

Chapter Six: Mirroglass



Figure 6.1. Foreigners in SUV with high-gain antenna; Kabulis on foot and bicycle (Author, 2007).

The Mirroglass mode

This chapter focuses on the third mode of urban planning in Kabul: Mirroglass, the exceptionalist mode by which local and transnational elites govern development. The term ‘Mirroglass’ 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, Mirroglass signals impunity and anonymity maintained by opacity.

Practices of bodily segregation that characterize the Mirroglass 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

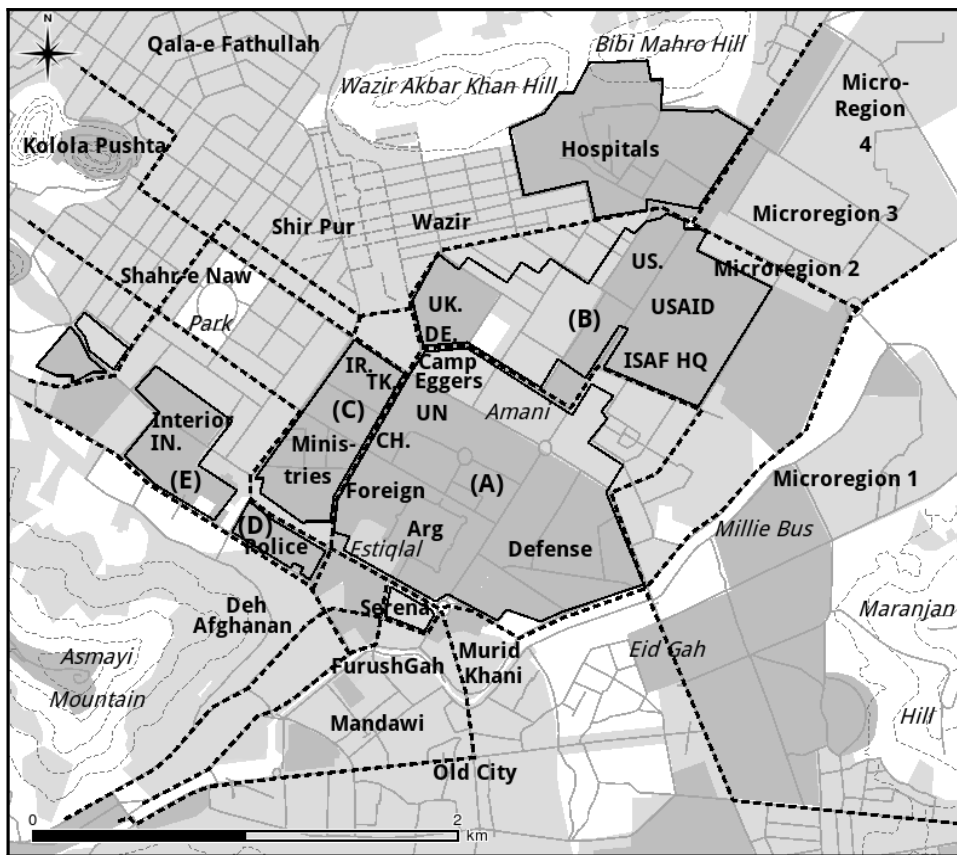


Figure 6.3. Central Kabul, showing key sites of the Citadel and the Global Village, 2007 (author). Secured areas are shaded dark gray; blockages are shown as double bars; highly-congested streets are shown as dashed lines.

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.

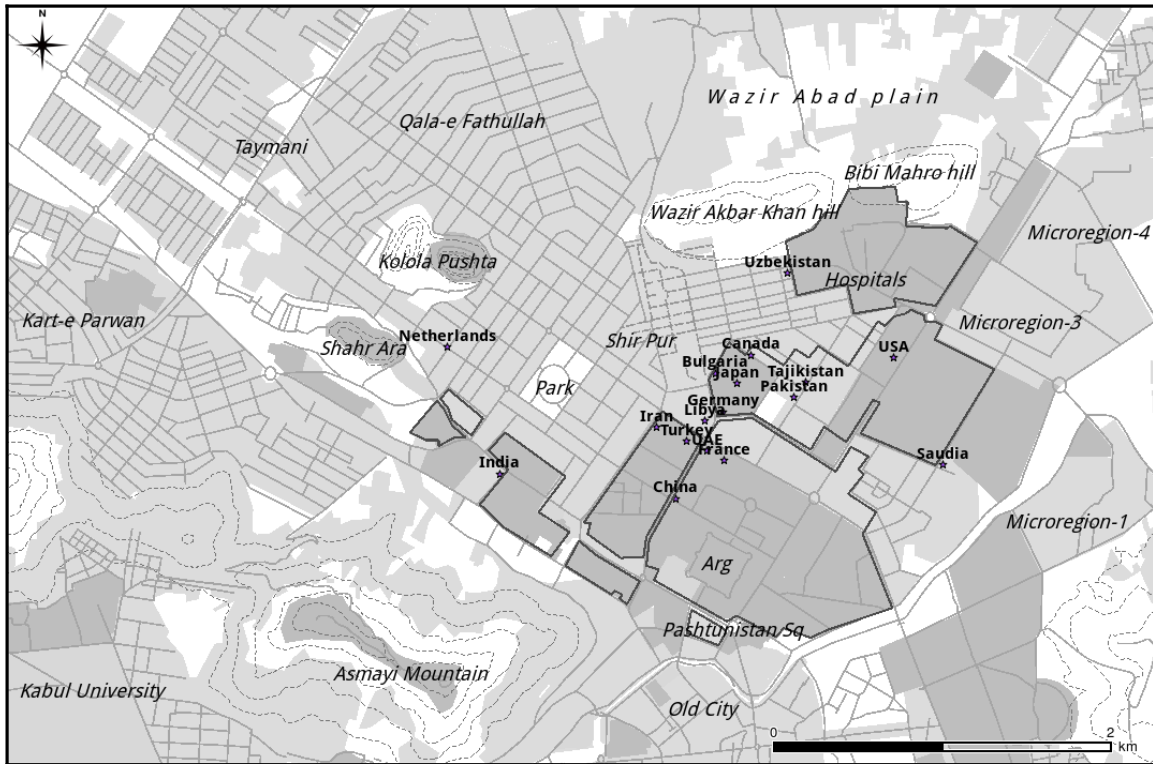


Figure 6.4. Embassies in central Kabul, 2007 (sources: AIMS/fieldwork; cartography: Author, 2009)

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.

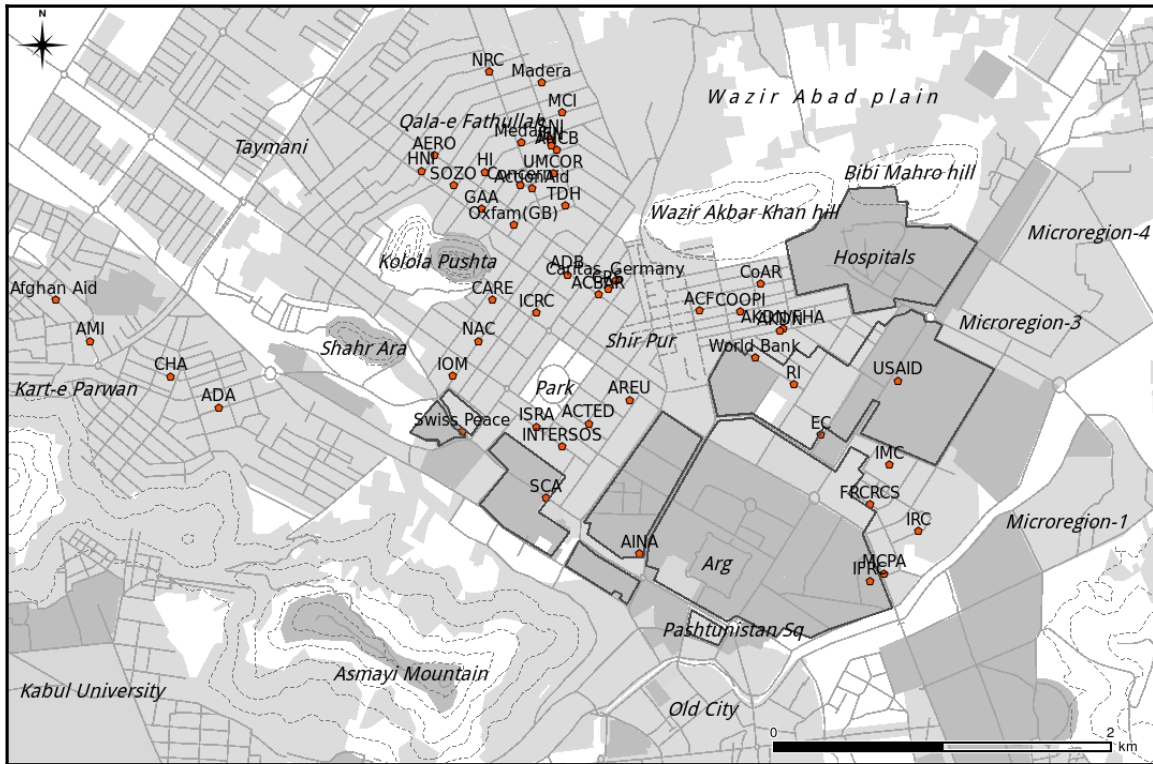


Figure 6.5. International non-governmental organizations, 2007 (AIMS/fieldwork)

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

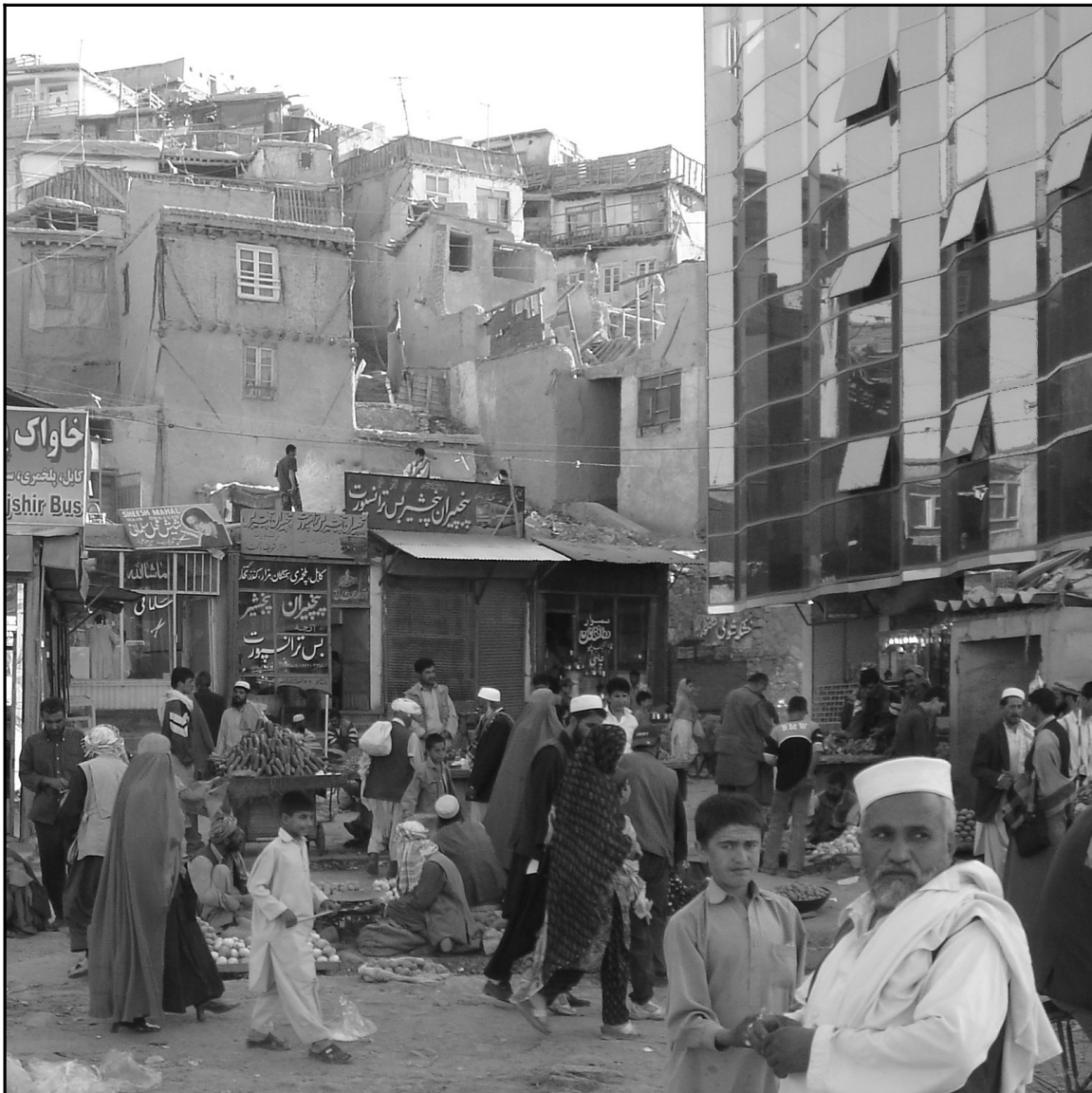


Figure 6.6. Vegetable market (foreground left), Deh Afghanan neighborhood (background), and new commercial building (foreground right), central Kabul (author, 2007).

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.

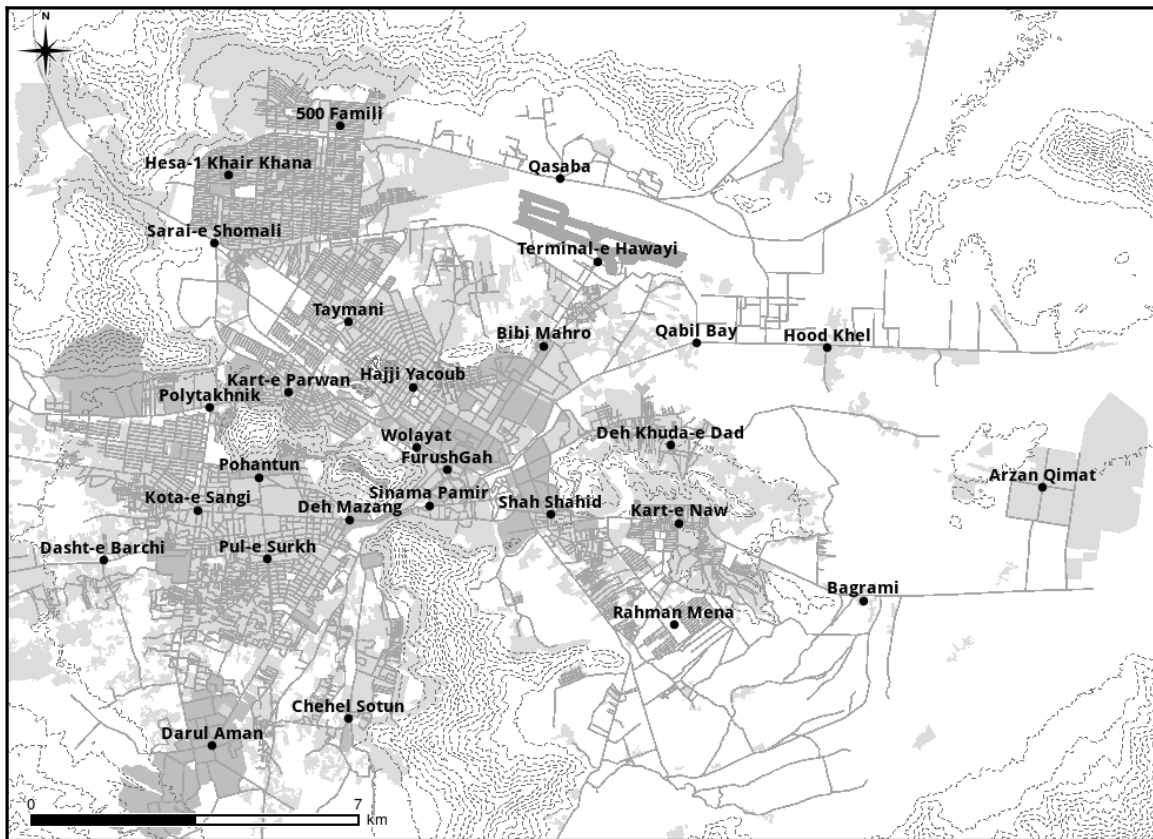


Figure 6.7. Urban geography of Kabul as nodes: major intersections a named by the National Bus service, and used by shared-taxi drivers. (sources: Millie Bus/fieldwork)

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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