in the 1980s. The rapid subdivision and development of the remaining military land in the Shir Pur area, immediately west of Wazir, had been a similar attempt

⁵⁵ Ayres, B. Drummond Jr. 1993. "THE SOMALIA MISSION: Voices; A Common Cry Across the U.S.: It's Time to Exit." *The New York Times*, October 9.

to tap circuits of capital that had suddenly arrived in Kabul.

What I did not recognize until later was that this same phenomenon was driving the development of Dubai. The hostile reaction of Americans towards Muslims in general after September 11 ended a gentleman's agreement that had been brokered by Nixon during the OPEC oil embargo in 1973. Nixon accepted that Gulf Arabs were furious about the American support of Israel during the Yom Kippur War; but he insisted that the windfall revenues they were receiving from rising oil prices should be deposited in American banks.⁵⁶ But in the fall of 2001, Muslims began to seek out other sites of capital investment. Dubai had been actively pursuing a long-term development strategy to reduce its dependency on oil production. As I mentioned in the Preface, I was even briefly involved in the development of the entertainment sector in Dubai in 1998, working for the same division of Bechtel that had designed Epcot Center in Florida and the massive new airport terminal in Dubai in the mid-1990s. Transnational financial reforms in the mid 1990s facilitated a very rapid shift in capital flows towards Dubai when many Asian investors sought alternatives to investing in the West. Through interviews of real-estate developers in Kabul in 2007, I discovered that as the security situation in Kabul deteriorated after 2005, many developers began investing in the more secure real-estate markets in Dubai.

One circuit of capital is therefore the following: social activists in the United States raise funds for a morally unimpeachable cause, and transfer those funds to an international non-governmental organization (INGO). The INGO uses a portion of those funds to rent a house, converted into an office and dormitory for its international staff, in central Kabul. Five thousand dollars per month are collected by an Afghan landlord, who uses the revenue to pay for one or several apartments in Dubai that will be rental properties. Even in the midst of the global financial panic of 2008-2009, Dubai is a relatively safe site of capital-investment.

As with biopolitics, a governing logic in capital-accumulation is risk-management. Thus, all else being equal, capital-accumulators in a risky environment will seek to transfer cash and capital to more secure environments. Although risk:poverty and security:wealth may be co-constitutive to some degree, the spatial logic of capital accumulation shows the first condition as more causal than the second condition in these pairs. Likewise, it is because of existing risky conditions that debt becomes expensive, not the other way around. Any long-term development strategy for Afghanistan must address this logic explicitly. Although free trade may provide broad benefits, the rent-farming of central Kabul suggests that the flow of capital and money needs to be governed to prevent a relentless flight of capital from the poorest spaces to the richest. Likewise, the United States had been one of the most effective interveners in housing markets by insuring both savings-deposits and long-term home mortgage loans. Singapore's Central Provident Fund is another example; what has not worked is an ungoverned market.

The metaphor of Mirrorglass is useful for describing the Global Village because of several apparent contradictions in its meaning. The security barriers and protocols of

⁵⁶ Yergin, Daniel. 2008. *The Prize: The Epic Quest for Oil, Money, & Power*. New ed. New York: Free Press.

transnational compounds in Kabul are intended to keep foreigners safe, in a privileged condition of suppressed risk. Yet those same barriers and protocols make the compounds into prisons. Aid workers complained about being ‘locked down’ and spending months within the confines of a few guest-houses and offices while working in Kabul. Here is a paradox: how can an agency conduct diplomatic outreach, or humanitarian assistance, or capacity-building development work when the boundary between that agency and the Outside is comparable to a minimum-security prison?

The MOSS house in the Global Village

I have argued in many ways that Kabul is a modern city, very much part of the twenty-first century. I respect to biological risk, though, the sustained violence and social disruptions of the last thirty years have made the biological risk-environment of Afghanistan very similar to risk-environments in Western societies during the early stages of the First Demographic Transition. For Western families, the risk-environment of Kabul is an unacceptable site for their children or kin. Families of college graduates going to work in the aid or diplomatic sectors in Kabul insist on security measures to lower biological risks, insofar as possible, to levels comparable to their home countries. Thus, the security “bubble” which Christopher Hitchens described is maintained around guest-houses throughout Kabul, at the very least with barbed wire atop perimeter walls. The United Nations codifies the form of this membrane as Minimum Operational Safety Standards (MOSS). All UN staff in Kabul must live in MOSS-compliant guest-houses including:

- blast-film coating on all windows.
- Armed guards posted outside the house, usually in a plywood box that occupies the sidewalk.
- A backup generator.
- A bunker built to withstand attack by small rockets.
- A two-way radio, powered by a backup battery located in the bunker. UN staff must radio in to their local security officer every night.
- At least one male international among the tenants.

During my last months of fieldwork in Kabul, I was that male tenant in one such guest-house. My housemates and I questioned the effectiveness of the armed guards posted outside, because the UN was only paying them \$120 per month—well below a living wage in central Kabul. On the one hand, their presence clearly marked our house as a target, on a street with no other foreign guest-houses. On the other hand, if an angry mob decided to target our house (as had happened during the city-wide riot on May 29, 2006), we suspected that our guards would not regard our protection as worth their low salaries.

Nonetheless, foreign tenants in guest-houses live in a substantially different world than their immediate neighbors. As the weather turned cold, I hired a taxi and went to the saw-mills of northern Kabul to buy thirty kilos of sawdust as fuel for our in-room heating stoves. Meanwhile, behind our house several families lived in a small building that, from the air, looks like a large shed at the back of our lot. However, those families had separate access to the street via a side-alley; MOSS protocol would not have permitted shared access to the same space. About once a week, our yard would fill with the reek of burning

plastic, as the wind shifted unfavorably. Our neighbors engaged in the common practice of burning collected trash to heat their house. Indoor air pollution during the sub-freezing winter months in Kabul causes frequent and severe respiratory problems, including asthma, pneumonia, and tuberculosis. While we were able to buy fuel for our 20 kVA generator and maintain wireless internet access, our neighbors had no electricity; while we could afford bottled water, our neighbors gathered discarded water-bottles for fuel and drank untreated pump-water. Using Graham and Marvin's terminology, urbanism in Kabul has splintered to such a degree that immediate neighbors inhabit entirely different worlds.

The Forbidden Forest

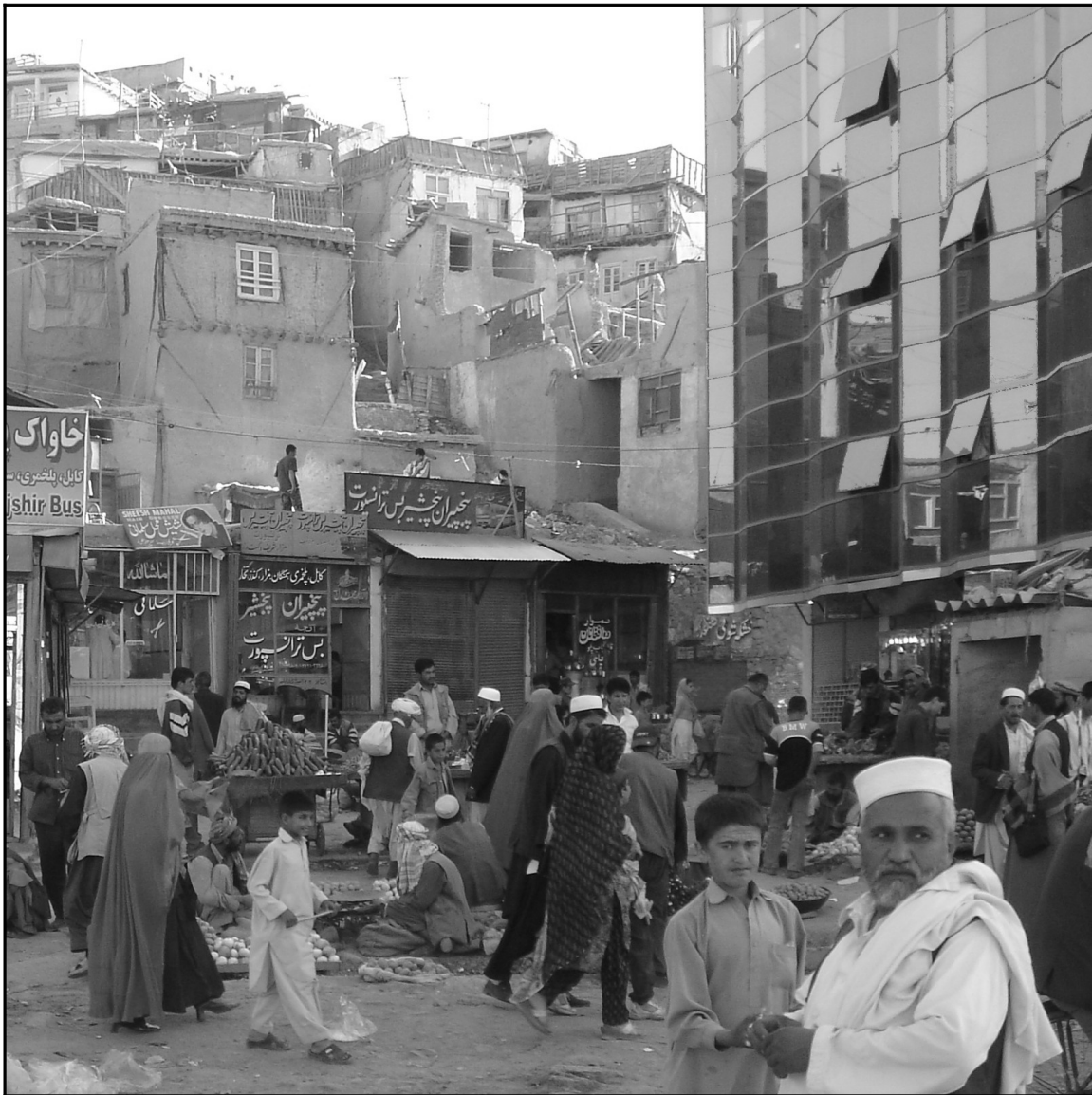


Figure 6.6. Vegetable market (foreground left), Deh Afghanan neighborhood (background), and new commercial building (foreground right), central Kabul (author, 2007).

The Forbidden Forest is the entire rest of the city of Kabul. I use a J.K. Rowling's term for the area because it captures many of the tensions in the naming of this space. Although it is portrayed formally as a dangerous, unnavigable space full of uncertain threats, it is also inhabited by beings who regard it as home. In Rowling's modern allegory, the centaurs are denizens of the Forbidden Forest whom wizards and witches have long assumed to be bestial, subhuman non-persons. It is a characterization which the centaurs find especially offensive because it is so naturalized, so ingrained as an assumption among the humans.

The Forbidden Forest also references older anxieties about the unknown as dangerous and chaotic. While Gayatri Spivak, Stephen Hall, and other post-colonial theorists focus on the effacement of the humanity of the Native Other, the Forbidden Forest is the *spatial locus* of this phobia in terms of Mirrorglass planning in Kabul. It is the *mirk wood* of Germanic mythology; the area "beyond the pale"—beyond the palisade (*palos*) of sharpened tree-trunks that constituted the frontier in the Roman Empire, and in eastern Europe in the early modern period.

Here I cite specifically European mythical-imperial conceptions of Other-space because these are the psychological referents of the Westerners in Kabul. When ancient Palestinians and Greeks described John and Jesus going into the 'wilderness,' they were referring to the stone desert (*reg*) of the trans-Jordan region. When these New Testament stories were portrayed by Europeans, the wilderness was portrayed as forest: that-which-had-not-been-cleared, that which lay outside of culture (land cleared for cultivation), and therefore outside of civilization. In Lewis Carroll's mythopoetic framework, this is the aberrant territory beyond the looking glass.⁵⁷

If Outsiders are to understand our role in the planning of Kabul, we need to be aware of this peculiar intersection of our psychological constitution—most clearly reflected in Western fairy-tale literature—and the project of biopolitical empire in which we are presently engaged.

Mutually invisible urban geographies: the Forbidden Forest as dis-counted space

To give a sense of the degree of separation between the Western aid community and local urban life in Kabul, I need to describe the problem of finding the Park Palace hotel. The Park Palace is used by foreign aid staff. Three months into my fieldwork, I had to meet someone who had just arrived from the airport and left a message with no reply number. By that point I was very familiar with the center of the city, and I recalled 'Park' and 'Palace' as hotel names in the city center at an intersection known as 'above the underground' passageways (*sar-e zer zemin*). Upon arriving at the intersection I found both the Park and Palace Hotel, directly across the street from each other, displaying their names on prominent signs. The concierges at both those hotels had never heard of the Park Palace. I began asking taxi drivers, who tended to have the most comprehensive knowledge of the city. One said he knew where it was in Shahr-e Naw, and brought me to Ansari intersection. However that was the Hotel Safi. The concierge there directed me around the corner, where I found the Park Residence hotel, facing Park Shahr-e Naw. The

⁵⁷ Carroll, Lewis. 1883. *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There*. London ; New York: Macmillan and Co.

guard at Park Residence thought the hotel might be somewhere to the north along the road facing the park, but all I could find was the Sultan Palace hotel, where they had never heard of the Park Palace. That concierge directed me to a travel agency across the street, but the people there were also at a loss.

I returned to Hotel Safi, where I found a guard who seemed much more confident that he knew of the existence and location of the Park Palace: less than a kilometer west of Hotel Safi. So I walked westward into an area with residential buildings that had been converted into NGO offices, and found more guards who also seemed confident about the location of the Park Palace. They told me to go several blocks further, take a left, and head down a block. I did so, although the block they had described seemed featureless and residential. I found another set of guards and asked them if they knew where the Park Palace might be. They hesitated for several seconds, and then one looked behind himself at the nondescript door he was guarding, looked back at me and motioned with his head. “Inja’s.” It is here.

My method of locating the Park Palace had been entirely mistaken. I had asked locals for directions in Dari, assuming that locals—especially taxi-drivers—would have the most detailed, comprehensive knowledge of the city. That had worked for months of research, in studying the Kabul that locals inhabit. What I learned was that the Kabul which Outsiders inhabit is not only partially concealed, but is a geography understood only by a discrete set of people. At one level, South Asians and Central Asians were traveling to the city and staying in clearly-marked, publicly-known hotels. In a parallel dimension, Western aid-workers were inhabiting a Global Village whose major landmarks were unknown to locals whose knowledge was otherwise very comprehensive and detailed.

Several months later I moved to a house rented by UN staff, in part to learn how this community lives; and I had to learn the geography of central Kabul all over again. There are many sites, like Guesthouse #26, Anar Restaruant, and the Gandamak Lodge, where Afghans almost never go. Most of these places have no signs on the outside, and they are a bit out of the way. But since the Western community socializes mostly with itself, you get to learn this geography informally, by word-of-mouth or dropping off friends after dinner-parties. If you are not in that circuit, the geography is almost completely invisible.

Meanwhile, for Western aid staff, the geography of most of Kabul outside of the Global Village is terra incognita. In part this is due to a different norms of urban geography: Kabulis know urban space by prominent intersections, not by street names. There are about ten streets in Kabul whose names are known and agreed-upon by locals; but these are rarely used for giving directions. However there are about twenty intersections across the city that are known by every Kabuli as a general schematic of the city as a whole. These intersections are often the termini of shared taxis, jitneys, and buses; so their names are reinforced even for people who rarely visit different parts of the city. Within any given area, a second tier of more specific intersections are also known, and streets are often described by their number past the intersection. “Past” an intersection generally seems to mean away from the center of the city; but I never

systematically tested whether some Kabulis used numbering relative to one's location.

This is not an unusual urban geography: a friend who lived among the Gaifuna on the east coast of Guatemala commented about how intersections in his village were named for major world cities. I also found this practice in Ahmedabad, capital of Gujarat State in India. Urban geographic conceptions in Europe are similar; at least in center cities, streets are named in the short segments in which they were originally developed; therefore street-names refer to a short segment of space. What is perhaps most exotic is the western North American practice of assigning one name to very long streets. Within San Francisco, both major and minor streets (Geary, Lombard, or even Scott or Pierce) change dramatically in character along their length. Other Californian streets are so long that address-numbers along them run into the ten-thousands. Stating that a business is located on San Pablo Avenue or Wilshire Boulevard is imprecise because these streets run for many miles through multiple cities.

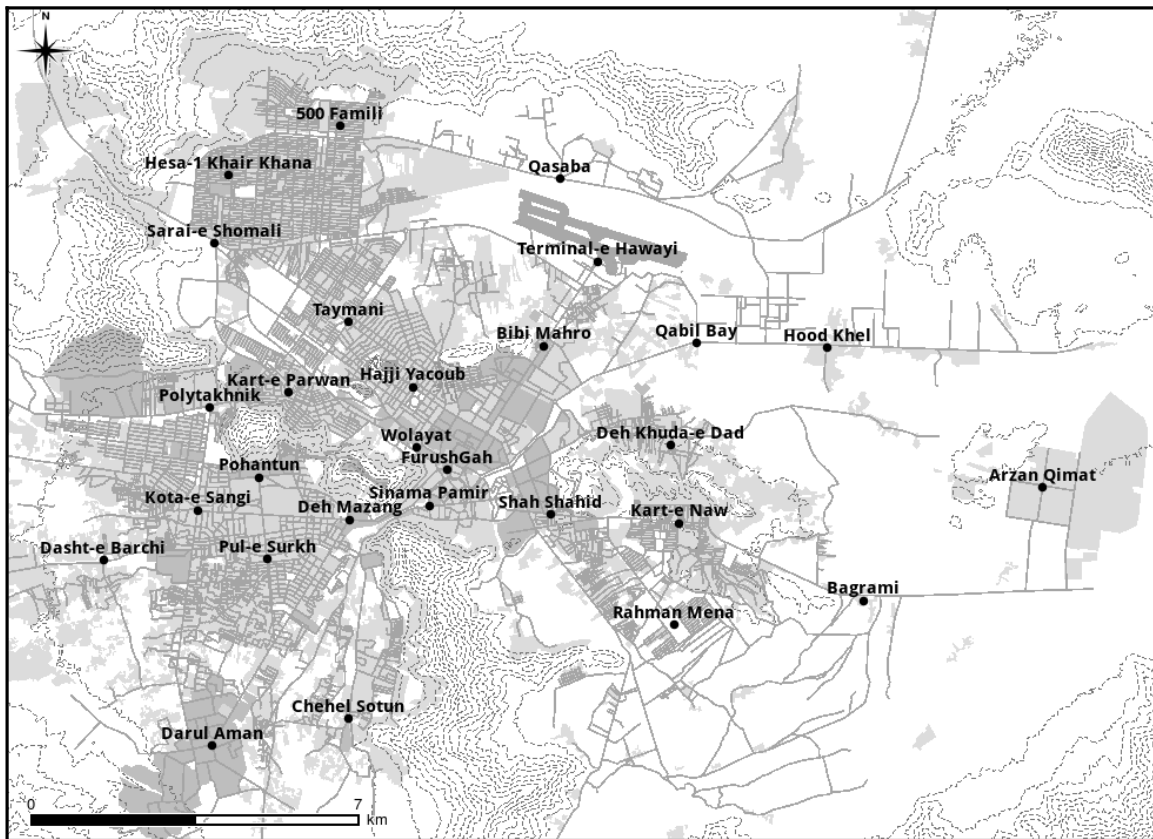


Figure 6.7. Urban geography of Kabul as nodes: major intersections a named by the National Bus service, and used by shared-taxi drivers. (sources: Millie Bus/fieldwork)

Figure 6.8 (below) shows major intersections in central Kabul. The map is cropped close enough to show how one would begin to navigate the Forbidden Forest immediately surrounding the Global Village. Figure 6.7 (above) shows the entire city at a much smaller scale, with the major intersections that provide a diagrammatic understanding of the city that can be used to navigate across it entirely. This is not

esoteric knowledge: the Afghanistan Information Management Service provided most of this information for free, in Latin script, as downloadable PDFs and GIS Shapefiles from their website from at least 2003 onward. In some cases, pronunciation deviates from spelling (as in English) so that Kota-e Sangi is shouted as "Kuteh sangi!" by vehicle drivers and hawkers.

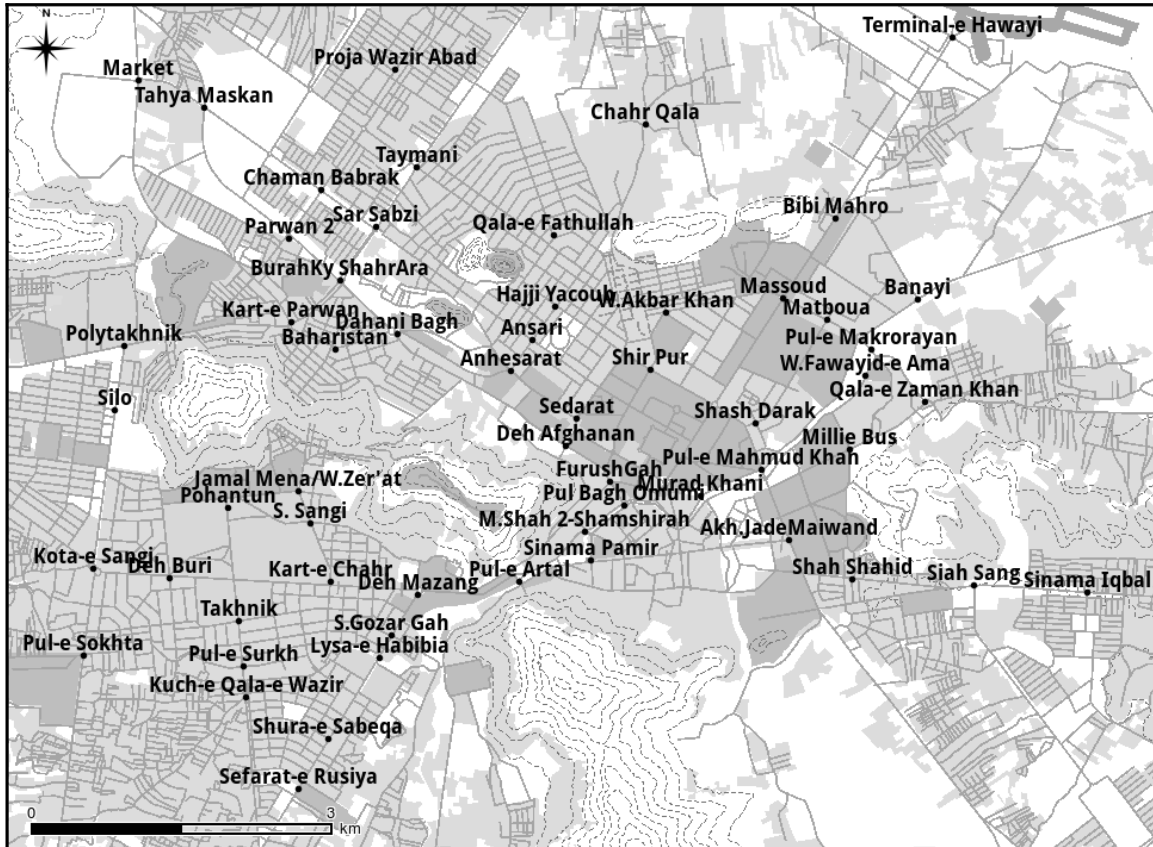


Figure 6.8. This map is a graphic expression of the nodal geography that locals use to navigate the 'forbidden forest' of central Kabul, the area in and around the 'global village' (author).

The absence of data-collection efforts in Kabul is a striking example of a change in techniques of rule by both the Islamic Republic and by the myriad aid agencies that have operated in Kabul for the last eight years. In 1998, James Scott argued that a hallmark of the modern state is that it seeks to "render legible" the society that it governs.⁵⁸ This was demonstrably true of modernizing states from the early nineteenth through the late twentieth centuries; and this 'rendering legible' was integral to the formation of modern urban planning. However, new technologies are enabling modern states to abandon a comprehensive approach to governing. Some of these new technologies are infrastructural, and affect urban planning directly. In *Splintering Urbanism* Marvin and Stephen Graham show how wealthier urban residents no longer need to share the cost of building and maintaining city-wide networks of water, sewerage, electricity, or

⁵⁸ Scott, James C. 1998. *Seeing like a state: how certain schemes to improve the human condition have failed*. New Haven Conn.: Yale University Press.

telecommunications infrastructure.⁵⁹ Thus the bargain between the elite and the urban majority, effectively argued by the English reformers from 1840 to 1880 no longer holds, and service-provision within cities is beginning to ‘splinter.’ While older cities may inherit comprehensive infrastructural networks that were built in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, recent urbanization has not been accompanied by comparable extensions of comprehensive infrastructural networks. At the mild end of this spectrum, high-end residential developers in the U.S. build gated communities with private roads to sidestep the long-standing common-law principle of right-of-way. At the harsher end of the spectrum, only five per cent of Kabul is served by sanitary sewers: the microregions described in Chapter Four. Since 1992, one of the few service networks that has been extending across Kabul is the electric grid. What makes this possible is that the grid is not simply a shared public network. Even in the most remote areas of Kabul, every household connection to the grid is metered.

The production of elite subjects

Practices of segregation, necessary to maintain discrete spaces of lowered risk, also perpetuate the Western phobias about Afghans. If personnel-security managers cannot estimate biological risk, then in an important sense that risk is unmanageable, inestimable. From the perspective of a security officer, the most reasonable choice is to commit a substantial fraction of operational costs to keep staff-members ‘as safe as possible.’ Independent of any actual risk, an incident that can be blamed on lax security would be unacceptable in a setting that is *perceived* as dangerous. Those perceptions of risk are produced through discourse; thus, the very way that Westerners discuss Afghanistan drives the proportion of donor funding that gets diverted to security measures.

Again: this is planning. Present urban resources—guards, barbed wire, generators, and armored sport utility vehicles—are invested toward anticipated future benefit: the formation of highly-skilled “symbolic analysts” with field experience. Unfortunately these practices of security—which are most observable to a planner as *spatial* segregation—are fundamentally practices of *experiential* segregation. A space of lowered risk is also a space of differential experience. The segregation which makes this differential risk possible also sharply limits the degree to which foreigners within secured spaces actually experience Afghanistan. This produces a pernicious circular logic: ignorance of a site begets fear of that site, and fear encourages security measures, which in turn propagate ignorance by preventing direct experience of that site.

One unfortunate example of this disjuncture is that Westerners who had worked in Kabul for several years by the time I did my fieldwork in 2007 had not learned any local languages at all. I cannot quantify this pattern; but I did discuss it with a number of UN staff who had been posted in Kabul for more than three years. The practical problem is that international agencies do not require learning any Afghan languages, and do not provide resources that encourage language acquisition. Within a ‘culture of urgency’ that pervades the aid project in Afghanistan, foreigners work twelve or more hours per day,

⁵⁹ Graham, Stephen, and Simon Marvin. 2001. *Splintering urbanism: networked infrastructures, technological mobilities, and the urban condition*. London ; New York: Routledge.

six days a week. If they want to take language lessons, they must do so in their spare time and at their own expense. Furthermore, learning the languages spoken by Afghans will not contribute to the advancement of one's career in the UN system or major international NGOs.

The irrelevance of language-acquisition for transnational aid workers reveals an vital structural difference between the aid industry and the academic industry. Coarsely put: while scholars can focus on transnational phenomena such as globalization-theory or microfinance, we are encouraged (or at least allowed) to specialize geographically. Many of the leading scholars whom I have referred to in this text do both. However the organization of the aid industry normally encourages specialization in a skill or 'best'-practice that can be transferred from region to region. One of those critical skills is to interface with the institutions and organizations of transnational aid itself. Each project usually involves numerous contracts, and an international aid worker is often responsible for managing the contracts of local employees. Donors also require substantial reporting on 'project delivery' as a condition for the fulfillment of their own contracts. Marilyn Strathern has identified a pervasive expansion of such accounting practices as *audit cultures*, which govern both academia and the 'moral fieldworkers' in NGOs.⁶⁰ In the latter case, the burdens of self-reporting preclude the opportunity for language-learning and other forms of cultural contact that are not project-specific. Ironically, as a neoliberal movement for personal accountability, audit cultures are performances of transparency, but *only directed at the specific audience of donors*. Afghans and Afghan-Americans have repeatedly complained to me that there is no way to find out how aid funds for Afghanistan are being spent. In the field, I found that aid workers were too busy reporting back to the donors to explain that same rationality of expenditures to Afghans.

As a result of this disjuncture, some important understandings do not spread among Westerners whose decisions about resource-allocations profoundly impact the urban space of Kabul. On March 6, 2009, Democratic Congressman Lee Hamilton was interviewed on the Lehrer News Hour about potential changes in US policy towards Afghanistan under the new Obama Administration. Mr. Hamilton co-chaired both the 9/11 Commission and the bipartisan Iraq Study Group. Thus Hamilton is both an informed and influential decisionmaker among the present American political leadership. Hamilton reflected upon the prospects of American influence in Afghanistan for the new Obama Administration:

I do not think we can make Afghanistan a flourishing democracy. Afghanistan has been like it is for a thousand years. It will continue to be like it is for a thousand years. And we have to have a real strong dose of realism to understand our limitation there, no matter what resources we put in. And I don't think the American people would support very large resources for a long period of time.⁶¹

Even with more information, Mr. Hamilton might still argue that Afghanistan is not modern, depending upon his definition of modernity. But his characterization of Afghanistan as 'unchanged and unchangeable' is profoundly inaccurate, given the evidence presented in this research. Likewise, on August 17, 2009, U.S. Ambassador to

⁶⁰ Strathern, 2000.

⁶¹ Hamilton, Lee. 2009. Interview with Lee Hamilton and James Baker III. *News Hour*. March 6.

Afghanistan Karl Eikenberry said that “in 2001, there were no institutions in Afghanistan.” The institutional continuities, particularly those presented in Chapter Four, show that many institutions did indeed survive, even if Americans did not want them to. The Soviet-assisted Master Plan, ratified in 1978, continues to govern most of the formal urban development in Kabul. That fact alone should dispel any misperception that sociopolitical institutions were erased by the series of conflicts over the last thirty years.

I cite Hamilton and Eikeberry because they are key American decisionmakers in the allocation of Western resources in Afghanistan. They are also two men who should be extremely well-informed about Kabul: Eikenberry served two military tours in Afghanistan, the second as commander of Combined Forces Command in 2006 and 2007. President Obama then appointed him as U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan in January of 2009. In their respective positions, both men had access to prodigious amounts of *data* about Afghanistan. But in the parlance of strategic planners, what sort of ‘picture’ did this data paint? To what degree has this flow of information been skewed by the general insulation of Westerners and Afghans from direct contact with each other? Ideally, the purpose of intelligence-gathering is to get around these types of barriers and constraints to information flows. American intelligence operatives may have achieved this the level of understanding for tactical military operations; if so, that information is not available to civilians. But even at the strategic military level, the conflict between Western forces and local insurgents (Taliban and otherwise) remains at an impasse; and at a ‘meta-strategic’ level, years of effort to foster a stable regime and a sense of developmental progress has thus far failed. Deployed American soldiers articulated the problem most clearly for me: they can defeat pretty much any force on the battlefield; but if ‘winning’ means being able to leave without locals shooting at their backs, then how is this achieved?

Within both the military and the aid industry, the system of career incentives, disincentives, and scopes of responsibility do not promote the types of local connections and understandings necessary to achieve either ‘development’ (however construed) or even the more practical goal articulated by the soldiers. Specifically: if security regimes obstruct many of the subtler, intangible aspects of an aid effort that would have enabled it to succeed, that failure may be unfortunate; but the security officer of any single agency is not accountable for the success of that overall effort. The officer is accountable for bringing valued Western bodies back, alive and healthy and with value-added experience.

Likewise, collective effectiveness is not an implicit goal within the ‘logical frameworks’ (LogFrames) of aid projects. In practice, accountability focuses on the ‘deliverables’ of each project contract and its attendant individual consultant contracts. This nongovernmental system—a neoliberal ideal of faster, leaner, lighter delivery of transnational aid—lacks a relationship of accountability to the ‘impactees’ that local governmental leaders must consider. I do mean imply that democratic government is the solution to this problem. Elections are one mechanism of accountability; but a critical press and regular tax payments are two other mechanisms that might compel even greater governmental responsiveness than periodic elections. And even the presence of all three of these mechanisms is not a guarantee of accountability between local political leaders and a local population; but at least these mechanisms exist. Transnational agencies, doing

their work well, are extremely *responsive* to local needs; but they are not *accountable* to local people. The fundamental accountability mechanism for aid agencies is the agency-donor relationship.

This may not be apparent to donors who live in the global North, who are the recipients of agency reports. From that position—as the natural audience of the audit culture—transnational NGOs must seem far more accountable. Furthermore, since that audience is quite removed from the project context, verification of contract deliverables is inherently biased towards tangible, reportable acts: interventions that can be photographed or counted. Roads, bridges, and schools get built; wells get drilled; and children get vaccinated. Indeed, a tremendous amount of work has been performed (and verified) in Afghanistan over the last nine years.

But has this yielded development? The persistent strength of the Taliban insurgency is one general indicator that there is little civilian ‘push-back’ to protect regional security. The most dramatic indicator, however was the day-long riot of 29 May 2006. Kabulis had given their verdict on NGO-assisted, market-led development by destroying, among other things, the national headquarters office of CARE.

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Chapter Seven: Transmission



Figure 7.1. Children swinging on the hook of a crane abandoned in place in 1992. In the background is another abandoned crane and the partially-completed buildings of Micro-region 4 (author, 2007).

I wrote this thesis to provoke further research into the planning of Kabul. I hope I have provided an argument that other scholars can ‘push against’ in the study of Kabul, other cities in Afghanistan, and cities across the Central Asian region. At the most general level, I argue that to understand world-wide urbanization better, we need to understand the degree to which the growth of each city is planned. To answer this question, we may need to seek out that planning in unexpected sites. For example, much of the planning of Kabul takes place as risk-management decisions, made in the United States and Europe. Not only do the political and economic forces that shape a city extend well beyond its nation and global region, but so do the very specific decisions that shape urban space and meaning.

Kabul is an historically important city, with evidence of habitation dating back several thousand years. I focus only on its modern-era development, especially very recent development, for several reasons. First, almost all of Kabul’s historic urban fabric is now destroyed. The British East India Company’s Army of Retribution destroyed the central bazaar in 1842;¹ Mayor Ghulam Farhad removed about one-quarter of the Old City for urban modernization in 1949;² and the mujahideen destroyed most of the

¹ Forbes, 1892.

² Arez and Dittmann, 2005.

remainder in the civil war of 1992-1996. The city that exists today is very much an emergent, contemporary city of the twenty-first century. This point is worth remembering in the face of an international discourse that portrays Afghanistan as unchanged and unchangeable. While Western commentators begin descriptions with tropes such as 'stuck in time,' Kabul continues to develop in ways that represent most of the rapid urbanization occurring in the world at present.

Studying this under-researched city is valuable in itself; but also as an effort to extend planning theory to grapple with wider challenges in planning. Those wider challenges are both collective threats and collective hopes for economic development and sociopolitical viability. We face interesting ethical dilemmas even if we do try to address these problems collectively, because such an effort must be made through existing institutional structures that remain radically unequal and inequitable. Which, in turn, means that even questions of geopolitical inequity must be considered *within* the scope of planning theory and practice.

Michael Burawoy argues that field research rarely refutes whole theories, and likewise rarely affirms theories entirely. In his view the best scholarship tests strong existing theories through participant observation in new sites. It then deconstructs and reconstructs that theory based on new observations, in a process of *theory-extension*.³ Burawoy's overall description of the character of field research helped frame my sense of what to look for, and my expectations about what this research might yield. I recognized processes of planning in Kabul based on my prior professional work in San Francisco. I failed to determine why I had such a different reaction from both the Afghans and aid workers I encountered in Kabul, but my guess is this: I had just spent the previous four years wrestling with the sharp disparity between declared housing policy and actual housing policy in San Francisco. That experience taught me the degree to which urban planning in North American cities is political, and not at all ideal. Few of the Westerners working in Kabul have also worked professionally in urban planning in their 'home' countries. Thus, what they were using as an implicit referent of 'the normal' was actually an idealized image of professional practice 'back home.' This seems natural in a discursive framing where aid workers and development specialists conceive of their work as entirely different from urban planning—a reproduction of difference that Robinson has eloquently refuted in her work.

This misperception extends to historical understandings of cities as well. In an effort to peel open another layer of embedded assumptions I am going to take a page to critique San Francisco a bit further. San Francisco is a striking instance of *apparent spatial order* being mistaken for *political order*. In her analysis of the spatial formation of San Francisco, Anne Vernez-Moudon points out that the Mexican authorities who laid out the orthogonal street-grid around the central plaza (now Portsmouth Square) never intended to extend that grid over the steep adjacent hills. However, three years after the United States occupied San Francisco in 1846, tens of thousands of Gold Rush prospectors squatted the hills around the formal settlement.⁴ The squatters knew that the Anglo city

3 Burawoy, Michael. 1991. *Ethnography unbound: Power and resistance in the modern metropolis*. Berkeley: University of California Press, pp.6-7.

4 Moudon, Anne Vernez. 1986. *Built for change: Neighborhood architecture in San Francisco*. Cambridge, MA:

government was deeply corrupt; and they feared that any contour-conforming street-extensions would be ‘adjusted’ to preserve the houses of squatters who paid the highest bribes. In the early 1850s, the squatters therefore agitated for a simple, linear extension of the existing street-alignments, even though this produced an extremely difficult layout for horse-drawn carts.⁵

In 1851 the city government bowed to popular pressure and the City Engineer drafted the street plan that sends several public rights-of-way over sheer cliffs. The squatters then proceeded to demolish or reposition their cabins to align with the new grid, in order to assert their formalized property-claims.⁶ The grid was ‘planned’ in the sense that a mobilized urban population fought for an awkward compromise with the urban regime; but it was not an ‘optimized’ urban design for the existing terrain.⁷

Only one major new street, Columbus Avenue, was cut diagonally through this grid in 1876. Columbus links Portsmouth Square to the docks on the north shore of the city through a low saddle between Telegraph Hill and Russian Hill. In contrast to this rare instance of planned modification, the reaction to the 1906 earthquake and fire is much more revealing of the disjuncture between formal ideals and the political economy of urban development. In 1903, only three years before the earthquake, the nationally-renowned planner Daniel Burnham had drafted a Beaux-Arts style urban design for San Francisco. Burnham proposed a series of new diagonal boulevards like Columbus Avenue, that would have facilitated travel through the hilly terrain. However the landowners insisted on rebuilding on their existing lots, again to assert their property-claims and the quick resumption of profits from rents. In an extraordinary moment when half the buildings were physically destroyed, the structure of property-relations proved more durable than walls in preventing a topographical rationalization of the street-network. Only in the 1950s was the lot-configuration transformed by the development of high-rises and urban freeways.⁸ What shifted as property-relations: after the Second World War, both private and public organizations could amass enough capital to buy up multiple lots.⁹ From a distance, the grid-geometry of San Francisco may seem like a premeditated design. But the actual politics of spatial-formation were driven by contentious demands for private profit, and for impartial treatment by a corrupt urban regime. Only rarely and sporadically did any part of this planning process rise to a level that one might consider ‘intentional’ at the collective level.

In this concluding chapter of an analysis of Kabul, I have gone into detail about San Francisco for a reason. In the book *Invisible Cities*, Italo Calvino’s Kubilai Khan eventually realizes that all of the cities which Marco Polo is describing to him are in fact different aspects of Polo’s memory of Venice.¹⁰ By never mentioning his referent, Polo

MIT Press, p. 27.

5 Robinson, W. W. 1948. *Land in California: The story of mission lands, ranchos, squatters, mining claims, railroad grants, land scrip [and] homesteads*. Berkeley: Univ. of California Press.

6 Scott, Mel. 1959. *The San Francisco Bay Area: A metropolis in perspective*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

7 Moudon, 1986, p. 28.

8 Vernez Moudon: “New physical structures of urban space: 1920s and 1960s” Chapter 7 in *Built for Change*, pp.125-132.

9 Gans, 1982.

10 Calvino, Italo. 1974. *Invisible cities*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, p.86.

was unconsciously reiterating it. This is a parable of colonial discourse, reminiscent of Gayatri Spivak's argument that the colonizer uses his own familiar referents to construe occupied lands and dominated peoples as Other, exotic, even deviant and perverse.¹¹ Jennifer Robinson's argument about the North-centric production of planning knowledge is a more tactful, but no less damning affirmation of this same point: a city growing at perhaps one per cent per year in North America or Australia probably should not be considered 'normal' when the vast majority of cities—now located in Africa, Central and South Asia, and Latin America—are growing at five times that pace.¹²

At the same time, cities in different parts of the world are both linked and comparable. There is difference, and it is worth learning from; but Kabul also provides general lessons because that difference is not what Derrida called the incommensurable *différance* of 'another world'.¹³ Indeed, the relative absence of research on the contemporary planning of cities in Asia, Africa and Latin America says more about politically-shaped assumptions of planners than about any fundamental, ontological distinction between cities of the 'North' and 'South'. The politics of urban development in Kabul are certainly linked to the politics of Washington, DC; and the processes of development in San Francisco described above are reminiscent of processes in Kabul. Furthermore, the visible regularity of San Francisco and other North American cities plays a role in the conception of planning among Afghans. The straight streets of San Francisco are taken as signifiers of an orderly process that is almost diametrically opposite to the contentious urban politics that actually produced this street-grid. If that process qualifies as planning, then the processes in Kabul certainly do as well.

Contributions of this research

In the effort to make the planning of Kabul intelligible, I have drawn on a broad spectrum of planning and social theory. By assembling these concepts into a theoretical model that explains the planning of Kabul, I believe I have made several contributions to both planning and urban theory.

Planning in multiple modes

First, I argue that planning can occur simultaneously in multiple *modes* within the same city. I believe that this specific argument will enable future researchers to identify planning, and multiple modes of urban governing, under conditions of fragmenting sovereignty. In societies that have experienced pronounced political and ideological shifts within short periods of time, it is possible not only for populations with different governmentalities to live side-by-side, but also for individuals to navigate, and even internalize, the contradictions and tensions between sharply distinct conceptions of how they and their society are—and should be—governed. I describe two conceptions of governmentality I found in Kabul. One is a continuing belief in the developmentalist state; the other is a localized neoliberal belief in free markets and a replacement of secular governance with public piety and 'faith-based regulation' of public behavior. The anti-infidel/anti-outsider insurgents, and the present Islamic Republic (the 'Karzai

11 Spivak, 1999.

12 Robinson, Jennifer. 2006. *Ordinary cities: Between modernity and development*. London: Routledge.

13 Spivak, 1999, p.425.

regime'), espouse very close to the same local version of neoliberal governmentality. From the outside, these contending political movements might seem utterly different, but that is only because the primary difference is the relationship to foreign agencies and governments. That difference gets overstated by the foreigners who are most directly affected by it; but that is an observation-based fallacy. For Kabulis, the significant shift in governmentality occurred very suddenly in 1992 when professional women trained as engineers and civil servants in the 1970s and 1980s, suddenly faced public condemnation, harassment, beatings, abduction, and rape by the new, US-backed Islamic State.¹⁴ That, in itself, was a surprising finding; but it also underscores a more general point: a close analysis of conflicts in urban ideals can reveal a great deal about how politics are locally understood and globally misrepresented.

Within the three-mode conception of planning, this research also makes a contribution by arguing that both the Clay and Mirrorglass modes *are* modes of urban planning. 'Clay' is the mode typically recognized as urban informality—a mode of urbanization that has been studied in Latin America since the 1950s. Initially, for instance in the writings of John Turner, this form of urbanization was considered *ungoverned*.¹⁵ The prevailing assumption was that formal and informal development formed a dichotomy: between that which is planned, legally recognized, and formally governed; and that which is unplanned, unrecognized, and extra-legal. The implicit absence of the state is still codified in the Spanish/Portuguese term for informal development: *autoconstruction*. This does not necessarily mean that the residents are building their own houses—as in Kabul, informal dwellings in Latin American cities are often built by professional contractors—but *autoconstruction* does imply that informal residents must rely upon their own resources to build. It assumes an official indifference or even negligence, an attempt at erasure based on persistent refusal to recognize.

That prevailing dichotomous view of formal/informal corresponding to governed/ungoverned was challenged by key researchers, beginning with Janice Perlman's publication of *the Myth of Marginality* in 1976,¹⁶ and continuing indirectly through the work of Peter Ward¹⁷ and Alan Gilbert¹⁸ since the early 1980s. Drawing on post-colonial and post-structural theory, Ananya Roy directly challenged this assumed dichotomy by relocating informalization as a process *within* the urban regime itself in her study of urban regime politics and the feminization of poverty in Kolkata.¹⁹ If the urban regime produces informality, then it governs this mode as well: the politics of official neglect, erasure, corruption, and sustained vulnerability are planned to the same degree that infrastructure is planned.

This assertion builds on and affirms the trajectories of several current urban theorists.

14 Benard, 2002.

15 Turner, John F. C., and Robert Fichter. 1972. *Freedom to build: Dweller control of the housing process*. New York: Macmillan.

16 Perlman, 1976.

17 Ward, Peter M. 1982. *Self-help housing: A critique*. Bronx, N.Y.: Mansell.

18 Gilbert, Alan, and Josef Gugler. 1992. *Cities, poverty, and development: Urbanization in the Third World*. Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press.

19 Roy, Ananya. 2003. *City requiem, Calcutta: Gender and the politics of poverty*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

In 2004, Nezar Alsayyad argued that urban informality must be recognized as a major, perhaps dominant mode of urbanization in the world today.²⁰ Mona Fawaz is now examining the way that the para-statal organization Hezbollah governs the spaces, meanings, and rebuildings in South Beirut.²¹ Oren Yiftachel argues that urban and national regimes are producing ‘Gray Spaces’ of partially-recognized, partially-legal urbanization.²² In this thesis I take one further step by arguing that spaces of urban informality are *planned*, at minimum because the urban regime determines the boundary between that which is legal and that which is illegal, that which is recognized and that which is unrecognized. Conceptually this is a small step, but politically it is important. Calling this mode *planned* is an argument that urban regimes and political leaders are also accountable to the people living under supposedly ‘extralegal’ conditions. It rejects the governing strategy of avoiding accountability through directed contractions of the formal sphere.

The third mode, Mirrorglass, is a more distinctly new contribution to planning theory. I argue that the urban informality of the socio-political elite is distinct from the informality of the poorer majority. The politics of Clay and Mirrorglass are related, but with one vital difference: Mirrorglass planning is the result of elites who willingly and willfully violate the plans and regulations of an urban regime, with confidence in their own impunity. In contrast to this, Assef Bayat’s description of ‘quiet encroachment’ describes the way that poorer households are more or less compelled to violate urban regulations through their daily efforts to obtain livelihoods.²³ Bayat was arguing that the ‘dangerous classes’ of urban poor had become ‘quiet rebels;’ but in this, as in many studies of urban informality, the ‘dangerous classes’ were missed because the researchers tend to look ‘down’ at the poor, and not ‘up’ or ‘across’ at the extralegal urban behavior of elites. Again, documentation of elite, exceptionalist informalization has existed for some time. In *City of Walls*, Teresa Caldeira points out that luxury apartments are as likely to be in violation of some code as working-poor neighborhoods in Sao Paulo.²⁴ In his current work, Yiftachel has begun to distinguish urban informalization into ‘gray spacing from above’ and ‘gray spacing from below.’ However by calling them both ‘gray’ he still (for the moment) groups these two processes together in a single category of semi-legal urbanization.²⁵ Ananya Roy has advised for some years now that social theorists must also ‘study up’ to understand the sociopolitical phenomena at play in shaping our present urbanizing world. This articulation of elite informality as a discrete mode of urban planning is an application of this research strategy of ‘studying up’ to the processes of spatial formation and transformation in Kabul.

20 AlSayyad, Nezar. 2004. “Urban informality as a ‘new’ way of life.” introduction to *Urban informality*. Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books.

21 Fawaz, Mona. 2009. “Hezbollah as urban planner? Questions from and to planning theory.” *Planning Theory* 8:323-334.

22 Yiftachel, Oren. 2008. “Theoretical notes on ‘Gray Cities’: The coming of Urban Apartheid?.” *Planning Theory* 8:88-100.

23 Bayat, Assef. 2000. “From ‘dangerous classes’ to ‘quiet rebels’: Politics of the urban subaltern in the global South.” *International sociology* 15:539.

24 Caldeira, Teresa Pires do Rio. 2000. *City of walls: crime, segregation, and citizenship in São Paulo*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

25 Yiftachel, Oren. 2009. “Critical theory and ‘gray space’: Mobilization of the colonized.” *City* 13:246-263.

Global empire, viewed from the city street

Separating out elite exceptionalism as a discrete mode of planning facilitates one further contribution of this research: the analysis of our present geopolitical empire through an urban lens. Perhaps more than any other city in the world today, Kabul would seem to be the place to observe American military and political hegemony as a twenty-first century expression of global empire. In practice, however, the configuration of this present ‘neoliberalizing’ empire does not correspond so simply to the political economy of ‘industrial-age’ empires of the late nineteenth through twentieth centuries. This does not mean that the present conditions in Kabul are not extremely unequal, exploitative, and violent—they are—but in this frontier-space of geopolitical warfare, the political economy of these inequities and impunities does not correspond to the pattern and discourse of industrial-era ‘New Imperialism.’

In many respects the Mirrorglass mode echoes the Clay mode, but at a higher level of class-difference and geopolitical scope. For an urban regime, delimiting the sphere of formality is a way of managing accountabilities. To assert formal sovereign and biopower over a rapidly-expanding urban terrain requires an active engagement with a population and its unbounded human demands for rights and recognition. Yet as Foucault argued in “the birth of biopolitics,” one of the persistent tendencies of modern political regimes is to ‘optimize’ the efficiency governing.²⁶ Neoliberalization is but the most recent of a series of movements in this direction, that can be traced back to the repeal of the Corn Laws (freeing trade) and the rewriting of the Poor Laws (disciplining the poor) the mid-nineteenth century Britain, and objections over taxation in Boston in 1774.

At the geopolitical scale this logic also pertains. Rather than formally annex Afghanistan into an empire, the United States *and the entire NATO coalition* have left Afghanistan independent in name, while violating its sovereignty as needed to biologically protect their own bodies-politic. Declaring Afghans as citizens of a separate, sovereign state restricts the movement of their bodies: Afghans cannot easily immigrate to North America, Europe, or Australia, especially as Muslim Others. Furthermore, Western countries maintain the discursive power to declare that the rising ‘insurgency’ in Afghanistan is not a war, with specific implications for the rights-claims of Afghans as war-refugees under international law. As we have seen, these restrictions hold several million internally-displaced people within Afghanistan, with tremendous consequences to the rate and pattern of urbanization of Kabul.

In the chapter Concrete, I distinguished this process from ‘typical’ informality as violations by agents who are more powerful than the urban regime, much as Yiftachel describes ‘gray-spacing from above.’ Foreign militaries, diplomatic corps, and the foreign staff of both security and development consultants enjoy this elite condition of exceptionality, but so do elite Afghans. This parallels earlier imperial practices. Under the Raj, local elites also enjoyed exceptional privilege, as did *compradors* in Latin America. Local complicities continue to be a necessary component of transnational rule; these complicities manifest in capital-accumulation from rent-farming the Global Village of central Kabul. But again this present empire differs in the facility with which local

²⁶ Foucault, 2003.

elites can mitigate their own biological and resource-risks, much as foreign elites do: not just through spatial segregation within Kabul, but also through the mobility of both their own bodies and their capital. As one very forthright land-developer explained: when local elites began to doubt the long-term viability of the Karzai regime, they began to invest their rental-revenue into the real-estate market of Dubai. By owning houses there, they have also purchased the right to flee to the United Arab Emirates if Afghanistan's Islamic Republic falls. Thus, part of the risk-mitigation strategy for local urban elites is capital-extraction and removal from the local urban economy, and flight-preparedness. Unfortunately, individualized risk-mitigation does not involve hard bargaining with the 'common' population to ensure collective security.

Neil Smith²⁷ and Mike Davis²⁸ have recently extended their analyses of gentrification to include elite capital-accumulation on a global scale. My hope is that this analysis contributes to their critique by showing how neoliberalizing empire echoes more local practices of urban informalization. In a complementary way this research also indicates that global empire has become a locally-manifest problem within the scope of responsibility and accountability of urban planning.

Planning as a normative project

Through this research I have found that planning is normative in two ways—one which I affirm, the other I reject. On the one hand, I affirm that as a future-oriented activity, planning is an inherently normative effort to envision and implement urban transformations. We work with specific expectations about how we want urban environments to change when we commit present urban resources towards anticipated future benefits. Not only is this normative: as Sandercock argues, planning is a moral project that reflects our collective desire for the future of our cities.²⁹ We may express plans in technocratic terms, but even the most quantitative forecast model reflects our moral ideals about efficiency, justice, and how we aspire to live. As a public struggle over resource-allocation, planning is politics in the original sense, as described by Aristotle in the *Nichoachean Ethics*. Planning is also politics in the modern sense, as a struggle over the 'we:' over how issues are identified and framed; over who gets to set agendas in both policy-formation and discourse; and over how urban resources are ultimately allocated. Where we set the boundaries of authority and accountability about the planning of Kabul—and every city—is primarily an identitarian question.

The challenging ethics of complex agency

On the other hand, this research challenges a normative expectation *about* planning: that the linkage between public intentions and observable outcomes is direct, and can therefore be judged as we judge actions based on personal choices. Again, this expectation rests on a prevalent assumption that 'the state' exists as a unitary entity; one that can be anthropomorphized. Numerous Afghan and Western interviewees pointed to an absence of apparent linkages between observable urban development and stated

27 Smith, Neil. 2002. "New globalism, new urbanism: Gentrification as global urban strategy." *Antipode* 34:427-450.

28 Davis, Mike, and Daniel B. Monk, eds. 2007. *Evil paradises: Dreamworlds of neoliberalism*. New York: New Press.

29 Sandercock, 2003.

official policy as the reason why they believed that planning did not exist in Kabul. My own professional experience in the United States gave me a different perspective: the public policy documents of San Francisco explicitly declare a pro-housing policy, but this bears a weak relationship to observable outcomes. San Franciscans treat houses as prized financial investments; we know that we make this collective decision, and we know that this makes housing in San Francisco some of the most expensive and least accessible housing in the United States. I do not doubt that San Francisco is planned; but the gap between stated public intention and observable outcome is very tangible.

By those same criteria I have never doubted that Kabul is planned as well. Rejecting this ‘found null hypothesis’ as the basis for this research, I found that the best way to refute a supposed absence of planning in Kabul is to explore *how* the city is planned. This is complicated by the governmentality of Kabulis themselves. The present meaning of *plan* in Pashto and Dari seems to be based on the thirty-year period of Soviet technical assistance (1962-1992), reflecting both the Afghan and Soviet ideals of a strong, centralized, developmentalist state. That, for many living Kabulis, is the lost golden era of their youth. For planners within Kabul Municipality, my sense is that they do not just assume that planning means a direct linkage between stated policy and coordinated implementation; they also deeply desire to recover that broken linkage as a way of collectively recovering broken lives.

Political leaders tend to promote the metaphor of the state as a person of good moral character. George Lakoff differentiates the political metaphors for the state as either “stern father” or “nurturing parents.” These metaphors loosely parallel the two political rationalities of sovereign power and biopower, respectively; but they are both very anthropomorphic. The 2004 Afghan Constitution names Zahir Shah as the ‘Father of the Nation’ as a way of appeasing the royalist faction while asserting that the new regime would be a republic. But the evidence from Kabul suggests something very different: that *governing* may persist at the local level even when national-level political regimes are repeatedly destroyed. I traced the political genealogy of national and urban politics to show that Kabul is modern, and has been so since at least the 1840s. That same evidence can be used to refute the myth of the monolithic state. In the main conference room of Kabul Municipality, photographs of the mayors of Kabul dating back to the mid-1920s are prominently displayed (figure 4.1). These photographs represent the sense of continuity which local government staff expressed in interviews. It is a sense of continuity they use as an argument for proceeding with the Master Plan implementation process. This sense of local governmental continuity contrasts dramatically with the discontinuity of Afghan national regimes. Afghan national leaders have declared a monarchy, a constitutional monarchy, a republic (dictatorship), a revolutionary communist junta, a communist republic, an Islamic state, an Islamic Emirate, and an Islamic Republic since 1930. Yet throughout these eight decades of national regime changes, the *urban* regime of Kabul has continued to govern the development of the city. Whole neighborhoods of Kabul have been planned; two city-wide Master Plans have been implemented; and a third Master Plan remains in progress, *despite active opposition by the current national regime*.

Urban planning in Kabul cannot be explained by a theory of urban politics that assumes a monolithic state. This political myth is a carryover from the era of strong monarchies, when the meanings of both loyalty and treason revealed the degree to which the ‘state’ was conflated with the person of the monarch.³⁰ As modern governments developed elaborated bureaucracies, this mythical conflation became increasingly misleading. The urban regime in Kabul is a particularly clear example of this. As one politically-connected Afghan explained to me, “every time there was another coup, the top twenty per cent was knocked off; but the bottom eighty per cent in the government remained. It happened with the mujahideen, it happened with the Taliban, it happened when the Americans brought the Northern Alliance back. The city staff? They’re still communists!” Through strong leadership and effective propaganda, the people acting within a regime may be brought into enough coherence to produce *the effect* of a state as a unitary agent. But to understand planning—or the process by which any governing policy gets formed, implemented, and propagated over time—it is a fundamental conceptual error to confuse a unified effect with a unitary entity.

This post-structural conception of the state, as a semi-coherent assemblage of practices and discourses, is a valuable conceptual shift for urban planners. However it also it presents new ethical challenges for us, regardless of our site of practice. Since the Enlightenment era—particularly since the writings of Kant—we have believed in the agency of individuals as self-responsible, sovereign subjects. This belief is an embedded assumption in two core Liberal practices: the right to freedom of private contract, and criminal procedure. In both contracts and crimes, individuals are held accountable as *agents* our own actions. If we reject the concept of the state as a unitary entity, we also invalidate the metaphor of the state as an individual, as an agent. Rejecting this metaphor greatly troubles the relationship between policy intentions and ethical accountability for harmful policy outcomes. In practice, planners have sensed this for decades—most clearly expressed by Rittel and Webber as one of the reasons why planning problems are ‘wicked.’³¹ Through the many layers of political leaders, conflicting interests, habitual practices, and emergent effects produced by a policy intervention itself, the outcomes of planning cannot be predicted. Yet both the public and planners ourselves judge policy outcomes in a moral framework which treats states themselves as moral agents.

We do not have a discrete ethical method for judging loose aggregates of institutions. I suggest this as important future work, because we know that governing regimes operate by a different logic than the conscious, deliberate individual. In this vein I reject a summary condemnation of the foreign role in planning Kabul as ‘imperialist,’ because such a judgment collapses together very local, specific practices with an overarching geopolitical process. They are related—‘entangled,’ as I describe in *Concrete*. But the facile application of a global-scale judgment can be very misleading in an effort to model processes at the local urban scale. Not only would this unfairly disparage the efforts of aid workers, but such a generalized judgment would also excuse brutal local commanders by grouping them into an abstract class of ‘victims’ or ‘the dominated.’ Rather, we need

30 Schmitt, Carl. 1985 [1934]. *Political theology: Four chapters on the concept of sovereignty*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press.

31 Rittel, Horst, and Melvin Webber. 1973. “Dilemmas in a general theory of planning.” *Policy Sciences* 155-169.

to carefully reconsider the nature of this present geopolitical empire. It is being produced by both the traditional logic of sovereign power and the emergent logic of biopower. Clearly empire has an effect on local urban planning, but we cannot model the nature of that effect fully until we develop an adequate theoretical and ethical model of ‘bio-geopolitical empire’ itself.

Chapter Five is a preliminary step in that direction, and may therefore be the most important contribution of this research. I do not think that other researchers have explored the relationship between biopower, biopolitics, and urban planning in this way since Foucault himself referred to the nineteenth-century English reformers who shaped so many modern practices of urban planning.³² The closest is the work of Giorgio Agamben,³³ and Derek Gregory as he builds on (and critiques) Agamben’s work.³⁴ However both focus on the intersection of biopower and sovereign power *in extremis*, at what Gregory calls the “vanishing point” of violent exception.³⁵ What gets eclipsed in their analyses is the way that very prosaic planning practices have been developed to promote and protect the biological life of the *demos*, of the polity. This biopolitical rationality can explain both the systematic violence and the systematic nurturing of whole populations; the question is whether the dominant population and its leaders regard others as human beings, as part of a larger *demos*, or as subhuman Others who deserve only extinction or, at best, systematic neglect. “Planning” itself does not do this; the problem with abstract theoretical terminology is that it often avoids identifying the agent: *we* do this.

Through practices of separation we have not only deferred risk spatially, but in doing so we have also deferred the need to struggle with this question. Our capacity to defer is the starkest expression of imperial power: so long as the deaths and deprivations of civilian Afghans are irrelevant to the American public, we continue to rule over that country with impunity. This is a very spatial segregation, and it is one in which rights—the urban-derived *ius*—get systematically denied.

Beyond the paralysis of cynicism

I expect that this argument for our broad and deep complicity with empire is appalling to most readers of this thesis. Planners in particular are ethically committed to action, so in a sense it would be a violation of our own ethical code to simply analyze and theorize the impunities and unaccountabilities involved in the transnational planning of Kabul. This analysis does not present any ‘easy fixes’ for Kabul. Rather, it reveals an extraordinary depth of misperception that has persisted across a dramatic shift in political administrations in the United States from the Bush to the Obama Administrations.

What I can offer planners is Hannah Arendt’s reflections on ethical actions in the public domain. Her essay “Action” was published in 1958 as Chapter 5 of *The human*

32 Foucault, Michel. 2003. “The birth of biopolitics.” Pp. 202-207 in *The essential Foucault*, edited by Paul Rabinow and Nikolas S Rose. New York: New Press.

33 Agamben, Giorgio. 1998. *Homo sacer: sovereign power and bare life*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press.

34 Gregory, Derek. 2004. *The colonial present: Afghanistan, Palestine, Iraq*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.

35 Gregory, Derek. 2007. “Vanishing points: law, violence and exception in the global war prison.” Chapter 11 in *Violent Geographies: Fear, Terror, and Political Violence*, edited by Allan Richard Pred. New York: Routledge.

condition.³⁶ Despite its remarkable relevance to planning theory, I have not seen it directly cited within the literature of planning, development, or post-colonial theory; David Harvey praises her work but only refers briefly to whole books by Arendt.

The central question Arendt addresses in this essay is the disjuncture between the intentions involved in public action, and public judgment of that action only by its outcome. Arendt argues that “men never have been and never will be able to undo or even to control reliably any of the processes they start through action,” what planners regretfully call the law of unintended consequences.³⁷ Furthermore, “this incapacity to undo what has been done is matched by an almost equally complete incapacity to foretell the consequences of any deed or even to have reliable knowledge of its motives.”³⁸ Here, Arendt anticipates Foucault’s argument that we need to focus on *how* rather than *why* because of the infeasibility of discerning intentions, and because what we can know is consequences. The central problem she identifies in this line of reasoning is that at the scale of public actions (such as policy implementations), the actor is held bound by discernible outcomes, not by intentions. She then acknowledges the threat of ethical paralysis that Melvin Webber identified as his regrettable lesson from the “Dilemmas” article: the actor

becomes ‘guilty’ of consequences he never intended or even foresaw, that no matter how disastrous and unexpected the consequences of his deed he can never undo it, that the process he starts is never consummated unequivocally in one single deed or event, and that its meaning never discloses itself to the actor but only to the backward glance of the historian who himself does not act.³⁹

...which is perhaps unfair to historians, but Arendt was sensitive to the simplistic retrospective narrative that was consolidating among Americans about their moral rightness in fighting ‘the good war’ against Hitler, whereas she faced the much more difficult and intimate challenge of reconciling, in some way, with her former mentor and lover, Martin Heidegger.

Arendt then argues that the consequences of action within the plural domain of human coexistence reveals the profound difference—indeed, mutual exclusivity—of sovereignty and freedom:

If it were true that sovereignty and freedom are the same, then indeed no man could be free, because sovereignty, the ideal of uncompromising self-sufficiency and mastership, is contradictory to the very condition of plurality. No man can be sovereign because not one man, but men, inhabit the earth—and not, as the tradition since Plato holds, because of man’s limited strength, which makes him depend upon the strength of others. All the recommendations the tradition has to offer to overcome the condition of non-sovereignty and win an untouchable integrity of the human person amount to a compensation for the intrinsic ‘weakness’ of plurality.⁴⁰

Following this ideal to its *telos* leads to the suppression of plurality, to totalitarianism. Conversely, freedom among human beings in relationship requires an active embrace of

36 Arendt, Hannah. 1998[1958]. “Action.” *The Human Condition*. 2nd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp.175-247.

37 Arendt 1998, pp.232-233.

38 Arendt 1998:233.

39 *ibid*.

40 Arendt 1998:234.

plurality, closely related to what I mean by disparity in this discussion.

However, acceptance of plurality is insufficient to resolve the dilemma of irreversible, unanticipatable consequences of action. Arendt then makes a startling proposal for a way forward:

The possible redemption from this predicament of irreversibility—of being unable to undo what one has done though one did not, and could not, have known what he was doing—is the faculty of forgiving. The remedy for unpredictability, for the chaotic uncertainty of the future, is contained in the faculty to make and keep promises.⁴¹

A cynical interpretation of ‘forgiveness’ is the sort of impunity observed throughout this study, but Arendt means something quite different by pairing forgiveness with promise. In a stark departure from the Graeco-Roman philosophical tradition, the social innovation of forgiveness among first-century Palestinians described in the Gospels does not mean absolution for responsibility comparable to erasure. Rather, it means being released (Gr.: *aphienai*) from being bound to the past, and to ‘trace back one’s steps’ (Hebrew: *shuv*) and change one’s own mind by acknowledging a mis-take, a straying, a trespass against another. Furthermore, paired with the act of promising, one is released from past actions but committed to future actions. Arendt’s description of the public, social role of the promise affirms my argument, at the end of Chapter Three, for why the Master Plan is so attractive to Kabulis:

binding oneself through promises, serves to set up in an ocean of uncertainty, which is the future by definition, islands of security without which not even continuity, let alone durability of any kind, would be possible in the relationships between men.⁴²

As a public declaration of an intended pattern of development, the Master Plan is a *promise*. It may not be an accurate forecast, but that is not its social role. Rather, its role as a public commitment towards future patterns of action that are ‘islands of security’ in that they reduce risk. The act of promise is also the commitment to continuity, a form of accountability which is at the moment broken in the mode of contract-driven development practices among transnational aid agencies.

What makes Arendt’s line of argumentation so surprising is that, as a secular German philosopher writing in the 1950s, she treats the Christian innovation of forgiveness in the same theoretical context as her understanding of Judaism, ancient Greek and Roman philosophers, and modern German philosophy. It is a traverse across difference which is rarely made, though it produces rich insight into modernity and contemporary understanding in the works of Charles Taylor and Talal Asad. But this is the traverse across difference that so many taxi drivers made with me, stuck in traffic in Kabul. It is not a universal, but the cross-cultural translation of both Christian and ancient Greek philosophy is much more active among Muslim scholars than among Westerners. The philosophical and juridical implications of both the ancient Greeks and early Christians have been actively debated by Muslims since the early days of the ‘Abbasid empire. Philosophers from Western Europe contemplating Aristotle traverse a great a cultural disparity than Afghans do, through the unbroken chain of authority, or *isnad*, back to Abu

41 Arendt 1998:237.

42 *ibid.*

Hanifa. Through parallel but fundamentally different chains she argues that as actors in the public domain we must be bound to our ethics through the commitments of promise but freed from bondage to our mis-takes, the unintended consequences of our actions, in order to act again in goodwill. For Arendt, this is the choice of living in freedom, versus existential death through bondage to the past:

The life span of man running toward death would inevitably carry everything human to ruin and destruction if it were not for the faculty of interrupting it and beginning something new, a faculty which is inherent in action like an ever-present reminder that men, though they must die, are not born in order to die but to begin.⁴³

Arendt's work gives us an ethical guide for how to plan across radical difference, and in so doing, gain our own freedom and survival. The stakes, in the urbanization that will happen in the next thirty years, are nothing less than this.

43 Arendt 1998:246.

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