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Mariam & Ashraf Ghani

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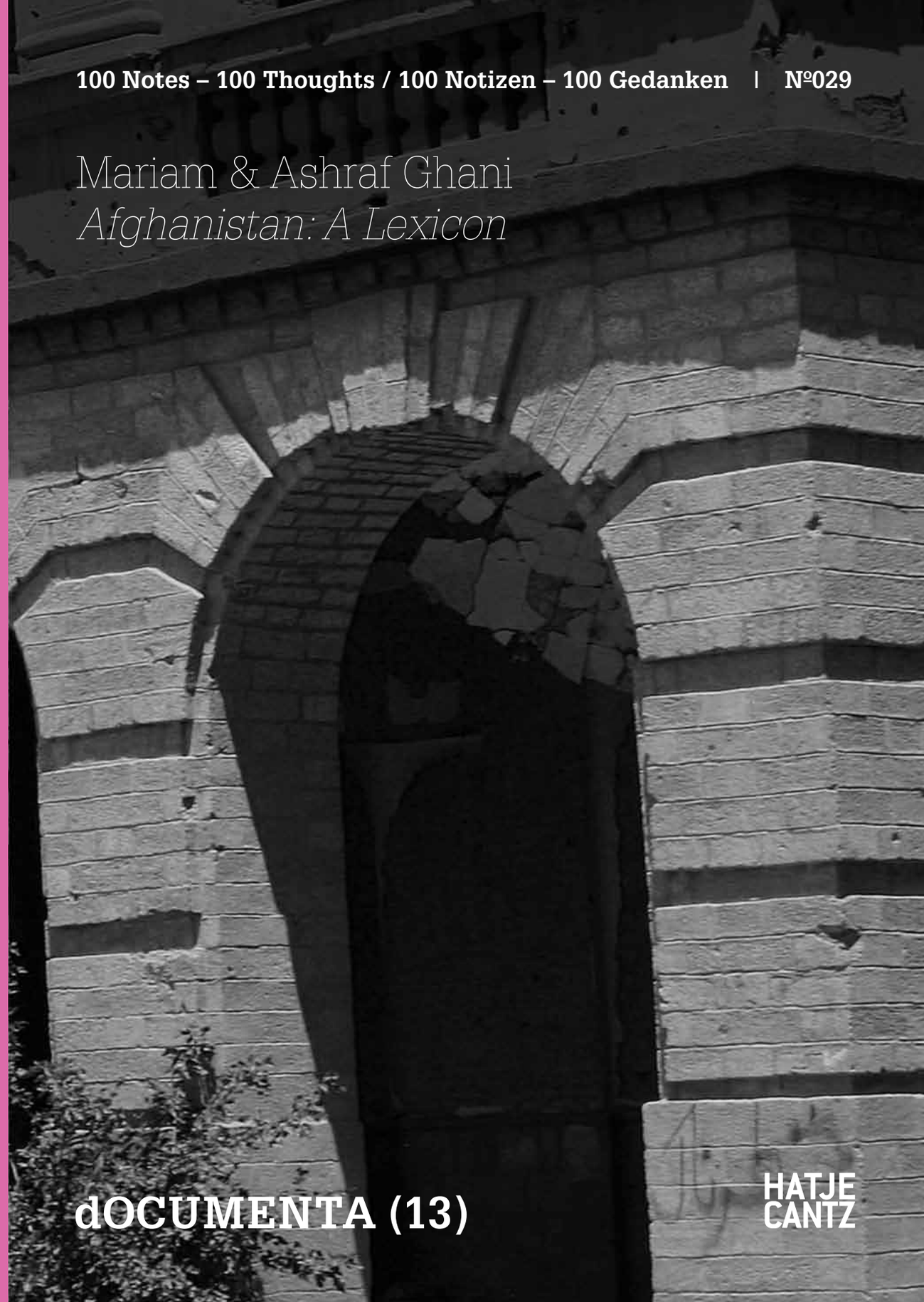
Afghanistan: A Lexicon



dOCUMENTA (13)

HATJE CANTZ

Mariam & Ashraf Ghani *Afghanistan: A Lexicon**

(*selective; associative; may include myth, speculation, and rumor as well as facts)

*Afghanistan: A Lexicon** uses the form of a lexicon to present a nonlinear narrative of twentieth-century Afghan history as a recursive loop of modernization attempts, revolts, collapses, and recoveries. The lexicon covers seventy-one terms, most illustrated by archival and original images, including: vocabulary unique to Afghan politics, like *bi-tarafi*, *jirga*, and *nizamnamah*; terms that have specific meanings or resonances in the Afghan context, like "infidel," "martyr," and *spetsnaz*; key players and places, from Bacha-i-Saqqao to Hizb-i-Islami and from the Bala Hissar to the Microrayan; and special entries on recurrent events and themes that form the weft and warp of the century, like constitutions, coup d'état, exile, fire, invasion, opposites, reform, unfinished, and vanishing. The lexicon begins with a close reading of the reign of King Amanullah (1919–29), whose successes and failures set the pattern for subsequent Afghan reformers. Amanullah's influence is followed through, among other things, a series of entries linked to his Dar ul-Aman Palace and the larger plan for a "new city" of which it was a part, tracing how Dar ul-Aman shapes the spatial politics of the twentieth century—as space of exception, site of contention, prototype for future plans, and symbol of past failures.

Amanullah

Amanullah ruled Afghanistan from 1919 to 1929, first as amir and then, after he changed his own title, as king. During his brief reign, Amanullah launched an ambitious program of modernization from above, which was cut off prematurely by a revolt from below. After inheriting autocratic power built through immense repression by his grandfather Abdur Rahman, who had reigned from 1880 to 1901, and his father, Habibullah, who had ruled from 1901 to 1919, he attempted to turn that power toward transforming the organization of both state and society. His many reforms included promulgating rule of law through Afghanistan's first constitution and the wide-ranging regulations of the *nizamnamah*; investing in education through literacy programs, study abroad, and the building of primary, secondary, and technical schools; promoting unveiling and the end of purdah (the separation of women from society); encouraging intellectual exchange by fostering an active press, literary societies, and archaeological missions; transforming the traditional institution of the *Loya Jirga*, or Grand Council, into a mechanism for public consultation; winning Afghanistan's independence from Britain, and forging new relationships with Europe and the Soviet Union; and large-scale urban planning, represented in theory by the regulations for Laghman, Paghman, and Dar ul-Aman and in practice by the partial completion of the "new city" of Dar ul-Aman, just to the west of Kabul.

While he accomplished a remarkable amount during his ten years in power, Amanullah did not succeed in permanently changing Afghanistan, since his ultimate failure to forge a broad political consensus for his reforms left him vulnerable to rural rebellion. After returning from a prolonged European tour, he attempted to speed up modernization by arguing for more radical reforms in a marathon speech at a 1928 *Loya Jirga*, after which his previous base of support among the elite was fractured, fragmented, and finally weakened beyond repair. In 1929, a relatively minor revolt (possibly fomented by British agents and factions of the divided elite) forced Amanullah out of the capital and ultimately into exile, and put into power a new dynasty that reversed many of his most innovative initiatives. Amanullah spent the rest of his life in Europe, where he brooded over what had gone wrong. Both his reforms and his failures have set the pattern for successive generations of Afghan modernizers, who have returned again and again to his unfinished project, only to succumb to their own blind spots and collapse in their own ways.

Arg

In the revolt of 1929, much of the fighting took place around the Arg, the palace built by Amanullah's grandfather Abdur Rahman after the fall of the Bala Hissar. When Habibullah Kalakani and his rebels took Kabul from Amanullah and when Habibullah was overthrown, scant months later, by Nadir Khan and his Musahiban brothers, the scenes of conflict centered around the Arg. Amanullah's new city of Dar ul-Aman and its new royal palace

were (perhaps because they were situated outside the city center) left out of the conflict entirely. When Nadir became the new king, Amanullah's plans to move into the new city and the never-quite-completed Tajbeg, or Queen's Palace, were scrapped, and the royal family retreated behind the walls and gates of the Arg. Today, the president occupies the Arg, and its gates are further reinforced by a system of concrete blocks and barricades, checkpoints, and scanners. The Arg is in one of contemporary Kabul's no-photo zones, the military and diplomatic quarters where no camera can go, so we must look at it instead as it was in the 1960s, when Zahir Shah was king.

Bacha-i-Saqqao

Habibullah Kalakani or Ghazi, the Tajik who led the rural revolt against Amanullah, is colloquially known as Bacha-i-Saqqao, or the "son of the water carrier." Depending on who uses this epithet, it may be meant as an insult or as the title of a folk hero. The distinction may be drawn from the alignment each speaker chooses relative to the photograph shown to the right. Would he have sympathized with the rebels executed by hanging in a public square, or would he have been in the crowd of watchers, applauding with sangfroid or schadenfreude as the temporary king and his entourage met their deaths?

Bala Hissar

A fortress marks boundaries of exclusion through its walls, gates, and parapets. Both the Arg and the Bala Hissar are, to different degrees, fortresses. To reach the actual building inside the boundaries, you must pass through a series of walls with ceremonial gates, while simultaneously traversing a ladder of hierarchies. In the Bala Hissar, these layers of hierarchy were further reinforced by its strategic position on top of the "emerald mountain," which physically dominates the landscape of the city of Kabul. It was built to withstand sieges and to support an entire *khanadan*, a household or retinue, in the feudal sense—everyone from the lowest to the highest, every hour of the day. The Bala Hissar construes a holder of power who is outside and above the daily affairs of the state, but also confined to the space of the fortress and contracted to its defense. Because the fortress is closed, as a space of power or politics it cannot support a social contract in any modern sense; it implies a legitimacy secured by other means. The fortress itself seems to have been constructed and reconstructed through a process of accretion; no exact dates mark the beginnings or stages of its usage. The photograph you see here was taken by John Burke as he accompanied Anglo-Indian army columns deployed in the Second Anglo-Afghan War (1878–80), during which the Bala Hissar was first occupied and then destroyed by the British.

Bi-tarafi

The foundation of classical Afghan politics, *bi-tarafi* could be translated as "non-aligned," or as "playing both sides against the middle" in order to gain the greatest advantage or maintain the most independence. Afghanistan's *bi-tarafi* stance in the nineteenth century was derived from its position as the Central Asian buffer state between two imperial powers in the Great Game of the British and Russian Empires. *Bi-tarafi* was revived in the twentieth century as Afghanistan, particularly under Prime Minister Daoud, used Cold War competition to bring flows of aid into the country from both the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R. The climax of *bi-tarafi* may have been reached when Afghanistan maneuvered the U.S.S.R. and the U.S.A. into de facto cooperation to build a highway system. The U.S.S.R. built the northern sections, the U.S.A. the southern sections, and they met in the middle. (The Soviets later used the system they built to send tanks south to Kabul in 1979; the tunnels, bridges, and roads were all built to the precise specifications of the Soviet military machine.) Some Afghans believe that Afghanistan was lost at the moment it abandoned *bi-tarafi*. However, they rarely agree on precisely when that occurred.

Bourgeoisie

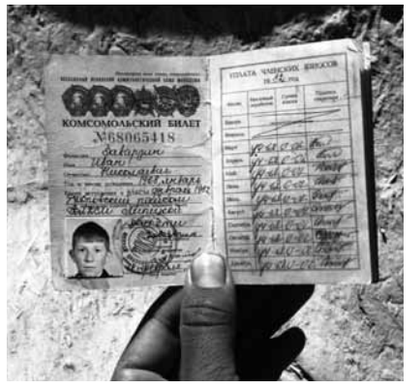
The bourgeoisie, in Afghanistan, has never really overlapped with the "middle class" in any traditional sense, perhaps because Afghanistan still does not really have a middle class. In Afghanistan, the bourgeoisie was not a merchant class that emerged between the aristocracy and the peasantry. Instead, it was a cultural category that emanated from Amanullah's royal palace and from the households of the Mohammadzai royal lineage, some of whom had experienced long periods of exile in India or the Ottoman Empire. Within these households, first men and then women adopted Western dress and what they thought were modern manners. When Amanullah modernized education and professionalized government bureaucracy, these styles and habits expanded beyond the original bourgeoisie, the royal family, to the growing civil service. The bazaar and its merchants, however, largely retained their own cultural forms. One side effect of this condition is that Afghanistan did not have an avant-garde who tried to *épater la bourgeoisie*, but rather a bourgeoisie who usually managed to *épater* everyone else.

Bureaucracy

While the Bala Hissar takes advantage of its position overlooking the city to construct itself as a space of domination and hierarchy, the Dar ul-Aman Palace is deliberately constructed as a space of intersection and connection. Four roads lead to the palace, which is slightly elevated on an artificial mound, but whose position is not marked by major natural barriers or hills. Dar ul-Aman's hierarchy is not based on physical domination; instead, it derives from and depends on bureaucracy. The spatial plan of the building—for example, the separation of rooms by governmental function—is delineated by a series of rules, just as Amanullah's larger vision for Afghanistan was governed by the rules and procedures of the *nizamnamah*. Similarly, Dar ul-Aman projects its authority into the open space surrounding it through the contractual order of urban planning rather than the physical fact of fortification. Randomness is removed from the new city, which is made up of straight lines and geometric forms, because the map of this new space precedes its physical construction, and its regulations prohibit deviations from the plans embodied in that map. As both the civil service and the educational systems were modernized and expanded under Amanullah, his regulations simultaneously created the class of bureaucrats that would fill the spaces of the bureaucratic order.

Communists

Just as Amanullah had an image of the West derived from books and short visits, the Afghan Communists had a bookish vision of Communism mediated through the writings of the Iranian Tudeh Party and the Indian Communists, and expressed through their literary journals, *Khalq* (The People) and *Parcham* (The Flag). Both journals died quick deaths under the ambiguously written and ambivalently enforced "Free Press Law" of the 1960s, but bequeathed their names to the two wings of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA). Their internal rivalry both before and especially after taking power in the "Saur Revolution" of 1978 (named after the month in which it took place) became the driver for a series of bloody assassinations, coups, and purges. Political parties grew in strange ways in twentieth-century Afghanistan, perhaps because they were only ever officially legalized in one-party systems—not unlike the experience of the Soviets who would invade in 1979, carrying their party cards (whose childhood photographs bore mute witness to mandated registration) in their army backpacks.



Constitutions

A constitution, defined as a set of written rules that defines the order of a society, is an idea formulated in eighteenth-century Europe and the U.S. During the twentieth century, this Western idea became nearly universal. In Afghanistan, Amanullah's foundational constitution of 1923 was followed by Nadir's in 1931, which reiterated the same principles in a slightly weaker form. The "decade of democracy" (1963–73) soon saw the new constitution of 1964, which introduced a constitutional monarchy and enabled a man from outside the royal lineage, Dr. Yusuf, to become prime minister for the first time since 1929. After Prince Daoud's coup in 1973, a new constitution was prepared and approved by a *Loya Jirga* in 1976–77. The Communist coup of 1978 brought a series of new attempts at constitution-making, with successive drafts ratified by the Revolutionary Council in 1980 and 1985, and a more conciliatory amendment introduced by the Najibullah regime in 1990 and ratified by a *jirga*. The current constitution has been in force since 2004. An appointed Constitutional Commission prepared a draft, which was subjected to intense public debate and then discussed and amended by a Constitutional *Loya Jirga* until consensus was reached. Because the political culture of Afghanistan is deeply embedded in Islam (historically the factor that unified the disparate regions and groups of the country), every constitution has contained clauses that define Afghanistan as an Islamic republic or articulate the primacy of Islam as the religion of its citizens, at least 99 percent of whom are in fact Muslims. Regardless of faith, period, or iteration, however, the constitutionally guaranteed rights of citizens have always been more aspired to in words than realized in fact.

Construction

The construction of Amanullah's new city of Dar ul-Aman represented a radical break with traditional building design, materials, and techniques. Government-contracted architects and engineers prepared a set number of standardized plans for private villas, and plots of land were sold along with a choice of house plan. Instead of mud and unbaked bricks, solid wood and stone were procured by the government and sold to plot owners at low cost. The government also formed a private construction company that specialized in building the new houses. While many Germans collaborated on the project, it was funded entirely by Afghan resources, without international assistance, since Amanullah's reign represents the only period in Afghan history when the country subsisted without foreign aid. Considering the lack of technical sophistication in Afghanistan at the time construction began, Dar ul-Aman's first quarter and two central palaces were constructed with remarkable speed. In the full, unrealized plan, each quarter of Dar ul-Aman was mapped out to include a mix of public and private space, including public parks and other green spaces. Private villas were also regulated to include substantial gardens and front (but not back) walls low enough for neighbors to see each other's front gardens.

The integrated plan also provided for a public commons made up of new government buildings, an urban district, warehouses and factories, a train line from the city center, and the widest roads in the city. The very few buildings that were constructed and still survive speak to the strength of this underlying conception. Unfortunately, Amanullah's innovative alignment of theory and practice, vision and mobilization, innovation and managerial capacity, was not followed up by the new dynasty. Some of the principles pioneered by Dar ul-Aman gradually resurfaced in the public housing projects of the 1930s to the 1950s, however, perhaps due to the influence of Nawruz Khan, who served as the Afghan project manager of Dar ul-Aman from 1927 to 1929 and subsequently rose to be minister of finance and speaker of Parliament.

Continuity

Until the twentieth century, occupations were organized and inherited through an informal structure reminiscent of professional guilds. The artisanal skills of the building trade were passed down from father to son, while literacy was largely confined to the religious establishment, from which it was passed on only to royals or aristocrats or to those exceptional students who gained the attention of the ulema (Muslim scholars, although the term is sometimes used to denote all religious leaders) in the network of mosques and madrassas (religious schools). The officer class of the military was generally linked to the royal family, and the rest of the army was either volunteer (often whole kinship-linked units fighting together) or conscripted (with tribal elders responsible for picking the conscripts). The high schools and military schools established by Habibullah and expanded by Amanullah, along with the professionalization of the civil service, military, and construction industry under Amanullah, radically changed these traditional structures and created new ties and paths that can be traced through the subsequent century. For example, seven hundred Afghans were trained as skilled craftsmen during the construction of Dar ul-Aman. Although no histories of their lives have yet been written, we can imagine these craftsmen as the one element of continuity that persists through all the disruptions and ruptures of the early twentieth century, since their skills must have been deployed in a whole series of construction and housing projects that, though small by comparison with the grand vision of Dar ul-Aman, gradually expanded and reshaped Kabul from the beginning of the 1930s up to the end of the 1950s. In a parallel thread, the architects who designed the projects, like Karteseh mastermind Abdullah Breshna (son of Abdul Ghafur Breshna, the German-trained painter and founder of the Afghan Academy of Fine Arts), were trained at the technical schools built by the self-styled *Darulaman-Herren*, the German architects and engineers of Dar ul-Aman. Other submerged continuities include the generations of Afghan students whose political futures were shaped by their education abroad, including the military officers trained in the U.S.S.R. during the Daoud era, who later became allies of the Afghan Communists and helped bring about Daoud's downfall.

Coup d'état

The three decades of conflict that decimated Afghanistan were precipitated by a series of coups d'état. The "bloodless" coup of 1973, which ended the monarchy, seemed at first like a palace revolution, as Prince Daoud, the first cousin and brother-in-law of the king, overthrew him without violent conflict and assumed power as the head of a republic. The coalitions into which Daoud had entered to engineer his coup, however, provided the seed of the very bloody coup of April 1978, which brought the PDPA, the Communist party of Afghanistan, to power. Daoud was violently overthrown; he and his entire family were murdered and secretly buried in the courtyard of Pul-e-Charkhi prison. Palace intrigues became a feature of the Communist regime, resulting in the killing of its first head of state, Nur Mohammed Taraki, in 1978; the assassination of its second leader, Hafizullah Amin, during the Soviet invasion of 1979; and then the more peaceful easing out of Babrak Karmal by Dr. Najib in 1985. After the Red Army withdrew in 1989, Tanai, Najib's minister of defense, launched an unsuccessful coup from Dar ul-Aman, which served at the time as the seat of his ministry. After the defeat of his coup, Tanai fled to Pakistan to join the mujahidin. Meanwhile, Najib's power collapsed when his party members and the militias he had armed to fight the mujahidin joined forces to overthrow him. The mujahidin government that came to power in 1992 formally retained continuity until 2001; the disputes among its constituent parts, however, engulfed the country in intense conflict and created an opening for the Taliban, who from 1994 to 2001 managed to expand their sway over most of the territory of the country, leaving the formally recognized government of Burhanuddin Rabbani confined to a small territory. After the ousting of the Taliban in 2001, the Bonn Agreement provided for a peaceful transfer of power between the Rabbani government and a new interim authority headed by Hamid Karzai, followed by presidential elections in 2005 and 2009. Twenty-first-century Afghanistan has so far been spared any coups, which can probably be attributed equally to the continued presence of international forces in the country, and the overwhelming desire for stability after years of political unrest.

Dams

Afghans have always had to build irrigation systems to make agriculture possible, and since ancient times all of Afghanistan's major cities have been built on river basins. From small *karez*, underground canals, to entire rivers, Afghanistan's precious water supplies are regulated by complex social systems devised for their communal operation, maintenance, and use. However, the current population explosion, propelled by the return of millions of refugees, has put immense pressure on irrigation systems already overtaxed by the neglect and destruction of the war years. The rules have begun to break down, and rural conflicts over water rights often erupt into violence. Today, only 10 percent of Afghanistan's water is managed through modern dams, and only some of those

dams generate electric power; less than 10 percent of the population have access to state-generated electricity. In the 1950s, however, a forgotten generation of technocrats dreamed of mastering the Helmand river. Using millions of USAID dollars, they set up a U.S.-Afghan Helmand-Arghandab Valley Authority (modeled on the Tennessee Valley Authority) and remade the Ghaznavid garrison town Lashkar Gah in the image of an American suburb to provide housing for Morrison-Knudsen engineers, who called it "Little America." From 1957 to 1979, hundreds of small projects extended irrigation from the floodplain of the river out into the desert beyond, where new towns were constructed and people enticed or, in the case of nomads, forcibly re-settled to populate them. The early years of farming the new land proved quite difficult, and as in many large-scale water projects, subsidies had to be offered to the settlers. (During the war years, most of the region came under the control of a mujahidin commander and was replanted with opium poppies; it now produces roughly 40 percent of the world's opium supply, despite all American efforts to spray, burn, or otherwise eradicate the crops.) The crown jewel of the HAVA was the giant Kajaki Dam, meant to generate power for both Lashkar Gah and Kandahar. The dam had not yet been completed, however, when U.S. aid and personnel withdrew from Afghanistan after the Soviet invasion of 1979. It fell into disrepair during the war years, but was put back into use by the Taliban just before being carpet-bombed by the U.S. in 2001. Since 2004, U.S. and British forces have been trying to rehabilitate the dam, but progress is extremely slow due to resistance from the Taliban. Since the U.S. Army is vast and the Taliban of today (a convenient name for a Hydra-headed insurgency) is not precisely the Taliban of yesteryear (a more organized and coherent force that was, by 2001, able to function as a government), it seems unlikely that the same men who once repaired the dam now try to destroy it, while the same men who once destroyed the dam try to repair it. But in Afghanistan the ironies of history can be particularly acute.

Daoud

Prince Daoud, the cousin and brother-in-law of King Zahir, was the most forceful member of the royal dynasty that ruled from 1929 to 1973, when he himself overthrew it to serve as the first president of Afghanistan's new republic. He was educated at a French lycée and served briefly as ambassador to France, was made a general while still in his early twenties, then served successively as a provincial governor, commander of the central forces, minister of the interior, minister of defense, and prime minister. During his decade as prime minister (1953–63), he was the dominant figure in the country, making both domestic- and foreign-policy decisions. His greatest legacy remains the large infrastructure projects, particularly dams and roads, which knitted the country together until they were destroyed during the conflicts of the 1980s. In 1955, breaking the cycle of isolation imposed by the U.S. on the Soviet Union in the region, he signed an agreement with Soviet leaders

that resulted in a commitment of $100 million in Soviet aid to Afghanistan. After the Bandung Conference, Daoud embraced *bi-tarafi*, or non-alignment—famously remarking that he liked to light his American cigarette with a Russian match—and attracted American and European assistance as well. Both as prime minister and as president, Daoud engaged in a foreign policy of confrontation with Pakistan, which was a key factor in his removal from power in 1963. His most fateful decision, however, was to send Afghan army officers to the Soviet Union for training. These officers, who eventually aligned themselves with the Khalq faction of the PDPA, became his allies in the coup of 1973, but turned against him in 1978 when he attempted to repress the Communist party and arrest its leaders. Ultimately, Daoud misread the global environment into which he launched his coup. Expecting support for a nationalist project from the Soviet Union, he soon discovered that the U.S.S.R. of the 1970s was not pursuing the same goals as the U.S.S.R. of the 1950s. He attempted to change course by entering into partnership with Iran, courting Saudi Arabia, and studying Anwar Sadat of Egypt to learn how to remove Soviet advisers and influence from Afghanistan. But these attempts came too late, and in too repressive a form, to prevent the Communist coup that would end in the brutal murder of Daoud and his family. Daoud had taken up Amanullah's project of reform from above, but with a more authoritarian approach. He succeeded in lifting the veil, building up infrastructure and technical capacity, and supporting higher education; he was not, however, interested in promoting a free press or free discussion of ideas, and this aversion to dissent ultimately cost him his life.

Dar ul-Aman

Dar ul-Aman, which translates as "abode of peace," is the name of both the district imagined by Amanullah as his ideal "new city," and the Dar ul-Aman Palace that was to be its center. While Amanullah's ambitious plan for the district was never realized, one out of four quarters and two of the major public buildings, including the Dar ul-Aman Palace, were almost completed when a rural rebellion forced Amanullah into exile. A French architect had drawn up the original plans, but after diplomatic relations were established between Germany and Afghanistan, the mayor of Berlin sent Walter Harten and his team of twenty-two architects and town planners to Kabul in October 1926 (including Wilhelm Rieck, who took the photograph to the right). Harten's team took over the district planning, which included preparing the detailed specs for the Dar ul-Aman Palace. The team recruited 700 sixth-grade graduates and put them through a six-month training program to become artisans and skilled builders for the project. Including unskilled laborers, around 1,000 workers were employed; estimated spending on materials and labor totaled 25 million Afs. The palace was 33 meters high, and each floor had 5,400 square meters of space. The big oval theater on the third floor was designed to be the *Majlis*, the meeting place of Parliament; the first floor, overlooking the great

road, was intended as offices of the king, his private secretaries, and the ministries of the court (*wazirs*). Decoration was worked with gypsum in the ceilings and very elaborate woodwork, particularly in the *Majlis*. The palace was the first building in Afghanistan to have access to both central heating and a regular water supply through integrated pipes. When Zahir Shah's administration renovated Dar ul-Aman after the fire of 1968, the facade was kept the same, but the inside was considerably reworked, including the introduction of false ceilings to make heating less expensive, twenty-four modern bathrooms, a library, and floors-within-floors to maximize office space. After Amanullah was exiled and his plan for the district abandoned, Dar ul-Aman was used successively as Kabul University's medical school, a storage space for raisins, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Public Works, the Ministry of Justice and Supreme Court, the General Staff building, the Ministry of Defense, a mujahidin base camp, a refugee camp, and temporary housing for resettled nomads. These days it is also occasionally used as a film set. The abode of peace has survived at least three fires and two coups, but has never hosted a meeting of Parliament, though a new Parliament building is now being constructed on a nearby plot of land that also once belonged to the lost dream of the new city of Dar ul-Aman.

Dynasties

During its long history, Afghanistan has witnessed the passing of many dynasties. Some are remembered as mythical, as in the epic stories of Firdausi's *Shahnameh*, or the Story of the Kings. Others have left markers in history or monuments, like the Ashoka Rock Edicts or the Blue Mosque of Herat. Afghanistan as we think of it today began with Ahmad Shah Durrani (1747–73), who established the Saddozai dynasty in Kandahar and quickly expanded to an empire encompassing contemporary Afghanistan, Pakistan, Kashmir, and parts of Iran. Wars among his grandsons brought an end to this dynasty in 1826. Dost Muhammad, the ruler of Kabul, gradually unified the territory of contemporary Afghanistan during his second reign, 1842–63. His sons again engulfed the country in a civil war that lasted from 1863 to 1869. Sher Ali, his third son, unified the country and ruled from 1869 to 1879, created a modern army, established a cabinet, and laid the foundations of a civil administration. The British invasion of 1879 resulted in his overthrow and the exile of his son and successor to India. Abdur Rahman, Sher Ali's nephew, established a new dynasty in 1880 that lasted until 1929. The three rulers of this dynasty displayed three different types of temperament and leadership. Abdur Rahman was a brutal centralizer who created an autocratic order; his son Habibullah ruled over a relatively peaceful country (which he managed to keep out of the First World War) and allowed the first newspaper and modern schools to be established; Amanullah was an ambitious reformer ultimately brought down by rural rebellion. Amanullah's distant cousin Nadir Shah (1929–33) established the last of Afghanistan's royal dynasties. His brief reign ended when he was assassinated by a student. His son Zahir Shah ruled from 1933 to 1973, although his uncles, the other Musahiban brothers, served as regents during the early years of his reign. From 1826 to 1973, all the dynasties were formed by members of the Mohammadzai lineage. The distant relationship between Amanullah and Nadir (pictured together on the opposite page during Amanullah's military service), however, made for some dynastic uncertainty in the early Musahiban years. Ironically, the uncertainty only fully evaporated after the Soviet invasion, when the dynasty had already lost the crown. The series of dislocations and excesses that followed that invasion gave the exiled Musahibans a retrospective, nostalgic legitimacy; the monarchy of memory, no matter how autocratic, acquired a rosy glow in contrast to the leaders of those desperate times.

Empire

Empires both ancient and modern have formed, fought, and fallen in Afghanistan. Alexander the Great left behind a Greco-Bactrian Empire that dominated the area for the first two centuries of the Common Era. From the eleventh to the fifteenth century, Muslim dynasties like the Ghaznavids and the Ghorids were formed in Afghanistan, and then established new centers of power in India. Babur, the founder of the Moghul Empire (1526–1857), said of Kabul that it was his favorite city on earth. He was the last ruler to use Afghanistan as a base for building an empire in India. From the sixteenth to the eighteenth century, the Moghul, Safavid (Persian), and Uzbek Empires dominated and wrangled over the territory of contemporary Afghanistan, while Ahmad Shah Durrani built his empire by invading India seven times and bringing its riches to Afghanistan. In the nineteenth century, Afghanistan became a field of play in the Great Game between the British and Russian Empires. Britain invaded the country twice, in 1839–42 and 1879–80, but suffered humiliating defeats both times. (The Second Anglo-Afghan War is remembered particularly for the Battle of Maiwand and its legendary heroine Malalai, who exhorted men to battle with her songs.) During the rule of Abdur Rahman, Afghanistan took up the precarious position of buffer state between empires, which Abdur Rahman maintained through a combination of repressive rule over rebellious groups (e.g., harsh treatment of Hazaras, forced resettlement of nomadic Pashtuns), strict isolationism (e.g., no railroads extending from India into Afghanistan), and measured concessions (e.g., the ceding of Panjdeh to the Russian Empire's 1885 annexation). By the time his reign ended and the twentieth century began, the borders of contemporary Afghanistan had been established, drawn largely by British boundary commissions.

Exile

In this photograph, Amanullah and his queen, Soraya, stand in the garden at Dar ul-Aman. To Western eyes they may appear to be dressed for a funeral, and in fact they may be mourning the loss of something (although in Afghanistan the color of grief is not black but white). This is the last photograph taken of Amanullah and Soraya before they left Kabul for their exile, first in Kandahar and finally in Rome. During their European tour, Vittorio Emmanuele had given Amanullah the ceremonial title "Cousin of the King," which (mirroring a real family relationship) rather awkwardly meant that the Italian royals were now duty-bound to offer their Afghan "cousins" a home. Under the new dynasty that replaced them, all photographs of Amanullah and his family were banned from circulation and his name stricken from official discourse. The directive against official mention of Amanullah and his reforms was not relaxed until the 1960s, at Zahir Shah's initiative. After the coup of 1973, Zahir and his family also settled into exile in Rome, but it is not generally known if this was because their actual cousins were there or because their "cousins" were.

Fire

The Dar ul-Aman Palace burned three times in the twentieth century, on December 14, 1968; December 27, 1979; and March 7, 1990. The 1979 fire was caused by grenades thrown by *spetsnaz* operatives, who had taken over Dar ul-Aman on their way to assassinate Hafizullah Amin in the Tajbeg Palace up the hill. The 1990 fire was the result of rockets fired at Dar ul-Aman by government troops loyal to Najibullah when Defense Minister Tanai tried to launch a coup from the palace in concert with Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and the mujahidin of Hizb-e-Islami. *Islah*, the official government newspaper, printed this report of the 1968 fire:

> The Dar ul-Aman Palace caught fire in the early afternoon and continued burning until 12:30 am on the following day. A source from the Ministry of Public Works indicated that the fire was concentrated on the third floor, where the Departments of Roads, Dams and Canals, Administration, Engineering and the Public Works Corporation were housed. The Fire Department reached the building at 2:30 pm sharp, but because the third floor was 18 meters high, the fire came under control only after great effort. The prime minister, expressing great sadness, ordered that this valuable and historic building be restored immediately.

Whispers in the city attributed the destruction to the intolerance of the ruling dynasty for Amanullah, accusing the royal house of sabotage. However, when an inquiry was made, some low-ranking officials were found guilty, fired from their jobs, and forced to sell their assets to compensate the state. Official records do not mention why these men might have been moved to set fire to their own workplace. Those who remember claim that these particular officials had been involved in some sort of corruption—influence-peddling, resource-siphoning, nepotism, the details are hazy—and knew that their misdeeds were about to be discovered, so they set a small fire in the ministry records room in order to destroy the evidence. As they discovered, however, once a fire is started, it can spread in unpredictable ways, snaking forward and backward through time and, almost always, burning more than you bargained for.

Flags

In modern Afghanistan, the national flag has changed as many times as the system of government. Daoud's republic replaced the monarchy's rendition of a palace and wreath with a bold graphic eagle, but each of the various republics that followed has hoisted its own standard, redesigned the logo, and reissued all the government stationery—except the current republic, which has reverted to the flag and symbols used by the old monarchy. Particularly egregious in its symbolic promiscuity was the PDPA, which changed flags nearly every time it changed leadership; this reflected not only the importance of symbolic standard-waving in the Communist system but also the split between the two wings of the Communist party, which extended to their having two different symbolic systems (a book and candle on one side, a sheaf of wheat and sun on the other), which were finally merged into a single, somewhat confusing compound logo (star, book, sun, wheat) during the Najib era.

Games

Games are played to develop the skills of a warrior (swordsmanship, strategy, manual combat), to prepare for the possibility or rehearse the reality of war (as in the photograph to the right, where children act out an air-raid drill in a potato field), to reenact past battles, and to play out scenarios for current conflicts. Games that are not directly related to war are often still discussed in the language of war (teams or players are "locked in combat" or "fighting to the finish"), while wars are often discussed as part of Great Games played by leaders, countries, or empires, moving their armies like pawns across a chess board. Games of all kinds have been played in Afghanistan. But as a buffer state for the Russian and British Empires, a neutral state during both world wars, and then a proxy in Cold War and regional quarrels, Afghanistan has perhaps hosted spy games more often than any others. Since, as befits their covert nature, spy games are usually played in the dark, no one can say for sure how many times they have been played, or how many players participated, or what rules may have been used.

Germans

The new city of Dar ul-Aman, and in particular the public commons planned for its heart and anchored by the Dar ul-Aman Palace, reportedly took inspiration from the central *Platz* (square) of Karlsruhe. Whether this is true or not, the persistence of the story demonstrates the enduring influence of Walter Harten and his team of *Darulaman-Herren*, the German architects and engineers who worked on the Dar ul-Aman project. Their impact extended from the principles informing urban planning, through the transfer of technical skills, to the formation of educational institutions; several high schools were constructed by the *Darulaman-Herren* and retained German affiliations for many years. On their European tour, Amanullah and Soraya met Hindenburg and arranged for more technical assistance and exchange between the two countries; like most of the schemes hatched on that tour, this too was thwarted by the 1929 revolt. The equipment shipped by the Germans apparently arrived in Kabul after the reformer-king was exiled and moldered in crates, unclaimed for many years.

Hizb-e-Islami (Hekmatyar)

Hizb-e-Islami originated in the student politics of Kabul University in the 1960s. A group of students, largely from the School of Engineering, founded a society of Young Muslims and engaged both in competition and physical fights with fellow students who identified themselves as Communist or Maoist. In 1976, some of these Young Muslims attempted to lead a series of rural revolts, but failed to generate any momentum. They had, however, gained the attention of Daoud's regime, which attempted to repress the group. A number of the members, including the young Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and the much older Yunis Khalis, fled to Pakistan, where they received training from Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto's government. They attempted to operate in Afghanistan from their base in northern Pakistan, but without much success, until the radical shift in regional and world politics after the Communist coup brought them backing, first from Pakistan and then from the U.S. and beyond. With this influx of arms and money, Hekmatyar and Khalis each founded and led a faction of Hizb-e-Islami, and both factions were among the seven mujahidin groups officially recognized and supported by the government of Pakistan. Acquiring a reputation for discipline, management, and recruitment of talented youth from the refugee camps and the Afghan exile community, Hekmatyar's Hizb-e-Islami received the lion's share of the American assistance that was distributed through Pakistan's intelligence service, the ISI, which fostered competition among the different factions in order to protect Pakistan from the possibility of a unified armed force rising up to its north. Hizb-e-Islami was both respected and feared in the camps, where it allegedly used brutal force against its opponents and rivals. When Najib's government fell, Hekmatyar became prime minister in a power-sharing arrangement with Rabbani, another former member of the Young Muslims who had studied Islamic law first, in Kabul and then in Egypt. The erstwhile friends resorted to force to settle the division of power, with Hekmatyar bombarding Kabul from a base of operations south of the city. Najib's army split and some of the officers, particularly the Pashtu speakers, joined Hekmatyar in his fight for Kabul against the Northern and partially Tajik forces of Ahmad Shah Massoud, who had become defense minister and the strongman of the Rabbani regime. After the rise of the Taliban, Hekmatyar's Hizb quickly ceded ground and he left Afghanistan for Iran, where he authored a number of books in both Dari and Pashtu. One of his most memorable tracts is a critique of the Iranian filmmaker Mohsen Makhmalbaf, whose projects in Afghanistan prompted Hekmatyar to articulate a strong and oppositional notion of Afghan nationalism. After the overthrow of the Taliban by U.S. forces, Hekmatyar initially remained in Iran, but then—suspecting that he might be turned over to U.S. forces—moved to Pakistan, where he has been active in both fighting and writing. Hekmatyar himself remains critical of the current regime and is still considered a terrorist by U.S. forces, while some of his former colleagues continue to move back and forth across the porous and dangerous border between Afghanistan and Pakistan. Hizb-e-Islami, however, is now formally registered as a party in Afghanistan, where it has members in Parliament, its leader, Arghandiwal, is minister of the economy, and it supported President Karzai during the election of 2009.

Independence

In 1879, when the British invaded Afghanistan for the second time, their goal was to dismember it. They planned to extend the frontier of British India to the Hindu Kush mountains, organize a series of petty kingdoms in the east, make Kandahar a separate principality, give Herat to the Iranians, and let the Russians take northern Afghanistan. An Afghan popular revolt, and the Afghan army's defeat of British forces at the battle of Maiwand in 1880, put an end to this scheme. Abdur Rahman, who had been living in exile in the Russian Empire for eleven years, was recognized as emir of Afghanistan by the British in return for agreeing to British control of his country's foreign relations. When his grandson Amanullah assumed power in 1919, he immediately proclaimed the independence of Afghanistan, and then put his declaration into practice by initiating the Third Anglo-Afghan War. Amanullah had picked his moment well; the British armed forces were exhausted by their efforts in World War I, while the Anglo-Indian leadership feared both the spread of tribal rebellion on the northwestern frontier and agitation by the Congress party within its borders. The British agreed to negotiations, and formally recognized the independence of Afghanistan in 1921. This independence came to an abrupt end with the Soviet invasion of December 1979. Since then, Afghanistan has enjoyed neither tranquility nor effective sovereignty. The Cold War made Afghanistan the Soviet Union's Vietnam, and the seemingly endless opposition to Soviet occupation became a factor in the ultimate dissolution of the U.S.S.R. Once that dissolution was complete, the West also disengaged from Afghanistan, which left it open to the hegemonic designs of its neighbors, and ultimately

allowed al-Qaeda to take root. The Bonn Agreement of 2001 created the necessary mechanisms for the reestablishment of Afghanistan's independence, a goal that has yet to be fully achieved.

Infidel

The term "infidel," or *kafir* (literally, "unbeliever"), has sometimes been deployed strategically in Afghanistan to discredit opponents or rivals. According to the strictest constructions of Islamic theory, the term should only be applied to those who do not believe in the One God, which should therefore exempt Muslims of all stripes as well as other monotheistic "people of the book." The case of Amanullah, however, proves that these rules are not always observed. At the beginning of his reign, Amanullah's stance as the champion of Afghan independence (and the protector of Muslims fleeing south from repressions in the Soviet Republics) earned him the title of *Ghazi*, the Warrior of Faith. After the dissolution of the Ottoman Caliphate, some called for him to assume the title of Caliph of Islam. As he began to push forward his agenda of modernization, however, he occasionally clashed with members of the religious establishment (notably the Hazrat of Shor Bazaar, whose descendants would declare jihad against the PDPA) even though he was careful to amass support for his programs from more forward-thinking ulema (religious scholars) before they were announced. Following his return from an extended tour in Europe, however, Amanullah decided that modernization needed to be accelerated, and he announced an ambitious set of more radical reforms for which he had failed to build any preexisting consensus. Photographs of Queen Soraya touring Europe without a veil began to circulate, along with rumors that Amanullah had consumed pork. The word *kafir* was whispered in the bazaars. When Habibullah Kalakani marched into Kabul at the head of his band of rebels, he assumed the title of *Khadem-e-Din-e-Rasulillah*, the Servant of the Religion of the Prophet of Allah. He abolished Amanullah's legal reforms, declaring the supremacy of sharia (Islamic law). To legitimate his regime, he convened a meeting of notables and ulema who signed a proclamation declaring Amanullah to be an infidel. When royal cousin Nadir Khan descended on Kabul some months later, however, he promised a new regime that repudiated Amanullah without breaking quite so radically with the past. This lure led some of those same signatories to turn on Kalakani. His new title proved to be no protection against his fate, and he was hanged ignominiously in a public square.

Invasion

Invasion has been a continuous threat throughout Afghanistan's history. Alexander the Great, Genghis Khan, Tamerlane, and countless others have galloped through the Afghan landscape, leaving scars and ruins in their wake. The nineteenth century saw two British invasions, the twentieth century witnessed the Soviet assault, and the twenty-first century began with the deployment of U.S. forces. Discontinuity rather than political stability has therefore been the norm. Over and over again, Afghans have had to start from scratch, with their assets destroyed, their families scattered, and their lives in shambles. The (quite likely inadvertent) result of all these disruptions is that Afghans tend to be both highly resilient and deeply suspicious of the intentions of strangers. The laws of hospitality require that unexpected guests be treated with courtesy, but courtesy can include serving tea while keeping one eye on the silver, the other on the clock, and a hand on the knife hidden in your pocket.

Isolation

With the end of the monarchy, a new barrier sprang up between the leaders of Afghanistan and its people. Where the royal family had moved through crowds with ease, trusting to tradition to enforce distinctions and respect (despite the long history of more or less successful assassination attempts on kings), the distinctly more uncertain position of post-coup presidents was secured through increasing isolation from the people they professed to lead. Zahir traveled with one escort car; Daoud, perhaps recklessly, drove his own Jeep; it was the PDPA and their Soviet advisers who inaugurated the culture of bodyguards, which has persisted and intensified ever since. This condition may mirror the geology of Afghanistan, which was born from the collision of two continental shelves, and is bisected by the uneven seam of the Hindu Kush, creating a country divided by a series of stark mountains and inaccessible valleys, and linked by the most precarious of passes. At the same time, Afghanistan has always been a crossroads through which commerce, ideas, and people flow from East to West, North to South, and back again; from the Silk Road to the oil pipelines, from the caravans to the long-distance truckers, China, Central Asia, South Asia, and the Middle East have converged and diverged, mingled and dispersed, passing through Afghanistan without penetrating its core.

Jadeh Maiwand

In the late 1950s, old Kabul was radically reshaped through a process similar to what the U.S. experienced under the banner of "urban renewal." Kabul's first elected mayor, a German-educated engineer named Farhad, drew a new map of the city by creating two long, straight avenues that travel through much of Kabul and meet in a triangle in the center of the city. The first avenue, Nadir Pashtun, stretches from the triangle to Pashtunistan Circle and the Ministry of Finance; some of the key monuments of old Kabul were demolished during its reconstruction. Jadeh Maiwand, which runs in a straight line from the monument for the fallen at the battle of Maiwand (shown to the right) to the palace, was entirely reconstructed into commercial blocks. In the 1960s the Bazaar Shahi, one of the last remnants of old Kabul, was demolished to make way for the construction of Zarnigar Park. The destruction of the bazaar was particularly apt, since the building boom had been motivated by the rise of a different kind of market, powered by new access to formal credit (and in particular, the Bank-e-Milli, or National Bank) and

international import-export trade. This new market, which at first seemed unanchored to particular physical spaces, would in turn be destroyed when its all-too-material support structures (roads, power plants, factories, banks, ministries) were eroded by war.

Jirga

The *jirga* is a widely used consultative mechanism in Afghanistan. A primary function of the *jirga* under customary law is to resolve disputes among individuals so that peace can be maintained among groups. *Jirgas* have also been convened to set priorities for communal undertakings or approve group actions; one example would be giving authorization to begin a conflict. The term *jirga* can also refer to a peace delegation, since asking for a *jirga* in the middle of conflict signals both the need and the intention to make peace. Certain clans in Afghanistan—like the Ahmadzai—have acquired a reputation for settling disputes as third-party arbiters and mediators. The elders and others proficient in this type of peace-making are referred to as *jirga-mar*, experts in the art of making *jirgas*. In contrast to sharia-based and state-promulgated legal systems, where punishment for crimes is the key norm, *jirgas* are not invested in punishment per se; the objective of the *jirga* is the resolution of disputes and prevention of further escalation of conflict. *Jirgas* exist in an implicit hierarchy ranging from the village level to the *Loya Jirga*, or Grand Council, the body that ultimately approves most national decisions, including changes in the constitution. Traditionally, *Loya Jirga* representatives were drawn from the elders of each clan, but contemporary *Loya Jirgas* generally elect representatives from each province. The institution of the *jirga* encompasses most ethnic groups in Afghanistan, as *jirgas* are part of the social and political traditions of Turkic-speaking populations as well as Pashtuns, Hazaras, and others. The origin of the term is likely to be either Mongol or Turkic, though is widely assumed to be Pashtun.

Kartechar

Kartechar, which means "Quarter Four," refers to a district planned and constructed during the 1930s and originally called "new Kabul." Kartechar was the first major urban-planning project undertaken by the dynasty that replaced Amanullah, and it demonstrated both continuity with and differences from his Dar ul-Aman project. Continuity could be located, first and foremost, in the primacy given to the notion and elements of planning as pioneered in Dar ul-Aman: maps and bylaws that pre-defined space, geometric layouts, quotas for green space, and a general culture of regulation and approval. The differences lay in scale and ambition. The new district was smaller, and it proposed a much less grand sort of architecture; Kartechar was not really a "new city," but rather a collection of pragmatic solutions to provide buildings for the growing civil and military bureaucracy, as well as public housing for bureaucrats. Whereas Dar ul-Aman's private homes were designed for the bourgeois upper middle class, Kartechar offered several categories of houses that corresponded to the different ranks of the civil and military services. Eligibility for ownership was determined first by rank, and then by ability to pay; and because homes were owned rather than rented or tied to office (reflecting the expansion of solid property rights during this period), when their owners advanced through the ranks, the houses could not change to correspond with their growing status. As in Dar ul-Aman, however, pre-built homes were not sold, but rather sites and services, with the understanding that you could only build from a small set of pre-approved designs. Because small families were more likely to buy into the Kartechar project than larger households, it also marked the beginning of the process through which nuclear families began to live apart from larger family networks. The new districts of Karteseh, Wazir Akhbar Khan, and Kheir Khana were constructed in subsequent decades along similar lines. Gradually, the regulations regarding pre-approved designs were relaxed, though all building plans still had to be approved by the municipality. One project financed by the Bank-e-Milli even offered pre-built houses. Properties in most of the districts were quite reasonable—for example, one *djerib* (half an acre) in Karteseh cost about $1,200 (60,000 Afs) in the 1960s, while the same land would be worth $600,000 today, and Kheir Khana was pitched to be even less expensive. Wazir Akhbar Khan, however, was laid out like an American suburb rather than a European neighborhood, with narrow side streets and large plots. The government sold those plots for $20,000 per *djerib* without any difficulty, including a number of plots bought by foreign embassies, many of which still occupy the district today. Until the Communist coup, the state continued to act as the chief regulator of space, using its power both to acquire land and to designate previously agricultural space as residential, commercial, or public. As regulation decreased, the spaces designated as public commons or green parks could not withstand the onslaught of influence from developers, and were re-designated residential or commercial. In the 1960s, informal settlements also began to proliferate in the city, but formal housing still predominated; today, illegal housing is far more prevalent than legal housing, meaning that many city residents have no access to municipal services (like water and electricity), and no way to call on them unless their settlements are formalized.

KhAD

Afghanistan's security apparatus has been influenced by Russian models since the days of Abdur Rahman, who used a czarist-style Secret Service to create a climate of fear and distrust. Fear of the Secret Service dominated the lives of intellectuals and dissidents until the ratification of the 1964 constitution, which ushered in the "decade of democracy." Daoud's coup in 1973 led to some renewed restrictions, but the intellectual freedom of the 1960s and 1970s closed down completely after the Communist coup of April 1978. With the guidance of KGB advisers, the PDPA reorganized and expanded the Secret Service into an instrument of rule by terror. This Secret Service assumed the name of KhAD (*Khedamat-e*

Etela'ate Dawlati, or the State Information Service) in 1980. From 1980 to 1985, Dr. Najib headed the organization, gaining a reputation for ruthlessness. Upon becoming president and general secretary of the party in 1985, he upgraded KhAD to a cabinet ministry, renamed it WAD (*Wazirat-i Amaniyyat-i Dawlati*, or Ministry of State Security), and relied on it to bolster his power until his overthrow in 1992. (For example, WAD had its own armed forces, separate from the national army, which were under Najib's direct control.) KhAD/WAD sowed the seeds of suspicion in every layer of society with its networks of informers and infiltrators, and operated interrogation centers throughout the country, known as *Riasats* (directorates). According to an Amnesty International report issued at the time, in 1991 more than a dozen *Riasats* were operating in Kabul, including *Riasat-e-Panj* (Directorate No. 5), which was located near the Dar ul-Aman Palace and specialized in the "arrest and torture of people suspected of involvement in coup attempts." After the March 6, 1990, attempt to launch a coup from Dar ul-Aman, dozens of conspirators were reportedly taken to the nearby *Riasat* and executed on the spot. To date, only three former KhAD officers have been held accountable for their involvement in the human rights abuses of the Communist period: Hesamuddin Hesam and Habibullah Jalalzoy were sentenced to prison terms in the Netherlands, where they had sought asylum in the 1990s, and Assadullah Sarwary (head of KhAD from 1978 to 1979, during which time more than four hundred people were summarily executed) was sentenced to death by firing squad in Kabul in 2006. KhAD was reconstituted in 2001, and the laws created by the PDPA government to enable prosecution of "enemies of the state" are currently used in the trials of former Guantánamo and Bagram detainees.

Kocha-gi

The lanes, or *kocha*, of old Kabul were so narrow that they could literally be closed with gates (*kocha-bandi*, or "lane shut-down"). Over time, the word *kocha* also acquired the meaning of "neighborhood," so that when you call someone *kocha-gi*, you acknowledge all the ties of neighborliness, bonds of obligation around rites of passage and mutual respect of property, which are often also tied up with or akin to kinship. In the new Kabul imagined by Dar ul-Aman and implemented through Kartechar and later planned neighborhoods, wider streets and larger plots of land for each house created a different kind of *kocha* for an emerging middle class, less tied together by *kocha-gi*, and perhaps more invested in the idea that good fences (or rather good walls) make good neighbors.

Land

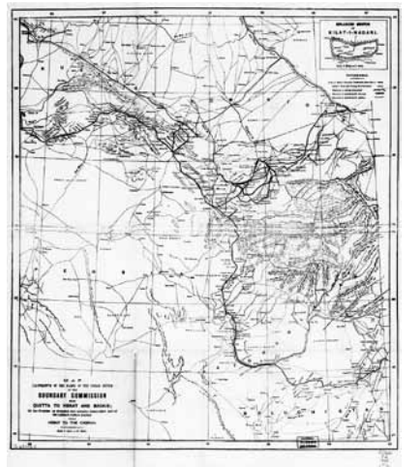
Deserts and mountains cover much of Afghanistan, making cultivated land a scarce and precious commodity. Irrigated land is even more valuable, because relying on rain to feed crops has rarely proved to be a successful long-term strategy for Afghan farmers. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Afghanistan experienced severe droughts every thirty years; the unpredictability of twenty-first-century weather patterns has produced much shorter drought cycles and made irrigation, and the social cooperation it entails, even more significant. Generally, land ownership takes three predominant forms: private ownership, state ownership, and endowments (*waqfs*) belonging to religious establishments and regulated by Islamic law. Islamic law also allows women to own property; customary law, however, only provides women with claims for help from their brothers or families. In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, property rights became confused and confusing, due to a succession of events that placed ownership of many properties in dispute. In the 1960s, mechanization of agriculture began, and cadastral surveys were launched to provide official documentation of land ownership to property holders across the country, but both projects remained uncompleted at the time of the 1978 Communist coup. Hoping to win over the rural population, the Communists immediately announced a land-reform project, but the Soviet invasion provoked such strong rural resistance that most of the peasants who received redistributed land returned it to the previous owners. During the decades of war that followed, many property owners, particularly in urban areas, abandoned their land and fled into exile. The deserted properties were promptly expropriated, whether by factions of the government, factions of the opposition, opportunistic squatters, or internal refugees. By the time the original property holders started trickling back into the country, after it stabilized in late 2001, their properties might have been bought and sold multiple times, with little or no record of the transactions or transfers of title. Untangling the resulting mess of rights, rewards, and punishments has been left to the courts, where corruption has allowed the emergence of land mafias that claim large swaths of both urban and rural land. Resolution of this complex problem will require sweeping change, not only in the judiciary but also in the creation of reliable records, without which property rights cannot possibly be enforced.

Loss

Over the past century, many things have been lost in Afghanistan: battles, wars, soldiers, standards, ground, money, advantages, generations, blood, hearing, sight, limbs, lives, livelihoods, land, dreams, dreamers, ideas, ideals, innocence, friends, friendships, parents, children, childhoods, schools, teachers, homes, villages, fields, forests, rivers, roads, bridges, dams, electricity, cities, monuments, paintings, poems, places, earrings, coins, keys, suitcases, maps, plans, plots, ways, means, sanity, reason, levity, proportion, judgment, balance, love, hope. Sometimes what was lost can be recovered; but more often, the lost stays lost.

Mapmakers

Before the nineteenth century, Afghanistan was part of an open Asian political system where boundaries changed with the expansion and contraction of empires. The country's current borders were largely fixed between the 1870s and 1890s, when British-led boundary commissions drew the borderlines between Iran and Afghanistan and between Afghanistan and the Russian Empire. These boundaries, as well as the small border with China, have become international frontiers and are not disputed. The boundary between British India and Afghanistan, however, has been a consistent source of tension between Afghanistan and Pakistan, which succeeded British India as the state controlling the territory. This border, known as the Durand Line, was drawn in 1893 by yet another boundary commission. The Durand Line cut villages in half, created the "tribal areas," and arbitrarily divided Pashtuns who were linked by millennia of interactions, including seasonal migrations from one side of the new border to the other. As recently as the nineteenth century, Peshawar had been a capital of the Afghan kings; perhaps that is why certain elements of the royal family took up the cause of "Pashtunistan"—the reunion of Pashtuns on the Pakistani side of the border with their Afghan cousins to the north—with such zeal. Afghanistan voted against Pakistan's membership in the United Nations when Pakistan held a referendum where the Pashtuns of the Northwestern Province (recently renamed Khyber-Pakhtun-Khwa) could choose to be part of India or part of Pakistan, but had no option to be either independent or part of Afghanistan. Tensions between the two countries increased under Prince Daoud's tenure as prime minister (1953–63), leading to the closure of the border and the transit route to Afghanistan through Pakistan, and to Daoud being sidelined. During the "decade of democracy" (1963–73), relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan were cordial. Tensions rose again after Daoud re-took power through a coup (1973–77). Daoud and his Pakistani counterpart, Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, had, however, started serious discussions to arrive at a solution, which might have transformed relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan had not first Bhutto and then Daoud been overthrown and killed. The issue of the Durand Line remains unresolved.



Uniquely, most of Pakistan's boundary lines are disputed in some form or forum, one result of which is its wars with India over Kashmir.

Martyr

Shahid, or martyr, refers to one who has lost his life in defense of his country's Islamic values; in earlier decades, the word also applied to political activists who gave their lives for their ideals of constitutionalist democracy and republican values. During the ten-year Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, more than a million martyrs were made. When, after a brief respite, the Taliban and other groups picked up their arms again, both the Karzai government and the armed opposition began to speak again of martyrs. The term is currently applied by the government to both the members of the armed forces who lose their lives and the civilian victims of NATO actions, while the opposition uses it to describe the fighters and civilian supporters who die for its cause. In an Afghan cemetery, a green flag over the grave usually marks the status of a martyr, and fabric torn from these flags is sometimes thought to hold a special power of blessing or protection. Every cemetery, every village, every family, every movement, and every side has its martyrs; no corner of the country has been left untouched by tragedy.

Microrayan

The Microrayan is a series of high-rise apartment blocks on the outskirts of Kabul. Construction of the Microrayan began, with Soviet aid, in the mid-1960s and was accelerated with the advent of Daoud's republic in 1973. The first blocks were completed before the 1978 coup, and construction continued into the 1980s. Microrayan 11 remained unfinished, though still largely occupied, for a number of years—a crane loomed over the empty field between the Microrayan blocks for decades while the construction was suspended—and was finally completed after 2001. In some ways, the Microrayan now functions as a small world unto itself, with its own post office, schools, and shops. As the last major public housing project of the twentieth century, the Microrayan departed from previous projects in several significant respects. First, it took its conceptual inspiration from the Soviet bloc rather than Western Europe or the U.S. Second, its prefab design marked a move away from artisanal construction to industrial fabrication. Third, as a series of apartment blocks rather than stand-alone houses, it represented a realization that Kabul (placed as it is in a valley surrounded by mountains) did not have unlimited space to expand, and new construction would have to grow vertically as well as horizontally. Apartment living also created new kinds of neighborliness (*kocha-gi*) and a completely new relationship of service and dependence between the municipality and the apartment dwellers; in buildings as large as the Microrayans, unit owners could not be solely responsible for problems with water, sewage, or heat, but instead had to depend on the municipality to provide

system-wide fixes and maintenance. In old Kabul, neighborhood ties had been woven tightly and informally; the districts built between 1930 and 1960 were much more formal. In Kartechar and its successors, your social world was not your neighborhood, because your relatives might be scattered all over the city or country, and your relationships would be mediated either by work or by schools. When Kabul University moved onto a single campus (built with American aid) and the new Polytechnic University campus was constructed (with Soviet aid), still more new networks were formed; university students and graduates began to form love marriages and then nuclear families. The Microrayan provided the first affordable space where those families could live apart from larger family networks and still survive on the low starting salaries of the era. Cost of transport quickly became a new problem, however. Like other new, low-income areas (Kheir Khana and Nur Muhammad Shah Mina), the Microrayan was on the edges of the city, far from the universities; hence the steady rise in popularity of bicycles from the 1960s to today.

Mujahidin

As you walk into the present-day palace of Dar ul-Aman, the abode of peace, you pass a wall pockmarked with bullet holes and scrawled with graffiti. One layer of this palimpsest exhorts: "O mujahid, adopt the way of battle, take a sword in your hand, so that they know that this is not the land for every piece of dirt, it is the pure and sacred land of Afghanistan." On an interior wall on the ground floor, a mujahid plagued by doubts has been reassured with the legend, "There is no defect in Islam; whatever defect exists lies in our way of practicing Islam." Farther down the corridor, a disillusioned foot soldier has rejoined, "Gulbuddin [Hekmatyar] is a national traitor." In a second-floor room full of postscripts for fallen comrades, a memorial for Mohammed Azim has been overlaid with the following exchange. From the first writer: "As long as there is a battle, we will be steadfast." From the second: "You will battle as long as there is money to keep you going."

Najib(ullah)

Mohammed Najibullah Ahmadzai was known for much of his political career as Dr. Najib, until his attempts to reconcile with the mujahidin opposing his government led him to re-adopt Najibullah (*ullah* meaning, literally translated, "of God"). Najib first gained prominence as a medical student at Kabul University, where he acquired a reputation both for public speaking and for physical strength, as displayed in the fights between student groups. He belonged to the Parcham faction of the PDPA, the Afghan Communist party, and after the PDPA coup in April 1978 he was appointed ambassador to Iran, from which post he was dismissed by Hafizullah Amin, the strongman of the Khalq faction and the de facto leader of the country from April 1978 to December 1979. When Soviet forces assassinated Amin and installed the Parchami Babrak Karmal as leader in 1979, Najib took over KhAD, running it efficiently and brutally. When Mikhail Gorbachev came to power in the U.S.S.R. in 1985, he decided that Brezhnev's favorite Karmal was unsuitable to his reform agenda, and promoted Najib to the post of general secretary of the PDPA and president of Afghanistan. Najib remained in office until 1991 and proved to be the last leader of the Soviet-backed PDPA regime. Although he was hated by the populace during the Soviet occupation, Najib, contrary to all expectations, proved adept at holding his regime together after the Red Army withdrew in 1989. He attempted to remake himself as a nationalist, tried to reconcile with the religious establishment and the more moderate elements of the armed opposition, offered to form a bloc national front, and accepted a UN plan to transfer power to a transitional government of Afghan technocrats. When he attempted to leave the country in 1992, however, one of the militias that he himself had established staged a coup, prevented his departure, and forced him to seek refuge in a UN compound in Kabul. He spent the next five years behind the compound walls, while a civil war raged around him. When the Taliban entered Kabul in 1996, they forced their way into the UN compound and hanged him from a lamppost in a nearby square. While some Afghans of his generation still hate Najib for the atrocities perpetuated by KhAD under his leadership, others now remember him primarily for his warning of the deluge that would come after him if the country rejected his offer of reconciliation.

Nizamnamah

Nizam is the word for "order," and *nizamnamah*—a term imported from Turkey—refers to a series of laws that were promulgated during Amanullah's reign (1919–29) to create an order defined by rules that are articulated and enforced. The *nizamnamah* ranged in scope from the constitution and rules defining the structures of governance, to regulations concerning the formation of clubs and the amount of money that could be spent on weddings. The record of Amanullah's 1924 inspection tour of Kandahar demonstrates the depth of his commitment to rule of law. During this tour, he publicly articulated the difference between the governors appointed by his father and his own governor, whose behavior was bounded by a clear set of rules. The *nizamnamah* system of rewards for compliance and punishments for ignoring the rules goes to the heart of the relationship between the theory and practice of governance.

Occupation

In 1979, the Soviet Union was propping up the PDPA regime with assistance and advice, but feared that its internal factionalism and external repressions would make it unable to withstand a popular revolt. The Soviet Politburo met behind closed doors and, without fully understanding either the situation in Afghanistan or the determination of the West to oppose the expansion of Soviet influence,

authorized a full-scale military invasion. While Hafizullah Amin, the party leader assassinated during the invasion, had retained a semblance of autonomy, his successor, Babrak Karmal, had been installed by the invasion and was therefore seen as a puppet. The presence of the Red Army transformed resistance to the PDPA regime into a genuinely national movement that engaged Afghans across the country in a life-and-death struggle against the occupation. The stronger the resistance became, the more brutal the Soviet response, resulting in approximately 100,000 deaths per year during the ten years of the occupation. With Soviet helicopters roaming the skies, death rained on villages from above, while the *spetsnaz* (military special forces) carried out brutal operations targeting opposition forces on the ground. The more Afghan casualties were reported, the stronger the support from the West became. When President Reagan authorized the delivery of Stinger anti-aircraft missiles to the Afghan mujahidin in 1986, the new weapons changed the nature of the war. The Soviets lost control of the skies, and their casualties started mounting. The Red Army units stationed in the Tajbeg Palace, which had been requisitioned as a Soviet HQ, were scrawling homesick messages on the walls: long Cyrillic letters to mothers and girlfriends thousands of miles away. Gorbachev, who famously described Afghanistan as a "bleeding wound," found the war a distraction from his project of reform for the Soviet Union. He entered into political negotiations and allowed the United Nations to broker an agreement for the withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan in February 1989. In a last act of brutality, the general in command of the retreating army ordered them to cut down all the trees along the route of retreat. As if to mark the futility and waste of all the years of occupation, when the general crossed the Amu Darya River and left Afghanistan forever, he paused on the bridge and gave a speech whose contents were never reported, because the only listeners were the frozen waves.

Old Kabul

When the Durrani emperor Timur Shah transferred his capital to Kabul, the city was made of mud and unbaked bricks, and roofs had to be renewed every year. In those days, neighborhoods were defined either by identity (groups formed into spatial units), eminence (areas associated with the houses or gardens of famous people of a specific period), or craft (the districts of haysellers, musicians, or washers of the body). As old Kabul is gradually replaced by the various new Kabuls imagined by Dar ul-Aman, Kartechar, and subsequent housing projects, space is produced and defined by the state (in the case of Dar ul-Aman, Kartechar, Karteseh, or the Microrayan) or restructured and redefined by the state (in the case of Jadeh Maiwand) and divided not by identity, eminence, or craft, but simply by ability to pay. Divisions between neighborhoods become primarily economic and only secondarily occupational or identity-based.

Opposites

The split within the PDPA was based on different mental models. The Parchamis were primarily second- or third-generation urban. The Khalqis, by contrast, were largely first-generation literate, predominantly from rural areas, and had been boarders at Kabul schools. (Amin, incidentally, had first made his reputation as the headmaster of one of these schools, Ibn Sina.) This internal split was, in miniature, a recurrence of the conflict between urban intelligentsia and rural or provincial conceptions and bases of power, which on a larger scale was also powering the various revolts against the Communist regime, and in an earlier form had defeated Amanullah's reforms and driven him into exile. However, opposites are not always as opposite as they appear at first glance. Some of the Parchamis, for example, had quite significant connections to the monarchist power structure they overthrew. Some of the Pashtun Khalqis had kinship ties to the Islamists who became mujahidin leaders, commanders, and fighters. Amin himself was a cousin of Sayyaf's mother, who had pleaded with him to release Sayyaf from prison; Amin refused, but did move him out of Pul-e-Charki, so that when all the other Young Muslims originally imprisoned by Daoud were executed by the PDPA, Sayyaf was spared and lived to fight another day. These ties came into play in the late, Parcham-dominated years of the PDPA regime, when a number of Khalqis threw in their lot with the mujahidin, leading to the attempted coup of 1990.

Ostracism

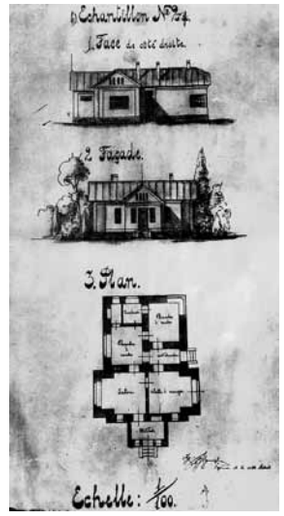
Amanullah had imagined the Dar ul-Aman Palace as a bureaucratic space within a holistically integrated district. After his exile, the larger project was consciously abandoned, but the palace remained. Detached from the plan that produced it, the building was almost an embarrassment: this huge empty thing hulking at the end of the largest road in town, with nothing (or very little) else happening around it. The palace became a free-floating but essentially marginalized space. The new regime attempted to rename it, but never succeeded. They used it to store raisins, and as a medical school. The train line was discontinued and the track pulled up; the Henschel engine rusted slowly in a shed. Still the palace remained a palace, and the name Dar ul-Aman always resurfaced. Finally, Daoud conceded that it was ridiculous to waste so much space and renovated the building so that ministries could be housed there. However, the royal family remained downtown in the Arg. (Amin would be the first and last leader to move into the Tajbeg, just up the hill from Dar ul-Aman, as in Amanullah's plan.) Dar ul-Aman is roughly fourteen kilometers from the center of the city. Because the power of a ministry is shown by its proximity to the royal palace, any ministry placed in Dar ul-Aman was instantly ostracized; both officials who served there and citizens who had business with them considered the trip to Dar ul-Aman a hardship. Today, however, this distance from

downtown makes Dar ul-Aman a particularly pleasant district, since it is largely spared from the diesel-fueled smog that chokes the air of central Kabul. Moreover, the Ministry of Rural Development, which now occupies a large chunk of land off the Dar ul-Aman Road, has planted a windbreak of new trees that they water regularly, so its neighbors are spared the worst of the dust storms that sweep from the deforested plains through the city, like a bad dream that visits every afternoon at four.

Parliament

In the twentieth century, Afghanistan enjoyed two periods when relatively freely elected Parliaments served as arenas for democratic debate. The seventh and eighth Parliaments were convened in 1946–53, when political activists had reached a consensus to support liberal constitutional democracy and the political agenda was set by a small number of intellectuals elected from urban centers. This period came to an abrupt end when Daoud was appointed prime minister in 1953 and promptly put most of the intellectuals responsible for the consensus of the "liberal Parliament" behind bars. The thirteenth and fourteenth Parliaments were convened during the "decade of democracy," 1963–73. While this decade did indeed allow for democratic exchange, there was no longer any political consensus on liberal constitutional democracy. The Left, represented by the PDPA (influenced by the U.S.S.R. and Iran) and the Maoists (influenced by China), vied for distinction with nationalist parties, ethnically oriented movements, and a revitalized Islamist movement deriving inspiration from the Middle East and Pakistan. When Daoud's coup of 1973 brought him back to power, this second experiment with parliamentary democracy also came to an abrupt end, as Daoud instituted a single-party system that had barely taken root before he was in turn overthrown. After the Bonn Agreement led to the new constitution of 2004, political parties graduated for the first time from illegal or semi-legal to legal and officially registered status. The first parliamentary elections under the new system were held in 2005 and the second in 2010. Allegations of widespread fraud during the second election, however, have put the legitimacy of the new Parliament in doubt. A special court is examining the issue, but some in Parliament have questioned the legitimacy of this body. These lingering questions continue to create tensions among the three branches of the government, and also between the confirmed candidates and those seeking to overturn the election results.

Plans

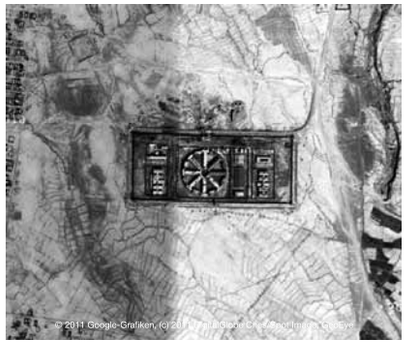


As the first large-scale urban development attempted in twentieth-century Afghanistan, Dar ul-Aman provided the prototype for all the public housing projects that would follow it. Dar ul-Aman's most important innovation was its insistence on planning, at every level: from the layout of the entire district to the design of each house within it, every aspect of the project had been thought through beforehand by Amanullah's architects, engineers, and city planners. In Dar ul-Aman, Kartechar, and subsequent projects, plans were even more important for private dwellings than for public buildings, because the homes were being sold essentially as ideas: a potential owner was offered a site, services, and a choice of designs, rather than a pre-built house. The larger plan for the district was enforced through the predetermined plans for single houses that were offered along with the site, or alternatively through the extensive regulation of owners who chose to design their own houses. Detailed instructions defined, for example, the type of material to be used in construction, the amount of green area required in each compound, the maximum height allowed for buildings, and the distance of structures from the road. Both new designs and modifications to existing plans had to be approved by a committee. The image to the right shows one of the five house plans offered to the original buyers of land in Kartechar.

Projection

During Amanullah's European tour of 1927–28, he and Soraya stopped at a British naval base, where they were given a tour and a chance to try out the armaments. According to a British paper, after firing off a torpedo, the Afghan king said, "I feel half an Englishman already." Amanullah had secured his country's independence, but he and his circle still exhibited a fascination with Europe that bordered on a fundamental inferiority complex; he also said "a short visit to Europe can really change you." Both Dar ul-Aman and Mahmud Tarzi's newspaper, *Siraj ul-Akhbar*, projected far into a future that they envisioned as cosmopolitan—Dar ul-Aman by building for durability, and *Siraj* by imaging a technologically advanced urban future in the delicate line drawings that accompanied Tarzi's essays. Amanullah's rules and regulations, public spaces and spatial relationships, roads and maps, all conformed to a sense of order based on the straight-edged geometries of European classicism. In one of his most widely derided reforms, Amanullah even attempted to follow Kemal Atatürk in imposing modern European dress on his court. In one sense this change could, as claimed at the time, have erased traditional marks of distinction between different regions of the country and levels of society, but in another it reflected a kind of alienation from self or history, a hope that changing the clothes would also change the people wearing them.

Pul-e-Charkhi



The wagon-wheel-shaped prison complex of Pul-e-Charkhi was built by Daoud on a plain east of Kabul during the beleaguered years of his republic. The prison became synonymous with torture and mass murder during the period immediately following the Communist coup, April 1978 to December 1979. Tens of thousands of young people and influential Afghans suspected of opposing the PDPA were incarcerated there. A significant number were shot and buried in mass graves. After the Soviets invaded in December 1979, they released most of the prisoners under a general amnesty, but as the resistance to occupation grew, the prison began filling up again. The physical plant of the complex was badly damaged during the civil wars of the 1990s. After 2001, it was partially rehabilitated and put back in use; a new wing, Block D, was built with American funding and houses former Guantánamo and Bagram detainees. Pul-e-Charkhi's notoriety continually increases, as the women's prison mysteriously fills with ever more children, graves are unearthed in the courtyard, and riots break out both within and around the prison. Some might claim that it is haunted or filled with malevolent *djinn* (spirits capable of tempting humans or taking on aspects of the dead); some might say, more simply, that some places are better left as ruins.

Qala

A *qala* is a compound surrounded by walls and containing a *khanadan*, a household. The household can be understood as anything from a nuclear family to an extended family network, along with all of the family's dependents—servants and other workers or helpers. The urban *qala* may be a villa of stone or concrete, surrounded by a walled garden (with, in today's Kabul, the addition of higher walls and armed bodyguards at the gates). The rural *qala* may be a series of small houses arranged around a source of water, common courtyard, or green space, enclosed by walls, the whole made of mud or unbaked bricks and reconfigured as needed. An Arg, Bala Hissar, or any other fortress from the sixteenth to nineteenth century, is still a large, complex, multilayered *qala*. And the walls of the *qala* constitute an order based on implicit knowledge of differences: inside/outside, male/female, resident/guest. It is a flexible order, with room for improvisation, but an order made by the space itself. By contrast, Dar ul-Aman was built without walls, open to its surroundings, and incidentally quite vulnerable to sieges, as history would attest. It has no space for *khanadan*; it is a purely bureaucratic space of governance, ordered by laws rather than walls. Discussing his potential "new city" in 1924, Amanullah made it clear that his city would not have walls, because walls would be of no use against the guns of the time (much less the guns of today); he believed that the only wall of significance is a wall made of citizens' bodies and will. Given this philosophy, Amanullah would probably not have approved of early twenty-first-century Kabul, with its roadblocks and barricades made of sandbags, concrete blocks, and barbed wire. He would, however, have cheered the present mayor, who has banned all such private fortifications from encroaching onto public streets and sidewalks, and thus reclaimed large portions of the city from those who must hide behind walls for those who walk freely outside them.

Queen

Afghanistan has always been known for strong queens. Gawharshad, the fourteenth-century queen of the Timurid Empire, is perhaps the most famous. She created extensive endowments, established a school of learning, and served as a patron of the arts and sciences. Amanullah's mother, the Ulya Hazrat, was a woman of iron will, adept at court politics and determined to make her son king, even though he was third in the line of succession. She succeeded when her husband was assassinated in Jalalabad (the assailant was never determined) and Amanullah was able to gain popular support against his uncle and older brothers. Amanullah's wife, Queen Soraya, became the symbol of the modern Afghan woman. She is often credited with influencing her husband's politics and policies, particularly with regard to the veil, purdah, and education for women. She herself publicly discarded the veil and traveled with her husband in Europe; pictures of the unveiled queen in the tiara and revealing gown created for the European tour were instrumental in the whisper campaign against Amanullah. Unusually for the era, Amanullah and Soraya married for love; in fact, in order to marry her, he had to discard a previous wife, who had been forced upon him by the Ulya Hazrat.

Reconciliation

The coup of 1978 brought the violent use of force to the foreground, dividing Afghans into hostile camps. With the departure of the Soviets in 1989, the Najibullah regime launched an agenda of reconciliation, but did not succeed in producing a political consensus on an orderly transfer of power. Since that moment, the idea of reconciliation has constantly haunted the fringes of Afghan political discourse without finding its way to the center. Attempts at large-scale DDR (Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration) programs have been largely unsuccessful; some have even suggested that for every gun turned in to DDR, there is likely to be another one buried in the backyard. Any whisper that Afghanistan might need something like a Truth and Reconciliation Commission is promptly quashed, even though amnesty for past crimes has already been guaranteed three times: by the mujahidin to the Communists in 1991, by Parliament to everyone who participated in the civil war in 2007, and by President Karzai to low-level Taliban in 2004 and again in 2010, when he held a large Peace *Jirga*. Because of that *jirga* and the Peace Commission it created, reconciliation has crept closer to the center than ever before; but just as disarmament and demobilization don't really work without reintegration, reconciliation rarely works as well without some sort of truth to

back it up. In this case, truth may mean the excavation of buried histories, or it may just mean all the players putting their cards on the table, without bluffing and without bluster, so that real negotiations can take place.

Recurrences

Amanullah's reforms enacted modernism from above. His grandfather and father had been absolutist rulers. While their autocracy created the space for his reforms, he understood neither the extent of his autonomy, nor the isolation that autonomy produced. He failed to balance between producing modernity and producing consensus, and instead produced opposition and finally armed revolt. This pattern recurs with all the modernizers who follow Amanullah. When he began his own reforms, Daoud was an authoritarian prime minister. After he lost his power, the system of monarchy cushioned the blow, and the regime continued unbroken for another ten years. But when Daoud overthrew the monarchy, he was unable to replace it with a new system capable of sustaining his power. Instead, his presidency reiterated the flawed model of modernization imposed from above without a base of widespread social consensus. Unusually, Daoud could have made his coup with a variety of actors, but he chose to work with the PDPA, who were the most radical of possible allies. When he tried to sideline the radicals after the coup, they quickly turned against him. Amanullah lost his throne; Daoud lost both power and his life. The same drama repeats itself under four Communist rulers: Taraki, Amin, Karmal, and Najib. The first two took power very easily, but again misunderstood their level of autonomy from society-wide forces. Their actions produced a nationwide disenchantment, which incurred a violent response from the leaders, which in turn led to an armed opposition. And the parallel with Amanullah (urban reformer unseated by rural revolt) would have been exactly repeated had it not been for the massive Soviet intervention that preempted it. The Soviets themselves thought, based on a false analogy, that Afghanistan was Soviet Central Asia. But their chosen leader, Karmal, could not overcome the sin of arriving at power through a foreign invasion, and his leadership only provoked further opposition. When Najib replaced Karmal, having learned some lessons from his predecessors, he made a real effort to produce consensus; but he ran out of options by running out of money when his support system collapsed with the withdrawal of Soviet troops and aid, the end of the Cold War, and the dissolution of the former Soviet Union. When Najib transferred power to a coalition of mujahidin, their failure to form a consensus even within their own ranks, much less in a broader social compact, made it impossible for them to govern effectively. The failure of both Najib and the mujahidin to consolidate power after the withdrawal of the Soviets illustrated once again the limits of imposing a model from above without generating support from below. Because this final failure came after years of war and destruction, however, it caused the collapse not only of a regime, but of the state itself—with devastating consequences both for Afghanistan and for the world.

Reform

Reform of state institutions has been a constant preoccupation for Afghan intellectuals ever since the state was centralized under Abdur Rahman. Amanullah's reign was the golden age in which the Young Afghan reformers were positioned to rethink and remodel institutions from within. Daoud offered the authoritarian version of Amanullah's attempt at reform. The "decade of democracy" returned to the more liberal impulse of Amanullah's period, but was unable to institutionalize power under the rule of law. Rejecting reform, the Communist party attempted revolution, but miscalculated the extent of the resistance they would face. Since 2001, "reform" has referred both to the institutionalization of a democratic political order initiated in Bonn in December 2001, and to an agenda driven by international organizations and actors to remake Afghan political and economic institutions. However, bad governance, corruption, and injustice have plagued the process of national institutional reform and fueled the opposition, while the results of international reform efforts have been decidedly mixed, with some visible successes and a significant number of failures. The possibility that international forces will depart from Afghanistan by 2014 has re-opened serious public debate on institutional reform as an instrument of change.

Republic

Daoud's coup in 1973 abolished the monarchy and created the first Republic of Afghanistan, whose logo can be seen to the right. After the Communist coup of 1978, the Afghan state took on the Eastern European form of the "people's republic." When the last Communist regime collapsed, the mujahidin groups who took over the government agreed to form an Islamic republic, but their coalition imploded into a vicious civil war. The Taliban conquest of 1996 rejected both the monarchical and the republican models, establishing the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. The 2001 Bonn process, managed by the UN, provided for a constitutional *Loya Jirga* to determine the form and content of a new political order. This took place from December 2003 to January 2004, and created a new Islamic republic that embraces the republican form of governance and provides for three branches of government, with a strong presidency. The constitution limits the president to two terms in office and, as part of checks and balances between the executive and legislative branches, does not allow the executive branch to dissolve Parliament. The constitution, while upholding the Islamic character of the state, enjoins the state to respect human rights and provides an extensive set of fundamental rights for citizens. The judicial branch is given an arbitrating function as the final interpreter of the rules of the game, which to date it has yet to assert.

Roads

Afghanistan's landlocked nature and its mountainous terrain have made roads a necessary precondition for development. The absence of roads before the twentieth century resulted in situations of economic autarchy, with grain surpluses in one part of the country, famine in another, and no means to connect the two. Long-distance trade was carried out through the caravans, but confined to luxuries. The first roads were built in the early twentieth century, and trucks began plying them soon after. While Amanullah maintained and expanded some of these, road-building was not a large part of his project. The new dynasty did, however, give prominence to roads; Daoud and his large-scale, foreign-aided development projects created most of Afghanistan's infrastructure of paved roads. The Soviet invasion and the subsequent decades of warfare and neglect led to the destruction of this road network. Both small and large roads became targets for the Red Army or government militias and their mujahidin opponents, and later for the fights between Taliban and mujahidin, who constantly sought to disrupt each other's supply convoys. Because of this destruction, as the rest of the world became smaller and more connected, distances grew longer and separation became more pronounced in Afghanistan. In 1976, it took five to seven hours to travel from Kabul to Kandahar; with roadblocks, checkpoints, stoppages, and gaps, the same journey took up to seventy-two hours in early 2002. Over the past ten years, the international community has invested substantially in the road sector; today it takes about ten hours to get from Kabul to Kandahar. Unfortunately, without funds and personnel for systematic maintenance, the roads may well erode again as quickly as they are rebuilt.

Ruins

An Urdu saying reminds us that "the ruins proclaim the building was beautiful," and even an unlovely building—the most utilitarian of strip-mall-style storefronts or poured-concrete provincial outposts—acquires a certain disreputable charm once it is riddled with bullet holes and crumbling around your ears. But ruins also tell other tales, for those who care to listen. The ruin of Dar ul-Aman, for example, is the story of a dream abandoned, consciously, by those who wished to erase the memory of the dreamer. Like the empty niches and half-effaced cave frescoes that we now refer to as the Buddhas of Bamiyan, the wreckage of Dar ul-Aman records not a single act of destruction, but rather a series of collapses, most initiated from within the government charged with its stewardship. The fire set in the palace's records room by officials in the Ministry of Public Works was followed by a coup launched from the palace by officials from the Ministry of Defense, which provoked the bombing of the palace by other factions of the government. When the internecine squabbles of the mujahidin coalition government tore apart the city, they did not spare Dar ul-Aman, pressed into service as both base camp and target. The re-taking of Kabul from the Taliban left a crater in the center of the palace, made by a U.S. bomb that plummeted through all three floors and deep into the ground below. Sandbag-reinforced lookouts, second-floor offices converted into improvised mosques, the debris left behind by refugees who sheltered in the east wing—these traces exist alongside, and helplessly modify, the bones of Dar ul-Aman's grand ballroom, still lovely in its fading green and pink, and the fluted columns that support the long, long corridors, leading the eye to some vanishing point that perhaps once existed in the architecture itself, but now must be imagined, around a corner or through a window or, more simply, in the piece that is missing.

Secrets

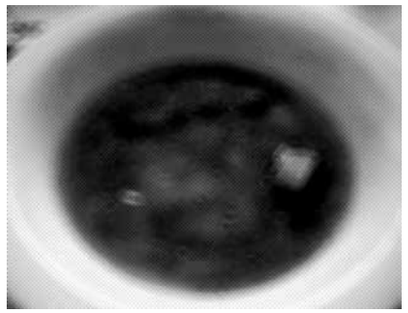
For every grave in Afghanistan marked with a martyr's flag, there probably exists another with no marker at all. The decades of conflict kicked off by the coup of 1973 left many traces on the landscape, the least visible of which are the mass graves that every such conflict seems to produce. When Daoud and his family were assassinated in 1977, for example, they were buried in a shallow trench in the courtyard of Pul-e-Charkhi prison, but the location of their grave was not discovered until the prison was renovated in the twenty-first century. Over the two years following the 1977 coup, Pul-e-Charkhi came to contain a number of such trenches, filled with the bodies of political prisoners of the Khalq regime; those who survived recount that once a week some were selected from the prison cells (according to some secret calculus), marched to the courtyard, executed, and immediately buried. Other graves from other years exist in other places; eighty-six have been discovered since 2001, most accidentally, during excavations to lay foundations for new buildings. Several years ago, however, an old man who used to drive a truck for the Soviets led the army to a site on the outskirts of Kabul, where they found a building that had been progressively filled in with both bodies and earth. The remnants of blindfolds remained wrapped around their heads, their hands had been tied, and the doors and windows had been bricked shut. Sadly, there is no forensic squad available to reconstruct old bones, so the names of the dead remain secret, and in any case, a few weeks before the bodies were unearthed, a law was passed in Parliament that granted amnesty to all the known and unknown perpetrators of all the known and unknown crimes of all the years of war.

Siege

The state of siege is an assault on the everyday, but an assault that is gradual rather than immediate, a slow wearing away of all the bonds that tie us together. When under siege we accept both the suspension of normal rules, and the postponement of confrontation. The longer a siege lasts, the more we accept suspension, postponement, and disconnection as norms rather than exceptions. When a city is under siege, we immediately recognize the danger of starvation; how can a populace survive if no resources

can enter from the outside? When an idea is under siege, the same danger exists: how can an idea (like modernization, or republicanism, or communism) survive and grow and change if it never breathes in the open air?

Somnolence



In his 1999 memoir *The Rise and Destruction of the Communist Party of Afghanistan* (published in Dari and Peshawar), former Politburo member Dastaghir Panshiri described the events of December 27, 1979 as follows:

> In those days, just as Amin's power was about to be destroyed, the center of decision-making, administration, political leadership, and leadership of the armed forces had been moved from the former Royal Palace (the Arg) to the newly rebuilt and refurbished Tajbeg Palace. The last meeting of the Politburo of the party was also to be convened in this governmental palace. I too, for the first and last time after my return from medical treatment in the U.S.S.R., attended the meeting of the Politburo. Amin did not arrive on time. Our wait became long. Finally, around 11 am, he entered the room and after expressing his apologies and making inquiries, he convened the meeting of the Political Bureau. . . . Reporting on his meeting with Tabayov, the Soviet ambassador to Kabul, Amin said, "The Soviet ambassador, as the representative of the leadership of the U.S.S.R., has given me a firm assurance that the Soviet government will provide technical, military, and financial assistance to Afghanistan on the same scale as Vietnam, and also that they will not leave us to face the interference of Pakistan and other countries of the region alone." Amin, while looking worried, also shared the unexpected and worrying news with the Politburo that "limited Soviet military contingents have crossed the port of Heiratan and without any popular resistance have reached the city of Pul-e-Khumri." We had not yet evaluated the consequences of the movement of our "uninvited guests" when we were asked to the dining room. As my doctors had forbidden me to eat food containing oil and salt, by chance I did not eat the soup that had been poisoned. Hafizullah Amin and the other members of the Politburo, however, ate that poisoned soup. After the end of lunch and the drinking of tea, signs of heavy sleep overtook Amin and other members of the Politburo. Amin declared the end of the meeting and the members of the Politburo returned with sleepy eyes to their homes and offices. They woke from their neglectful sleep after huge explosions and bombardment of the central communication installations of the city. Within a day or two, some were riddled with bullets, others were sent to the Pul-e-Charkhi prison, and others were sidelined. Thus ended the reign of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan. It also is worth mentioning that the cooks of the palace in those days worked for the KGB and were Soviet citizens.

Spetsnaz

Spetsnaz is an abbreviation for *Voyska spetsialnogo naznacheniya*, which refers to the Special Forces Units in the Soviet Army, Security Service, and Internal Troops. On December 27, 1979, after the Afghan Politburo was fed the drugged soup, three *spetsnaz* units launched an operation code-named "Storm-333," whose primary goal was to assassinate PDPA leader Hafizullah Amin. Different accounts of what followed offer conflicting details. Some say that Amin and his family were alone in the Tajbeg Palace along with his two hundred hand-picked guards. Others, who were just children at the time, claim that a number of politicians' families were at the palace that night attending a sort of housewarming party to celebrate Amin's move into the newly restored Tajbeg. Most agree that some kind of explosion, perhaps a grenade, cleared the first floor, and that at one point in the evening, Amin ran down the third-floor corridor, half-asleep and half-dressed (one account puts him in Adidas boxers), shouting to his wife to pass the Kalashnikovs. Everyone knows that a few minutes later he was dead, shot through the heart, and his eleven-year-old son killed by shrapnel from a grenade. While the support troops outside the building far outnumbered the Afghans inside, the *spetsnaz* who actually entered and engaged the guard force were a small cadre of fifty-four men from the KGB's "Thunder" and "Zenith" strike forces. They took the palace in forty-three minutes (although in their memoirs, former special operatives would remember their slow advance up the Tajbeg's corkscrew approach road as an endless hail of gunfire). No one agrees on the number of casualties on either side, although one Russian participant would admit years later that they had been ordered to "kill everyone" and that when it was all over, they wrapped all the bodies in the palace's blood-stained carpets and buried them without ceremony in the grounds. While Storm-333 unfolded in the Tajbeg, other *spetsnaz* units had attacked other nearby targets: the General Staff building (which in those days was the Dar ul-Aman Palace), the Security Service building, and the Interior Ministry. More strike teams fanned out through the city and took out power plants, phone exchanges, and hard-line Khalq ministries, ministers, and generals. The rest of the Red Army was marching in to meet the advance force. The occupation had begun.

Students

Afghanistan is a predominantly non-literate society, although it is quite literary. The majority of the population has never been taught to read or write, but still participates in a widespread culture of memorization that encompasses *surahs* (verses) from the holy Q'uran, historical epics like the *Shahnameh*, local poets like Rumi, Jami, and Rabia Balkhi, and various short verse forms, such as the *landai* couplets. The first modern school was established in 1906, but state investment in education really expanded under Amanullah. The number of students steadily grew through the 1940s and 1950s and neared one million in the 1960s and 1970s. During the relative freedom of the "decade of democracy" (1963–73), student politics emerged as a trendsetter. The deeply divided Kabul University student council, on which both Najib and Hekmatyar served, prefigured many of the oppositions that would wrack Afghanistan from the 1970s to the 1990s. Since 2001, the rapid expansion of education—particularly girls' education, which was forbidden under the Taliban—has brought millions of children to school, yet quality has not kept up with quantity at any level, from the primary to the tertiary. A significant number of high school graduates cannot find places in universities, while many university graduates have no marketable skills. These students swell the discontented ranks of the unemployed, the other Taliban (which literally means

"students," reflecting the original Taliban's roots in the madrassas or religious schools of northern Pakistan), who are drawn to some form of armed opposition because they have no jobs, no money, no support structures, no place in society, and no hope for the future.

Tarzi

Mahmud Tarzi is widely considered the father of modern Afghan nationalism. He belonged to a branch of the Mohammadzai royal lineage known for literary accomplishments. His father and grandfather were both poets, and his early education was informed equally by traditional Islamic culture and poetic sensibilities. His mature intellect was formed, however, by his family's exile in the Ottoman Empire between 1881 and 1905. During this period, Tarzi became an active member of the Young Turks and married into a prominent Damascene family. When he returned to Afghanistan, he convinced a number of Young Turks to return with him to launch a process of modernization; their example inspired the Young Afghans to agitate for constitutional reform. He persuaded Amir Habibullah to allow him to publish Afghanistan's first newspaper, *Siraj ul-Akhbar*, where he carefully exposed his readers to modernity. (To this end, he also translated Jules Verne into Dari; the popular response to Verne's work in Afghanistan anticipated by some decades Arthur C. Clarke's famous remark that "any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic.") Every genre of literature in Europe was propagated by Tarzi in Afghanistan and took root through the imaginative efforts of his students and their students. Two of his daughters married Habibullah's sons, with Soraya becoming Amanullah's queen and among the first Muslim princesses to tour Europe without a veil. Tarzi himself became Amanullah's foreign minister and led the team that negotiated the independence of Afghanistan from Britain in 1921. After the 1929 revolt, he settled in exile in Turkey. Several of his sons eventually returned to Afghanistan, but one became a general in the Turkish army. Tarzi's name was formally obliterated during the first decades of the new dynasty, but he was rediscovered by a new generation of Afghans in the 1960s and is now credited with the extensive influence he undoubtedly exerted.

Train

Die 7 km lange Eisenbahn zwischen Kabul und Darul-Aman war stark überfüllt.

By the 1950s there was no longer any trace of the train that ran from the match factory just opposite the Dar ul-Aman Palace to the Harten Bridge, the beginning of the heavily residential area of Kabul. The Henschel-manufactured engine is still here, in the Kabul Museum. Why the tracks were removed is a mystery, but removed they were, and they must have been pulled up rail by rail and tie by tie—a deliberate act of unmaking. Amanullah's dream of a railway that would connect Afghanistan to the outside world—which would have shocked his grandfather Abdur Rahman, who refused even to let the British extend railheads up to his borders as part of his isolationist, protectionist politics—dissolved into a few scattered photographs and lines of print, like the photograph published in the German magazine *UHU* in 1930, or the report on page 15 of the *London Times* of June 19, 1928:

> Telegrams in Brief: The only railway in Afghanistan, the narrow-gauge line between Kabul and Dar ul-Aman, the new city built two years ago by King Amanullah, had its first serious accident last week, when an engine overturned, killing one man and injuring two. Its driver, a Peshawari Pathan, escaped.

Curiously omitted from the *UHU* caption of two years later is any mention of the 1929 revolt that had unseated Amanullah and placed a new dynasty on the throne, and that would, ultimately, stop the train forever.

Traps

On a hillside near Bamiyan, in a landscape whose features are described in Zoroastrian myths, is a monument known as *Shahr-i-Zohak*, or the Red City. A fortress was built onto this steep cliff in two layers—one from the Buddhist era, in the third or fourth century A.D., and one several thousand years later, after Afghanistan had been almost wholly converted to Islam—and a twisting path up to its summit is carefully marked out with white stones that stand out starkly against the red earth. Individually, each stone marks a place where a landmine was removed, and together they map out a safe way through terrain that may still contain dangers. Writing about Afghanistan is a bit like walking through the Red City. If we keep to the marked path, and avoid the obvious pitfalls, we may avoid setting off any explosions. But what about the pleasure of meandering off the path, sidling up to the unknown, looking at things sideways instead of straight on? Sometimes speculation is dangerous, at other times pure fun; sometimes speculation is necessary to shake loose different truths. As Donald Rumsfeld once said, there are "known knowns, known unknowns, and unknown unknowns"; as someone else said, the wisdom lies in knowing the difference.

Unanimity

The essential danger of a political system based on unanimity is the suppression of healthy skepticism, critical thinking, and other forms of discussion that can be read as dissent. A "unanimous" group can survive quite a lot of external criticism and dissent if it allows debate and criticality within its own ranks, so that decisions that look unanimous to the outside are actually subject to some meaningful internal discussion and review. It is more common, however, for unanimity to be insisted upon to the point that unanimity becomes autocracy, decisions from the top are ratified automatically, meaningful discussion becomes impossible, and dissent within the ranks becomes a punishable offense. It is also quite common for a political culture of unanimity to spread outward until it subsumes an entire state, giving rise to the need to punish and purge dissenters everywhere and the expansion of the security apparatus to carry out that task. For example, if it had been possible to hold a real debate in the Soviet Politburo in 1979 it might have saved Afghanistan, the U.S.S.R., and the rest of the world from the invasion that many in the Soviet leadership later came to regard as, quite possibly, the worst decision they ever ratified unanimously.

Unfinished

For Afghans, the Dar ul-Aman Palace has always symbolized the unfinished project of which it was both the most visible icon and the smallest part. For decades, the road that leads to Dar ul-Aman was lined by majestic poplars. When the poplars were planted, the road was envisioned as a Champs-Élysées or Kurfürstendamm; but the district that should have grown up around it only existed on the yellowing paper of abandoned plans. By the time the poplars were cut down for firewood, in the most desperate days of the civil war, Amanullah's dream of a new Kabul had been taken up, destroyed, taken up again, and destroyed more completely. These days, 70 percent of the dwellings in Afghan cities are informal and illegal—constructed without plan or permission, growing haphazardly in the cracks and corners and hastily patching over all the wounds made by war. Repeated attempts to return to Amanullah's unfinished project indicate both a yearning for what he represents and the difficulty of attaining it. It will take years to close the gap in literacy between men and women caused by the repressions of the Taliban, and the exodus of intellectuals during the war has drained educational institutions of vitality and credibility. While a vocal press has revived freedom of expression, the intelligentsia lacks consensus on a vision that combines freedom and responsibility. Rule of law, the most vital part of Amanullah's legacy, is fragile. Most agree that justice is not blind, and that the poor suffer from injustice and abuse at the hands of the powerful and the rich. Independence, as embodied by a strong state that can reflect the aspirations and respond to the needs of its citizens, has yet to be attained. If the unfinished project is to be finished and the ghost of Amanullah put to rest, a new generation of Afghans must articulate a program of reforms that can be implemented from below rather than imposed from above. If they do not succeed, the unfinished project will linger, haunting another century with what might have been.

Vanishing

In a special 1966 government almanac dedicated to Kabul, the writer Gharghast described a visit to Dar ul-Aman as follows:

> On the right hand we find the museum, the school of Mahmud Tarzi, a series of small and large buildings, all of which are beautifully cultivated with flowers and are full of mature trees. We continue on to the wide road that takes us to the Tajbeg hill. On top of this hill is another palace made of stone and concrete that has a distinct grandeur, although most of its internal decorations had been left incomplete, and until recent years it had been left unused. This Tajbeg Palace is three stories high, and there are legends that its bathrooms were made of lapis lazuli and seamed with gold. Most of the internal parts were not finished according to the original plan. On the eastern side of this hill is a very large *maidan* (flat plain or parade ground). Next to the village of Sarasiya is another building constructed from marble, but left incomplete; only its first story remains. This building was called the new Arg. Its foundation was laid during the Amanullah period, but it is not known why the project was not completed. [The writer is being sarcastic here, since he knows perfectly well why.] We retrace our steps, and where the train station used to be located forty years ago, we take the western gate and enter the garden, and slowly move up the hill on which the impressive palace building is located. We move forward, and at the middle of the hill enter the huge courtyard of the palace. We descend from the car and move by foot to face the courtyard, which is rectangular in shape, in the middle of which is a pool and a fountain. We enter the large door of the palace, cross the long hallway, ascend its marble stairs step by step, and stand in the grand corridor of the third floor. After that we face the huge walnut door that leads into the central chamber specifically constructed for the great *Majlis* (Parliament) of Afghanistan. After seeing its decorations, and other abandoned furniture, we come to the balcony and look out at the verdant area of Chardi. . . . The road right in front of us, which extends from north to south up to Barakat, is seven kilometers long and constitutes the great road of Dar ul-Aman, the "new city" of Kabul. In the plan for this new city, drawn by the German architects, the palace of Dar ul-Aman was the center. The rest of the green area of Chardi was divided into four districts. Each was to be successively built around the palace. The cruel hand of time, however, did not allow the city to be completed. Therefore its entire plan was destroyed and vanished.

Veils

The preoccupation outside Afghanistan with the veils worn by women inside Afghanistan sometimes seems like a fetishistic insistence on the symbols that mark gender difference rather than a move to address the real causes of inequality and oppression. Still, successive generations of Afghan reformers have also taken up the lifting of the veil as a symbol for larger efforts to end purdah, the (historically urban and upper-class) custom of isolating women from contact with men who are not immediate family members. (Among the large numbers of Afghan rural families living from subsistence agriculture, both the veil and purdah are impractical, due to the need for women to work in the fields.) In the earlier years of Amanullah's reign, Queen Soraya attempted to introduce a "new fashion" in veils, whereby smart Western hats would substitute for the traditional head-covering *chaderi* and a diaphanous scarf would partially cover the face. Later, her husband decreed the end of purdah and required the wives of public officials to remove their veils, with the queen publicly lifting hers at the announcement as an example. While this decree has been held up as evidence that Amanullah attempted to impose radical religious reforms on his people, thus provoking their revolt, in reality the announcement had little effect on the day-to-day practices of most Afghans, especially those outside Kabul's elite, and it was easily reversed after the ousting of the reformer king. The efforts of Prince Daoud as prime minister in the 1950s were more successful, though initially more covert. No official decrees were issued, no public "unveiling" events were staged. The word was quietly put out through civil-service networks that the lifting of both veil and purdah should be encouraged, and a decade later (as the photographic record shows) women were studying at Kabul University wearing bouffant hairdos and knee-length skirts. Even more than the resurgence of religious conservatism, the dangers and uncertainties of decades of war may have caused the return to veiling, and in particular the concealment of the full-body *chaderi* (better known in the West by the Arabic term "burqa"),

by the same generation of urban women who experienced the market-enabled freedoms of the decade of democracy and the relative gender equality of the Communist period. (The reforms of these periods did not significantly change the lives of rural women.) In wartime, a veil takes on the qualities of a shield; it protects by deflecting unwanted attention away from the wearer. The perfect anonymity of the burqa provides even more protective coloring, as it becomes a kind of camouflage, concealing the truth of whatever it covers. The two extremes of this condition are the insurgents in Algeria (or more recently, Afghanistan) who have used full-body veils to cover bombs, and the women in Iran (reportedly 30 percent of the female population) who no longer wear any clothing at all under their full-body veils, as a protest against their imposition by the state. A final note: it is unwise to assume that because a woman wears a veil, she is not a feminist.

Whispers

The whisper campaign, whereby an anonymous source spreads rumors about a political or military target, has a long history both inside and outside Afghanistan. Whisper campaigns, like psychological warfare operations, are often fueled by a volatile mix of truth and fiction. And, just as in the game once known as "Chinese Whispers" and renamed (in the age of political correctness) "Telephone," the content or calibration of a whisper cannot be controlled once it begins to pass from one whisperer to the next. Since the twentieth century, the machinations of whisper campaigns have also been facilitated by first the mechanical and then the digital reproduction of photographs, whose frozen truth seems particularly easy to manipulate or reframe to an opponent's advantage. One early example is the use of this photograph of Queen Soraya, in the dress made for the 1927–28 European tour of Amanullah and Soraya, to discredit the royal family and label them as infidels and unbelievers who had abandoned the strictures of Islamic custom. The photograph, evidence of the queen's European unveiling, was put into circulation in the company of whispers of other broken rules, impossible to substantiate and equally impossible to squash. Within a year, the whispers had grown so loud that they silenced Amanullah, Soraya, Mahmud Tarzi, and all their fantastic plans and dreams.

Xs & Os

Since the 1930s, the Afghan government has issued annual almanacs or statistical yearbooks that provide both written and photographic records of the changing structures, aims, and players in the Great Game of governance. The copies that survive have often passed through several sets of hands, and like most old books they retain some traces of their former owners: marginalia, re-bindings, random slips of paper used as improvised bookmarks. Perhaps the most insistent of these marks are

the Xs and Os that obliterate or call attention to faces in certain photographs. In one late Daoud-era yearbook, every instance of the Iranian ruler Reza Shah's face was crossed out, in the section where Daoud's meetings with foreign dignitaries were documented; we might in this case speculate that the former owner was a student in that era and saw friends or comrades imprisoned under the Shah's regime. In an almanac from the first years of the Communist government, a single face is circled in red pen in the back row of a group photo of PDPA leaders. The photograph is blurry and unlabeled, and it is difficult to discern to whom the face belongs or why it may have been marked out. But knowing all we know now about the excesses and brutalities of those days, it is not difficult to imagine that some ministry worker, on receiving his copy of the almanac, vented his frustration, rage, and sorrow by circling the face of someone against whom he did not dare complain in words. From these small signs we compose a history, or histories, or stories, or fictions. Were you waving or drowning, protesting or acquiescing? At a distance of decades, it can be quite difficult to tell.

Young Afghans

In the twentieth century, "Young Afghans" referred to several different generations of a semi-secret constitutional movement inspired by the Young Turks. The first group of Young Afghans emerged in the last years of Abdul Rahman's reign to advocate for a constitutional monarchy. Brigadier Subhan, whose courageous leadership of the movement has been largely forgotten, was executed for his views. The next group of Young Afghans emerged during Habibullah's reign. One Young Afghan wrote a long and stirring poem condemning Habibullah's indulgence in the colonialist game of golf, but then went further and attempted to shoot the ruler. Some of the Young Afghans were imprisoned, and others executed. Their fortunes turned when they recruited the young prince Amanullah to their cause and shot Habibullah dead during a hunting trip in 1919 (though the identity of the assailant was never established). Once in power, Amanullah released the imprisoned Young Afghans and enlisted them and their comrades in his government and modernizing project, even though some were quite critical of his autocratic approach. When Amanullah was overthrown and Nadir Shah took the throne, the Young Afghans faced their nemesis. After Nadir Shah was assassinated by a student in 1933, the Young Afghans experienced severe reprisals. Many were imprisoned, forced into exile, or executed. Although some of the survivors were later brought back into the government and rose to prominent positions, they always retained a strong current of resentment against the royal family and its style of governance.

Zenana

If purdah is the isolation of women from men outside their families, imposed by men inside their families, "zenana" (as the term is currently constructed) posits a different kind of restriction, a space that is reserved for women by women, and into which men must ask permission to enter. While purdah is a theory that can be imposed on any space, zenana is usually a specific, physical space. Within the bounds of the zenana, women are free to act, speak, move without constraint—specifically, without the constraints imposed by the observation of men. While each zenana is circumscribed by its physical limits, each house usually has a zenana, a space into which men will not go unless invited. In a royal palace, like the Arg or Dilkusha, this was the harem or seraglio where the wives and *surati* (concubines) of the king lived, as in the photograph of Amir Habibullah to the right. In an ordinary house it is the "women's room." The reclaiming of the term "zenana" from its strict association with purdah and the harem owes much to the fiction of feminist writers like Rokheya Shekhawat Hossein, whose 1905 short story "Sultana's Dream" playfully imagines an upended society where women have locked men into *mardana* (to maintain purdah when it became necessary for the women to take over running a society whose men had failed to solve its problems) and turned an entire kingdom into a joyful and harmonious zenana-as-utopia. In view of all the problems still facing Afghanistan today, perhaps our best hope is that the next generation of Afghan women takes up Sultana's dream.

Mariam Ghani (b. 1978) is an artist living in New York.

Ashraf Ghani (b. 1949), author of *Fixing Failed States* (in English) and *A Window to a Just Order* (in Dari and Pashtu), lives in Kabul.

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