Planning

on Contested Ideological Terrain: Kabul

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Abstract

Kabul experiences many of the challenges of a rapidly-growing capital city in the global South, including insufficient urban services, informality in property relations and state-society relations, and substantial disagreement about what it means to be modern. As a capital city, it also suffers the problems of intergovernmental conflict between municipal and national agencies, and the 'dual-economy' challenges of a wealthy diplomatic/NGO sector and an otherwise relatively poor urban population. In these respects Kabul is an exemplary case-study of the challenges to urban governance in similar capitals such as Tashkent, Dhaka, Khartoum, and Rabat.

In addition, Kabul is a testing ground for two competing projects: American-backed neoliberal imperialism and regional Sunni versions of political Islam. In this paper I plan to explore the local intersections of these various issues through the theoretical lens of governmentality.

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Violating the implicit rules

This conference is about planning and risk. In the political economy of risk, we often seek to defer risk to a later time or, if possible, burden others with risk in order to reduce our own. This is true of political, biological, and resource risks, which are often deferred through subcontracts and outsourcing to other, poorer countries.

The techniques of deferral we use today render whole populations invisible. Those techniques also shut off significant paths of information about the social conditions and changes in most of the urbanizing world. At the same time, globalization is linking sites across the world into an urban complex through specific and very unequal terms of political power, of knowledge production, and of property relations. But if techniques of deferral render us oblivious to the condition of most of humanity, how can we evaluate the changes—let alone the risks—to any city in this partially-integrated global urban complex?

For my dissertation I am studying sites and processes of planning in Kabul, the capital of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. This paper explores the types of deferral I have just described.

In the 1980s the United States outsourced a war in Afghanistan, deferring the risks of combat onto the Afghan population. With the assistance of Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, a nationalist insurgency was turned into an Islamist jihad (Rashid, 2000). The eventual blowback from this proxy war may remain the quintessential example of urban risk for the next century. Once Afghans had completed our job for them and broken the morale of the Soviet military, we discarded them like a spent contract. Despite of our involvement in Afghanistan in the 1980s, we took no responsibility for the civil war, collapse of government, and humanitarian disaster of the early 1990s. In the later 1990s, as the Taliban sought international recognition and economic assistance, we ignored them and did not recognize the danger to us when they turned to a Saudi patron (Johnson & Leslie 2004).

Afghans use September 11 as a plea against the barriers of deferral. 'Please do not forget us again,' they reiterate at fundraisers and international conferences. And yet that barrier is stronger than before. It is far more difficult for Afghans to immigrate to the United States today than six years ago; and since the "era of war" is supposedly over, Afghans are no longer eligible for international political asylum. Perhaps even more surprising is that the information barrier remains intact as well. Journalists have focused on just a few themes—terrorism, opium, and the plight of women—and very little else gets reported about a country in the midst of dramatic social and sociopolitical transformation. The rising power of the parliament, and the renegotiation of the social role of Hazaras are two examples of major change in Afghanistan that are almost never mentioned in the English-language press. And as I found out the hard way, there is virtually no funding for studying a field such as city planning in Afghanistan.

This poses a disturbing problem for an academic. I have few older sources to draw from, and few contemporary sources to check the assumptions of my own work. What I tell you about planning in Afghanistan may be almost impossible for you to verify. What if I have made a mistake in my research design or fundamental assumptions? How will you know what to question, and if you do have doubts, how will you test them? Since we fear political violence, hostility toward non-Muslims, contagious diseases and severe pollution, we rely on the information and very peculiar bias of daredevil reporters from these 'zones of the Other.' Unfortunately these zones include the poorer parts of American and European cities, virtually all of urban Africa, and most of the Middle East, Central Asia, and much of South Asia. Summed together, I suspect that these add up to most of the urbanizing world.

Kabul is peculiar for two reasons. One is the unusual role that geopolitics plays in the processes of planning and urbanization in Kabul. The second is that many Afghans look like Westerners—in particular, like southern Italians. Without pretending to be Afghan, I can work as a researcher in Kabul in what Spivak might call a 'scandalous act' of violating the principles of Othering. Thanks to Soraya Goga of the World Bank and Jolyon Leslie of the Aga Khan Trust for Culture, I have been placed outside of the security bubble in which most Westerners operate so that I can teach, study, and travel by bicycle or shared taxi across the city. This is a privilege. I am very critical of the security protocols which constitute a practice of apartheid within Kabul, but I am also aware that few of the aid workers in Kabul would opt for these protocols if they had a choice. But the politics of risk-deferral ensure that the barrier remains enforced, and it is the key element of a series of micropractices and conditioned assumptions which Ananya Roy sums up as the *management of difference*. In her teaching she introduces this concept as an essential set of practices for making colonialism possible. Then in the post-colonial, globalizing era, she describes the transmutation of this set of practices into the *management of distance*. In Afghanistan both sets of practices operate simultaneously. And they strongly impact the processes of urbanization in Kabul. Here is an example of the management of distance:

On February 15, 2007, President George W. Bush delivered a speech at the American Enterprise Institute about Afghanistan and the Global War on Terror (Bush, 2007). Our President has shifted his focus back to Afghanistan as a rare success among his policies. In the speech, he makes comparisons between the Taliban era and the Karzai era. Among them is an important quote:

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

First of all, Afghans actually began to return to Kabul once the Taliban had established security in the capital in 1996 (Johnson & Leslie, 2004). Four years previously, in 1992, the collapse of the Afghan communist regime led to a civil war among the mujahidin factions. Perhaps fifty thousand people were killed in the capital between 1992 and 1995. No one knows for sure; and the politically-motivated unreliability of data in Afghanistan is an important theme I will return to. But the extraordinary violence and chaos under the muhajidin explains why Kabulis welcomed the Taliban into the capital to establish security. Indeed, nationwide security under the Taliban was not only better than it was under the previous muhajidin; it was also better than post-Taliban security under the combined powers of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), the American "Coalition" Forces, and the Afghan National Army. Security had been the overwhelming priority of the Taliban from the outset. Their first supporters were the guild of Afghan truckers, who were tired of paying up to forty per cent of their cargo as bribes at road blocks. The Taliban therefore were pursuing a fundamentally Liberal agenda, of providing security to enable trade. They also began negotiations with Unocal, an American oil company, to build a gas pipeline from Turkmenistan to Pakistan (Rashid, 2000). However, their other economic policies failed miserably; partly due to severe drought, partly due to their style of rule-by-fiat which did not gain the confidence of the business community. So the economy of Afghanistan remained in a state of collapse under the

Taliban. But they invited expatriates to return and help rebuild the country. Many expatriates did return, especially to secure their claims to valuable urban property (Sidiqi, 2007). Thus, the massive land-rush and appalling inflation of urban land rents under the present Islamic Republic is a process that actually began in the late 1990s.

Hopefully I have begun to dispel some of the night-and-day contrasts of the Taliban and the Karzai regimes. The transition from the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan to the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan was actually much less profound than Western commentators present it to be.

However an even more important distortion is hidden in the second half of President Bush's comparison. The number is probably correct: about 4.6 million refugees have returned to Afghanistan since December 2001. However 'return to Afghanistan' is presented as "return home," an action which is presumed to be voluntary and unquestioningly positive. Those presumptions do not explain why Afghan refugees rioted against the proposed closure of the last three refugee camps in Pakistan, which would have essentially forced the two hundred thousand refugees back into Afghanistan (Siddique, 2007). Those presumptions fail to explain why Iran's President Ahmedinejad uses forced repatriation and the threat of forced repatriation as a political weapon against Afghanistan and its American patron. It fails to explain why Iran's repatriation of fifty thousand Afghans caused such controversy in Kabul that the Parliament removed both the Minister of Refugees and the Minister of Foreign Affairs by no-confidence votes (Gall, 2007).

The reality is that most of the refugees who have returned to Afghanistan after twenty or more years abroad have no homes to return to. The Soviet counterinsurgency campaign in the late 1980s destroyed hundreds of villages and irrigation systems. Local commanders have seized land. Families have grown in size so there is no room in the old family home. So more than half the Afghan refugees who have been repatriated have ended up in Kabul, which was never their home (Turton & Marsden, 2002).

When I first proposed this paper I suspected that rapid urbanization by refugees would produce unusual processes and problems in the growth of Kabul. What I have found thus far in my research is perhaps more disturbing: the only difference seems to be in the rate of growth—about ten per cent per year—and the prevalence of informality—about sixty to seventy per cent of the population of Kabul. Aside from the rate and scale, the fact that a large fraction of Kabul functions as a permanent refugee camp makes it *similar* to many cities in the global South, and historically similar to cities in what is now the global North. Once Afghan refugees repatriate they lose their internationally recognized status as refugees, which puts them in the same position as war-displaced refugees in Thailand, Burma, Sri Lanka, Iraq, Somalia, Sudan, Congo, Morocco, Peru, Mexico, and perhaps a dozen other countries. But as refugees driven off the land by warlords they are also like the English peasants driven into the Midland cities by the Enclosure movement, and the Adivasis driven to the edge of Mumbai by the Narmada Dam Project (Engels 1999; Roy 1999). They are the very low-cost labor force of the global urban complex. They have asserted some right to citizenship by building more than half the urban fabric of Kabul as informal housing, but as is always the case with informal housing, their tenure is extremely insecure. We know from the work of Perlman (1976), Roy (2003), and Chatterjee (2004) that urban informality is in fact a mode of power relations of the formal urban regime. So to get a better sense of the situation that Kabulis are facing, I am going to focus the rest of this paper on the urban regime and the processes of planning in Kabul.

Contested Modernities

A useful way to understand the history of planning in Kabul is as a contestation of different modernities. Significant modernization began in Kabul with the succession of Amanullah Khan as king in 1919. One of his first acts was to declare war on the British to gain full political and diplomatic sovereignty, which he did within six months. He then proceeded to plan a new administrative center just outside of the existing city of Kabul, with modern infrastructure including electricity and a commuter railroad that linked his new capital to the old city. Partly due to the influence of his father-in-law, Amanullah was more sympathetic to Turkish and German interests. He hired a German architect to plan out his new city, and he followed the political and institutional reforms of the Young Turks closely. In 1923 he ratified a constitution, created a Parliament, and declared Afghanistan a constitutional monarchy. He opened high schools, including one for girls (Nemat 1976).

The British therefore backed an insurrection against Amanullah, and a group of brothers forced him to abdicate. After about eighteen months of political chaos, one of the brothers—Muhammad Nadir—consolidated power in 1930. Three years later he was assassinated, but his brothers immediately supported the succession of Nadir Shah's son Zahir Shah to the throne. They remained on as Prime Ministers and Ministers of Defence until 1953, when Zahir Shah's cousin Daoud became Prime Minister. Throughout this period, this new dynasty publicly rejected the modernization of Amanullah, but quietly continued his reform and modernization policies. Royal gardens were opened up to the public in 1930. The national medical school was founded in 1932. Kabul University was founded in 1934. A central bank was founded in the 1940s, and large new areas of urban growth were planned out, beginning with Shahr-e Naw in the 1930s and extending northwestwards, southwestwards, and southeastwards in the late 1940s and through the 1950s (Arez, 2005).

Unfortunately this modernization also included urban renewal, in the form of a wide, straight avenue cut through the center of the old city in 1949. In some respects this has kept the old city commercially viable, but at the cost of much of its historical and cultural landscape. One of the most significant mosques in the city was also rebuilt in 1954, giving the urban core a Modernist, International-Style appearance (Arez, 2005).

In the early 1950s the Dulles brothers disregarded diplomatic overtures from Afghanistan. Afghanistan had opposed international recognition of Pakistan in 1947, because Afghans claimed a large region in what would be Pakistan, land which a previous king had only ceded to the British under a one-hundred year treaty in 1893. The U.S. therefore had to choose between Afghanstan and Pakistan, and the U.S. decided that Pakistan was a better anti-Soviet strategic partner. So Afghans turned increasingly toward the Soviet Union for assistance, including urban planning assistance. After Kruschev consolidated power in 1956, he began to implement an aggressive urban development program in the Soviet Union, and by 1963 an Afghan-Soviet team was studying Kabul to develop the first GenPlan for the city, which was adopted in 1964. This plan called for mid-rise apartments for civil servants, and the development of industrial areas at the edge of the city. This first GenPlan was immediately followed up by studies for a second GenPlan, which would include more forecasting and integrated development, since the city was growing rapidly. The second GenPlan, issued in 1970, was designed to accommodate a population of eight hundred thousand people over the next five years. The third GenPlan, issued in 1978, was to guide the growth of Kabul to a population of two million over the following twenty-five years, up to 2003. At the point when this third GenPlan was issued, the population of Kabul was slightly less than eight hundred thousand, as projected.

Meanwhile the political stability of Afghanistan deteriorated. In 1963, Zahir Shah forced his cousin Daoud to resign from his positions. Zahir Shah convened a constitutional convention, and with the ratification of the 1964 Constitution, Afghanistan became a constitutional monarchy once again. But in 1973 Daoud organized a coup and declared Afghanistan a Republic. Initially, Afghan communists were pleased with the overthrow of the monarchy, but soon they were disappointed in Daoud's unwillingness to implement a full-scale communist revolution in Afghanistan. They in turn organized a coup in 1978, and initiated a series of violent land reforms and purges of bourgeois intellectuals that alarmed even their Soviet allies. By December of 1979, it was clear that the Afghan Communist regime was collapsing, so the Soviets intervened.

Hopefully this brief review of pre-conflict Afghanistan makes it clear that what happened next was a brutal process of *de-modernization* (Graham, 2003; Gregory, 2004). Political and institutional reforms began in Afghanistan well ahead of the wave of African and Asian decolonizations in the 1950s and 1960s. Urban renewal—specifically the gutting of an old urban core—began at the same time as in the United States. Major new urban districts had already been laid out before Afghans began implementing a regular cycle of GenPlans which accurately predicted the high rate of growth and provided thousands of units of low-cost housing: some as apartments, but most as enhanced sites-and-services areas. However, by the late 1970s Kabul was an island of modernity in a country that operated mostly by customary rule and occasionally by Shari'a jurisprudence. The People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan was probably right that many rural areas needed major land reform, as Atul Kohli has argued in his comparative analysis of state-directed development (2004). But the brutality of their methods provoked a popular backlash which seemed to force the hand of the Soviets, who had refrained from direct intervention in Afghanistan since the 1920s. Under Soviet-backed Afghan communist rule, Kabul continued to develop from 1980 to 1992. Even as the insurgency became a major jihad in the late 1980s, Kabul remained secure. Only in 1993 did the capital become a site of combat between mujahid factions.

Modes of Planning of Kabul

Today, under the Islamic Republic, planning in Kabul means planning on contested ideological terrain.

Afghans and foreigners alike have often looked incredulously at me when I describe my research project, generally responding with something like, 'But there is no planning in Kabul.' There is still the 1978 Plan, which is dismissed by Westerners as an ideologically and procedurally obsolete relic. Then there is the Ministry of Urban Development, which has been saying the right things to Western donors for the past five and one half years about keeping the informal housing, upgrading rather than bulldozing, and engaging in participatory planning. All wonderful music to the ears of the World Bank, USAID, and the armada of NGOs which arrived in Afghanistan to do things right this time. But the Ministry is just barely beginning to produce new building and zoning codes and an urban upgrading plan, none of which have been implemented yet. Meanwhile, tens of thousands of square meters of mid-rise commercial construction has occurred, and informal settlements have extended up and over the hills to the north and west of Kabul onto the southern edges of the Shomali Plain. It appears that those with strong connections to the Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Defense, or the office of the Vice President have secured sufficient assurances from their political patrons that they have felt confident enough to proceed with development on a massive scale. If rule-by-fiat and graft governs the urban development of Kabul, then the question remains, is there any such thing as formal planning in Kabul?

My working answer is that there are three modes of planning in Kabul, which I will identify by metonyms.

First there is Clay. This is informal settlement in clay-brick houses, either on subdivided fields or on the slopes of mountains. Informal settlement qualifies as planning in the broader definition of: an investment of resources for long-term benefit. In this case the decisionmaking unit is the family, which in Afghanistan can be quite extended. When we surveyed households in 2003, we found that informal households are usually only one part of larger family units. Part of the family may live in the countryside, and several male family members may be working in Pakistan, Dubai, Iran, or even further abroad. So informal urbanization in Kabul has both a transregional and a transnational component (Stigter & Monsutti, 2005). One of the problems with refugee repatriation is the assumption that neither of these linkages exists. The image of the exhausted little family in a truck on its way home not only misses the point that the individuals in the truck are probably *not* returning home, but it also misses the point that they are usually part of large family networks which are trying to mitigate risk by diversifying locations and livelihoods in a very sophisticated manner. That does *not* mean that such a household is necessarily better-off. Intra-family property and power relations in Afghanistan can be brutal. A common method of alleviating overwhelming debt is to marry off a daughter to the debtor. She may be as young as twelve, and the debtor may be a cousin within the family system. Furthermore, as many people have noted about Afghans (especially Afghans themselves), the population as a whole is traumatized from war, dislocation, and impoverishment. The trait which living Afghans tend to share is the capacity to survive under distressed conditions. To the dismay of many Afghan expatriates returning from the West, this often means very short-term thinking and acting for personal benefit without regard to wider consequences. This observation is often used as an argument that Afghans are incapable of planning, because they do not think in the long term. Yet the Clay mode of planning is a strong counterfactual: informal households are trying to get within reach of jobs, but also trying to get within reach of medical care and educational opportunities for their children. A driving force behind the Clay mode of planning is intergenerational investment.

Much of the rest of the planning in Kabul operates in the mode which I call Concrete, named after both the primary building material and the expectative rights of this mode of planning. This is more or less normal, rule-bound, formal planning; including urban reconstruction and the building of new roads and public facilities. Much of this work is done by Kabul Municipality, and the Municipality would like to do much more. In particular, they have completed specific plans according to the 1978 GenPlan and they would like to implement the planned growth of whole new urban quarters. Unfortunately most of those projected growth areas have already been built over with informal housing in violation of the GenPlan, so the Municipality would like to redevelop these areas in roughly forty-hectare increments, relocating and re-housing families within the area as they proceed (Zinatullah, 2007). Given the major commitment to social housing in Kabul in the 1970s and 1980s, I believe the Municipality would actually do this if they had the means. The problem is that they do not have the means. And this ends up being a major source of anxiety for many Kabulis, because they are not certain whether they can buy and build in any given area of the city without having their house expropriated and demolished at some future time for some future development plan. Ostensibly the 1978 GenPlan was suspended in 2004 by Presidential decree, at the urging of the Minister of Urban Development. But ever since the Ministry began to conflict with the Municipality in 2002, the urban public has been waiting anxiously for a clear, Concrete indication of the pattern of future urban development. The plan-implementation staff at the Municipality agree that it is time for an updated plan, because the GenPlan only forecasted to 2003, and because a great deal of development has occurred outside of the control of the Municipality since 1978. But until a new Plan is developed, they are continuing to implement the 1978 Plan within their means (Bakhtar, 2007). In May of 2007 senior Ministry staff finally began to meet formally with Municipality staff and discuss the new urban development plan which they are completing. I have seen how the new plan focuses on major urban expansion to the north, but it is unclear how the new plan will address the existing, problematic city.

The third mode of planning in Kabul is what I call mirrorglass. This is exceptionalist planning, an elite form of informal planning done by those powerful enough to corrupt or ignore existing regulations and social rules. The term Mirrorglass comes from both the reflective windows which are used in the construction of luxury housing, and the tinted windows on vehicles used by the elite. Mirrorglass also represents the secretive, ephemeral quality of the foreigners and Afghan expatriates who may or may not stay in Kabul if the situation becomes very difficult. Mirrorglass also represents the class difference between Afghan elites and the vast majority of Afghan society, and it represents the security perimeter and practices of difference that separate foreigners from the rest of Kabul.

Mirrorglass planning is not a simple mode to explain, and I was tempted to separate out the planning processes of the foreign presence into a fourth mod. But the diverse processes within this mode of planning are all exceptionalist in some way, and they overlap enough that it makes sense to hold them together. For instance, there seems to be a certain thug aesthetic among foreign security contractors here which is emulated by the staff of Afghan commanders and warlords. Furthermore the Afghan elite include many Afghan-Americans and Afghan-Europeans who hold foreign passports and get paid at the international pay-scale while working for the aid industry. This imbrication of the foreign presence and the current ruling class also means that foreigners are associated with a culture of corrupt officials, and with narcotics traffickers—the three types of people who appear in public in large SUVs with armed guards. This is unfortunate because most staff of NGOs and other organizations abide by rule-bound behavior in their work. It is in their private lifestyles and urban movements

that they set themselves apart, and sometimes in their treatment of Afghan staff. Likewise most Afghan officials do not operate in this mode, as I described in the process of Concrete planning. But an unfortunately large fraction of the Afghan leadership are emulating their American patrons, who regard themselves as above Afghan law.

Mirrorglass manifests in Afghan planning in several ways. First of all, the elite do not share the same anxiety about suspended formal plans that most Kabulis do. They build a villa wherever they obtain land, confident that they will not be removed. In some cases this also benefits poor informals, such as when former President Rabbani built a villa in an informal district in direct violation of the GenPlan. Neighbors gained some degree of protection from wholesale demolition of the area by the presence of Rabbani. Some shared infrastructure may also be improved, such as roads and drains; and the Ministry of Water and Power might be more reluctant to cut the power to that neighborhood now that Rabbani has moved in.

Secondly, Mirrorglass has become a major mode of development at the urban edge. There are eighteen *shahraks*, or new little cities, being developed around Kabul at present. Two of them are being developed officially by the government. But even those two are not being developed by the Municipality, nor even the Ministry of Urban Development. They are being developed by the Office of Economic Development within the Office of the President (Pathak, 2007). So President Karzai himself is now involved in the developmental regime of Kabul. The remaining sixteen *shahraks* are being developed by private companies, under the protection of various powerful officials. So the urban regime of Kabul is a developmental regime, similar to Los Angeles in the 1920s.

Although I can give specific examples to illustrate each of these modes of planning, in the process of development these distinctions are not clear-cut. For example, many of the large buildings which are being built by right in western Kabul mainly fall within the Concrete mode of planning. They are very substantial investments in the future development of Kabul, often undertaken at considerable financial risk. But how are they financed? Who in Kabul has the cash to underwrite large construction loans? I may never be able to confirm the rumors because of the danger involved, but it appears that the narcotics traffickers are investing heavily in the reconstruction of Kabul, either as lenders or as developers themselves. In essence, then, opium is financing the new urban development in Kabul. Even if Concrete planning is rule-bound and transparent in the location, scale, and type of land use, the means of paying for it may not be legal.

This raises a larger question. How do various ideologies and paradigms interact in the planning of Kabul? The general perception from the outside is that the big contestation is between political Islam and Western imperialism. In the development of Kabul, though, this conflict does not manifest clearly. At the material level, mosques and madrasas are being built legally and fall within the Concrete mode. Islamists, like the Soviet-educated Municipality planners, seem to prefer rule-bound behavior, as do the staff of Western NGOs. All three also share a strong social-justice agenda, although their visions of social justice vary significantly. Westerners and communists agree with each other about social justice and gender, and tend to disagree with the Islamists on this issue. But Westerners and communists disagree sharply about a vision of the modern future of Kabul: one with tenure-security granted to informals, the other with a modern city in which all people can live in solid housing with proper infrastructure. Supposedly Islamists and communist Afghans should despise each other, given the wars in the 1980s and 1990s. But in practice I have not found that to be the case. At Kabul Polytechnic University, which was set up with Soviet assistance and still uses a Soviet curriculum, I found much more open profession of Islam than at the American-affiliated Kabul University. Furthermore the United Front, a political party that was formed in Parliament this spring, includes both old mujahidin leaders and some of their former communist foes (Tarzi 2007). Despite extreme ideological differences, Afghans engage in negotiation with each other in ways that often surprise outsiders.

Some aspects of Western practice are also being adopted by Afghans such as a competitive independent media, and a major home-grown NGO movement. But there seem to be two problems with the Western presence, one which is obvious and one which is far less apparent. The obvious problem is that Westerners support and promote exceptionalism in many ways. The release of Daniele Mastrogiacomo and the death of Ajmal Naqshbandi is a recent vivid example of this. The message that Afghans received from this was that President Karzai would release key Taliban prisoners to save the life of an Italian, and nothing for a respected Afghan journalist. Exceptionalism erodes the legitimacy of the government, and this particular incident provoked Afghans to refer to their President with disgust; a tone that I had not heard before.

The less apparent, but urbanistically significant impact of Westerners is on property relations. Americans regard real property as a capital asset in a way which is subtly but significantly different from Afghans. In his classic work on transformations of political economies within modernity, Karl Polanyi warns that treating land, labor, and money as pure commodities is socially destabilizing (Polanyi, 2001). We have just deferred a recession in the United States through a round of refinancing which resulted in a massive shift of home equity from the borrowers—the working class—to the lenders. And the lenders, in the globalized financial architecture we have built, are a transnational class of increasing volatility and ephemerality. The long-term social impact of this shift is just beginning to be theorized by American planners. And yet Americans bring this ideology of land-as-capital to their involvement in Afghanistan, applying pressure to Afghans to conform through donor meetings and project terms-of-reference. On June 22 of this year a BBC correspondent announced that "Afghans are primed

for a mortgage revolution." The Ministry of Urban Development plans to finance the development of the largest *shahrak* north of Kabul through mortgage-lending to home buyers. I quote the Minister: "Mortgage is the only way we can make homes affordable to our middle class." It sounds, thus far, as though he is echoing Margaret Thatcher's 'There Is No Alternative' mantra for neoliberal economic reforms. But the Minister's next sentence reveals his skepticism: "New Kabul will prove whether it works" (Biswas, 2007). The danger of reconceptualizing urban space as commodity is what David Harvey (Harvey, 1989) calls the privileging of exchange-value over use-value, which leads to the privileging of property-rights over the right to the city, the rights to urban livelihoods and effective citizenship.

The Politics of Opacity and Negotiation

In closing I want to consider the modernity emergent from this contested terrain. In *Seeing Like a State*, James Scott argues that one of the technologies of modern government is to render the society legible through enumeration, the promulgation of standards from weights and measures, and prosaic practices such as address-systems (Scott, 1998). AbdouMalik Simone, in contrast, argues that 'the invisible' is a major political force in the urbanization of South Africa. He describes invisibility as a defense of the vulnerable against a state which constantly threatens the shifting, contingent livelihoods outside of the formal economy (Simone, 2004). This is the strategy employed in the Clay mode of planning. Whether they are subdividing land which they customarily own or squatting on land that might be claimed by the state, informal settlers do not want the state to know what they are doing. In the Mirrorglass mode, even if elites are part of the state, they do not want to inform other parts of the state about their activities. Therefore in defense against both the Clay and Mirrorglass modes, many formal planners in the Concrete mode also conceal their intentions. Until 2007, the Plan Implementation Office of Kabul Municipality would not let foreigners or Afghans obtain a copy of the 1978 GenPlan. They explained this to me as defense against unethical speculation, because they feared that wealthy Afghans would buy up undeveloped land and charge a premium to the city for expropriation. However I think no small part of their secretiveness was resentment towards Westerners, who opposed socialist values and began disparaging the GenPlan as soon as they occupied Kabul in 2002. As a result of this rough consensus about maintaining opacity, Kabul has no address system nor is one likely to be implemented in the foreseeable future. Perhaps ten streets in the entire city have names. Foreigners and locals have completely unrelated mental maps of the city. If I need to find a hotel or guesthouse used by foreign aid workers, I either need to find an aid worker and ask them or, if I am lucky enough to guess the general area, I can begin to ask guards on the street. Invitations to parties among foreigners often use landmarks which no local, not even a taxi driver, would know. Conversely, Kabulis visualize the city as districts and intersections, and once you learn the major intersections and their relationship to where you want to go, you can travel across the city quite quickly for forty cents or less. Very few foreigners ever learn this geography, and so whole communities inhabit the same city but do not coexist in the sense of public encounter or shared knowledge. Slowly this is changing. The fewer NGOs which remain are actively seeking to integrate with the larger urban society both as an alternative security strategy, and out of a genuine interest in and commitment to Afghan culture. Turquoise Mountain Foundation, a recently-established NGO which is restoring a historic quarter of Kabul, had to get formal permission from the Municipality, the neighborhood, and the district representative to begin its work last year.

This trend toward the Concrete mode of planning is an indicator that Afghans are beginning to successfully integrate the extraordinarily disparate regimes of knowledge they have experienced. Abdul Haq Wardak, my host at Kabul Polytechnic University, begins each class with a collective prayer, a *d'uay-e shuru*. He listens to my descriptions of Western planning theory with interest, and encourages his students to ask questions. But he also points out the way that Soviet standards for high-rise construction are quite nuanced and allow for site-specific design. Urban planning in Kabul may end up incorporating more disparate threads of modernity than any city I have known. I wish more scholars were studying this remarkable transitional moment.

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