

How Local is Urban Governance in Fragile States?

**Theory and Practice of Capital City Politics
in Sierra Leone and Afghanistan**

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Abstract

Historically capital cities in less developed countries such as Sierra Leone and Afghanistan have served as sites of deliberate attempts to bring about change in both local and national political systems. Ranging from modernist agendas to contemporary donor-driven ‘reconstruction’ efforts, strategies to build effective state structures, including local governance institutions, have been at the core of such politics.

Drawing on a multidisciplinary methodology that combines historical analysis with micro- and meso-level field research, the thesis explores the dynamics of agency and structure in an investigation of the function of capital cities as political arenas. It reviews key strands of urban political theory for their applicability to developing country contexts and situations of state fragility. The thesis finds existing approaches to be insufficiently suited to explaining political processes operating in and on war-affected capital cities. Current theoretical treatments present cities as distinct or contained political spaces, which in these contexts they are not. They also fail to account for radical changes in the polities in which they are embedded and underestimate the degree of coercion exercised towards local stakeholders by supra-local actors, highlighting the need for a revised interpretative framework.

The study juxtaposes policies and programmes targeted at urban *and* national level institutional change with urban political trajectories in war-affected Freetown and Kabul. The thesis examines how external resources and lines of control create political axes that intersect and transcend urban spaces. The research finds that these axes work to the detriment of local political deliberation and explains why institutional reforms aimed at strengthening local political agency have given rise to the opposite outcome. The research thus illustrates the importance of political economy factors related to international intervention and shows how these have served to influence the nature of capital city politics in least developed countries.

Empirically the study establishes why the two capital cities function as linchpins of international assistance yet fail to benefit from local political empowerment and equitable urban recovery. It is concluded that local politics in these two cities are overdetermined by national and international interests and agendas. Theoretically the thesis offers the concept of ‘tri-axial urban governance,’ which combines historically informed political economy analysis with an explicitly spatial framework for analysing politics in and on war-affected cities. This reconfigured conceptual scaffolding exposes power relations operative in city politics in fragile states and explains their impact on dynamics of structure and agency.

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For with Thee is the fountain of life;
in Thy light do we see light.

Psalm 36:9

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D.E.E.
New York, August 2007

Dedicated to

Monika Wege-Luft

*and “Oma Eisebein”
Margret Wege (2004)*

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Abbreviations

AACA	Afghan Assistance Coordination Authority
APC	All Peoples Congress
AREU	Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit
CSO	Central Statistics Office
DAAD	German Academic Exchange Service
DESTIN	Development Studies Institute
DFID	Department for International Development
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
FDI	Foreign Domestic Investment
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GNI	Gross National Income
GoA	Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan
GoSL	Government of Sierra Leone
GTZ	Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit
HDI	Human Development Index
HIPC	Highly Indebted Poor Countries
ICG	International Crisis Group
IDM	Illicit Diamond Mining
IDPs	Internally Displaced Persons
IFIs	International Financial Institutions
ILO	International Labour Office
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INGO	International Non-governmental Organisation
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
KURP	Kabul Urban Reconstruction Project
LED	Local Economic Development
LSE	London School of Economics and Political Science
MIT	Massachusetts Institute of Technology
MUDH	Ministry of Urban Development and Housing
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
NPP	National Priority Programmes
NPRC	National Provisional Ruling Council
NSP	National Solidarity Programme
NUP	National Urban Programme
PLP	Peoples Liberation Party
PPP	Purchasing Power Parity
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
PRT	Provincial Reconstruction Team
RfP	Request for Proposals
RT	Regulation Theory
RUF	Revolutionary United Front
RUFP	Revolutionary United Front Party
SDR	Special Drawing Rights
SLA	Sierra Leone Association for the Improvement and Defence of Commerce, Agriculture, and Industry

SLPP	Sierra Leone Peoples Party
SOW	Statement of Work
TISA	Transitional Islamic State of Afghanistan
UN	United Nations
UNAMA	United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
UNAMSIL	United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone
UNDAF	United Nations Development Assistance Framework
UNDESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCAP	UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
UNHAS	United Nations Humanitarian Air Services
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees
UNIOSIL	United Nations Integrated Office in Sierra Leone
UNOCHA	UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
URA	Urban Regime Analysis
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
World Bank	International Bank for Reconstruction and Development

Foreword



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On 22 March 2006, Jacques Barrot, the European Commissioner of Transport, issued a list of 92 airlines banned from landing at European airports. A number of carriers immediately sprang to my eye: these airlines are not only transporting passengers; they are also carriers of emotional souvenirs from my fieldwork in Afghanistan and Sierra Leone. While the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) appeared to be the front-runner of impossible companies, I was not really astonished to also find *Ariana Afghan Airlines* in this illustrious collection. Having flown with them only once—I had to leave Kabul in a hurry due to the rapidly worsening security situation in late spring of 2005—I remember vividly the loose seats and swinging overhead bins. However, I was slightly more befuddled that *Phoenix Aviation* of Kyrgyzstan was featured there as well. They were the main contractor for the *United Nations Humanitarian Air Services* (UNHAS), operating several flights per week from Dubai to Kabul, and my airline of choice for three of my four visits to the country. I can also claim to have flown *KamAir* once, the warlord-owned carrier whose only jet plane crashed eleven miles from Kabul in a snowstorm in early February 2005—one day prior to my scheduled departure—causing 107 deaths. It remains a mystery why they did not make it onto Monsieur Barrot’s list. To my satisfaction—and pushing the shares in aviation insecurity between my two case study countries back into balance—I found *Paramount Airlines* on the roster, an airline operating four Russian MI-8 helicopters built in the late 1970s, which connect Freetown proper with Lungi Airport, Sierra Leone’s international hub, through hourly eight-minute flights. In spite of the brevity of these commutes they can be memorable journeys, such as when the chopper that I was travelling in was shattered by a heavy twitch after taking off from the sandblasted helipad in Freetown-Aberdeen. Hence it did not come as a total surprise when in June 2007 one of their helicopters crashed, killing 19 passengers including Togo’s Sports Minister. For my part though, I have been lucky enough to always land safely, and looking back at my travels I feel a deep sense of gratitude for the glimpses into urban life and politics in Sierra Leone and Afghanistan, which in crucial aspects are so markedly different from my experience of European and North American cities.

Chapter 1: Rationale, hypotheses, structure

Why a study on urban politics in fragile states?

Politics and urban life are strongly intertwined social phenomena, in history as much as in the present. It has been in cities where the concept of the “citizen” was forged and where debates on deliberation, legitimacy, and democracy have been taking place since the time of Greek city states (Blockmans 2003). But David Harvey (2003: 939) has also remarked, “calmness and civility in urban history are the exception not the rule.” This comment echoes the doctrine of St. Augustine (410), who more than a millennium and a half previously noted that although “the earthly city [...] has its good in this world, [...], this city is often divided against itself by litigations, wars, quarrels, and such victories as are either life-destroying or short-lived.”¹ Analysing the specific processes through which different cities shape and are shaped by conflicts, the range of social and political patterns that emerge, and “whether outcomes are creative or destructive,” according to Harvey (*ibid.*) “the only interesting question,” is key to understanding the dynamic relationship between cities and conflict.

Contemporary theories aiming at structuring and explaining politics in cities thus touch upon vital issues of society, including the preservation of peace. These theories have so far been developed and applied predominantly to urban politics in the so-called ‘developed,’ industrialised countries to explain city-level politics in urban spaces that have, to some degree at least, undergone a capitalist transformation. Conversely, almost no theorising and testing has focused on less developed countries, and certainly not on those states whose polity is structurally fragile and operationally weak due to being challenged—often violently—by actors either within these countries (cf. Caselli and Coleman 2006) or beyond national boundaries, such as terrorist networks (cf. Milliken and Krause 2002). This is surprising in light of the logic introduced above, namely that it was urban spaces that constituted the

¹ Cf. Martin (1972) for a discussion of St. Augustine’s philosophy of the heavenly and the earthly city.

first fora—political arenas—in which debates on the factors generating peaceful co-existence and prosperity, both locally and at what is now known as the ‘national’ or even global levels. The fact that little is known on whether existing theories of urban politics apply to settings marked by violent conflict and rampant poverty constitutes a theoretical gap in need of being filled.

Herein, while in fact implicit in the theories of political change theorists have pointed out that the “three-tiered agenda of linking agency, space, and structure [...] is rarely explicitly taken up” (Tajbakhsh 2001: 22) in theoretical texts on urban political economy. This is despite one of the central lessons learned from the debate on urban autonomy during the 1980s being that power relations that play out in the city do not always originate in the city (cf. Beauregard 1984, Mollenkopf 1989). From this insight the journey to questioning the applicability of urban theory to post-war urban settings is a short one. At the same time, the call for a holistic yet heterogeneous urban theory that is applicable to all cities in all countries has recently been uttered by theorists insisting on placing “different kinds of cities within the same field of urban theory without suggesting that all cities are alike.” (Robinson 2006: 63, cf. Scott and Storper 2003). Capital cities in least developed countries just emerging from large-scale violence are tempting places to analyse in light of such claims. If such cities could be integrated meaningfully—that is, if they didn’t require an ‘extra set of theory’—into existing theoretical constructs, this would suggest that other conflict cities could potentially be incorporated as well.

This study rests on an assumption that urban institutions and policies cannot be modified or changed effectively unless urban politics are understood. This proposition draws inspiration from the observation that writing about urban politics is not primarily concerned about the place of politics, but about the “politics of place” (Burns et al. 1994: 7-8, cf. Smith and Katz 1993), i.e., the analysis of inter-spatial processes of institutional change and policymaking. Brenner (2001: 599, cf. Sellers 2005: 441, Kaltenbrunner 2006: 15, Kufeld 2004: 17, Harriss 2002: 494) calls this the ‘singular and plural politics of scale,’ and it is the plural notion, the one that cuts across polity

layers, that is central to this present study. An analytical framework is therefore needed that accounts for both changes and continuities in political choice and structural contexts over time and within a given place, but also at different levels of politico-economic interaction (cf. Stone 1987: 4-5).

Similar to the embeddedness of markets in specific social and political relations, so can the space for local political agency be expected to vary from place to place – as much as specific roles of central governments and international actors in “shaping and delimiting that space” (Burns et al. 1994: 11, cf. Karstedt 2004, Tetzlaff 2003: 343). Grindle (2005: 2, 14) explains,

“Acting within particular contexts, those who lead change initiatives often try to undermine the power of existing interests and to alter the biases of institutions. Whether they are successful or not depends in part on their strategies, but also on the *context* within which they seek to promote change. [...] The politics of policy change reflect a dynamic interaction of interests, institutions, and agency in a *particular (and sometimes changing) context* that unfolds over time. [emphasis added]”

The resulting challenge, then, is to explain rigidity, rupture and reconfiguration of urban institutions *vis-à-vis* highly dynamic environments. Recalling Immergut’s (1992, cf. Dunlavy 1994) contention that those designing the institutional framework are usually not the ones who design policies that take effect within it, Brian Uzzi (1997) has pointed to the “paradox of embeddedness” where agency for change is possible, but structural change is usually difficult, which in turn limits the scope for agency. However, while this rings true in late-industrialising (historically) and industrialised countries (from a contemporary viewpoint), one may challenge this sequence of “agents shaping institutions shaping agency” in the case of post-war developing countries, proposing instead a *higher degree of immediateness* resulting in a higher degree of discretion for policy-making and institutional change potentially to the benefit of both local and international actors. Moreover, while this investigation could mistakenly lead to an assumption of “fluid institutions” where *every* structure is in flux *over time* (Thelen 1999: 397), the empirical observations discussed in this study revoke this by showing that some institutions such as ethno-political faultlines across rural-urban ‘divides’ have remained rigid despite the dynamic past.

When it is thus posited that systemic factors such as power, incentives and institutions are conditioning the scope of agency over time, I am touching almost inevitably on an important body of sociological literature on ‘structuration’ whose central propositions are attributed mainly to Anthony Giddens. Henceforth this study also creates an opportunity to re-examine the allegedly self-constraining nature of Giddens’ theory of structuration, which posits that it is rendered in an idling circle of structure-conditioning-agency-conditioning-structure caused by “a conceptual trap [of] residual sociologism” (Soja 1989: 141, 156). In a dynamic environment such as post-war, least developed countries, isn’t it legitimate to suggest a greater likelihood for an ‘empirical escape’ from this trap? The termination of large-scale violent conflicts may trigger a window of opportunity for what I propose to label ‘accelerated structuration’ – institutional structures are altered rapidly and deeply through the cross-spatial interaction of urban, national and international actors.

We should note at this point that the idea that cross-border cooperation can accelerate the change of structures that embed such interaction is one that Giddens discusses in his “Runaway World” (1999: 51), yet he does so without raising the case of least developed (and pre-capitalist) countries or those arising from large-scale violence and experiencing targeted intervention. In Giddens’ view, structures ‘run away’ without armed conflict, but due to collective action increasing the intensity of global flows of goods and services. In the view purported in this study, structures are being altered within spaces that are not well-integrated parts of these global networks and through processes that are not necessarily collective – ‘accelerated structuration’ happens at the spatial margins of post-industrialist capitalism.

We also have to note that the term itself has not been invented here. Neil Brenner (2001: 697) must be credited for introducing the notion of ‘accelerated restructuring’ in his discussion of systemic capitalist crises. Brenner (*ibid.*) uses the concept to argue that “scalar configurations are not infinitely malleable, even during phases of intensified, *accelerated restructuring* [emphasis added].” But much like Giddens, he looks at capitalist and post-industrial societal systems and, what is more, provides no immediate

empirical discussion of his contention. This is where this study delves in – it aims at clarifying what exactly *is* going on during such potential “phases of intensified, accelerated restructuring” (Brenner 2001), and it tests this in a research setting characterised by substantial supranational involvement typical of (but not necessarily limited to) spaces of recently ended large-scale violence and institutional multiplicity, the latter partly an effect of unfinished projects of creating nations within a capitalist structure of production. Crucially then, this enquiry also addresses the accusation brought forward against Giddens of “dip[ping] into empirical analysis at will and without commitment to any but his own framework of interpretation” (Soja 1989: 155). Rather than trying to ‘make structuration work’, the empirical data used here help assess the applicability of Giddens’ *analytical* framework.

How close, then, does this investigation come to delivering an analysis commensurate with an extension of urban Marxism (cf. Giddens 1984: 366)? While certainly engaging with urban neo-Marxist literature, the enquiry maintains a respectful distance. Soja (1989: 32) notes that Marx himself regarded geography an “unnecessary complication” to the determinist nature of capitalism, a conviction that has served to fuel the “annihilation of space by time”, as Soja puts it (*ibid.*, 33). This ‘despatialisation’ propagated by orthodox Marxism was eventually reverted through what is now labelled the ‘spatial turn’ – a revived interest in the relations of space, knowledge, and power (Soja 2002, Harvey 2000, 1989). Agreeing with these critics, the present enquiry seeks to transcend this competitive view of time and space. Space assumes a central role in this analysis in that it broaches empirical phenomena such as migration, production and politics, tagging them as central to the understanding of political processes surrounding the city as a policy objective and occupying the city as the political arena. History matters too, and greatly so, yet we shall see that precisely the post-war context including international intervention and externally driven institutional (re)construction has the capacity to tip the balance towards space, not time.

This said, an uncritical reliance on the currently prominent post-modernist school of urban political theory to prey on the latter’s remarkable success in reconstituting discursively a “location for spatiality” (Lefebvre 1991: 119) in

the analysis of global and local political economies and their interconnections, would be equally misleading. The undeniable existence of politico-economic structures of extraction and exploitation in the developing world must not cover up the differences in nature and relative weight of their constituting factors when compared to conceptually similar configurations in now-industrialised countries. If space matters for analysing the latter, it might do so differently in different politico-economic contexts.

Despite the attractiveness of the intellectual thought experiment, filling this theoretical gap and addressing the resulting analytical agenda are not considered ends in themselves. In a recent contribution to the literature on peacebuilding in fragile societies, Scott Bollens (2006: 67) has proposed that “[t]he city is important in peacebuilding because it is in the streets and neighborhoods of urban agglomerations that there is the negotiation over, and clarification of, abstract concepts such as democracy, fairness, and tolerance.” Therefore, explaining urban politics in cities in fragile states also serves a very practical purpose in that a better understanding of such politics may help make cities places conducive to peacebuilding, not only locally, but potentially yielding additional positive effects on other parts of the country as well, or even on the country as a whole.

The spatial level of peacebuilding is thus regarded as an important factor determining the effectiveness of peacebuilding (cf. Herrero 2005, Darby and MacGinty 2003, Abdullah 2002, Abrahamsen 2001, Low 1996, Lederach 1995). Yet a “black hole” (Stanley 2003: 11-12, cf. Gleditsch 2004: 148-150) has purportedly been identified

“in the peacemaking literature when it comes to cities and to the urban scale [even though] substantive arguments about what is required for conflict resolution, about the dynamics of conflict transformation, about the praxis of peace making, all actually link very clearly to the urban scale, and cry out for agency at the urban level.”

In sum, even though peacebuilding is purportedly a bottom-up process, “in practice, the reverse is frequently the case.” (MacLean 1998: 35)

To be fair, despite the gaps and 'black holes' identified, scholarly interest in the issue of *local* politics and conflict is not entirely new. Research exploring the relationship between space and politics in fragile polities has gained momentum in the past decade, both in political geography and in peace and conflict studies (cf. Long 2001: 223-231), thus also responding to Bourdieu's (1992: 33) call for integrating theory and practice in social enquiry.

This study builds on these different perspectives by proceeding in tandem, theoretically and empirically. The analysis examines the extent to which existing theoretical approaches to urban politics are applicable to fragile statehood and then, on this basis, reconfigures a framework for urban analysis that can accommodate the reality in two cities in such fragile environments, and possibly also other cities in similar settings as well.

The two cities that this study looks at in depth are Freetown and Kabul, the capital cities of Sierra Leone and Afghanistan. These two countries have notably been labelled 'failed states' in the recently evolving liberal-interventionist literature on the subject, which aims at categorising countries on a continuum from collapse to weakness (Rotberg 2004: 11). Arguably an alarmingly reductionist ontology, this concept and classification have subsequently served to inform statements such that the intervention of external military forces helped Sierra Leone recover "sufficiently to be considered failed rather than collapsed," and to then argue that it was the national "election in 2002 [that] capped the process of recovery back to mere failure," (ibid., 12) a process that should be supported through "jump-starting battered economies, re-introducing the rule of law, and rejuvenating civil society" (ibid., 33). This task sounds straightforward. But it isn't. Fragile states (some of which the aforementioned camp has labelled 'failed') may not be effective in creating livelihoods and delivering services to their citizens and often also exclude their citizens from decision-making procedures. Their monopoly of violence may be challenged by actors or groups with subversive, progressive and even legitimate agendas. But all of these aforementioned processes that render such countries in a dynamic state of fragility do not imply that such countries are political greenfields, institutional vacuums, or structural voids. On the contrary, when

international forces (military as well as ‘humanitarian’ and those committed to ‘development’) set their feet on these allegedly ‘failed’ territories, what they find—if they allow themselves to listen and see—is a plethora of actors, institutions, and structures. These may not be effective; they may even stand in fierce competition with one another, but they are the fragments that when taken together constitute the political, economic, and social reality that is supposed to be saved from ‘failure’ and strengthened to be rendered less fragile. Asking what happens to the incentive structures of different actors embedded in the political economy of such places when foreign resources, plans, and personnel suddenly come flooding in therefore is a promising approach. What kind of institutional and organisational frictions occur as a result of these interactions? And what are the benefits and costs to the different stakeholders in the recipient country, both at the city level and nationally?

The investigation presented in this thesis shows that throughout history, resources *external* to the city and the resulting political leverage have mattered greatly in such settings (cf. Mitchell 1988). It thus concurs with recent studies such as Hohe’s (2005: 68-70) fascinating analysis of transitional administration in East Timor that development policy that is aimed at “breaking through traditional systems of power and former corruptive top-down decision-making processes” (*ibid.*) cause more harm than they create tangible improvements for those subject to them. Hohe (*ibid.*) concludes, “[s]ocial engineering seems very tempting in a post conflict scenario, yet without full knowledge of local dynamics, attempted empowerment of new leaders will fail as local realities are stronger.” This example from a young country that has—for a number of years at least—been considered a successful exercise in democratic state-building suggests once again that the core problem is not a lack of formal institutions or technical capacity, but rather the tension between external visions of, and measures toward, the implementation of depoliticised urban development plans on one hand, and the reality of cross-level urban politics on the other (cf. Bastian and Luckham 2003: 314-318).

With intensifying international interconnectedness now termed ‘globalisation’² and ‘regional integration’ and the simultaneous softening of national boundaries, local-national interaction concerning the distribution and use of resources increasingly renders supra-national organisation and institutions, in particular in Europe but also in the Americas and parts of Asia. The analytical category that has evolved to capture these cross-level interactions is ‘multi-level governance.’ Urban actors and structures are central part of these governance networks (e.g., Bache and Flinders 2006, Welch and Kennedy-Pipe 2006, Scharpf 1997). With reference to European cities, Keil (2006: 335) explains the prominence of the concept with the “spatial concentration of multi-dimensional problems in parts of urban areas,” which he considers a “known but unanswered question in international urban research.” Yet Olowu (2003: 515) stresses that the concept of multi-level governance, if applied to the analysis of developing country polities, commonly stops at the national level – precisely because of the relatively lesser degree of regional integration observed.

Conversely, the present study reveals that processes of urban ‘recovery’ in post-intervention Sierra Leone and Afghanistan constitute telling examples of how international assistance to war-ridden cities can backfire because specific forms of multi-level governance are not paid attention to. The research reveals that, even though the two countries were not officially ‘at war’ at the time of writing,³ both continued to experience tugs of war between entrenched interests and institutional multiplicity at several levels of polity that were weaving the urban level into a multi-layered structure. The analyses of different players and their political agency provided in this investigation not only demonstrate that these cities are highly politicised arenas; they also show that cooperation, collusion, and coercion around issues impacting on urban life in Freetown and Kabul connect actors and

² Based of his critical analysis of trans-national flows, Wade (1996) finds ‘internationalisation’ a more appropriate term as ‘global’ implies an inclusion of *all*, and a *general* withering away of national units.

³ On September 15, 2006 amid mounting casualties among NATO forces fighting the Taliban in Afghanistan’s south, the US news channel CNN changed its theme for reports from the country to “The Unfinished War”. As CHAPTER SIX shows, this changing interpretation of the security situation came with a significant delay considering the thousands of Afghans—both government troops and insurgency forces—that died since the official ending of the coalition-led regime change in late 2001.

interests at different levels of polity. What is more, international intervention and resulting projects of nation state-creation and 'local empowerment' have produced ambivalent outcomes by buffering the relative power of non-urban actors and coalitions at the expense of 'policy space' for the cities (cf. Cavill et al. 2004: 170).

The crossover of political space in such cities is suggested to be labelled "triaxial urban governance," a concept that resonates with Brenner's (2000: 367) submission that "the urban scale is not a pre-given or fixed platform for social relations, but a socially constituted, politically contested and historically variable dimension of social relations." In essence, 'urban bodies politic' (Schneider and Susser 2003: 317) like Freetown and Kabul have been governed neither exclusively locally nor jointly by local and national entities, but in fact through dynamic processes of governance that have been depending on three axes of political deliberation. First, an axis that denotes the political relationship between formal and informal urban institutions; second, another axis that links urban agency to agency at the national level, and third, an axis that renders vital urban functions being governed 'remotely,' through collusion between national and supra-national interests and organisations.

The study also finds that the last axis—connecting national and international agencies—is the most powerful; it has the greatest leverage with respect to the formulation of policies geared toward alterations of existing institutions within the urban realm. Extending a theoretical notion that has been fielded by Tajbakhsh (2001), the study proposes the additional concept of 'overdetermination' to describe the structural foundation on which these processes of partly remote-controlled urban governance can evolve. Seen against this theoretical background, the "radical reimagination of scalar relationships" (Purcell 2002: 105) in *favour* of local autonomy that has been hailed as a by-product of globalisation therefore is—in post-war fragile states at least—the reimagination of democratic countries, but not cities.

Based on the empirical investigation of post-intervention politics in Freetown and Kabul and in conjunction with the comparative exploration of

their historical trajectories as capital cities, the study also shows that at least three assumptions commonly made about reconstructing post-war cities in fragile states may require substantial revision. First, the dividing line between vulnerable and protected, poor and rich, and voiceless and powerful cannot be drawn neatly between urban and rural spaces as it equally runs within cities. Second, an apolitical and market-driven vision of, and resulting strategies to, recovery in a weak institutional environment are not the best, but in fact the worst approaches to post-intervention and post-war urban planning as they carry the potential to strengthen exclusive structures and patterns of the urban political economy while simultaneously empowering anti-government forces. Finally, imposing urban development strategies without accommodating—rather than depoliticising—local politics and also committing to the necessary patience for local institutional adjustment will not only be ineffective; it may also increase human insecurity, thus rendering such cities even more difficult to plan and govern.

To illustrate this last point, the declared national and international objective in post-intervention Sierra Leone was decentralisation, namely the devolution of resources; this strategy had been taken up right after the cessation of fighting in what was clearly the attempted continuation of a pre-war international donor agenda. Yet pushing it through proved extremely challenging. Political agendas and priorities of different actors at the different levels of polity were at loggerheads. Instead, decentralisation as a donor-supported key strategy for effective peacebuilding in Sierra Leone was in practice reformulated by national entities into ‘deconcentration’ to counter what was perceived as both politically and economically dangerous urban growth. This ultimately played into the national government’s hands as it weakened the opposition party in power in the capital city, clearly the most decisive constituency. At the same time, the neglect of urban development reinvigorated already existing triggers of conflict in the urban realm, including restricted public access to local policymaking and the urban land market, high rates of youth unemployment, and poor urban services.

The ‘overdetermination’ also conditioned the neglect of workable urban development strategies and thus hampered the formation and use of

productive local capital. Capital accumulation in both countries did to some extent involve urban economies, but it nonetheless remained largely outside the legitimate political realm, a pattern that can be explained with informal institutional frameworks that had either survived modernisation attempts in the past or were outcomes of both pre- and post-war polities. These institutions are found to have reinforced rather than helped overcome economic inequities. While some efforts were made to encourage urban investment in both cities, conflicts arising from institutional diversity and resulting political competition had a highly restrictive effect. At the same time, attempts both at and beyond the city level to depoliticise the discourse and substance of city-related policies and to reframe them in a ‘capacity building language’ were remarkable.

In spite of these arguments however, the critique of intervention presented in this study is not informed by a general attitude against ‘humanitarian’ interventions. That violence might ultimately be the only effective countermeasure to violence is an insight that even most peace researchers admit. At the same time, effective violent intervention to put an end to a vicious circle depends on the quality of coordination and understanding of the local conditions in order to transform the dynamics of violence into a potential dynamics of reconciliation and peace (cf. Waldmann 2004). This study is designed to hopefully contribute to making such interventions more responsive to the people in the receiving countries who are supposed to benefit from them.

One afternoon in Freetown—I was sitting in an Internet café housed by a dented cargo container on the roadside—I witnessed hundreds of young men running down the main street, chanting slogans and throwing stones at random targets. I turned around and asked a local web surfer sitting next to me whether this was a riot. He answered, “No, this is just soccer!” ([Image 1 in annex 3](#)). A couple of days later, an interviewee who at the time was working in a very senior position in the national bureaucracy (NPB-F2)⁴ commented on this incident as follows: “When the young men marched

⁴ The data coding system used in this study is explained in detail in the final section of CHAPTER THREE.

down the street, this was a rehearsal of how the rebels descended into town. [...] These are the same problems as well: poverty, disease, and violence.”

Such short tales from the micro-level are complemented by macro-level evidence. For instance, even though the United Kingdom’s commitment to ending the war in Sierra Leone has been lauded widely, analysts have also pointed to a lack of a multi-functional political approach that would have done justice to the multi-dimensional nature of the conflict (Woodhouse and Ramsbotham 2005: 105, cf. Fombad 2004, PRIDE 2002: 24-25). Similar critiques have been uttered recently in the context of peacebuilding in Afghanistan. Commenting on US-led reconstruction efforts in the country in front of the U.S. Congress’ International Relations Committee, development consultant Amit Pandya (2006) could argue unchallenged,

“Even where there have been assistance initiatives that have posted records of success, such as improvements in the legal and judicial infrastructure and institutional capacity—through, for example, courthouse construction, technical assistance to ministries and legal education—the reality remains that the majority of Afghans outside the cities, and many in the cities, remain untouched by them.”

It follows then that if we take such critiques and accounts seriously, the analysis of cross-level urban politics in post-intervention cities in fragile states developed in the course of the following chapters ought to serve not only to reconceptualise a specific body of theory, but also to dissect and improve the practice of urban policymaking and implementation in post-intervention settings in order to address those ‘same problems’ more effectively, to the benefit of those who otherwise suffer most.

Research questions and hypotheses

This investigation is guided by three research questions. The first question pertains to the applicability of urban theory to post-war urban settings in least developed countries and also aims at capturing conceptually the reality of post-intervention city politics. The second and third research questions are empirical in nature and trigger three working hypotheses.

In order to evaluate the solidity of potential theoretical foundations for this enquiry, I first ask:

1. Which existing theories of urban politics are suitable to explain political processes and their intended and unintended outcomes in impoverished post-war intervention cities?

In response, I discuss these theories and assess their applicability. Against this background, I then ask:

2. Can the politico-economic leverage of capital city-based actors over urban institutions and policies be linked empirically to (a) the emergence of the nation-state and (b) the most recent armed conflicts in the two countries?

To clarify this hypothesis, I analyse the relative autonomy of urban governance in Freetown and Kabul over the course of the past two centuries *vis-à-vis* the rise of the two nation-states and the impact of intermittent supranational influences. I thus seek to clarify when 'periods of politico-economic restructuring' have occurred, and how they have impacted on urban politics and development. In line with the assumption discussed above of tight interaction between urban, national, and international levels after the most recent wars in both countries, I put forward the following first hypothesis:

A. The political leverage of capital city-based actors has been correlated positively with the historical emergence of the nation-state project, but as an effect of war, urban pro-development politics are overshadowed and paralysed by national recovery agendas and supranational strategies to (re)create the nation-state. The initial correlation has been reverted.

Arguing that the relationship between urban and national agendas is impacted—i.e., resulting in institutional and structural changes or shift—by international 'forces' not only prior and during armed conflict but especially

so afterwards in periods of internationally assisted ‘recovery,’ I elucidate the channels and means of influence of such forces on city politics. Hence whereas the first ‘spatial turn’ (Soja 2002) was an epistemological manoeuvre triggered by a critical review of the physical manifestations of capitalism, this study asks whether there exists a rationale for pondering a ‘second spatial turn,’ this time ontological, in response to the assumed reconfiguration of urban polities through supranational actors and resources.

In this context I need to clarify both temporal and spatial aspects of this hypothesised process. This leads to my third research question:

3. To what extent, at which pace, and between which levels does international intervention in post-war countries affect structure and content of city politics and development?

To address this third question the second hypothesis of this study posits:

- B. The political leverage of local actors and institutions in post-war, post intervention cities is limited sufficiently through interorganisational competition with other institutions at other levels of polity that agency by coalitions with sufficient financial means gains enough leverage to alter local institutions and policies in a process of ‘accelerated structuration.’

Through a theoretical discussion and the empirical investigation of the two cities, this study will investigate whether, and if so under which conditions, this accelerated process occurs, and also explore the relationships between it and the changes in autonomy (or disempowerment) of local actors and institutions in the two cities as a result of external politico-economic ‘aid.’

Finally, the investigation sheds light on the spatial component of urban political restructuring because it seeks clarification of the levels between which agency and structuration are taking place. Arguably, in the context of ‘peacebuilding’ *cum* ‘nation-building’ missions, the ‘propinquity’ (cf. CHAPTER

TWO) of large cities makes them prime loci of either initiating or unintendedly causing shifts that are, following hypothesis (A), to the *detriment* of urban policies and governance. Not only common sense, but also the review of theoretical approaches to urban politics in CHAPTER TWO below then suggests the following spatial interaction:

C. Urban policies and politics in the two cities are determined mainly by the interaction of international and local actors.

This constitutes the third hypothesis that this investigation tests.

Structural outline

Cities are embedded in countries and regions, policies in institutions and structures, and intervention in fragile states in discourses and agendas. In order to appreciate the role of local political agency in and on cities in fragile states over time, CHAPTER TWO explains concepts central to this investigation and offers a critical examination of urban theories, illustrating their strengths as well as their shortcomings regarding their applicability to post-war intervention settings in least developed countries. This analysis culminates in the final section of this chapter, which develops the rationale for extending existing strands of urban theory in light of the missing coverage discovered. Following the empirical analysis in CHAPTERS FOUR to SIX, this analysis is revisited in CHAPTER SEVEN.

In CHAPTER THREE, I outline how the research agenda guiding this enquiry can be translated into a comparative methodology. The chapter thus lays out the investigative path travelled in this thesis, which combines deductive with inductive reasoning in order to arrive at a revised theory of urban politics that can serve as a conceptual framework⁵ for analysing political processes in and on post-intervention cities in fragile states. The objective of this study is not to create a “theory of everything” (cf. Mahoney and Rüschemeyer 2003),

⁵ Judge et al. (1995: 3) define ‘conceptual frameworks’ as providing “a language and frame of reference through which reality can be examined and [which] lead theorists to ask questions that might not otherwise occur.”

a ‘one-size-fits-all’ in that it would explain all processes of politics in all cities in all settings of challenged and ineffective statehood. At the same time however, this investigation rests on the conviction that patterns do exist, and that some of these processes bear enough similarity to be captured in a reconfigured interpretative framework.

CHAPTER FOUR juxtaposes the trajectories of the two cities central to this investigation from urban places to national “command posts” (Low 1996: 393) to illustrate the respective changes in structure and agency as they pertain to the politics on urban and national development in both countries. It thus demonstrates that it is this “overdetermination” that carries one important clue to understanding contemporary urban governance in Freetown and Kabul. The historical narrative begins with an overview of the founding of Freetown and compares this period with the rocky rise of Kabul as the centre of Afghanistan until 1880. It then turns back to Sierra Leone to describe the turbulent period between the annexation of the hinterland and the politics of immediate post-independence roughly seventy years later, paying particular attention to the influences on non-native political and economic forces as well as urban challenges in both governance and management that arose. This period will be paralleled with the fate of Kabul as the place of increasing social diversification and the container in which rapid societal progress was conceived and from where it was pushed ‘into the provinces’ under Abdul Rahman Khan and his successors, especially his grandson Amanullah, and later Zahir Shah.

The third juxtaposition provided by CHAPTER FOUR focuses on the political relationships of the two nation states with international aid institutions. In Sierra Leone, this covers mainly the one-party state under President Siaka Stevens until the outbreak of rebel violence in 1991, mirrored against the increased debt entanglement during the second half of Shah’s reign up until 1973 and the following six years of fierce political competition that ended with the Russian invasion on Christmas Day 1979. In the fourth and final direct comparison the fates of both cities in the ensuing armed conflicts are juxtaposed, highlighting important parallels with respect to the functional dynamics of both cities as centres of political agenda setting and military

command posts (and hence targets), but also differences in terms of the degrees and characteristics of their resilience, occupation, and physical destruction.

The most primary data-rich segments of this study, CHAPTERS FIVE and SIX then discuss the politics operating in and on the two cities after the cessation of large scale fighting and put them in context with commentaries from the urban policy and governance perspective. The primary data to address the three research questions and assess the validity of the working hypotheses are derived chiefly from qualitative research techniques employed during four fieldwork periods between June 2004 and May 2005.

The combined data from these three chapters provide the basis for a synthesis of theoretical considerations with empirical findings, which is presented in CHAPTER SEVEN. Drawing on aspects of the politico-economic histories of Freetown and Kabul as well as the contemporary spatial politics of agency and structure in both cities, differences and similarities are carved out, and important observations are tested through counterfactual reasoning. Step by step the answers to the three research questions emerge, and the evidence amassed throughout the foregoing chapters leads to nuanced assessments of the working hypotheses. The final section of CHAPTER SEVEN pulls these insights together and develops a revised research question to guide future enquiries into city politics in post-war intervention settings. To conclude, CHAPTER EIGHT revisits the advances made by this study but also addresses its limitations. This leads to targeted suggestions on how to adjust current policies of urban management in Freetown and Kabul, as well as concrete recommendations for further research.

Chapter 2: Literature review

Local autonomy and the spaces of urban politics

Complementing seminal writings by Henri Lefebvre (1991) and David Harvey (e.g., 2000: 210-211 and 1978: 102, cf. Slater 1978: 43), it is Edward Soja's (1968, 1989, 2000) work on post-modern geographies which can be credited with 'respatialising' urban narratives and thus providing a theoretical foundation for the 'spatial turn' that informed the resurrection of *political* urban studies (Schlögel 2003: 68). Reiterating Jessop's (1997a: 63-64) proposition to *map* asymmetries between local actors from different sectors of urban society with regard to their political proximity or distance from specific modes of economic growth, Jonas (1997: 228) has argued that the main question regarding urban polity today, in contrast with Dahl's (1961) notion, "is not so much one of 'who governs cities?' as one of 'at what spatial scale?'" Brenner (2000: 395) points out that inter-spatiality in urban governance first became an issue during the late 1980s as scales "were no longer equated with unitary social functions but were viewed increasingly as material crystallisations of multiple overlapping political-economic processes," a development that later culminated in the literature on supranational and subnational governance (cf. Jessop 1997b; Keil 2006 and Olowu 2003 in CHAPTER ONE). I argue that this multi-spatial modification over time is both an empirical and a theoretical endeavour, not only in industrialized cities but also in urban centres in developing countries. Indeed, images of cities that characterise them as political arenas in themselves but also as products of overarching spatial politics abound in developed and developing contexts alike, as Cornwall (2004: 77) points out:

"Talk of 'arenas' conveys spaces where voices and ideas jostle for attention while 'political space' is not only something taken up, assumed or filled, but something that can be created, opened, reshaped. Less frequently heard, yet critically important, are other spatial terms that speak about and to issues of representation and power: 'positioned', 'situated', and 'dislocated', 'displaced'."

Hence cities are not 'subjects' (for a contrary position see Mazzonelli 1993: 293), but a "particular manifestation, and form an essential component, of wider political, economic, social and cultural networks and relations [which

warrant] urban analysis in the context of the principal external and internal forces and processes which underpin a city's evolution or its role at a particular point in time" (Simon 1992: 5). Stone (1987: 8)—in his study of Atlanta city politics—similarly points out that contents of local or national political agendas and agency do not derive from predetermined roles of local or national government ("cities don't make development decisions; people do") but are results of competing interests, including the distribution of benefits and costs at different levels (cf. Goldsmith 1995: 228-230).

In line with this observation, Wolman and Goldsmith (1992: 45) have proposed a definition of local autonomy as "the ability of local governments to have an *independent* impact on the well-being of their citizens [emphasis added]" and distinguish between aggregate well-being (efficiency) and the distribution of well-being among community members (equity) in the sense of a 'local *gini* coefficient'. Following Page and Goldsmith (1992, cf. Gurr and King 1987: 57-58), the evaluation of the specific position of local government institutions will be conducted by assessing the *functions*, *access*, and the *discretion* of local authorities *vis-à-vis* the central state (cf. CHAPTERS FOUR TO SEVEN). *Functions* denote the tasks to be dealt with at the local level, including production, service provision, equity, and security; *access* measures the nature (formal-institutionalised versus informal/personal) and the intensity (frequency and privilege) of contacts between local and central government actors (a potentially important linking pin for local politicians with national aspirations); finally, *discretion* refers to the liberty in decision-making with respect to the technical and financial options for local delivery. In practice, however, such interaction is not straightforward; "paradoxically those systems in which local government does more might suffer limitations of local discretion. Where local government has extensive functional responsibilities, its actions become more important to the centre, and are therefore more likely to be the target of central influence." (Page and Goldsmith 1992: 10, cf. Mann 1984)

To begin with, the study of urban politics differs from other areas of enquiry in political science in two important dimensions, namely propinquity, i.e., the spatial proximity of political and social actors, both to one another and to

decision-making processes, and numerosity, i.e., there are more localities than states, and hence more arenas to nurture ‘modernisation’ or change (John 2006, cf. Amin and Thrift 2002: 31-50). At the same time, understanding the place of politics as well as the politics of place (Burns et al. 1994) in the context of this analysis requires a closer look at the types of political agency that take place in cities, the structures in which they are embedded, and the degree of autonomy resulting from different institutional and structural constellations. Crucial given the perspective of this study, such enquiry also necessitates the contextualisation of urban policies and politics in settings of widespread poverty, vulnerability and political fragility.

Given the existence of an elite in almost any societal structure, it seems fair to expect these elites to ‘run’ such a structure and ‘elite theory’ to thus wield substantial explanatory power (Eyerman et al. 1991: 31, Schneider and Teske 1992: 738)?⁶ Alternatively however, theories taking a pluralist view by building on Dahl’s (1961) work “Who Governs?” suggest that a multitude of actors can all exert significant influence on the policy-making process. In essence, pluralism suggests a multitude of political actors in the urban arena based on short lived coalitions that cluster around particular policy issues (Mollenkopf 1989: 120). In its extreme form, ‘hyper-pluralism’ may even lead to stalemate where different factions block one another, making decision-making processes ineffective and paralysing urban politics (cf. Yates 1977).

Occasionally, contemporary comments on post-war reconstruction do indeed buy into the blaming and shaming of urban elites as the “central actors of manipulation” of the political economy of conflict (Nolting 2005: 7, author’s translation), but both theoretical and empirical problems come to the fore when trying to apply the aforementioned analytical approaches to post-war cities. With the important limitation that some are heavily invested in the war economy, economic elites such as the Lebanese and Fulah trading networks in Freetown and the urbanised warlords *cum* economic interests in Kabul have a certain interest in keeping the peace to safeguard purchasing

⁶ Hobley (2004: 18), in her study of voicelessness at the local level in Bangladesh, distinguishes three groups of local elites: patron-client elites that exert direct leverage over others, neutral elites who co-exist with other groups, and pro-poor elites, whom she calls “pro-poor proxies”.

power, but comparably little interest in pushing urban development as long as local labour supply is abundant, the majority of high yield retail products is being imported, and financial capital remains internationally mobile. In fact, the almost monopolistic control of local markets through collusion and retail cartels in Freetown could well turn out to be a constraining factor to post-war local economic development. Conversely, political elites in both countries and at both the local and the national level have indeed bought into the peace and development agenda, but the foci on re-integrative agricultural development in Freetown and alternative rural livelihoods outside Kabul provide little incentive to cluster around and push towards policies to facilitate the emergence of sustainable urban incomes through production.

However, pluralism appears equally problematic as it is confronted with a reality of economic, social and political exclusion from policymaking; most definitely so in the respective countryside and only marginally less severe in both capital cities. Stone (1987: 12-15) argues similarly that in the debate on structural determinism versus political autonomy, barriers to public participation and external constraints on coalition building have been recognised by both schools of thought, demonstrating that the “inward-looking” pluralist view had been superseded by a more “outward-looking” (yet still locally centred) analytical framework. Elite theory, on the other hand, tries to explain the formation of power structures at the local level by local ownership of productive assets dominating local politics, media and educational institutions (cf. the ‘entrepreneurial activism’ hypothesis by Logan and Molotch 1987: 52) and emphasises detrimental effects on less organised residents. It fails to focus on ‘positional characteristics’ of non-capitalist groups and their members’ relationships with supraurban patterns of production and administration (cf. Harding 1995: 39-45).

Economic structures and their spatial expression thus matter greatly in explaining urban politics, irrespective of whether actors are concentrated and powerful or infinitesimally heterogeneous. Therefore the concept of ‘structure’ needs to be considered as power-loaded, with Mollenkopf (1989: 129, cf. Foucault 1990: 93) even warning against the “trivialisation of the

political” in the urban realm. Similarly, Moe (2005) posits that power embedded in institutional arrangements must not be dealt with implicitly, but instead be made a determining factor. Power is not being reconfigured in the course of every new transaction, but is preserved through the institutional landscape (cf. Greif and Laitin 2004: 639). This ‘self-preservation,’ as Moe (ibid., 229) points out, “accounts for the survival of political institutions. Usually, they are stable because of the agenda power of current supporters, not because the original agreement lives on.” Both of these institutionalist strands are thus geared towards explaining stability, yet they vary in their assessment of political forces. In the following, we shall see how interpretations ranging from orthodox Marxism to regulatory gradualism lie at the heart of an epistemology of structure and agency across political space.

Early urban Marxists suggested that the conceptual framework for analysing cities could be the general class structure of a society, a social order in which urban interactions then occur as a subset of social relations. One of the best known in-depth studies with this perspective has been conducted by Cockburn (1977) who describes local processes of urban management in Lambeth (England) as a function of class relations, thus rendering a single neighbourhood a ‘local state’ in that it mimics the class struggles based on opposing interests that also occur more generally in society, making “its parts work *fundamentally as one*” (ibid., 47; emphasis in the original). Linkages between central government and urban management reinforce this parallelism of local and national arenas designed to serve the interest of capital accumulation (cf. Harvey 2000: 192). Emphasising the centrality of the mode of production and the deriving composition of the local workforce, Cockburn (1977: 41-46) points out,

“There is *no ready-made theory of local government*. It is necessary to piece together a number of concepts about the state as a whole and draw conclusions from them for local government. [...] The state nationally has its headquarters in London but it comprises nationwide and permanent institutions. [...] It is widely believed that local government is in some way constitutionally independent of central government. [...] This is not the case. They are, and under capitalism have always been, subject to central government. [...] Thus local authorities, including local health, water and transport authorities as well as local education, housing and planning authorities, are aspects of the national state and share its work. [emphasis added]”

Castells (1977: 439) had made the same point, but after several years of empirical research however, he (1983: 291) presented a more moderate position, arguing that “although class relationships and class struggle are fundamental in understanding urban conflict, they are not, by any means, the only primary source of urban social change. The autonomous role of the state, the gender relationships, the ethnic and national movements and movements that define themselves as citizen, are among other alternative sources of urban social change.” This exemplifies are general trend within Urban Marxism to migrate away theoretically from orthodox Marxist determinism, positing instead a degree of higher autonomy from dominant capitalist interests, a higher degree of fragmentation of state institutions and, consequentially, a higher degree of discretion at the local level. Neo-Marxist theories in particular base their modifications on such constellation and suggest that some leeway for political actors at the local level derives from complex networks of local alliances and coalitions (Pickvance 1995: 254).

A similar shift can be observed regarding the loci, or localisation, of class struggles in developing countries. Focusing on causes of crises potentially leading to structural bifurcation points, Lipton’s (1977: 13) contention of an “urban bias” was that

“the most important class conflict in the poor countries of the world today is not between labour and capital. Nor is it between foreign and national interest. It is between the rural classes and the urban classes. The rural sector contains most of the poverty, and most of the low-cost sources of potential advance; but the urban sector contains most of the articulateness, organisation and power. So the urban classes have been able to ‘win’ most of the rounds of the struggle with the countryside; but in doing so they have made the development process needlessly slow and unfair.”

Lipton thus criticised the concept of developing rural areas indirectly through strengthening urban centres, which by default produced winners—such as government (fiscal incomes), urban consumers (subsidised prices) and industry (cheaper production factors)—at the expense of private and public investment in agriculture, which fuelled rural exodus rather than curbing it and also catalysed a rural perception of neglect coupled with cultural overwhelm (cf. UNESCAP 2001: 110, Herold 2004: 313). However, Lipton’s critique has travelled a long distance since 1977, with David A.

Smith (1996: 149) twenty years later formulating its most recent perspective by arguing that “The basic conflict really is not between rural and urban classes; rather, it pits the urban-based elite (in alliance with international capital) against both urban and rural masses. [...] Misery and hardship [...] actually benefit some people. They also may actually be functional for surplus extraction under the conditions of dependent capitalism.” This view is supported empirically by Brockerhoff and Brennan (1998) who criticise Lipton’s notion of cities as “islands of privilege” (Harrison 1982: 145) by pointing to inter-city comparisons between large and medium-sized urban centres, with the former increasingly experiencing deteriorating or relatively unfavourable living conditions, due in part to what the United Nations termed an “anti-urban bias” of official development aid that has coincided with a widespread underestimation of the vigour of urban growth particularly in Asia (UN ECOSOC 2006: 3, cf. Marcus and Asmorowati 2006), but also increasing violence against residents in the form of urban insurgency and city-centred terrorism.

The second and more recent strand of Urban Marxism leaves the orthodox interpretation behind. It focuses instead on explaining the rigidity of the capitalist system of production *in spite of* the inherent contradictions and conflicts that, following Marxist logic, must ultimately lead to their demise. In his study of the ‘City’, the commercial and financial district of London (England), Ingham (1984) points out that an endogenous style of theorising is inadequate, thus rejecting determinist analyses that try to explain the adaptation of city based institutions to environmental changes as a function of capitalist polity (cf. Cockburn 1977). Ingham argues that alternative explanations need to be sought through a study of city-based coalitions that acknowledges the scope of agency and the potential for alternative development, as opposed to interpreting it as a temporary deviation from a predefined path. Ingham therefore focuses on the interplay between politico-economic dynamics at different levels, regulatory modes, and organisational responses that are both following and shaping the former over time, and his enquiry can therefore be considered one of the earliest works of Regulation Theory (RT). RT has to be regarded as the methodological response to the proposition of cities acting as ‘local states’,

positing instead that municipalities are “the very medium through which regulatory practices are interpreted and ultimately delivered” (Goodwin et al. 1993: 67). Rather than analysing individual or group action as in the case of elite theory and pluralism, RT focuses on changes in environments and resulting changes in local institutions to accommodate external shifts (Judge et al. 1995: 10; Feldman 1997: 47-49). It thus acknowledges the embeddedness of locality in larger contexts but emancipates itself from requiring deliberate coalitions, positing instead that the mode of regulation changes with modifications to the regime of accumulation. “Norms and codes are not set up *for the purpose* of sustaining a regime of accumulation, but they can sometimes interact to produce that effect.” (Painter 1995: 278, emphasis in the original)

However, through its focus on continuity, RT emphasises long time spans and therefore appears less suited to explain sudden changes that occur in governance in spite of the alleged desire for stability, because it does not pay sufficient attention to the specific practices at the local level and the emerging conflicts that they produce. Instead, it focuses on decade-long political negotiations preserving capitalist structures in order to explain economic growth, which sits uncomfortably with large-scale reconfiguration of political networks in war-ridden developing countries in general, and in fragmentally capitalised societies in particular (cf. Steinmetz 1994). We thus see that RT can be criticised on the grounds of two defining features. First, it does not offer insights into disruption. Goodwin and Painter (1997: 20) argue, “Very rarely, if ever, does regulation cease altogether (civil war accompanied by the complete collapse of state institutions is perhaps an example).” Yet this is *exactly* the case in many of the ‘crisis states’ and embattled cities that have been undergoing frequent eruptions of physical violence and institutional collapse. Second, the *specificities* of local agency, which might be causally linked to these disruptions, are not granted explanatory power. One of the most instructive critiques in this context has been formulated by Jonas (1997) who suggests that in order to examine the relationship and relative weight of structure and strategic action, one would need to focus on “spatial settings [...] in a period of crisis or restructuring. (*ibid.*, 207)” Jonas urges that an “important component of the investigation

would be to actuate and contextualise the regulationist concept mode of social regulation in a way that draws out the relationships between local *capacities* and *strategies*, and the wider structures of accumulation and regulation into which local actors and interests are inserted (ibid., emphasis added).” This, then, is where my *assumption of distinctiveness* regarding the state of capitalist (under)development and structural dynamics in least developed post-war countries—and resulting supra-local resource discretion and policymaking—dovetails with the critique of neo-Marxist thought.

The contested promise of urban distinctiveness

My scepticism of universal comparability of urban settings is thus borne out of a critique of First World structuralism. However, before we turn to some recent and indeed centrally related theoretical contributions to urban political analysis, it is important to understand how structuralism came under attack from yet another universalist corner and how this debate informed the rise of a literature that emphasizes the value of context and distinctive politics.

In 1981, Paul Peterson made a straightforward suggestion: that the scope of urban policies was limited to developmental means. What is more, this was meant to be an observation, not a prescription. Peterson argued that policies to “strengthen the local economy, enhance the local tax base, and generate additional resources that can be used for the community’s welfare” (ibid., 41) were the only ones that could reasonably be expected from urban governments. Social costs would be incurred, but as a result of these policies, the community would gain new employment opportunities, and increased demand for locally provided services, higher land values, and higher local government revenues. On the contrary, redistributive policies helping “the needy and unfortunate” would be “pernicious” (ibid., 43) because they would drain scarce resources from local governments whose main concern, driven by the ‘benefits received principle’ as opposed to the national ‘ability to pay principle’, was to strengthen the local economy. Economic motives are indeed the drivers of Peterson’s theory: he argued that redistributive policies required a high fiscal capacity but were politically unjustifiable,

whereas developmental policies would be more cost-effective and respond to a high public demand, explaining that “insofar as the presence of the poor weakens a local fiscal base, one must expect to find instead an inverse relationship between poverty and redistributive expenditures.” (ibid., 50) Put simply, the poorer the city, the more essential the concentration on developmental policies. This, then, incorporated the main cause of local-and national conflict: “Where the national policies are developmental, local and national goals will overlap and the policy will be executed with a good deal of cooperation [...]. But where the central government is pursuing a more redistributive objective, its goals are likely to conflict with those of local governments. The national interest in equity will conflict with the local interest and efficiency developing its local economy.” (ibid., 82, cf. Saunders 1986) We can see how this contention makes sense within Peterson’s rational framework, but it appears less obvious in post-war cases in which both national and local politicians, confronted with resource scarcity, are either forging or being forced into a developmental coalition with external ‘development’ agencies. This does not necessarily mean that such agencies always pursue clear-cut development goals as opposed to working towards equity—the most recent World Development Report of the World Bank (2005a) claims combining both to a cohesive strategy—but it demonstrates that Peterson’s emphasis on ‘choice’ in urban politics is questionable in a post-war context.

Furthermore, in rational choice theory, choice also matters for the demand side of public service provision. The special situation of higher fluidity and mobility of a large part of the population encountered in post-war cities due to internal displacement could, at least theoretically, carry the possibility of residents exercising their sovereignty by voting with their feet. However, the level of service provision is often directly linked with the price of land and property, with the effect that many spatial options within the city are, *realiter*, unattainable due to financial constraints. Opting for ‘exit’, in Hirschman’s (1970) terminology, by going back into peri-urban or rural areas would clearly not ameliorate the service situation. Moreover, following Wolman and Goldsmith’s (1992: 17) analysis of supply and demand sides, public choice theory begins from the erroneous assumption that urban public

services exist in abundance—that there is an oversupply of provision. But in the case of least developed countries and their large cities, the expectation of consumers simply following their cost benefit calculations without having to worry about budgetary constraints is clearly misplaced. A critique of public choice theory can therefore safely focus on taking up the latter's own assumptions before even addressing more normative aspects such as its negligence of equity and other ethical considerations.⁷

A Western-centred but supposedly more levelled approach to economic drivers of urban politics and policies is 'World Cityism', which emerged in the mid-1980s. It emphasises networks and flows and constituted a theoretical response to the global economic contraction experienced in 1973 and 1974 (cf. Soja 2000: 96-97). Among those who first saw cities as nodes of a global system were Timberlake (1985) and Hill (1984). Looking back ten years later, Smith and Timberlake (1995: 81) explain the root of this theory with cities then considered in a new light, "somewhat separately from nations because, although their interrelations are often mediated by nation-states, they are in direct and frequent contact with one another through the various city-to-city flows." Cities were thus seen as *potentialities* for the inclusion of countries into the international political economy (Potter 1990: 3). At the same time, cities in the developing world would compete with those in developed countries to improve or at least maintain their position in this global system. They have to engage in "a punitive game of catch-up" (Robinson 2006: 6); according to other authors, this 'Darwinist' structure also helps explain the rise in informal sector employment in the Third World (Jenkins and Wilkinson 2002: 33-45, cf. Hall and Winlow 2003: 142). Fast-growing cities in unstable regions suffer from a particular disadvantage. Since they have limited prospects to be chosen as hubs for economic flows, they are at risk of eventually becoming structurally irrelevant, which adds 'structural violence' (Galtung 1985: 145) as another powerful shaper of

⁷ The conceptual reduction of residents to consumers of public services also risks depoliticising their role in local polity. This is both an objective and a normative concern. Objectively, the discourse of consumerism focuses public attention and indeed the direction of institutional development on consumptive rather than participatory arguments (cf. Lowndes 1995: 175). Normatively speaking (and in rather exceptional agreement with recent post-modernist writings), political diversity is desirable to provide checks and balances of power – "power to take decisions, to assess standards of service, and to evaluate outcomes" (Hill 1994: 6).

urban reality in these countries. Third World cities can therefore be considered a medium for both inclusion and marginalisation (Knaudor 2000: 28, Mabogunje 1994: 23).

Much like Rational Choice *au* Peterson, World Cityism suggests a predominance of economic reasoning, but it embeds it in a trans-border setting. At the same time, the approach also has stoutly normative features when its conclusions on urban policies prescribe economic measures to safeguard supranational competitiveness, which includes the discourse of the apparent inevitability of economics-driven urban policy frameworks in order to survive the ostensibly all-encompassing competition within so-called ‘city-to-city networks’ (cf. Beall 2002). Redistributive policies, its proponents argue, could be effective in the short run but jeopardise the development agenda imposed by the dynamics of economic networking across local political and economic space. In this sense, then, World Cityism is the watered-down and globalised version of Peterson’s argument: a neoliberal index finger cautioning against local social entrepreneurialism in light of an allegedly powerful economic superstructure – the ‘choice’ lies between positivist submission and fatal resistance. By positing that cities in developing world have to compete in a global system, the theory gives momentum to general prescriptions for Third World cities to somehow ‘transform’ into world class cities. Yet this is a futile approach, as Beall et al. (2002) exemplify in the case of urban development policies in South Africa. In light of poor residents benefiting “disproportionately from the efficient and inclusive delivery of services,” what is needed instead is to engage “critically with urban growth agendas and imagining opportunities for tying urban interventions for economic growth more closely to a politics of redistribution.” (Robinson 2006: 150, 165) In other words, engaging with local politics rather than subduing it to a globalist discourse holds the key to viable and liveable cities in the South.

Robinson’s (2006) notion of ‘ordinary cities’ is therefore both a curious and intriguing theoretical contribution to the current debate. It is curious because of her normative agenda “to promote strategies for city improvements that build on their distinctive and individual creativities and resources” (*ibid.*, 6,

cf. 64, 167). At the same time, her proposition is intriguing in its implication for a comparative methodology which is not constrained by an understanding of cities in developing countries as somehow distinct or ‘special’ places (cf. Lauria and Wagner 2006) and instead highlights their “diversity and complexity” (Robinson 2006: 114). Resulting policy suggestions are equally captivating; Robinson is dissatisfied with the dominance of inter-city literature and, instead, encourages refocusing urban studies towards cities themselves (*ibid.*, 10), not to serve a purely developmentalist agenda—which eventually give way to “homogenizing tendencies flattening out the rich diversity of what constitutes urban politics” (Yeoh 2001: 463)—but in order to analyse and understand the diversity that ‘keeps cities going’ in spite of their supposed (yet possibly dubious) belonging to a “worldwide hierarchy of urban centres” (*ibid.*, 92), as well as to allow local realities to inform policymaking rather than trying to shape local realities in accordance to a pre-given policy framework (cf. Parnell and Pieterse 1998).

It is true that policies can be captured by special interests under the umbrella of a ‘participatory’ or ‘inclusive’ discourse, as Stokes (1998: 136) fears, but this serves much more as an argument in favour of enabling political opposition, rather than deliberately depoliticising the policy process. It is indeed the “political confrontation with social and political exclusion” that creates “the foundational moment of citizenship” (Simone 2005: 14). Urban politics is thus concerned chiefly with the creation, re-creation, and destruction of structures of inclusion and exclusion that operate at and link the different levels of governance impacting on urban dwellers—structures that lie at the very core of the agenda to revitalise post-war cities, economically and socially.

At the same time, the normatively tinted tendency of this emerging literature to posit, prescriptively, that cities can and should serve as “spaces of tolerance and sociability” (Ash and Thrift 2002: 137) is troubling in that it suggests a harmonious turnaround from more critical perspectives of the city as a space of “politics of propinquity” (Copjec and Sorkin 1999). One of the most innovating critiques of apolitical interpretations of urban space stems

from Robins (1993) who criticises the “consensual belief in public space, the idea that the city should create some sort of communal vessel for shared activity” as an artificial facet of postmodernity, a condition that, according to Robins, derives from a misread duality of modernism and what supposedly follows it. Following Stoker (1989), Robins shows that the logic of politico-economic domination continues to apply in spite of an agenda of postmodernists to shift from the Fordist to the post-Fordist city, analogous to Harvey’s (1989) argument that the neo-capitalistic logic of ‘flexible accumulation’ was the main driver of the entrepreneurial approach to urban governance that had been developing during the 1980s. Urging acceptance of continuity and change, Robins warns against the “tendency to inflate economic, political and cultural spheres, and then to assume a straightforward logic of development from Fordism/ managerialism/ modernism to post-Fordism/ entrepreneurialism/ postmodernism (*ibid.*, 309).” It follows that urban development cannot aim at (re)creating cosy cohesion, but at creating new spaces for political participation to counter social segregation and the consolidation of intra-city divisions along political and economic axes. Urban policies’ overarching goal must therefore be the creation of a viable city ‘in the place’ and avoiding connecting the city globally without anchoring it locally (*ibid.*, 320). Robins concludes, “The diverse and different populations of cities must be seen as active political entities constituted through these encounters and confrontations, and urbanity must be a consequence of the bargaining and negotiation this makes necessary. And for this we need ‘tougher’ notions of public space” (1993: 326)—notions that enable politics rather than silencing it, and empirical approaches capable of questioning the “camouflage for what is really going on in the city” (Pieterse 2005: 146).

Still, even the most advanced thrusts in this direction are not free of conceptual challenges. The claim that “cities are sites of contestation” characterised by “deeply contested politics” that frame policy outcomes (Robinson 2006: 166) appears to sit somewhat uncomfortably with the parallel argument that “releasing cities from [...] colonialist assumptions about their modernity has the potential to enable city managers and residents to frame policies that address the distinctive needs of their city” (*ibid.*, 172).

While the first contention seems to affirm both the centrality and ubiquity of city politics, the latter suggests that there exist, in fact, a ‘way out’ of political discourse via the reconstitution of the epistemological framework in which policymaking takes place. Her threefold argument that cities of the South must not fall off the map, must be able to write not only their own history but also determine how we understand urbanisation and cities globally, and must be tackled at the city level is critical, as is Robinson’s assertion that “[i]t is the *politics* of city-development strategies [...] that are central to understanding their significance and potential.” (Robinson 2006: 131, emphasis added) Yet as much as the call to ‘post-colonise’ urban studies and to integrate analyses in developing countries into a heterogeneous body of ‘one urban theory’ is theoretically fascinating and normatively comprehensible, it also runs the risk of missing out on the distinctiveness of urban histories, and particularly so in the case of cities that have endured repeated and direct foreign intrusion, both administratively-militarily and structurally-economically. Freetown and Kabul have experienced such significant interventions by external forces. As a result, their internal structures and ‘external’ relations with the central state are markedly different from both pre-industrial cities in Europe and North America, and from many contemporary capitalist cities in developing countries. Clearly such cities are *not* travelling on an inevitable path to political and cultural convergence with the Metropolitan North, as proposed by modernists half a century ago (cf. Sjoberg 1960: 25-27). Of course this is also *not* what Robinson (2006) proposes, but it serves as a reminder that abolishing the legacy of some cities as contingent places marked by unfinished projects of capitalism and their bellicose ‘inclusion’ into regional structures of power may exclude factors that could be central to our comprehension of their contemporary political landscape if they explain why opportunities for “shaping autonomous and inventive futures” (*ibid.*, 7) in these cities is so markedly limited. In essence, then, a straightforward affirmation of Robinson’s stance on engaging with political reality on the ground is followed by a question mark behind the nature of the two cities investigated in this study—also in light of their role as potential placeholders for other cities in similar settings—as ‘ordinary’. There is a possibility that Freetown and Kabul are rendered ‘extraordinary’, temporarily at least, as a result of the

magnitude of intervention and the interplay of these thrusts with phases of large-scale violent conflict. This proposition will be revisited in CHAPTERS SEVEN and EIGHT; this review must now turn to the final and arguably most pertinent interpretative framework to the concerns of the study, urban regime analysis.

Urban regime analysis (URA) affirms the relevance of historico-structural constraints but aims more explicitly at filling the analytical gap where power and politics act out at the local level. It thus takes a different view from RT in that it puts the coalitions of actors—agency—into the centre on analysis. One of the earliest mentions of URA comes from Elkin (1985, cf. 1987) who, under conditions of a stable electorate and reliable provision of basic services, analysed the motivations and conditions under which local politicians cooperate with economic interests, finding that land use was the crucial issue around which coalitions developed. Stone (1987: 17, 291) then adopted this approach but argued against a rigid conceptual scheme to be imposed on cities, proposing instead a “regime paradigm [...] to ask how a governing coalition is held together and what difference that makes in the city’s development agenda” taking into account “the particulars of time and place as well as general structural condition.” (cf. Stoker 1995: 59) Based on the contributions to his edited volume, he suggested that “no single group monopolises the resources that city officials need in order to put together and maintain a workable set of governing arrangements” (*ibid.* 283), and identified inductively three different types of regimes: corporate, caretaker, and progressive coalitions, which are not necessarily responding to electoral power—power is regarded as an enabling, not a dominating force (cf. Stone 1989: 229).⁸ Leadership control is therefore “not achieved through ideological indoctrination [...] but a result of a group of interests being able to solve substantial collective action problems. [...] This form of power is intentional and active.” (Stoker 1995: 65)⁹ One crucial question against this background is whether there is a possibility of conflicting regime preferences

⁸ Stone (1993) later modified his initial classification, subsequently denoting development regimes, maintenance regimes, and lower class opportunity expansion regimes.

⁹ By logical extension, one application of regime theory that has received considerable resonance are approaches connecting it with negotiation theory, focusing on changes in bargaining power of regime members as a function of the relative weight of their stakes (Kantor et al. 1997).

among the players in the urban arena. For instance, political maintenance, i.e. the strengthening of existing institutional frameworks, may be confronted with mounting pressure to bolster local development, exerted by both local businesses but, particularly relevant in post-war countries, international donors.

Given that it is economic motives that initiate the cooperation between different actors, an existing coalition is *only* considered a regime if it *involves private sector actors* and if it succeeds in *inducing capital investment from private-sector markets to achieve economic development*, thus *producing economic growth* (Kantor et al. 1997: 349-350, cf. Stone 1993, Elkin 1987). Structural stability in itself is therefore not an *objective* of a regime, but rather a result of carefully accommodated economic interests. “Once established,” Stoker (1995: 65) explains, “a regime is a powerful force in urban politics. Opponents have to ‘go along to get along’ or face the daunting task of building an effective counter-regime.”

Note that this observation is similar to the notion of structural rigidity in that it does not necessarily derive from targeted actions but can evolve as a result of everyday practices – that is, political practices. Painter (1997: 135-138) therefore suggests that Pierre Bourdieu’s notion of *habitus* in his *Theory of Practice* (1990) is a more realistic concept to analyse urban politics than institutional determinism or rational choice: Within a field spanned by structures, these structures frame human agency “without being in any way the product of obedience to rules” (ibid., 53). Applied to the urban context, this does not necessarily mean that one city equals one structure; on the contrary, cities are often a space of overlapping structures, “virtual schemas” complementing “actual resources” (Sewell 1992: 13), with obvious consequences for the *habitus* and the stability of the conglomerate of structures itself. *Habitus* also prevents actors from evaluating their own actions consistently and arriving at rationally defendable choices, instead including “a whole range of other influences to be brought into an analysis of regime formation [such as] trust and mutuality, local chauvinism, political ideology [...].” (Painter 1997: 137) Indeed, such a widened spectrum of socialisations and ‘knowledges’ held by different political actors at the city

level, such as local politicians, business owners, bureaucrats, civil society leaders, and security organisations, is a safe assumption even without examining the cognitive structure of every single player. “Any policy, no matter how sincerely put forward as being in the public interest, is inescapably shaped by those who carry it out: it is shaped by their interests, their perceptions, their modes of operation, and in a particular form of interdependence with one another.” (Stone 1987: 11) What is more, the notion of *habitus* also includes conceptions of development that influence city level actors within their specific structural framework(s) but that *originate elsewhere*. This, as will be shown, is an important feature of explaining politics *on* the capital cities investigated here, as it transcends the accusation of stasis made against allegedly reinforcing and self-preserving local structures (cf. Sewell 1992: 15).

At the same time, this reminder of political interconnectedness also provides the entry point for a critique of URA. Probably the most vulnerable aspect of urban regime theory is what Stoker (1995: 55, cf. Horan 1991) calls the ‘localist trap’: its focus on the *internal*, i.e. local politics of coalition building (Stone 2005: 324, cf. Stone 1989: 178). Even the claim that this must be overcome by an opening of the focus towards “the connections to external political economic relations” (Lauria 1997: 5) does not fully remedy this shortcoming, as it continues putting an undue emphasis on economic linkages. What is needed is “a recognition of the impact of shifts in *exogenous conditions* as well as developments in the internal dynamics of coalition building [emphasis added], as Stoker (1995: 68) suggests.

Keating (1991) and Leo (1997) argue similarly. For them, the role of the national state and city politics has historically been too large a factor to be ignored in the analysis of political dynamics within a contained space, because it has determined the intensity of grassroots participation and the autonomy of different parties interested in urban development. In order to enable cross-national comparisons, Leo therefore suggests that “our unit of analysis must become not just the local regime but all of the forces that help to shape political decision making in and for the city, whether they originate at the local, regional, or national level (ibid., 97).” Pointing out that

interrelationships between different levels of society have for centuries been the subject of enquiry of various disciplines, Leeds (1973: 19, cf. Wolman 1995: 135) criticises that only the *forms* of interrelationships have been investigated, but neither their nature nor the potential of ‘those dealt with.’ Leeds emphasises,

“localities can be considered loci of power in the society at large, varying according to their unique histories, and a geographical basis, their position in the locality hierarchy, and so on. As loci of power, they can, therefore, enter into various sorts of interrelationships with other loci of power, characterised by different conjunctures of power sources. These relationships can be quite dynamic and may be of various sorts, e.g. cooperative, hostile, competitive, autonomous, *or several of these at once*. [...] In general the evolution of society involves the continuous adjustment and readjustment between locality and supralocal power institutions.” (ibid., 26, 30; emphasis in the original)

Leeds’s emphasis here is clearly on the continuous adjustment of power between different levels of governance, which leads him to conclude that shifts, while carrying the potential to create *temporary* disequilibria, ultimately stabilise the polity (cf. Barth 1998 for a similar contention from the anthropological perspective). Leeds does not consider exogenous shocks in the form of political intervention through hitherto non-systemic actors, and hence does not analyse the case of externally induced change and, possibly, disequilibria. In a post-war setting experiencing foreign intervention, the pace and direction of these processes of (re)adjustment could well be different as compared to more ‘contained’ environments.

A late follow-up to Leeds’ (1973) critique, Cox (1997) can be credited for not only looking at connections from the city to supraurban actors, but also at the relationships between levels. He argues that the city-based actors are in fact co-operating, competing or at least being influenced by institutions and organisations beyond the urban realm. The ‘place-dependency’ of URA has so far constrained an appropriate analysis of these relationships. Beauregard (1997) also supports this notion of spatial interconnectedness and contends that “the regime’s performance is not solely a matter of the internal distribution of benefits, consensus around development projects, and relations with the governing coalition. Urban regimes are neither isolated nor closed arrangements.” (cf. Stoker and Mossberger 1994)

This is where Kantor et al. (1997) pick up the critique. In light of the rather cursory treatment of politico-economic environmental factors by regime analysts, they argue that this “agency bias actually hinders achieving the very thing that regime theorists set out to do – namely, to demonstrate the scope for political agency in urban politics. (ibid., 349)” Instead of focusing on the dynamics of internal decision-making to explain economic development policy, they present a conceptual framework to distinguish the *type* of regimes that are likely to emerge in different structural constellations, which they then test empirically through a comparative case study framework covering eight cities “within the Western industrial system of advanced democracies (ibid.).” They explain that ultimately, local democratic conditions, market position and intergovernmental environments “constrain the very composition of governing coalitions (encouraging who does and who does not participate), the mode of bringing about public-private cooperation, and dominant policy agendas (collective versus selective benefits, residential versus commercial development, downtown versus neighbourhood investments)” (ibid., 350).

In the context of post-war capital cities in least developed countries, we can immediately see that their analytical framework is not applicable without significant modification. Democracy in such environments is usually induced externally or at least facilitated substantially, markets are commonly fragmented and often concentrated and controlled by a national elite, private investment is frequently tied to non-capitalist economic activity that takes place, at least partly, in the informal realm, and the competitiveness of large urban centres emerging from full-blown war is seldom conducive to local economic development. Therefore, only the analytical column concerning the role of the national government—which provides fiscal and political support for local development either in an integrated or diffuse manner, or withholds it altogether—can be transferred from the author’s contribution without overstressing the category.

Despite these modifications emanating from within the discipline and the conceptual advances that have resulted, little is known yet about the *dynamics*

and *means* of regime change throughout the process from being challenged or redefined to being replaced by the institutionalisation of a new urban regime. Feldman (1997: 46) accuses regime theorists of failing to explain why exactly politics matters. He urges to move beyond descriptive accounts of urban regimes, towards an analysis of the politics of policy-making (cf. Hibou 2004: 348). This is particularly true for cities in the less industrialised parts of the world. Stoker (1995: 68-69) suggests that regime dynamics reflect “a considerable expression of power,” but an obvious question remains as to where—both spatially and structurally—this power originates. Besides, few publications discussing URA actually make explicit what is one of its central assumptions: that regimes govern under democratic conditions. As described above, Kantor et al. (1997: 350) are a noteworthy exception in this regard, to the extent that they introduce variation by testing the impact of democratic institutions that differ with regard to the effectiveness of popular control on different types of regimes. Still, their study is confined to democratic urban and national environments. Unless we understand the conditions for policy emergence and urban governance in non-democratic settings under stress, we cannot really gauge the applicability and value of their and others’ analytical advances for this study.

Policy emergence and governance in settings of fragile statehood

We need to ask to what extent First World-centric conceptual frameworks of urban politics are actually relevant to cities in fragile and impoverished countries, especially as ‘the local’ is receiving growing recognition as a “creative and auto-dynamic [site] to ‘modernise’ or reconstitute order beyond the state” in contexts of fragile statehood (von Trotha 2005: 37-38, cf. Graham 2004a, Unger 1987: 563-564, Hindess 1986: 115)? Ultimately, “autonomy is not so much a legal status as a real practice,” as Batley and Larbi (2004: 105) point out in a multi-country comparison, and while this mandates central government’s (un)preparedness to devolve decision-making authority, it also crucially hinges on local capacity (and its creation, where necessary) to implement nominal changes in polity. Further constraints exist in the “wider institutional environment—centralised

government systems, unclear policy frameworks, weak private actors, unstable economies and polities, and resistance to the competitive ethic of the ‘contract culture.’” (*ibid.*, 179) For instance, decentralisation as a tool to increase local responsiveness and upward accountability is often constrained by central government’s commitment to political stability, including the preservation of its own rule and externalising, i.e., localising, responsibility for poor performance, as well as an interest to prevent the creation of local political platforms that could potentially act as breeding grounds of oppositional politics (Rakodi 2002: 57, cf. Dahl 1967). Another example, whereas in democratic polities local institutions may facilitate residents’ claims through the provision of formal channels of participation into city halls (cf. Berry et al. 1993: 288; Rowlands 2001: 147; Post and Baud 2002; Bollens 1997), legitimate channels for such pressure in post-war cities are commonly ruptured, and overbearing central state control can reduce the potential of cities as instruments of public policy, thereby diminishing participation in public decision making (Frug 1999: 8, cf. DFID 2001: 31).

Rather than in substance, i.e., control over resources, it is in the expression of as well as in the scope and scale of participation in local-central competition where diversity (and possibly divergence) in cities in fragile and impoverished countries comes to the fore. Similar to Mollenkopf’s (1989) concern discussed above and in response to Foucault’s (1991) warning that the production of space is driven by those in power, not those at the receiving end of political deliberation, Simone (2002: 31, 43, cf. Hoffmann and Lubkemann 2005: 325, Cleaver 2004: 276, Strathern 1985: 65) has suggested that city-based collective action in developing countries needs to be made more visible to counter depoliticisation and subsumption under “specific development trajectories” as part of a wider—yet presumably external—development agenda. Simone’s aforementioned critique dovetails with Horowitz’s (1989) late rejection of Lucian W. Pye’s (1958, cf. Diamant 1959) notion of a “non-Western political process.” Horowitz points out that not only in economically successful societies but also in impoverished countries, actors face constraints and have to make decisions under the condition of bounded rationality. Ripe moments’ (a concept that puts emphasis on a critical mass of social factors that together possess the

leverage to produce change¹⁰) catalyse outcomes, and initially unintended effects of policies factor into strategies of adaptation and adjustment. However, Horowitz then argues that under conditions of political uncertainty and limited resources, as often found in fragile and impoverished countries, the scope of alternative policies is *greater* than in democratic or democratising polities, where interests are already well organised (ibid., 203-205). It is therefore the context and not the substance of policies that explains difference.¹¹

This raises the question of *local* triggers. Do urban politics possess enough ‘issue power’ to mobilise the local public? Peterson (1981: 109-130) has famously argued that a significant amount of public policies for industrialised cities are designed and implemented without public involvement, not necessarily because of exclusion, but out of disinterest. Except in the case of local crisis (which one could of course argue is precisely the case in post-war cities), local issues—according to Peterson—do not carry enough weight to outweigh established preferences for national parties; non-partisan elections mediate this but, logically, do not have any impact on the national level and also complicate institutional accountability (cf. Jones 1995: 75). Even though political survival cannot be expected to hinge exclusively on the quality of public policies, as Hirschman (1958: 64) has pointed out in his theory of unbalanced economic growth, corrective action is often taken as a response to pressure on public authorities.

The view held by Peterson is congruent with predictions of constituency theory, which suggests that central government has a larger and more diversified stakeholder landscape representing more diffused interests allowing for mutual checking, which in turn increases the need to build coalitions to achieve mutually shared goals. On the other hand, local governments have a smaller constituency, which makes it easier for dominant interests to control policy, leading to the exclusion of less organised stakeholders. The problem associated with such a view in the

¹⁰ This builds on Althusser’s notion of contingency of social constellations; cf. Steinmetz (1994: 182).

¹¹ More recently, Mitchell (2004) fielded a similar argument in the context of international natural disaster relief; cf. Barakat and Chard 2004: 31, Holohan 2005: 167.

context of this study is that it *assumes* ‘the national’ to be somehow more diverse than ‘the urban’, where interests are organised insufficiently. However, particularly in less urbanised developing countries under conditions of urban primacy, capital cities embody the greatest diversity of political interests and the greatest proximity to decision-makers both directly and via the media, which is often absent outside the capital city. As a consequence, many urban governments in war-torn countries have to bear the brunt of immediate public pressure, whereas politics at the national level is potentially more insulated, ‘detached’ and dominated by entrenched rent seeking interests. Hence if national policies favour certain locations in the process of local development, this is not necessarily the result of any cohesive national development plan but can well be an effect of political entrepreneurship in the context of coalition building (cf. Mollenkopf 1983).

Much like in industrialised cities local interests in cities developing countries are not monolithic, resulting in an equally pressing need for negotiation and coalition-building. Clarke (1987: 112-114) has identified several distinct stakes in local public policy processes which—within given polity limitations—provide useful categories for this the analysis of Freetown and Kabul and will be discussed in CHAPTER SEVEN on the basis of our empirical investigation. Clarke distinguishes as follows. Groups that have territorial claims and organise around land use issues depend on community mobilisation in order to gain political clout and often experience organisational inertia and collective action constraints. Local elected officials have a latent interest in increasing the public’s voice, but their incentives are usually closely aligned with fostering urban growth. Local administrative officials underlie institutional norms and needs for power and control and will, collectively, aim at maximising budgetary allocation but also, individually, follow career aspirations and ideological beliefs. Based on this classification, she deduces three potential triggers for policy responses: electoral needs, ideological concerns, and institutional interests.¹² The first response is triggered by a clearly delineated public desire, making opposition potentially costly due to a loss of political support. A response to ideological

¹² Note that this view once again mirrors the concept of the city as a closed circuit.

concerns becomes more likely when the electorate is either undecided or stalemated. Finally, policy may kick in as a response to institutional interests, including the enhancement of institutional capacity, when both electorate and ideological drivers are either absent or blocked (*ibid.*, 114-117). Clarke concludes that institutional responses are necessary in order to maintain local legitimacy, authority and control, which may also require ignoring specific demands by social groups (*ibid.*, 121).

Indeed, the competition between city and central governments observed in many developing countries—also in the course of this study—can be considered not only an effect of resource scarcity (e.g., Barrows 1971: 1) but also a symptom of competing legitimacies (cf. Appadurai 2003: 337) between real and ‘imagined’ communities (cf. Andersen 1991). In striking similarity to the case of Kabul, which will be analysed in CHAPTER SIX, Nagel (2002: 722-723, cf. Makdisi 1997) illustrates in the case of Lebanon “a nation-building agenda [that] has infused the country’s reconstruction” since the end of the ‘regio-civil’ war (cf. Özkan 2004) in the early 1990s designed to fill the “virtual power vacuum. [...] The new Beirut is designed to represent a national space where a decade earlier there had been only rubble and gutted-out structures [and] to signal the beginning of legitimate, centralised authority where there had been political chaos and fragmentation.”¹³ In developing countries undergoing ‘peacebuilding’¹⁴ efforts, urban policies and polices for urban reconstruction are thus not exclusively bound to local needs and incentives; they are equally relevant to the national as well as the international political economy of state (re)creation and resilience.

Equal attention is due to deliberate attempts of reforming national as well as sub-national governance institutions and practices as part of the peacebuilding agenda, as diverging views prevail with respect to approaching their reform. While certain analysts consider post-war settings “an opportunity for some of these countries to rebuild their societies, economies

¹³ Kubursi (1999) has emphasised that the cost of this physical exercise in nation-building was far exceeding any standards of financial prudence, eating up almost 90% of annual government revenues.

¹⁴ Peacebuilding needs to be distinguished from peacemaking (military intervention to deescalate) and peacekeeping (enforced preservation of security status by an international third party; Mehler and Ribaux 2000: 33).

and polities and to start reforms and restructuring *that may have previously proved unattainable* [emphasis added]" (Green and Ahmed 1999: 189-190), others underline that the main task is to prevent connected zones of lawlessness, a "fertile ground for the establishment of drugs, crime, and terrorist syndicates from which no country may be immune" (Caplan 2005: 256). Advocating external design, some go as far as prescribing the perfect state brought about through the workings of an international body equipped with military and civilian personnel specialising in nation-building "flexibly, creatively and with sensitivity to local conditions" (Rondinelli and Montgomery 2005: 19) and urge that

"post-conflict nation building requires programmes to create a strong state *quickly* and in such fashion as to strengthen the capability of the governing regime not only to provide security, eliminate violent conflict and find ways to reconcile conflicting ethnic or religious factions, but also to *protect human rights, generate economic opportunities, provide basic services, control corruption, respond effectively to emergencies and combat poverty and inequality.*" (ibid., 22; emphasis added)

To achieve this, interventions and intermediate 'de-sovereignisation'¹⁵ in the form of 'executive international authority' (Caplan 2005: 179) are being suggested but have also been considered problematic, either in terms of practical feasibility (ibid.) or more substantially with respect to political legitimacy (cf. Paris 2004: 231, Paris 2002, Young 2000).¹⁶ CHAPTERS FIVE and SIX illustrate that an important concern pertaining to post-intervention governance of fragile polities is the question of legitimacy, which is inseparably linked to the spatial levels at which governing and holding accountable is supposed to take place. Legitimacy and accountability relationships that cut through levels of polity are more fragile and easily contested than those that are considered by both governors and governed as 'within reach.' Still, in his comments on a study on regulatory developments

¹⁵ Some even urge 'decertification' of such states rather than embarking on ineffective strategies to 'rebuild' them at all (Herbst 2003).

¹⁶ Not surprisingly, contemporary liberal-interventionist literature remains silent on the role of international agencies in speeding up the disintegration of some West African states through structural adjustment programmes during the 1980s. It focuses instead on the negative influence of regional governments in destabilising their neighbours, such as the provision of military training to insurgent movements (e.g., Libya, Liberia, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan) and the involvement of mostly Eastern European and Asian countries providing such anti-government movements with small arms—a position naturally welcomed by human rights activists—(cf. Fosu 2005: 237, Fosu 2002, Control Arms Campaign 2006: 12-17), but neglects the potential negative consequences of political interference and foreign leadership in the context of post-war reconstruction.

in global governance (Messner 2003) Müller (2005: 10, cf. Call et al. 2003: 237, 246) highlights that the *potential* for peacebuilding across levels of governance “appears obvious. [...] Multi-level networks of diverse actors concerned with peace processes might provide an opportunity to establish effective monitoring capacity based on strong local participation and accountability.” Related hopes that international NGOs (INGOs) act as connectors between global bodies of peace building and local arenas (von Trotha 2005: 38) are comprehensible, but may overlook an important politico-economic incentive that potentially diminishes the effectiveness of such organisations. Indeed, an important incentive for decentralisation derives from practical effectiveness considerations by non-state actors active in the reconstruction of the national economy and social structure. NGOs, highly dependent on short-term photogenic success to secure external funds, therefore tend to “reinforce the inclination of rehabilitation programs to adopt the highly decentralised and integrated approaches of relief rather than those of development.” (Macrae 1997: 197, cf. Knapp 2006)

Insisting on involvement with legitimate government entities, Debiel (2005: 13-14) suggests a distinction between input legitimacy, i.e., the scope of participatory opportunities, and output legitimacy, i.e., the “developmental orientation” of the government. In states with limited political legitimacy of the government where donor agendas and governmental interests diverge, he recommends ‘systems alignment’ and a focus on projects rather than direct budget support. He also explicitly urges the support of change agents. Where political legitimacy is stronger, donors should focus on policy alignment in order to substitute their lack of effective institutions. Yet this strategy, while theoretically sound, overlooks the implicit perverse incentive it carries. International agencies will seek to legitimise their national counterparts as soon as possible after the termination of large-scale violence—an approach taken in both Afghanistan and Sierra Leone—in order to get started with ‘serious’ development programmes. Klemp and Poeschke (2005: 25) acknowledge this dilemma of uncertainty with regard to legitimate country level partners and recommend “profound politico-economic analyses of power relations and actors” prior to making large scale commitments in order to avoid symptom (rather than cause) based strategies. Similarly, Risse

(2005) criticises the forging of transnational/local alliances in “spaces of limited statehood” against a background of the privatisation of security services but does not raise any concerns about changing political structures.

Yet while Risso envisions democratic guidelines for a remote controlled polity, he does not outline how to deal with the ongoing politics in the temporary void. Besides, the notion of ‘governance’ has also been criticised more generally for allegedly eclipsing an alternative discourse of the necessary conditions for inclusive democracy through its “binary opposition [between] alien state intervention, which is associated with past development failures, and indigenous capitalism, which represents the basis for future development successes,” thus suggesting that the cutting back of the state automatically give rise to “a people friendly democratic venture, almost to the extent that state contraction or destatisation is presented as synonymous with democratisation.” (Abrahamsen 2001: 50-51, cf. Apthorpe 2005: 5) Of central concern against this background is thus the mode of “establish[ing] a sovereign authority capable of enforcing a hegemonic peace upon all the fearfully contending parties.” (Walter and Snyder 1999: 17, cf. Paris 2004: 227, Klute and von Trotha 2004)

As we shall see in both cases studied for this investigation, competition for politico-economic control of post-war assets was fierce, and often ran along the lines of pre-war coalitions of actors or groups. Simply superimposing a new system of governance was thus unlikely to be effective. Still, there has been little analysis investigating intervention impacts on *sub-national* institutions [other than studies on the role of donor agencies in bringing about *de jure* decentralisation, one of the “ephemeral aid trends” identified by Périn and Attaran (2003: 1218)]. Undeniably, it is plausible to assume—in theory at least—that the institutionalisation of democracy is facilitated through routine, reciprocity and a subsequent increase in political predictability via a learning process among political leaders that increases the effectiveness of ‘governance as conflict management’ (cf. Rothchild 1997: 240-241, Zartman 1997: 10-12). However, the problem with such a proposition is that it presupposes the existence of a political culture as a tool to achieve democratic political skills, hence failing to explain how

governance as conflict management can be effective on the conditions of political uncertainty and violence. The desire of international actors in post-war situations to hold immediate elections is often not shared by the population, who usually express a strong preference for physical security and a reliable justice system before embarking on cementing well-known political constellations (cf. Green and Ahmed 1999: 203). Still, international calls for slowing the pace by laying out its intentions and strategies to devolve financial and governmental authority first “and only then focus on elections” remain the exception (ICG 2003b: 29, cf. DiJohn 2002: 5, Martinelli Quille 2000: 24, Green and Ahmed 1999: 200). Such an *iterative* approach to peacebuilding has been advocated by Paris (2004) who suggests that liberalisation and public voting be preceded by an effective institutionalisation of the state (“institutionalisation before liberalisation”). But this is a condition unmet in Sierra Leone, and even “partly reversed” in Afghanistan with its “quick and dirty approach to liberalisation” wrapped in a discourse of leaving only a ‘light footprint’ from a curious mix of technical advice and (arguably heavier-weighting) military missions to root out ‘anti-government forces’ (Paris 2004: 223-227). Indeed, not only in Sierra Leone and Afghanistan the creation of institutions to fulfil the normative agenda that donor agencies are trying to promote has proven to be a tall order.

There is also some recognition of a need for more careful peacebuilding processes ‘from below.’ The contributions by Bakonyi and Abdullahi (2005) on the central role of local institutions to preserve local structures in an environment of complete disorder highlight this, and Ahmed and Green (1999: 124) challenge the view that clan elders are unnecessarily unrepresentative based on their historical analysis of civil war in Somalia. Similar to Omaar (1994: 234), the authors underline that local communities made great efforts to identify members who enjoyed trust in their ability to mediate and lead; eventually, communities were quite satisfied with the quality of their local governance. On the contrary, what they considered the real problem was the *disconnection between local politics and national politics through the lack of physical representation of local issues in the capital city* and the insufficient support for rebuilding traditional structures of local level conflict resolution (cf. Maynard 1997). As a consequence, several successes in peacemaking at

the local level were not tied together nationally, which hampered the overall process (cf. Green and Ahmed 1999: 191).

How, then, can legitimacy be achieved? A growing number of scholars have come to emphasise the essential role of tax collection in order to build, or rebuilt, a viable state structure that has the fiscal capacity to create an institutional framework in which growth-oriented economic policies can be implemented and take effect (e.g., DiJohn 2005, Addison et al. 2005). Resource mobilisation is thus considered to be at the heart of post-conflict reconstruction, and policy measures that develop taxable economic activity and facilitate the shift from illegality to legality are central components of related strategies. However, this also entails the redistribution of property rights. The cases of Sierra Leone and Afghanistan demonstrate not only that this is an inherently political endeavour, but also that urban centres are key loci for such redistributive processes, prone to conflict.

Towards a revised interpretative framework

In essence, all theories considered in the previous section have their merits, but clearly none of them is able, *prima facie*, to offer an individually compelling rationale for urban politics in post-war intervention capital cities. Elitism and pluralism do not pay sufficient attention to structural constraints and opportunities. RT as the more progressive expression of Urban Marxism is limited mainly through its constitutive assumption of relative stability of the polity. Rational choice mischaracterises the economic environment and incentive structures embedding national-urban politics and policymaking. World Cityism is more receptive to inter-spatial relations but deterministic, and indeed reductionist, in its normative aspects by suggesting that streamlining local policies towards economic growth is the only feasible option at hand. Postmodernism tackles this and emphasises the scope of local agency, but—in addition to frictions in its suppositions—risks being overwhelmed by local politics without considering the impact of politic-economic supra-structures. In contrast, while URA is equally tied to the local, its applicability, too, is limited due to its focus on *economic* coalitions.

This, then, constitutes the preliminary answer to the first research question,¹⁷ which will be taken up again in CHAPTER SEVEN to accommodate key empirical insights as well. In order to illustrate the remaining gaps in theory, the three-dimensional cube below visualises the foci of the aforementioned theories on a two-layer continuum of structure and agency, and of local, national, or international interaction (figure 1). For instance, a theory of urban politics that focuses on agency between predominantly local actors would be found in the lower left cube in front (e.g., pluralism). One that seeks to explain urban politics by national-local structures would be placed into the lower right cube in the back (e.g., the 'local state' hypothesis).

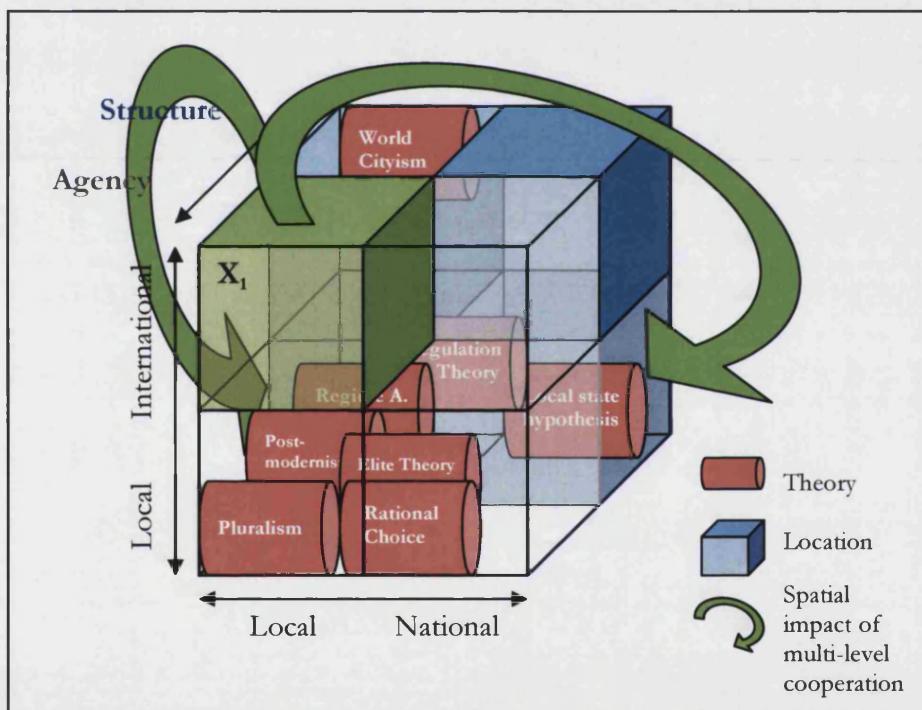


Figure 1: Locating theories of urban politics

Noting the insights from the literature review on cities, development and war provided above, and from the subsequent discussion of theoretical coverage, and in line with hypothesis (C), we observe that box 'X₁' (marked in green) is an unfilled yet presumably crucial area of theory in the context of

¹⁷ "Which existing theories of urban politics are suitable to explain political processes and their intended and unintended outcomes in impoverished post-war intervention cities?"

post-war urban politics. Buffered by both authoritative and allocative recourses (Jabri 1994: 80-81), active cooperation between international and local actors in a structurally dynamic setting is expected to generate enough leverage to reconfigure local polity and practice in accordance with hypothesis (B) of 'accelerated structuration.' This is visualised by the two green arrows showing the alteration of both local and national spheres.

The concept of accelerated structuration thus differs from regime theory in that it accounts for fundamental shifts at the macro, meso, and micro level (e.g., as a result of the post-war economy, political fragmentation and segmentation of social structures). At the same time, it is superseding RT by explaining external agency in environments of weak rule of law.

By way of summing up, reconfigured urban theory in the specific settings looked at in this study would therefore have to incorporate the following features:

- i. Conceptualise institutional multiplicity both within and across spatial levels of polity and explain its relevance for political processes, including the politico-economic legacies and remnants from colonialism and incomplete capitalist transformation, and political activism around inclusion ('street-level politics') and service delivery at the micro-level that emerges within these structural constraints
- ii. Shed light on different understandings and practices of policymaking through different kinds of formal and informal politics
- iii. Address the challenges of incomplete capitalism in the context of externally assisted post-war recovery, first and foremost the tension between a lack of taxable local resources and the 'soft budget constraint' introduced by external grants and programmes

- iv. Account for timeframes significantly shorter than those prevalent in democratically controlled cities, and for resulting political dynamics

This adds up to a tall order, but it is a feasible task if the analysis builds on a methodology that captures the different dynamics in need of investigation in order to evaluate the merits of my theoretical propositions. Based on an exploration of different epistemologies, the following chapter explains the rationale for the methodology chosen and outlines its components.

Chapter 3: Method

Places in context: the rationale for a comparative methodology

Comparative methodologies have gained significant theoretical and practical support by social scientists over the past decade. DiJohn (2002: 14), for instance, argues that the analysis of party politics and political strategies and “their effects in generating more or less divisible parameters of contestation” in a comparative case study research design can render important insights into the dynamics of national conflict. Stoker (2006) has made a similar argument for the study of local governance beyond national boundaries. Yet only recently Pierre (2005, cf. Mossberger and Stoker 2001) attested that urban researchers have been slow to harness the cognitive potential of comparative studies, for several reasons. First, urbanists have a tendency to regard their research as somehow disconnected, or rather, emancipated from mainstream, mono-disciplinary political science. Second, comparative research would require a certain degree of reductionism that, at first sight, sits uncomfortably with the preference of urban researchers for in-depth single case studies. And third, theoretical advances underpinning such comparative urban study has displayed a certain degree of US-focused ethnocentrism that limits its transferability to other contexts.¹⁸ Inspired by such critique, this study addresses this gap and aims at reaping the aforementioned benefits of comparative setups. In the course of my analysis in CHAPTERS FOUR to SEVEN I am using the comparative method to gain a deeper understanding of each place and its political socio-economic historical trajectory and reality by analysing them *in tandem*. The key objective of this cross-national comparison is thus to distil explanations for similarities and differences, and to generalise from them to the extent possible.

Unlike settings enjoying democratic stability, the environments into which post-war cities are commonly embedded are usually highly dynamic. With the scope of any agency defined by institutional frameworks, crisis situations thus become critical junctures at which decision-making by political actors is

¹⁸ The reverse is also true, as findings from non-US (but nonetheless developed) cities have fed into discussions of US-based urbanists only tangentially (cf. Vogel 2006).

crucial (Bastian and Luckham 2003: 306-307, cf. Greif and Laitin 2004, Thelen 2003), and grounding this comparative study historically therefore proved indispensable. At the same time, given that my empirical analysis demonstrates a significant extent of competition between newly conceived institutions with persisting established ones, attention to self-enforcing institutions based on belief systems (cf. Durkheim 1950) is equally warranted. This again necessitates a historical analysis in order to identify periods of (re)structuration during different phases of external involvement and also the bifurcation points that initiate processes of reordering local-national government relations. In CHAPTER SEVEN of this study, I will employ counterfactual reasoning as a method to scrutinise the significance of the assumed causations.¹⁹ I will follow Fearon's (1991) approach to counterfactuals and distinguish accordingly between actual analysis and analytical tools: rather than seeking to incorporate cases with zero incidences, I ask, e.g., "Would xyz be the same under different circumstances?" Rather than writing "history backwards" (cf. Bastian and Luckham 2003: 306), a tendency particularly prevalent in the deterministic ontology of 'failing states' criticised above, this requires the tracing of bifurcation points from the past to the present, as "design is a rare and unlikely mode of change of institutions in general." (ibid., 305).

Herein, sharp distinctions between 'causes' and 'effects' appear highly problematic. Building on a dynamic perspective put forward by McAdam et al. (2001), Sambanis (2004: 263) rightly points out that mechanisms "can also be outcomes: depending on the level of aggregation at which a theory is built, different outcomes become intervening variables, connecting a set of variables to other outcomes." The value of proposing causal relationships, however, is not absolute; it hinges on the proximity of the independent variable(s) to the *explanandum* (ibid., 263). This argument has again two important implications for the design of this enquiry. First, Sambanis'

¹⁹ I am indebted to Ralf Leiteritz for guiding me to the key literature on counterfactuals, and to Professors Lehmann-Waffenschmidt and Demandt for providing me with an introduction to this method. Demandt (2003: 192) has concretised the contribution of this method in a historical context as follows: "Counterfactual History is necessary for the assessment of causal factors that only show their weight once taken out of the larger context; [...] unrealised possibilities open up during first stages of a development and crises, less so in the history of civilisation and culture but more often in the history of wars and states [author's translation]."

contention can be interpreted as an argument in favour of multilayered investigation. Second, given these multiple levels of research, a focus on identifying the larger mechanisms appears crucial, thus confirming the need to integrate analysis of different spatial levels of polity over time. The figure below visualises this analytical combination of longitudinal and multi-level approaches in CHAPTERS FOUR, FIVE and SIX.

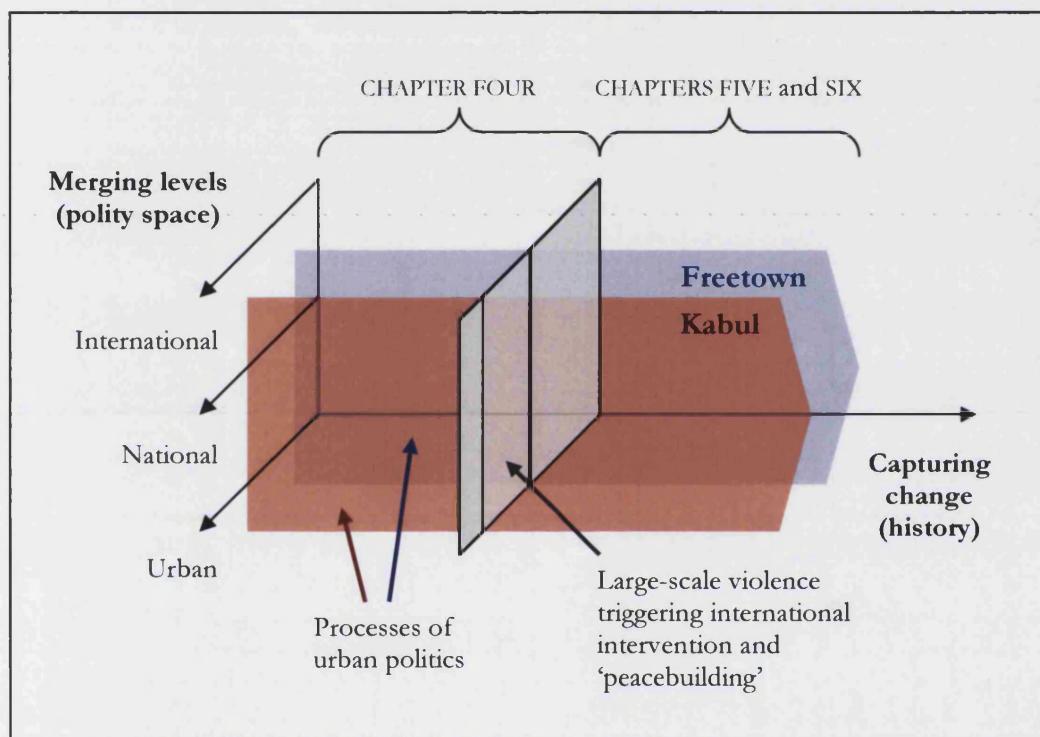


Figure 2: Analytical approach

We should note that in comparative studies of *two* cases there is a natural tendency to reduce, as much as possible, the variation among dependent variables. However, such a 'most similar systems design' may fall victim to the futile endeavour of trying to find empirical clarity in a world of complexity (cf. Przeworski 1987: 39-40), and the explanatory power of the overall argument should therefore not hinge on an expectation of absolute certainty of results (cf. Evans 1995: 20, Sekhon 2004: 281).

But careful extrapolation *is* possible, even when based on a small number of cases ('*small N*-problem'). Mitchell (1983: 190-191), in his influential article on case studies and sociological research, points out that the potential for

extrapolation does not exclusively derive from statistical inference, but is “in fact based on the validity of the analysis rather than the representativeness of the events.” Hence if the analysis is sufficiently rigorous, a case study can serve “as material from which some theoretical principles are to be inferred.” Thus, even though comparative studies cannot be expected to produce strong inference if their theoretical foundations are still emerging—as in this study—, they can demonstrate that new models can perform as well as, or even better than, mainstream models (Leach and Sabatier 2005: 499).

The comparative method, even when comprising only a small number of cases, is equally suited to theory testing. Goldstone (2003) has shown that an empirical investigation as part of a *deductive theory testing* exercise that rests on a small set of case studies does not automatically provide less analytical insight than a large N-study. *Inductive theory development* would require a sufficiently large set of cases (Sambanis 2004: 262) but deductive theory development can handle smaller sample sizes and benefits as well from variation in parameters to capture the greatest observational diversity possible (George and Bennett 2004: 19-22, cf. McKeown 1999, Ragin 1994, Patton 1990: 169). It also follows from Goldstone’s (2003) case that Turner’s (1953) ‘causal prime mover’ argument, which holds that prediction from the case studies tends to be theoretical rather than empirical, is not compromising the present study because the enquiry’s main aim is to advance the body of theory, not to make accurate predictions based on any notion of statistical inference. Case studies do not have to be ‘typical’ representations of reality to ensure the practical applicability of analytical conclusions. In other words, there is value in specificity; one case that contradicts strong priors can be highly instructive for theoretical refinement, which is precisely the intention of this study.

In this endeavour, guidance can be drawn from Eckstein’s (1975) discussion of case study research. In ‘configurative-idiographic studies’, social reality is dealt with in a largely descriptive manner. On the contrary, ‘disciplined-configurative studies’ have a more focused theoretical component. Eckstein (1975: 100) explains that this type of “case study is thus tied to theoretical enquiry—but only partially, where theories apply or can be envisioned.” The

other two types of case studies in Eckstein's taxonomy fall squarely under the category of 'heuristic case studies.' The first of these two subgroups is what Eckstein calls 'plausibility probes'. These are used to *test* specific arguments. Mitchell (1983: 196) points out, "Plausibility probes may be undertaken after heuristic case studies have been successfully concluded. [They] are used, then, as a preliminary test of theoretical formulations previously established by some other procedures." Consequentially, plausibility probes would appear very well suited to refine the conclusions of this study, and will therefore be discussed in CHAPTER EIGHT.

The second subgroup is constituted by 'crucial case studies,' which are used to illustrate outliers with enough explanatory power to reject a commonly accepted theoretical proposition. The explanatory power of this method can be charged further by embedding it into a 'most conducive' setting (cf. Hague and Harrop 2004). In order to test a new or revised theoretical proposition, such an approach is useful to examine its validity and applicability. If the proposition does not seem to carry sufficient explanatory power even in the context where its potential to clarify empirical observations can reasonably be expected to be greatest, then one can safely assume that it needs to be amended or even done away with completely. As the following section will outline, both Sierra Leone and Afghanistan could be considered 'most conducive settings.'

In sum, three different approaches classified by Eckstein's taxonomy are directly relevant to this study: heuristic cases, plausibility probes, and crucial case studies. Step one of deductive theory testing in this study is informed by references to general processes in post-war cities in order to demonstrate the theory gap. Facilitated by a 'disciplined-configurative' design and two arguably 'most conducive' settings, CHAPTERS FOUR to SIX then provide the analysis of past and present politico-economic processes in and on Freetown and Kabul. Herein, despite obvious differences regarding geography, socio-economic institutions and cultural norms, the *contextual parameters* in Sierra Leone and Afghanistan are not only comparable, but indeed similar with respect to a number of essential aspects. While I am thus not comparing like with like, an 'approximate equation' of the two study environments, to

paraphrase what Mitchell (1987: 32) purports as the crucial pre-condition for meaningful case comparison, is given. The following section on case selection serves to substantiate this claim.

Case selection: distinct characteristics, similar contexts

In the text sections of the latest World Development Report on 'Equity and Development' (World Bank 2005a), Sierra Leone and Afghanistan (see figures 3 and 4 on the following page; NB: different scales) are hardly mentioned. One finds only two references to the latter country, one focusing on the continuously appalling state of health care, particularly in rural provinces (ibid., 144), and the other one briefly touching the issue of reconstruction aid in 2004, the largest contribution (US\$ 0.9 billion) coming from the United States of America. Not surprisingly, after 22 years of war, the data situation in Afghanistan is extremely patchy, leading to the country being classified as an "other economy." The report only mentions *one* reliable figure—its gross national income, which is claimed to hover in the area of 5.5 billion US\$ (ibid., 300). However, as this excludes illegal incomes from poppy cultivation and trade, estimated to constitute up to two thirds of the overall Afghan economy (cf. Rubin et al. 2004), it is clearly a dubious indicator of economic activity. In a complementary country data sheet updated in April 2006, the World Bank adds that 47.2% of the 2004 gross domestic product (GDP), estimated at 5.8 billion US\$, was generated by merchandise trade, and that ODA had risen sharply between 2000 and 2004 from 140.9 million US\$ to 2.2 billion US\$ (World Bank 2006b).

In the 2003 Human Development Index (HDI), Afghanistan was not listed in the main indicator tables either but was reported to have the second lowest life expectancy (43.1 years), by far the highest infant and under-five mortality rates (165/257 per 1,000 live births), and the second largest percentage of under-nourished people (70%) among those countries not listed in the main ranking. The only country with an equally challenging record was Somalia, which remains a collapsed state (UNDP 2003a: 339), recent international incursions notwithstanding.



Figure 3: Sierra Leone (source: CIA factbook online: www.cia.gov)



Figure 4: Afghanistan (source: CIA factbook online: www.cia.gov)

Similar to per capita disbursements for Sierra Leone, calculatory payouts in Afghanistan were estimated at US\$ 182 per head per year during the period of 2004-2010 and are thus significantly lower than in Kosovo (US\$ 814), East Timor (US\$ 256), and Bosnia (US\$ 249) during the aftermath of these conflicts, and only marginally higher than per capita pledges for post-genocide Rwanda (US\$ 114; Rubin 2004 et al: 9). In August 2005, approximately 50% of indigenous national income was still generated through customs collection, but the government was planning to introduce a national scheme for income taxation with flat rates at 10% for above-average and 20% for high incomes, and was hoping that this scheme would constitute 50% of national income by 2007. On the contrary, existing copper and iron mines were not expected to make a significantly higher contribution over the course of the coming half-decade (AVT 2005).

With 98.5% of its urban population living in slum-like conditions, Afghanistan is statistically second only to Ethiopia and Chad (both 99.4%) in the group of countries with the highest percentage of slum dwellers (GUO 2003: 33-34). While post-war estimates of Kabul's population among local, national and international practitioners differed substantially—covering the extraordinarily wide range of 2 to 4 million (cf. Mumtaz and Noschis 2004: 7), the Central Statistics Office (CSO) set it at 2.707 million in March 2003. Including peri-urban areas, the figure added up to 3.314 million inhabitants. This compares to 1.3 million inhabitants counted in the Kabul City Census from 1986 (CSO 2003). The table below summarises these figures.

data sources: CSO 2003; Arez and Dittmann 2005, Yavari d'Hellencourt 2003						
	1965	1978	1986	2001	2003	2005
Kabul city population	435,000	780,000	1,300,000	2,000,000	2,707,000	-
incl. peri-urban areas					3,314,000	4,000,000

Table 1: Population of Kabul

Sierra Leone is not mentioned anywhere in the 229 pages of 2005 World Bank analysis, yet the statistics for this country, to the extent that reliable information is available, paint an equally bleak picture.²⁰ The gross national

²⁰ The following data has been extracted from World Bank sources (2005a: 279-299); cf. Schmidt (2006).

income in 2004 was estimated at US\$ 1.1 billion, roughly US\$ 200 per capita. Given low commodity prices, local purchasing power of the Leone is significantly higher, and PPP gross national income is therefore estimated at US\$ 4 billion total and US\$ 790 per capita in purchasing power parity terms. Nonetheless, in 2004, 70.2% of the national population was considered to live below the poverty line, with 56.4% of city dwellers living below the threshold, and 79% of those dwelling in rural areas.

The annual GDP growth rate from 2003 to 2004 was estimated at 5.4%, mostly due to post-war recovery in legal regional trade activities. Data from 2004 show that agriculture was the dominant sector with 53% value-added followed by industry with 30%. Services only contributed 17%. Government spending was comparably low, accounting for 13% of overall expenditure. Private households accounted for 83%. With 20% of GDP, gross capital formation was relatively low in 2004, compare to other countries in the region. In 2004, the value of imports was more than double the value of exports, with US\$ 285 million and US\$ 140 million respectively. Manufactured exports only accounted for 7% of total exported merchandise in 2003, with the largest export commodity being agricultural products.

Recorded net private capital flows were US\$ 3 million in 2003, matching the US\$ 3 million of foreign direct investment in the same year. Official development assistance, on the contrary, was more than nine times the combined amount of investment capital: US\$ 56 million. In the same year, total external debt added up to US\$ 1.612 billion, thus far outweighing gross national income. Domestic banks only provided approximately 30% of overall credit, with the rest stemming from international creditors.

Male life expectancy is still extremely low, averaging at 36 years. With 39 years, female life expectancy is only marginally longer, and while male life expectancy can be expected to increase as an effect of the cessation of armed hostilities, the state of maternal health, particularly outside provincial centres, remains dire. The literacy rate of citizens of 15 years and older is estimated at 30% according to national census data. In 2000, education surveys revealed that 74% of the population had no schooling, 4% had between one to six

years, 19% had seven to 12 years of schooling, and only 3% had more than that. In the period from 1995 until 2000, the country was witnessing substantial migration in the area of 110,000 residents (World Bank 2005a: 279-299).

Exceeding the regional trend, Sierra Leone is urbanising at a rapid pace. The UN Population Fund (2003: 75) calculates with an urban growth rate of 6.3%; (regional average: 4.3%, cf. *The Economist* 2007a: 50). While only 21.4% of the population lived in cities in 1975, 38.8% were city-dwellers in 2003. In 2015, the United Nations expect almost half of Sierra Leone to be urbanised (46.7%; UNDESA 2004: 26, cf. Cramer and Schmitz 2004: 12). Freetown is by far the largest urban agglomeration with a population of around 800,000 people (of which more than half are estimated to live in poverty; UN Habitat 2006b: 49), which is roughly a sixth of the overall 4.97 million of Sierra Leone.²¹ The table below illustrates population growth in Freetown over the course of the past five decades.

(source: GoSL 2005a: 4)	1963	%	1974	%	1985	%	2004	%
Sierra Leone total population	2,180,355	-	2,735,159	-	3,515,812	-	4,963,298	-
Western Area Rural population	67,106	3.08	40,065	1.46	84,467	2.40	164,024	3.30
Western Area Urban population	127,917	5.87	276,247	10.10	469,776	13.36	786,900	15.85

Table 2: Population of the Western Area:²² rural, urban, and as of total

This growth of the capital city and the dire situation of urban poverty in Freetown coincide with an oversupply of skills in petty production and a dominance of informal sector employment, estimated in 2003 to account for 70% of total employment (IDP Project 2003: 64-65).

As foreshadowed in the previous sub-section, the comparison of Freetown and Kabul can build on similarities but also on differences. With their size both in terms of absolute numbers and percentage of their countries'

²¹ The total population estimate is taken from UNDESA (2004: 26) and the Government of Sierra Leone (2005a). The World Bank's (2004b) population figure was slightly higher (5.2 million in 2002).

²² The Western Area is the province embedding the city of Freetown.

populations, both cities are metropoli. Moreover, Grünewald's (2004: 16-18) provocative notion of the 'non-urbanised city' seems to apply to both: city-based organisations have a coordinating function, groups identify themselves through and via the city, transactions are on the spot due to lack of trust, and public services are largely absent. Nor are the urban economies in Freetown and Kabul specialised on any particular value-creating industry, and urban space in both cities is not subdivided into quarters with specific functions such as production, services, administration, and living (*ibid.*, note the parallels with the 'urban functions' production, service provision, equity, and security outlined in CHAPTER TWO). Finally, and vitally important, both cities and the countries in which they are embedded have undergone foreign military intervention and external rule, which—following hypothesis (B)—renders them 'most conducive' settings that make structuring effects relatively more likely than in sovereign, self-contained post-war environments. Both Sierra Leone and Afghanistan have been hosting so-called 'integrated missions' of the United Nations (Eide et al. 2005: 12, 34) that have combined an agenda for re-establishment of security and peacekeeping with transitional justice and relief systems, reconstruction and development objectives.²³

Yet such parallels regarding contextual parameters must not gloss over substantial differences between Freetown in Kabul, which equally exist. First and foremost, any comparison of Freetown and Kabul needs to consider the two fundamentally distinct historical paths of these cities. It pits a city that owes both its existence and its structural importance to colonialism against a city that has grown *in parallel* with colonial attempts. Freetown, a "Christian colonial city" characterised by an *intrusive* elite, a place "created by Europeans for their own purposes of administration and trade, playing a critical role in the process of colonial political domination and in the extraction of profit by colonial business enterprise," (Harrell-Bond et al. 1978: 309) and an urban space planned from the very beginning (Fyfe 1968: 3) is being compared

²³ This is in spite of the mission in Sierra Leone being credited to have had an *ex post facto* 'role model' impact on the design of such hybrid constructs, whereas the mission in Afghanistan is significantly less holistic due to the crucial involvement of coalition forces in both military (e.g., anti-terrorism operations) and civilian matters (mainly the development function of PRTs).

with what O'Connor (1983: 32-40) has labelled a “dual city”, a space in which the traditional meets the ‘modern’ (cf. Enwezor et al. 2002). The latter occurs not necessarily through imposition, but through the emergence of alternative visions of politics, culture, and public life.²⁴

This difference is not to the detriment of this study, on the contrary. The histories of Freetown and Kabul carry important implications for the testing of the hypotheses formulated at the outset of this study, in particular hypothesis (B). To recall, this hypothesis holds that *structuration in and of post-intervention cities is accelerated*—that is, the process is happening significantly faster than in previous occurrences—through agency by international actors. If colonialism, as in the case of Sierra Leone, was found to carry a strong explanatory value with regard to explaining this disconnect, then this would weaken hypothesis (B). This would be so because colonial rule in the past may have had a very similar or even stronger effect on local and national institutions, thus rendering the relative leverage wielded by foreign intervention and post-war governance on altering institutions and structures diminished. Conversely, if the historical analysis of colonialism does not explain sufficiently the institutional landscape in Freetown in the present, then one can argue that *alternative forces* seem to play a role as well.

In addition to starkly different historical paths, contemporary national polities in the two countries are diametrically opposed as well. Consider Brinkerhoff's (2005: 11) submission who aptly calls Sierra Leone an example of a polity “where high levels of centralised control and political/ethnic domination” prevail whereas Afghanistan “illustrates the opposite situation, and national government too weak to function effectively outside the capital city.” But here again, this diversity is not hampering the analytical potential of this study. As explained above, the shape of a polity at a given point in time is not considered a contextual parameter embedding the enquiry but quite the opposite, the *explanandum* itself.

²⁴ This notion of duality does not hinge on an absence of socio-political relationships between different sections of the urban society, nor does it condition a sharp distinction between the wealthy and the deprived—rather, the duality exists between the norms and practices that are exercised and replicated voluntarily by different groups of residents. Cf. Grötzsch (1979) who labels Kabul an “Islamic oriental city” to essentially describe the same fusion of economic, socio-cultural and political spheres in space.

This does not mean that no challenges have been encountered throughout the research process. The remaining two sections of this chapter outline the approach to field research and explain unanticipated problems and resulting compromises in practice.

Field research: listening across levels of polity

Fieldwork was necessary not only to gain access to primary data on projects, programmes, and investment at different levels of governance (for which research reports and newspaper articles have been included as well), but also in order to clarify the political agendas and resultant activities at these levels as they relate to the recovery, integration and development of the two cities. During the preparation phase, the question had arisen whether a q-squared methodology, i.e., a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches was feasible. Both types of inquiry have their specific strengths (cf. Sambanis 2004), and combining them therefore appeared diligent. However, on the ground this intention faced not only epistemological but also operational obstacles.

Initially, the motivation for this study had been to study city level ‘peacebuilding’.²⁵ This was eventually abandoned for an analysis of the city as a political arena. The reason for doing so was the degree of politicisation observed right at the beginning of the field research stints. During the early conceptualisation phase, I had been focusing on the potential of grassroot collective action for more equitable service delivery and greater inclusion into local political processes. Yet after a more thorough engagement with the peacebuilding literature as well as scholarly analyses of recent international interventions to fragile states, I began to question this focus. My scepticism was reinforced further after my first conversations with informants in Kabul in mid-2004 who redirected my attention to the influences on local politics exerted by international agencies and organisations. On my ‘modal map’, the task of explaining conflict and ‘peace’ thus morphed from a mainly technical

²⁵ An article by Bollens (2006) is, as far as I am aware, the first rigorous contribution on this aspect; previous work was exploratory in nature; e.g., Esser (2004a), Stanley (2003).

issue to one that appeared to be both object and driver of local politics. Consequentially, surveys of the populations of Freetown and Kabul did not appear fully appropriate anymore to capture this new direction. I could have surveyed certain fractions of the urban population to arrive at a comprehensive picture of their perceptions regarding their political and economic inclusion. However, exclusivity was so obvious in both cities that I felt that my main effort should focus on understanding the rationales and objectives of different political players active in the urban realm. Moreover, the infrastructure and security situation especially in Kabul would have rendered large-scale surveys a rather complicated and unjustifiably hazardous approach. In Freetown, this would have been more feasible, also in light of already existing surveys conducted by other academic researchers after the war – to the extent that I had heard of them or that they were ongoing during my presence in the country. Still, in order to ensure comparability and also in light of the reflections outlined above, the decision was made to rely on a range of qualitative tools.

The ensuing primary research aimed at accomplishing two objectives; first, to check the *status quo* of political competition within and beyond the city order to allow, together with the data collected through desk research and presented jointly with primary accounts, for an evaluation of recent dynamics; *second*, to provide leads for a comprehensive assessment of the hypotheses formulated in CHAPTER ONE and the theoretical propositions deduced toward the end of CHAPTER TWO. In order to cover this agenda, field research in Sierra Leone and Afghanistan was comprised of non-participant observation of multi-stakeholder gatherings, spontaneous as well as arranged focus groups, and semi-structured interviews with two most diverse sets of respondents. The latter formed the empirical backbone of this research project. However, data collected through this method had to be triangulated to ensure validity and reliability (Patton 2001: 247). In qualitative inquiries, validity and reliability are married to the concepts of confirmation and completeness (Breitmayer et al. 1993). In the context of this study, information gathered through primary research in Freetown and Kabul had to be verified because of certain adverse incentives of respondents as well as methodological constraints (the following section elaborates on these issues).

Triangulation was also sought to detect potential bias (Mathison 1988: 13). To this effect, direct interaction with research subjects was complemented through observation of controlled (focus groups) and uncontrolled (meetings, sessions) interactions among informants as well as desk based research. At the same time, the methodological and operational limitations confronting the interview approach explained below necessitated alternative methodologies to collect the maximum possible amount of data and to “search for convergence among multiple and different sources of information” (Creswell and Miller 2000: 126) in order to eventually achieve—to the extent possible—generalisability of the key findings (Johnson 1997: 283). Hence, triangulation was employed not only to verify the information gathered but also crucially to generate broader understanding (as opposed to directly explaining) of the study sites, according to Stenbacka (2001: 551) the main purpose of good qualitative research.

To capture the urban political landscape and dynamics, the scope of key informants includes municipal and ministerial officials, local and national politicians, tribal leaders, grassroot organisers, local as well as international staff of NGOs, businesspeople, diplomats, and international aid workers. Interviewees were identified through initial contacts and subsequent snowballing, and interviews were conducted during four field trips: three to Kabul, the first one from June until early August 2004, then again in January 2005, and in April/May of the same year. This was complemented by one extended stay in Freetown in November and December 2004. In total, 122 in-country informants—62 in Sierra Leone and 60 in Afghanistan—from a variety of sectors informed the study through 74 individual interviews and twelve focus groups. This scope seems appropriate in light of similarly broad yet significantly smaller sample sizes for comparable studies, such as the one on governance by Hyden et al. (2004), which bases its conclusions on a minimum of 35 interviewees in each of the 16 developing countries included in the study. My study builds on roughly twice the number of interviewees per country, which was the maximum that was feasible operationally. Nonetheless, 122 respondents still do not guarantee complete exploration and explanation, as different people would have told me different stories (cf.

Keen 2005: 6). This is a methodological problem that is acknowledged and that can be mediated only by offering a diligent analysis of the data that *is* available.

Regarding the ‘objects of politics,’ the analytical framework focused on coalitions and conflicts pertaining to policy areas including local polity reform and its drivers and constraints, land tenure and related institutional reform, local economic development, the provision of municipal services with a spotlight on waste collection and water, and the assisted recovery of social cohesion in the context of internal displacement and migration. In both cities, an apt starting point for the discovery and classification of political alliances and coalitions emanating within and beyond the urban arena was the identification of issues *against* which actors and groups were mobilising. In order to do justice to the complex nature of urban politics, this methodological approach benefited from the ontological openness embraced by this study, with regard to both the space (different levels of political interaction) and time (dynamics) aspects explained above. At the local level, disagreement arose during different points in history between residents and strangers, between younger and older residents, between different ethnic groups, and most important perhaps, between different economic stakeholders. At the national level—which, in the case of capital cities, can be overlapping with the local—the practice and ideology of party politics or its absence or even suppression was a field of contestation, as were competing positions on preferences regarding the geography and content of sub-national development activities and related actions of interference. At the international level, perceptible cleavages seemed to occur as results of different strategic objectives and financial priorities, but also triggered by specific interventions, either unilaterally or indirectly, through supporting particular national and even local actors.

All conversations (except for two, which were transcribed manually following respondents’ preferences) were tape-recorded after seeking explicit consent of those interviewed. Using *Dragon NaturallySpeaking 8.0* software these tapes were then dictated by the author into a word processing programme. Therefore, the accuracy of the documentation can be assumed

to get be to one hundred per cent. The structural outline for the interviews used in both countries is attached as annex I. An overview of interviewees in both cities can be found in annex II.

Methodological and ethical challenges encountered

In light of this study expressly intersecting different levels of polity, the question of where to ‘seal off’ objects of enquiry has been a challenging one. The need to do so *in general* has been explained above (e.g., Mitchell 1987), but its application to my case study settings seemed difficult during the conceptualisation phase. I realised that I had to position myself between the two extremes of calling every issue or political activity ‘urban,’ or alternatively ascribing by default every issue political process to vertically or horizontally different levels of polity. But once I had set foot on Sierra Leonean and Afghan soil and conducted my first interviews not only did I feel confirmed that the cross-spatial approach was appropriate, but drawing the boundaries also became less of a daunting task. Clearly, seeing the socio-political reality on the ground with my own eyes proved vital.

Conversely, a challenge whose exact magnitude I had failed to anticipate was the relative *weight* of information gathered during interviews with key informants in my analysis of political reality. My methodology proved highly effective in generating a rich dataset. Triangulation helped identify and—where necessary—exclude misrepresentations. But the question prevailed to what extent, for example, a statement by an international aid worker about the motivation of international agencies to disregard the municipality in Kabul in favour of the national ministry compared to a remark on the same topic uttered by a bureaucrat within that municipality. It should have come as no surprise that stark discrepancies existed among the diverse set of interviewees in both cities with regard to leverage, education and self-reflection. Still, I quickly noticed that I constantly had to remain alert in order to prevent statements made by more influential and informed respondents from automatically appearing more valid and instructive. As for validity, I have tried to address this challenge by probing whenever I had any

doubts and by testing such data in subsequent conversations with other informants. Nonetheless, an error margin remained, which in my view was an inexorable by-product of interviewing powerful and powerless stakeholders alike, protected as well as vulnerable ones, and also some who may have hoped to gain something from talking to me amid the hardship of urban life in Freetown and Kabul.

This general feature notwithstanding, the *milieux* of the cities investigated in this study did indeed diverge, confirming Wood's (2006: 384) observation that "conflict zones differ enormously in their [research] conditions." An application of Nye's (1993) taxonomy to categorise bipolar politics of the Cold War era to the two cases investigated in this study characterises this distinction very well. His taxonomy renders Afghanistan—initially at least—more of a USSR-type 'black box' (i.e., complicated data analysis because of information scarcity), whereas Sierra Leone was found to lean more towards the other end of the spectrum, located in a previously USA-held 'noise' position (complicated data analysis because of abundant and sometimes contradicting information). Apart from occasional language constraints in Afghanistan,²⁶ which were overcome by employing local research assistants and debriefing interviews conducted in *Dari* (the predominant local dialect) immediately after they had been conducted to assure accuracy, a period of immersion was needed to develop a sufficient contact base, and ethnographic methods such as non-participant observation were used to overcome suspicion and create trust. Nonetheless, conducting qualitative research in urban Afghanistan proved to be challenging. Indeed very similar to the observation of many NGOs working in rural areas of the country, I regularly experienced the effects of a curious combination of compliance and secrecy. "Faced with agencies' questions, villagers quickly work out what is going on," as Johnson and Leslie (2004: 58) have observed, and the invention of additional features or the dramatisation of facts prove to be common reaction, brought to light in regular debriefings with the Afghan interpreters aimed at validating or problematising individual responses.

²⁶ Most interviews in Afghanistan were conducted in English.

But the caveat lies hidden precisely in this structure of direct academic enquiry and its assumption, while false, that such intrusion will create factual information-loaded responses. Quite the contrary, respondents might have their own agendas, therefore appreciating the opportunity to share their interpretations and demands with the researcher. This was often the case in Sierra Leone. Despite lengthy explanations of what the research was aimed at and the assurance of anonymity, interviewees in Afghanistan would regularly remain suspicious, preferring to guard their knowledge rather than sharing it with an unknown foreigner, and responding by making friendly but general statements on the hardship of urban life in a post-war context (residents), the need for more resources and the lack of coordination among the donors (local urban officials), and the constraints created by insufficient technical capacity and the ‘securitisation of development’ agendas (international aid workers; cf. HoC/IDC 2006: 9-10). Targeted follow-up questions sometimes missed their targets as well, and research ethics suggested moving on to a set of related issues in such situations rather than putting undue pressure on interviewees (cf. Goodhand 2000: 14).

Sierra Leone then presented itself as an antipodal research setting, with limited language constraints and remarkable openness towards this project, which found its expression in interviewees being willing to be consulted on the spot and sharing a broad range of information – sometimes to the point that the conversation was in need to be realigned gently in the interest of maintaining a certain focus. At the same time, what had to be avoided in this context was a form of “hegemonic spectatorship” that would sacrifice research subjects to a logic formulated *a priori* and adhered to during the field test (Merleau-Ponty 1964: 115) and instead engaging in seeking “lateral relationships” (*ibid.*) between researcher and interviewees. Apart from not pushing respondents into a specific direction, as experienced in Afghanistan, or unjustifiably forcing them ‘back on track’ as sometimes tempting in the case of Sierra Leone, twice I also had to refuse paying small bribes to ‘middlemen’ offering to facilitate access to government officials.

Several of those interviewed in both cities requested that their statements be anonymous, which also in light of the often political nature of the subject

and the remaining actuality of the research at the time of publication seemed to be the ethically most diligent mode of data presentation (cf. Goodhand 2000: 13-14). The list of respondents has therefore been codified by offering descriptions of the organisational, functional and hierarchical background of every respondent. This code will also help appreciate the context of responses and statements as they appear in the written text, as abbreviations denote both the sector and location of the interviewee. 'IBA-F5', for instance, shows that the interviewee worked for an international or bilateral agency in Freetown. In this case, the respondent's functional title was Decentralisation Advisor, and the interview was recorded on 22 November 2004. Similar details of all data events can be found in annex II.

Chapter 4:

The evolution of two capital cities and the paths to armed conflict

Freetown: from colony to capital city

“The town belonging to the colonised people [...] is a world without spaciousness; men live there on top of each other, and their huts are built one on top of the other. The native town as a hungry town, starved of bread, of meat, of shoes, of coal, of light. The native town is a crouching village, a town on its knees, a town wallowing in the mire.”

Fanon (1963: 39)

In her recollection of her father’s role and life as a former government minister murdered under Siaka Stevens’s reign, Aminatta Forna (2003) provides a vivid illustration of Freetown as a highly politicised arena that mattered as a space of consolidation of national politics. Freetown has been one of the “crucibles of experimentation with new patterns of political life [through their] multiplicity of political groupings and structures attempting to serve variegated occupational, economic, social, and ethnic constituencies,” (Skinner 1972: 1208) but has also remained a typical ‘colonial city’ (cf. CHAPTER THREE) in terms of space – a socio-geographical “promontory” and pivot of administrative and economic convergence including airlines, the telecommunications network, the country’s barely functioning postal service, and most television and radio stations; in sum, a “point of dissemination [...] of imported goods and ideas” (Barrows 1971: 6-7). Freetown yesterday and today has also been *the* place for garnering electoral and financial support in the struggle for national governance and political domination, including the vibrant and ever-growing landscape of indigenous non-governmental organisations. Indeed, Sierra Leone is probably one of the few least developed post-war countries where this diverse sector could appropriately be labelled ‘civil society.’

This ‘arena function’ has been fuelling intense and immediate exchanges of national party politics ever since the creation of political parties. The current political constellation in Sierra Leone is quite telling. The party in government until 2007 won a landslide victory in national elections in 2002, gathering approximately 80 per cent of the national vote. However, in the

first local elections of the post-war period conducted in 2004, the opposition party—in power during the reign of Siaka Stevens in the 1970s and 1980s—managed to win a landslide victory in Freetown proper.

Yet Freetown, and Sierra Leone embedding it, is also a poignant example of rural-urban divides. The Temne, one of the two dominant tribes in Sierra Leone, refer to the city as “Salone,” the same word they use to denominate their country. For many, living in the country’s capital has been a promise of higher wages, a more vibrant social life, better healthcare, and a more immediate access to political decision-making structures.²⁷ In spite of the existence of regional centres such as Koido, Kenema and Bo in the centre farther to the east, the country remains governed in a dichotomic manner: the ‘west’ (Freetown and the Western Area) and the ‘rest.’

Freetown itself spreads from east to west, its expansion limited by the coast in the North and steeply rising hills in the South. Residential patterns can be put into four categories: houses of the more affluent residents and international staff in the West, often on larger lots with front- and backyards on the hillsides and towards Tower Hill, the seat of the national government; crammed housing in the city centre (“Cotton Tree”), where buildings are used as shops on the ground floor and residences on the first and second floor, together with squatter settlements along the river bed; middle-class housing, in part still from the 19th century, and small shops, many of them run by Lebanese families, at Fourah Bay east of the geographical centre; and finally, large-scale squatting in slums such as Kissy Town in the very east on the way to the interior provinces. The map on the following page shows the expanse of the city in mid-2003 (courtesy of UNOCHA).

²⁷ Conversations with pedestrians in downtown Freetown; 2-6 December 2004.

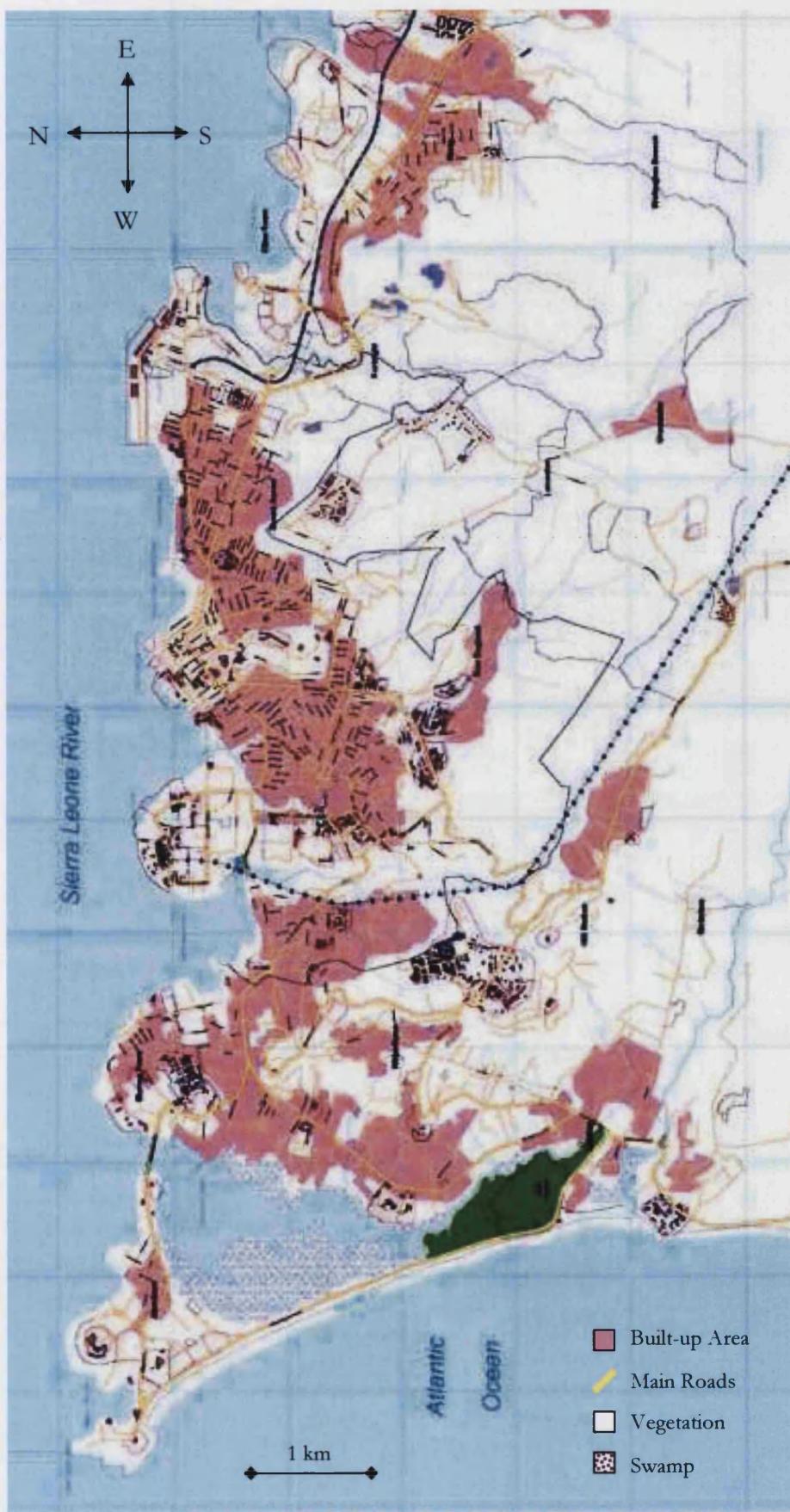


Figure 5: Freetown in 2003

The city's founding was a spatial by-product of the demise of mercantilism and the rise of early international capitalism. In the late 18th century, the slave trade was increasingly regarded as a waste of human resources, and following economic rationality it was argued that Africans should be producers of raw materials and consumers of European products, and not a commodity themselves (Conteh-Morgan and Dixon-Fyle 1999: 24). Slaves were to be freed – and turned into 'free' producers.

Even though traces of human inhabitation date back several centuries prior to the arrival of outsiders, Freetown's foundation as a formal settlement is commonly related to the arrival of 1,200 freed black slaves from Nova Scotia to Sierra Leone in January 1792. These newly arrived settlers from North America soon developed a suspicious caution *vis-à-vis* the Sierra Leone Company established by the first group of foreigners, a mistrust that was exacerbated by the introduction of a land tax by the Company in 1794 in order to offset the cost of physical reconstruction after a French attack on the harbour and town. Whereas the Company successfully retained political and economic control over the city, the freed North Americans settlers hung on to their vision of Freetown as a fully independent entity.

In 1796, the British leaders of the Company 'imported' Africans from Jamaica (then called *Maroons*) to enforce taxation and governance structures, which safeguarded, at least temporarily, the functioning of what was to become a vibrant trading community. In 1807, the Temne tribe, from which the land had been purchased, were prohibited from settling within an 11-mile radius from the city, and Native houses became subject to destruction (Doherty 1985: 150).²⁸ In 1808, Freetown was chosen as the place of liberation for Yoruba slaves who had been freed after the capture of trader vessels transporting this human commodity along the African coast. Most of this group, which eventually numbered 50,000, were channelled into experimental farming activities or apprenticeships in or close to the city.

²⁸ Trickling returns were tolerated; by 1823 an estimated 15% of the population was again of native origin.

Partly a result of the constant influx of people and the slow pace of adaptation of immigrant social institutions to the new urban environment (Banton 1957: xiii), the security situation in Freetown worsened significantly. There were also repeated arson attacks by hinterland tribes on the city (Harrell-Bond et al. 1978: 2), and by the mid-1820s most of Freetown's infrastructure was lying in decay (Nunley 1987: 4-10, Conteh-Morgan and Dixon-Fyle 1999: 25-26). Contemporary commentators mostly blamed the lack of effective public control through local governance and policing and the absence of sufficient employment opportunities for the fast-growing urban population as preventing the emergence of orderly community life.

Yet even though the attempts by the Sierra Leone Company to create a cohesive Christian city-state were largely considered a failure, Freetown survived as a settlement, influenced both in terms of religious practice and local politics by local traditions and developing into a heterogeneous colony that was the site of the emergence of a new Creole class, which in spite of its own diversity and its many economic interactions with its hinterland, nurtured gradually “an attitude of superiority” (*ibid.*, 14) over the indigenous Africans living in what would later become Sierra Leone’s national ‘up-country,’ and the factions dwelling in the city proper (Spitzer 1974). This sentiment was reciprocated by the various tribes in the hinterland who feared the extinction of their traditional way of life by the black intruders as much as they were hostile against the British colonisers.

During the second half of the 19th century, paramount chiefs developed a vital interest in constraining large-scale economic entrepreneurship within their realm of power in order to prevent “alternative forms of patronage” that would have diminished the leverage over their subjects, and preferred indigenous (and directly taxable) economic activity instead (Cartwright 1978: 252-253). Even though missionaries and foreign scientists had regularly pointed to the developmental potential of the Sierra Leonean hinterland (cf. Roberts 1982: 11), its eventual annexation under British rule was triggered by an economic event thousands of miles up north—the Great Depression of 1873 in Britain, which, through a slump in demand, directly affected the colony’s economic prosperity. As a result, the small British community

together with economic elites of Creole origin under the leadership of the Sierra Leone Association for the Improvement and Defence of Commerce, Agriculture, and Industry (SLA) lobbied the Colonial Administration to annex the adjacent territories in order to ensure the advancement and protection of trade routes and relationships, which dovetailed with the colonial desire to increase the colony's tax base (Kilson 1966: 220). Abraham (1978: 54) explains that this was considered necessary "because duties levied on goods entering the Sierra Leone Colony could hardly produce much revenue so long as goods entering immediately adjacent areas paid no duties at all." The chiefs had been right in their suspicion and concerns.

Over the course of the following twenty-three years, discussions among representatives of the Crown and city based traders about this move eventually led to regular excursions of colonial authority into the neighbouring chiefdoms. Says Abraham (1978: 67),

"The [colonial] administration was careful not to get entangled in the politics of the interior. But slowly and imperceptibly, it was coming to find itself in a position from which it was unable to disentangle itself. As colonial influence spread, traders ventured further inland. Mostly Creoles who were British subjects, they expected to be protected."

Thus mimicking the process of state formation in Europe, the 'state followed the trader.' Even though it was declared policy to incentivise rural producers to bring their produce to the city rather than venturing out into the locations of production, the protective measures that were required to uphold trading patterns eventually prompted the shift from fiscal jurisdiction of the hinterland to spatial annexation in 1896 – "a political act necessitated by economic considerations" (*ibid.*, 68).

In 1898, Freetown was made the capital of the hinterland. Until the country gained independence more than 60 years later, the colonial administration remained the largest national *and* urban employer through its railway system, ports, and the state bureaucracy. What is more, the lack of economic progress beyond Freetown and Bonthe (a much smaller urban settlement 90 miles south) after one hundred years of colonisation was a common feature in contemporary comments on the state of affairs in Sierra Leone. Indeed,

the imposition of a British Protectorate was claimed to have saved the colony from for ever remaining economically backward and “from that of shocking terrorism [of tribal competition] which was the perpetual condition of their existence until the creation of the Protectorate” (Alldridge 1910: vii, 357). This practice of remote-ruling the Sierra Leonean hinterland from the capital city was anchored in the minds of rural subjects via the defeat by British troops in the Hut Tax War in 1898, a rural rebellion against the perceived economic marginalisation through the dominance of Creole economic activity, the abolition of slave trade in the hinterland, and the introduction of a hut tax in order to mobilise resources in the Protectorate upon its declaration two years earlier (cf. Kilson 1996: 221).

Only three years prior to Freetown rising to capital city status, the first mayor of the city had been elected. First constituted in 1799 through a Charter to the Sierra Leone Company, Freetown Municipality had vanished soon after when the Colonial Administration cancelled its magisterial rights in 1821. It took over seventy years for it to re-emerge, owing to the ever-increasing importance of the city as an economic centre. The election of Sir Samuel Lewis, a Creole lawyer, in 1895 followed the re-establishment of the Freetown Municipal Council in 1892. Lewis was granted the authority to regulate trade, fire prevention, education, and planning. This marked the reconstitution of Freetown as the city (cf. Banton 1957: 10). 15 councillors, twelve of whom had also been elected, assisted him.²⁹ Freetown had thus been given a local government typical of Anglophone territories (cf. Stren 1989: 25). A legal distinction between native and non-native was introduced in 1905, requiring that everyone seeking the status of non-native had to prove to have made a ‘reasonable contribution towards some system of education’ and possess valuable property in the city (Harrell-Bond et al. 1978: 7, 169). This separation was not only of legal nature. It also manifested itself in space, and the following quote from the Creole-financed newspaper *Sierra Leone Weekly News*, published in 1900, is a telling illustration (quoted in: Harrell-Bond 1978: 8).

²⁹ The British Governor appointed the three remaining councillors.

“When we speak of ‘The City’, we mean, of course, the area enclosed by Little East and Garrison Streets, and Poultney and Water Streets with the Maroon Town flanking it on the West and South western sides, as a respectable compliment. The portions remaining [...] should be styled ‘Freetown’. The City is marked by good sober dignity [...], Freetown [...] by the confused noises of heathen [...] population.”

In 1907, the city’s second mayor of the Protectorate period, John Henry Thomas tried to canvass support for a moderate increase in water fees in order to offset the initial investment for which the city had approached the Colonial Government, which had granted a loan for which the Municipal Council assumed responsibility. This endeavour was frustrated repeatedly by the “customary indifference” displayed by Freetown citizens who showed no dedication to get involved in public affairs (cf. Peterson 1981)—including the mayor’s intention to nurture economic development through the extension of the existing urban infrastructure and the desired effect of improving public health in light of rampant waterborne diseases and the general perception of uncleanliness among native urban settler communities (Harrell-Bond et al. 1978: 7)—and whose main interest was in keeping price levels stable.

Thomas decided to raise the rate with the backing of the Municipal Council, which a contemporary commentator interpreted as an encouraging sign that citizenry in Freetown relying on “the present hereditary petty and most precarious system of trading” could eventually be transformed into “a more generally enlightened community”, which would require overcoming the “public ignorance and apathy” through the realisation of the “benefits that such a representative assembly should bring to the citizens, socially, commercially, and intellectually—not the least of these being the training of the young citizens and public work.” (Alldridge 1910: 62-66) The mayor’s vision of economic development in order to catch up with other colonial centres such as Lagos, which had already been equipped with electric lighting and a tram line, and his unshakable commitment to servicing the loan granted by the colonial administration were proofs of the desired institutionalisation of ‘modern’, progressive urban mindsets, even leading a contemporary commentator to call him “an example of what a citizen should be.” (ibid.) Freetown had thus ascended to the dual function that continues

to dominate its politics until the present day. Not only was it a city to be governed; it also served as the politico-economic centre of an entire country.

Kabul: from urban settlement to capital city

Pekharke ablee wa pa ghre ke yaghi. (Pushtun proverb)
“Be tame in the city, rebellious in the mountains.”

Kabul’s genesis as an urban settlement preceded by millennia the era in which the leaders of the country developed a language and policy of nationalism and crowned Kabul as the capital of the Afghan nation. Yet in striking temporal similarity to the case of Freetown, at the beginning of the 20th century it endured the same tension between being ‘just’ an urban place and serving as a centre of national politics, leading to ebbs and flows between centralisation and regional autonomy.

Centralisation was dominant during the reign of Amir Abdur Rahman Khan (1880-1901), during the communist government (1979-1992) and the Taliban period (1996-2000), even though the latter were committed to an anti-urban agenda. Conversely, “the second model” of national governance was characterised by the priority of modernising the state apparatus in Kabul during the intermediate Habibullah and Amanullah governments (1901-1929), and to a lesser extent also during the royal government of Zahir Shah (1933-1973). These regimes all displayed expenditure patterns substantiating an urban bias towards “building a modern state sector in Kabul that bypassed the rural power holders, leaving them with a large measure of local autonomy” (Johnson and Leslie 2004: 139). This spatial imbalance went hand in hand with the beginning ‘tribalisation’ of the state (Shahrani 1998, cf. Lake and Harrison 1990), namely the co-optation of tribal leaders into central structures in order to lessen tribal pressures on the administrative apparatus and to gradually detribalise society. As early as in 1932 the fight of the central powers with territorial powers was labelled the “red thread” of Afghan history (Schwager 1932: 34). Thier and Chopra (2002: 895) have reiterated this observation seventy years later.

As explained in the previous chapter, Kabul can be classified as an 'Islamic oriental' city connecting a *bazaar* (permanent market offering a variety of handicraft and traded goods) with one or more mosques, institutions of higher leaning (e.g., schools or *madrassas*), and the political infrastructure of an administrative centre. Together with Herat, Ghazni and Kandahar, Kabul was a distinct urban place in that its population, unlike in most other Afghan centres, fluctuated only marginally between winter and summer seasons due to its well established socio-economic strata (Grötzbach 1979: 6-7, 18, 35).

The first accounts of a town at Kabul's geographical location are from 1,500 B.C. about a settlement called *Kubha*. From the second century, records exist documenting the existence of *Kabura*. Muslim Arabs captured the place in the 7th century from the Hindus, but Islam was not established as the dominant religion until the 9th century. In the 13th century Genghis Khan's hordes conquered the settlement, which had already become an important node for interregional trade before the discovery of the seaways, yet without establishing any permanent rule. Kabul later became a provincial capital as part of the Moghul Empire. In 1747 Ahmad Shah Abdali, later Durrani, was crowned King of Afghans in Kandahar, marking the birth of the country as a *de jure* unified nation (Schadl 2004: 114). In 1776 his son Timur Shah replaced Kandahar as the seat of his kingdom with Kabul, which at that point only had 10,000 inhabitants, to insulate his regime from the dominant Pushtun tribes resident in the southern city (Rubin 2002: 46, 52). Ethno-spatially, Kabul lies on the border between Tajik, Pashtun, and Hazara regions, hence to exert political power ethnic strongmen had to leave their turf and venture into the blurred boundary. Thus anyone that could hold Kabul also proved that they had, to some extent, wider legitimacy outside their own regions.³⁰ As Adamec (1996: 129) has put it, "To be recognized as a rule of Afghanistan, one had to be in possession of the town [Kabul]." Similarly, Giustozzi (2003: 6-7, cf. Rubin 1993: 189) remarks about the country's more recent history of national politics as a fight for the capital,

"While it may appear odd that the capital of a collapsed state could be the object of much desire, everybody has always been aware that whoever is in control of Kabul

³⁰ I owe this insight to Ajman Maiwandi; personal communication in March 2007.

will be better positioned to claim international recognition and receive a greater share of power in the event of a settlement.”

Timur Shah died in 1793; his death plunged Kabul into quarrels for his succession. This power vacuum rendered the country susceptible to foreign influence, and Russian and European envoys began visiting the capital city more frequently.

By the 1820s the majority of its residents considered themselves “Kabulis, detribalised inhabitants of the city,” (Rubin 1992: 79) and in spite of their ethnic diversity they shared a common identity based on a shared version of Persian, *Dari*, and a common habitat, which was regarded by the surrounding tribes as “coward” in its rejection (or supersession, depending on the perspective) of tribal origins (Kakar 1979: 137, Grötzbach 1979: 49).

Despite its religious diversity that included Hindus, Jews, Armenians, and Sikhs, Kabul was also a centre of recruitment of Muslim warriors recruited by the ruler of the era, Dost Mohammed, for his military campaigns against Sikh tribes in the east, which were wrapped into a religious discourse yet motivated primarily by the political objective of securing a cohesive sphere of influence. Dost Mohammed had been holding the city since 1826 when it had approximately 80 mosques, fourteen *karawanserais*, several *bazaars*, and a steady income from taxing its population and subordinated tribes dwelling in its vicinity (Gregorian 1969: 77-79, Kakar 1979: 215).

Yet continuing ethnic factional fighting and futile attempts of the central government to subjugate neighbouring tribes had stark consequences for the fiscal health of the national *cum* municipal government, thus also impacting on the city’s development (Shahrani 1986: 35-36). As a result, much of Kabul’s physical infrastructure was degenerating (Masson 1842: 264, 289). On top of this decline and unlike other Afghan cities such as Kandahar and Herat, Kabul also became the target of colonial forces, enduring two sieges and conquests by the British Hindu army, with the second attack causing widespread destruction and leaving the city under the knout of urban gangs

looting and pillaging what was left after the British forces had retreated (Canfield 1986: 76).

Lord Auckland had conquered the capital city on 7 August 1839 precisely with the objective to expel Mohammed Dost and to replace him with one of his fiercest rivals, Shah Shoujah. After enjoying a colonial lifestyle maintained through massive imports of luxury goods—commentators noted that both officers and soldiers were “all looking uncommonly fat” (cited in Macrory 1966: 124)—, the urban population rose up and expelled the expedition force from Kabul, and legend has it that all but one soldier got massacred on their way across the Khyber Pass in January 1842. British troops stationed in colonial India embarked on a bloody revenge mission, taking Kabul in days, killing hundreds of suspected insurgents, and destroying the *bazaar* and razing some of the city’s most outstanding architectural heritage.

The occupation of Kabul during the second Anglo-Afghan war was brief, but equally bloody. After the Indian Army had initially conquered Kabul in the twinkling of an eye in May 1879, an armed uprising drove out the British invaders only four months later. The British-commanded troops regrouped outside the city and attacked the rioters, defeating them in a swift battle. The British then declared martial law and imposed heavy fines on the citizens. The death penalty was also used frequently, and those accused of having led the riots were hung publicly. By December, the mob rose again and forced the British into the *Sherpur* bastion, from where they launched a successful counter attack, but from then on the army ‘governed’ from the bastion rather than from municipal buildings, with their forces having been diminished substantially and survivors branded with “a scare which has never been entirely shaken off,” having to watch quiescently when urban gangs inflicted major plundering on the city and, in early 1880, beginning to ponder an organised retreat from Kabul (quoted in: Adamec 1996: 206, cf. Roberts 2002: 18-19). This temporary success notwithstanding, these events show that externally induced regime change to Afghan polity is as little a

phenomenon of the 20th century as is physical destruction as a result of international power play.³¹

Abdur Rahman Khan, who had taken over power in 1880, emulated his predecessor's stance towards establishing Kabul as the political and physical centre of the nation—at the expense of the economic and administrative development of most of the other provincial centres, and the countryside at large—and combined his reconstruction of the administrative apparatus with the concentration of executive power in his own hands (Kakar 1979: 135, 224; Gregorian 1969: 160, Ghobar 1967: 343-344).³² Khan also split up the provinces into smaller units so to weaken provincial tribal authorities and enlarged Kabul Province, which remained under his direct rule, to the extent that it also included remote areas such as Uruzgan and Kafiristan, thus making Kabul Province “virtually a kingdom in itself.” (Kakar 1979: 48-49).

Khan decreed that provincial expenses had to be covered with local revenues, but surpluses had to be forwarded annually to the centre, and newly appointed provincial officials had to report regularly to Kabul and wait for ordinances; their own initiative was explicitly discouraged and they were treated internally, receiving instructions on even the most trivial matters of administrative concern or personnel appearance.³³ Khan also reorganised local administration in the cities by introducing government appointed officials (*kotwals*) and elected representatives (*kalantars*), which were then approved and appointed for life, and endowed the latter with far-reaching duties to guarantee civic order (Kakar 1979: 53-54).³⁴

Khan seconded this political centralisation with a strong commitment to economic nationalism and widespread nationalisation of larger firms. This

³¹ Revenge hit the city again in 1919 when the emerging British air force in response to an inroad by an Afghan general into British controlled territory, bombarded Kabul and Jalalabad, causing widespread destruction to both cities – but also triggering the Afghan declaration of independence.

³² Under Khan's reign, Kabul's population rose from 100,000 to 140,000 (Schadl 2004: 16).

³³ Kakar (1979: 70) notes that the Amir instructed them in writing “to pause and to think first before they answered tricky question, especially those asked by foreigners.”

³⁴ While he thus initiated a new period in Afghanistan's history of urbanisation to the concentration of political power in the city, this consolidation was not translated into an active policy of urban development, which was only adopted during the 1920s (Grötzbach 1979: 14).

had a detrimental effect not only on the country as a whole, whose borders became fully demarcated under Khan, but also on existing urban economies, including Kabul's. This rapid worsening of the urban business environment was dovetailed by the falling purchasing power of urban residents who were suffering under sharply increased government dues and fees, and the restriction of foreign imports following Khan's order, who was convinced that trade and involving foreign merchants both would only serve to impoverish the kingdom via monetary outflows and remittances (Kakar 1979: 205-212).

Khan's nationalist and monopolist policies were only abolished upon his death when his son Habibullah Khan took over the crown in 1901, leaving behind a central bureaucracy that did not extend much beyond the capital city and that maintained social order mainly through the threat of force, but that also formed the basis of an emerging class of urban intellectuals (Grevemeyer 1990: 167-168, Rubin 1988: 1195, Kakar 1979: 209).

Freetown: from boom to decline

Freetown's rise to the nation's capital brought with it the invigoration of administrative and economic activities across ethnic, tribal or religious lines. The city at that time has aptly been referred to as a "city of churches and mosques" (Fashole-Luke 1968: 127) in light of its balance between its Muslim and Christian populations, and even though religious leaders occasionally played important roles in city politics, questions of faith were uncommonly absent from urban politics. Yet this was altogether different with respect to the national economic dimension.

After the declaration of a British Protectorate, a railway line to Makeni in the south-centre was constructed, and finished in 1914. But already in 1872 a colonial civil servant had suggested the construction of a line towards the—mainly Muslim—northern region in order to facilitate the transport of foodstuff to the capital city. When the colonial administration finally gave its support, it was only under the condition that the track enable the

transportation of exportable goods such as cocoa, coffee, and palm oil, all due to be shipped through and from Freetown (cf. Barrows 1971: 6). These plants were mainly cultivated in southern Mendeland, which was also already benefiting from Christian schools (Harrell-Bond et al. 1978: 163), and the decision to change the routing substantially contributed to the creation of a structural advantage of the southern part over the north (Sibanda 1979).

Apart from functioning as the most important trading point and port, Freetown thus also became a means for the economic empowerment of the country's south, with vital implications for the post-colonial politicisation process, as the following section on the city will demonstrate. Nonetheless, at the time not only the hinterland still followed Freetown's rhythm; the vibe was also most seductive to people from farther away. Fulahs from Guinea had arrived in Freetown during the 19th century as liberated slaves. Having no rights over soil and being confronted with agricultural techniques different from those employed in their homeland, where stock-rearing and growing of millet and corn were predominant, most Fulah entrepreneurship began with non-trading activities in services, the income of which was then invested in cattle and livestock or for setting up small shops (Banton 1957: 95). During the first decades of the past century, some of most successful and wealthy merchant among the resident strangers living in Freetown were Fulahs (Harrell-Bond et al. 1978: 69).

However, even though individual members of this community created considerable wealth, this did not prevent the stigmatisation of the group as a whole, with the post-colonial government using them as scapegoats for unrecorded alluvial diamond mining and threatening them with their deportation to Guinea on several occasions (Harrell-Bond et al. 1978: 312). In addition, their popular image—fuelled by the groups' social history of impoverishment—that portrayed them as thieves and crooks proved remarkably resilient to change (Koroma and Proudfoot 1960: 43). Nonetheless, ever since their socio-economic conversion the Fulahs constituted a significant player in the urban economy.³⁵

³⁵ A study by Fowler (1981: 53) found that migrants from Guinea accounted for 26 per cent of a sample of 967 enterprises in the informal sector in Freetown.

European traders had become more active in Freetown as well. Their involvement up until the 1960s can be characterised in four phases. The first phase, from 1895 to the early 1920s, was a period of expansion with several French and British companies engaging in commodity trade, with an increasing share of retail sales and the establishment of The Bank of British West Africa in 1898 (Alldridge 1910: 71). Conditioned by a weak recovery of the European post-war economy during the 1920s and as a result of the global economic crisis by the end of the decade, human and financial capital was withdrawn from the colonies, supported by a general conviction among merchants that the maximum level of engagement had been reached. New investments, therefore, were predominantly in the area of manufacturing and services, including after-sales service and maintenance.

During the Second World War, demand for unskilled labour increased for a short period of time, with Freetown intermittently acting as a strategic port for the British war effort (cf. Sesay and Mitchell 1968: 83), but the demobilisation in 1946 impacted heavily on the households of poorer daily labourers. In the 1950s, a reinforced geographical withdrawal of trading activities began from the villages of the periphery, again concentrating economic infrastructure in the capital city and the country's main ports, yet without providing the employment opportunities for unskilled and low skilled workers.

Contrary to the first period of expansion, this third period was characterised by a desire to keep operating costs, including travel expenses for managerial staff, low and inspection times of manufacturing equipment short, which necessitated and conditioned the concentration of physical and human capital in Freetown. This trend of economic withdrawal, however, was balanced subsequently by massive foreign investments in diamond mining infrastructure in the east of the country. The preferred exit point for such diamonds was Freetown; this export geography changed only after the central administration increased controls between the east of the country and the capital city, thus redirecting trade flows via the Liberian border (cf. Pugh and Cooper 2004: 101-102). Thus this fourth phase did not check the

primacy of Freetown as the main economic hub either but at least created an alternative pole of economic activity (Harrell-Bond et al. 1978: 161-162, cf. Riddell 1970).

As following sections and also CHAPTER FIVE will show, this economic structure continued to exist on to the late 1980s, albeit with decreasing margins as a result of poor economic policies, which in turn triggered structural adjustment programs that proved largely ineffective. The outbreak of the civil war in 1991 and the subsequent decline of economic outputs in both trading and mining, marked the fifth and current phase of foreign involvement in Sierra Leone's economy; a clear turnaround of this trend is still not in sight.

The historical concentration of foreign traders in Freetown was matched by a pattern of indigenous economic activity, but with a significant time lag (cf. van der Laan 1975: 22). The creation of businesses by tribesmen from the interior only gained momentum in the late 1950s, with the majority of petty traders operating in Freetown in 1970 being in-migrants. By this time, larger enterprises focusing on exports were already firmly in the hands of either foreign or city based owners, and the commercial structure of the capital city was divided between European and Lebanese companies, leading “one to wonder whether Freetown [was] in many ways two separate communities” (McKay 1968: 75). What is more, this contemporary commentator also added (*ibid.*, emphasis added),

“The mal-distribution of incomes and spending power between the few lucky members of the community and the mass of the population is clearly shown up in shopping habits or necessities. It is often said that African countries are split into two distinct parts, the urban and rural dwellers, and that the gap in living standards between them shows no sign of diminishing. In some ways a similarly serious problem exists within the towns themselves.”

Adding to this division, Lebanese traders since their arrival in the late 19th century had continuously been enlarging their activities. They broadened their portfolios, which originally had focused on foodstuff, in the early 1930s to include gold mining and, in the early 1950s, diamond mining and related trade and also became heavyweights in urban services such as banking and

transport, construction engineering, and materials (Van der Laan 1975: 30; Conteh-Morgan and Dixon-Fyle 1999: 87). This economic success story (compared to European and African merchants in Sierra Leone) can be explained in part with the nature of extended family networks providing mutual support and the “tenacity” of these structures over time, as Van der Laan (1975: 233) concludes. Moreover, the Lebanese community enjoyed diplomatic protection first by Turkey, then by France, and finally, after the creation of an independent Lebanese state in 1943, through the appointment of a Lebanese consul in 1954. The British colonial apparatus also followed a tacit policy of gradual empowerment of Lebanese traders in order to counter the predominance of Creole businessmen (Gberie 2002: 10).

Attracted by this heterogenous and indeed effective agency in economic development, young rural men increasingly aspired to become part of the ‘modern’ society by taking up white-collar jobs in Freetown and the provincial centres, and seeking mixed marriages with Creole woman (and, to a lesser extent, vice versa). Still, both culturally and politically the relationship between Creoles and ‘countrymen’, ‘citizens’ and ‘subjects’ in the ‘bifurcated state’ (Abdullah 2002: 203, cf. Mamdani 1996) remained the “bitterest and most long lasting ethnic conflict” in the country’s history (Cartwright 1978: 170). This in-migration also caused the emergence of a new urban group of stakeholders, which in spite of its location was rooted in rural traditions. Conservative Creoles became increasingly concerned about the political and cultural power of these native migrants as a different constituency. They repeatedly emphasised the superiority of city-based Christianity over traditional rural practice, accusing in-migrants of innate lawlessness and low morale and pointing to the alleged inability of rural recruits to the police to maintain order in the city and to constrain widespread criminal activity by Creole youth gangs (Nunley 1987: 44-47, cf. Alldridge 1910: 267).

Another serious concern in the city was unemployment. Whereas Freetown had had 44,100 inhabitants in 1921, by 1953 its population had almost doubled. After the onset of World War II, the migratory pattern from countryside to the capital city had been fuelled further by the availability of wartime jobs (Nunley 1987: 49-50), and the continuous inflow had created a

sharp oversupply of labour in the capital city (cf. Banton 1957: 60). In 1953, the colonial government reportedly employed 10,211 of the city's 85,000 residents—most of them in public works and the railway department—, compared to only 9,676 state employees in the entire Protectorate. Nonetheless, an estimated 5,000 urban dwellers were without jobs (Banton 1957: 93-94). The urban elite was quick to link unemployment directly with a rise in youth delinquency in petty crime, which was indeed marked by an increasing share of non-Creole offenders (Nunley 1987: 50, cf. Banton 1957: 36, 213). The fear among Creole residents of unemployed rural youths was paralleled by a general conviction that native tribes would aim to “drive the creoles [*sic*] out of the city” by registering for municipal elections in great numbers to put pressure on the Colonial Administration (*African Standard*, 10 August 1945, quoted in Banton 1957: 142).

This Creole political front crumbled—for the first time—over the 1947 constitutional proposals, which aimed at institutionalising the political rule of Protectorate politicians over all ethnic groups, including the Creole minority, who at this time accounted for 27% of the urban population (cf. Banton 1957: 24). The Creole community was split in two, with a minority accepting their fate but the majority openly opposing the proposal, thus infuriating the British administrators and weakening their political clout in the decades to follow. While remaining dominant in the bureaucratic apparatus (Harrell-Bond et al. 1978: 315), the Creoles lost several subsequent political battles, including the one to be granted the right to acquire land upcountry in order to ease the pressure on the land market in the peninsula, created by the increasing demand for private land by foreign traders – first of all the Lebanese community.³⁶

It is important to note at this point that throughout Sierra Leone and including Mende country and Kono district where most of the diamond mines are located, land belongs collectively to families and clans through customary ownership administered by tribal chiefs. Individuals can only gain access to this land if they become members of these networks (cf. Roberts

³⁶ In 1962 the national government decided that only Sierra Leoneans, i.e., Creoles, could buy land in and around Freetown.

1982: 156). Those left out are therefore “neither ‘citizen’ nor ‘subject’” (Fanthorpe 2001: 385) as they are not cared for by tribal structures yet they also remain out of reach of the Freetown-governed ‘national’ state.

Political life in Freetown was thus already vibrant decades before the struggle for national independence set in, hence also prior to post-colonial redistributive agendas gaining momentum. Moreover, agency in political change in Freetown between the declaration of the protectorate in 1896 and the wake of decolonisation in the post-war context was neither confined to the bureaucracy of the Colonial Administration nor to the established political channels such as the municipal council, but was framed as well by non-governmental actors.

Even though the leadership was held by the non-native elite, the political landscape increasingly included the other social strata even including native migrants, thus rendering elite approaches to urban political change incomplete (cf. Kilson 1966: 122). Still, the first move was made by well-to-do Creoles aiming at contesting elections of the municipal council by capitalising on their political weight of their monetary contributions to the Freetown City Council. In 1909, they founded several Ratepayers Associations, which by definition excluded non-Creole residents. Conversely, an urban lower-class counter elite that carried forward the political preferences of the large native migrant community developed only a decade later, kickstarted through the foundation of the Sierra Leone Railway Skilled Workmen Mutual Aid Union in 1920 as a response to two railway strikes in the previous year (Best 1949: 48, cited in: Abdullah 1994: 213). Abdullah (1994) views these incidents as the first substantial collaboration between workers dissatisfied with the rigidity of their low wages and the urban poor, who were equally suffering from increased costs of living (cf. Kilson 1966: 106). Yet in despite of these uprisings, the formation of a cohesive class was impaired by the prevailing tribal and ethnic identification, and by occasional opportunistic moves of the African-American elite aimed at neutralising grievances. Even though the Creole elite was diametrically opposed to this street approach to politics, during the third strike in 1926 some of its more liberal factions tried to embrace the railway workers in

order to subsume their movement into the existing structure of urban African politics under Creole leadership. While this attempt clearly failed—it even prompted a colonial investigation of the Freetown City Council which promptly found it to be corrupt and inefficient, leading to the latter's dissolution in 1927—, it served to weaken the organisational capacity of the underclass.

In effect, apart from occasional rioting, which often coincided with strikes of skilled labourers, the urban poor participated in political processes not through clear-cut demands upon the colonial administration, but only occasionally and in an unorganised manner through the dozens of their mutual aid associations that had sprung up around the turn-of-the-century and to which, by 1925, roughly a third of Freetown's population belonged (Kilson 1966: 108). Their organisational pattern was diverse, building on tribal, religious, and occupational foundation, and it was in the mutual aid associations where traditional and progressive elements of urban life were blended most effectively. Nonetheless, their political weight only materialised after the creation of mass parties in the wake of decolonisation.

It is important to recall at this point the fact that the vast majority of city dwellers were unable to vote or nominate themselves as candidates because they did not possess the material wealth and property to register, as mandated by the municipal code. When this property qualification was eventually removed in 1957, it prompted doubts as to whether this “enlargement of the franchise” (Pratt 1968: 157) was in fact beneficial to municipal administration given that it “proved to be one of the avenues along which party politics has been introduced in the government of the City” (*ibid.*), thus reversing through a “rude shock” (*ibid.*, 164) a previous quasi-convention of non-partisan municipal politics, which was resting mainly on the influence of ratepayers’ associations. However, in spite of criticising municipal party politics for limiting choices and compromising enlightened interests in urban development, party politics must also be credited with catalysing a keen interest among the public in the deliberations and activities of the city council, the creation of an organised opposition to

highlight mistakes or lapses, and its function as a “training-ground for future politicians and statesmen.” (*ibid.*, 165)³⁷

The Freetown electorate in the 1950s and early 1960s consisted of 70% Creole and northern Sierra Leoneans, mostly Temne. Many Creoles showed sympathy for the All Peoples Congress (APC), expecting the party to counterbalance what was at times perceived a too Protectorate-friendly national government of the Sierra Leone Peoples Party (SLPP). The Creoles also shared a conviction that political pluralism was preferable to one-partyism both on ideological grounds in that it would be more effective in preventing political heavyweights from interfering in the Creole-dominated bureaucracy.

The Temne had an altogether different motivation. They were primarily concerned about ways to curtail the influence of the southern communities, first of all the Mende, in the country in general and in the capital city in particular (Collier 1970: 33). The outcome of the municipal elections in spring 1964 is therefore not surprising: 11 of the 18 elective seats went to the APC, which prompted the election of Siaka Stevens as the new APC mayor of Freetown—only four years after the party, which had been created on 11 September 1960, had first run for the November 1960 municipal elections, winning only two seats.³⁸ A day later, the election result was mentioned in the evening news, but only in the context of an announcement that the Minister of Interior would take legal action against it. The court later ruled that it had in fact been illegal due to political pressure prior to the vote casting, but Stevens managed to cling to the position and ascend to the leadership of Freetown Municipality.

In spite of the SLPP’s defeat, the poll had by no means been a disastrous result for the party, which had garnered only 2% less votes than their

³⁷ Particularly the latter turned out to be true when Siaka Stevens, a former mayor of the city, was elected president. Pratt’s (*op.cit.*) following conclusion is therefore plausible, and its implications are as central today as they were almost 40 years ago: “The party system has come to stay in the municipality. The problem is not to curb it but to determine the degree to which it can be exercised in securing the good government of the City of Freetown.”

³⁸ Note that Kilson (1966: 274) errs in his claim that the APC had already won the 1960 municipal election.

average over the previous four years and whose candidates had drawn consistent electoral support, nor a personal defeat of Prime minister Albert Margai, who had simply misjudged the political preferences of Freetown's residents. Nonetheless, after the municipal defeat the Prime Minister felt confirmed in his "distrust of 'Freetown people'", subsequently balancing his attempts to diminish the influence wielded by the APC in the capital city with setting up additional local party organisations and youth groups, and focusing his political efforts on the provinces where he urged the SLPP to forge even stronger politico-economic links with Southern Chiefs (Cartwright 1970: 191, 200).³⁹

A crucial institutional bifurcation point in the political history of Freetown came later in the same year, when in September 1964 a member of the APC challenged the legality of the City Council arguing that the SLPP had nominated a successful candidate from a ward that was not the one where this candidate had been a resident. This challenge played into the hands of some members within the SLPP national government, led by Margai, who were committed to display openness towards sub-national administration. The Supreme Court agreed and suggested that the council itself remedy the situation. Few days later however, Albert Margai dissolved the Council and announced the decision to reform its structure by increasing the number of elected members from twelve to 18, cutting those appointed from six to three, and decreeing that the council from now on be elected at once.

National politics had, for the first time, directly altered the structure of urban government.

Albert Margai considered the ensuing political campaign an opportunity to test and demonstrate his political backing following his ascension to power after the death of his knighted half-brother and predecessor Milton Margai, and decided to put it under his direct leadership. Politically however, the institutional change proved to be a grave mistake. Rather than emphasising the achievements of the SLPP-led Council over the past eight years, the

³⁹ This approach set the precedent for the gradual abolition of the SLPP under Siaka Stevens during the 1970s (Hayward 1984: 23-24, cf. Jackson 2004: 141-142).

declared strategy was to promote the prospects of Margai's personal leadership skills. In fact, electoral publicity claimed that Freetown's infrastructure was outright "inadequate" even though it was the SLPP that had been responsible for urban development. Furthermore, SLPP candidates also emphasised in their speeches the risk of losing public funding in the case of an opposition-led municipal government (Cartwright 1970: 189-190).

National party politics thus played a crucial role in post-independence Freetown, but politics did not stop at party lines. They also included an institution whose purpose was even more directly that of social control: tribal headmanship and its expressions in the city. Indeed, the creation of two parallel urban polities—Freetown City Council and urban headmen—had been an integral part of colonial governance, which, following Mamdani's (1996: 136) interpretative line of 'despotic decentralisation', can be understood in the context of creating an exclusionary capital city where tribal residents would be overseen by tribal authority, which in turn was answerable to a white administration and an alien black citizenry (cf. Abdullah 2002: 204).

Even though the establishment of paramount chiefs by the British rulers had been initiated and concerted from Freetown, one of the faultlines of urban-rural tensions prior to Sierra Leone's decolonisation were precisely the attempts by the central government to tackle chiefs' permission to commission community labour and to hold court, as well as to close the loopholes in the administration of local tax collection. The chiefs had been the direct beneficiaries of the tax collection system between 1896 and the early 1930s, a period during which they had raised the 'hut tax' and additional fees. Further income had been generated from obligatory annual gifts and entertainment allowances (Kilson 1966: 53-55). Legal institutions were then altered by the British to increase the amount of revenue at the hands of the central colonial government, but the magnitude of atrophy remained a concern among both colonial and Creole administrators.

Tribal leaders working for the Tribal Administration in Freetown during the brief period from its creation in 1926 until its disempowerment in 1933 were

largely obedient to the colonial administration (Banton 1957: 17). However, their relationship with the City Corporation, the predecessor of the Freetown City Council, was less amicable as the latter saw the former as competitors in the urban polity. The Colonial Administration, however, decided to temporarily strengthen the role of the Tribal Administration by further restricting the Corporation's power, which prompted local protest from within the Creole-dominated institution.

The Tribal Administration persisted for six short years, eventually being dismantled under politically charged accusations of corruption (*ibid.*, 27-29) and informed by a commissioned report published in 1932 describing the various tribes dwelling in Freetown as 'transitional groups,' and the tribal administration therefore necessarily as a temporary system. The dismantlement constituted in shifting the right to appoint 'urban headman' to the colonial Governor, denying explicitly any civil or criminal jurisdiction of headmen over their subjects, and granting the right to supervise the implementation of these changes to the Governor's office, practically rendering headmen merely a social institution.

During the following fifteen years, colonial inspectors forwarded several reports of non-compliance by eleven of the fourteen tribal headman in Freetown to the colonial administration and the municipal council. Neither of them intervened, mainly due to a lack of personnel but also, after 1945, due to the increasing involvement of tribal chiefs in the Freetown City Council.

However, this did not prevent a committee appointed to investigate the constitution of the Creole-led City Council in 1944 from arguing that it would have been "wrong in principle to give any special representation to Protectorate natives as such. The idea to which we look forward is a Freetown of intelligent and independent citizens, not an agglomeration, or a federation of tribal detachments." (quoted in: Harrell-Bond et al. 1978: 170)

Yet another review was ordered by the acting Governor in 1951, and the final report published in 1956 admitted that the headmen system possessed

advantages with regard to social control and two-way communication, therefore recommending strengthening the welfare and judicial aspects of headship through the creation of an integrated tribal council (Harrell-Bond et al. 1978: 142-143, 150-156, 173).⁴⁰ This was not only met with scepticism by the majority of colonial officials who remained inclined to pay tribute to the idea of Freetown as an Anglo-Christian city, but it also sparked resistance among members of the Freetown City Council, with the Creole-dominated ratepayers' associations arguing that a tribal council would be "diametrically opposed to the Freetown Municipality Ordinance, derogatory to the dignity of the mayor, aldermen, councillors, and citizens of Freetown, and a complete retrograde step in the social order of the city" (quoted in: *ibid.*, 151). Not surprisingly, this position triggered protest among headmen who accused the Creole community of favouritism and maintained that the chieftaincy system was necessary in Freetown to address tribal affairs.

By the mid-1950s, both the British authority and the SLPP leadership still agreed that the chiefs were necessary to remote-rule the hinterland, but a decision had to be made on whether to take a hard line on the issue, or to accept the *status quo* of largely independent chieftaincy. Even though some members of the central government argued in favour of a more tolerant approach, a coalition of the British with younger educated members of the SLPP managed to generate substantial pressure on Prime Minister Margai (who also acted as Minister of Local Government) to end the "extortion" exerted by 'big men' on 'ordinary men' (Cartwright 1978: 138), a move that prompted northern chiefs to temporarily ponder the creation of a new "Northern People's Party".

Even though this plan never saw operational light, the reaction of the chiefs was clearly considered a potential political threat to the urban establishment given the size of its rural electorate and the fact that the amount of foreign investment and the central government's control over it was insufficient to bypass the chiefs economically. On the other hand, doing nothing about the

⁴⁰ The functions of headmen were in fact fourfold; they acted as legal and social patrons for newcomers, judges, spokesman of their communities, and government agents to communicate and implement municipal policies (Harrell-Bond et al. 1978: 16).

rural power structure could have led to the creation of an ‘anti-chief’ party, which could have challenged the SLPP through attracting younger voters both upcountry and in the provincial centres.

Milton Margai opted for the latter, a decision that was partly motivated politically and partly a result of his personal appreciation of certain tribal practices as a means to uphold the hierarchical structure of Sierra Leonean society. The only major concession that Margai asked from the chiefs via the enforcement of a 1932 ordinance was that forced communal labour not be used for personal benefit, but only for “public purposes.”

By 1961, all but one chief that had initially been deposed had again been restored to office, and legislation introduced in 1963 (‘Local Courts Act’) extended local courts’ jurisdiction over all persons living in a particular chieftaincy while centralising the right to appoint the president of such courts—previously under the discretion of the chiefs themselves—a change that was indeed considered a noteworthy check on provincial patronage power but which also helped preserve customary laws as much as possible in light of the pressure exerted by Freetown-based Creole elites.

The late Prime Minister’s half-brother Albert, who assumed leadership after the death of his predecessor in April 1964, was more strongly committed to political centralisation and the creation of a one-party state (a formal motion concerning this matter was only presented to the Parliament in January 1966, another 11 years before the APC-led one-party state was anchored in the constitution) and hence took a more delineated stance towards the chiefs, using his authority to appoint city-controlled court presidents while simultaneously making the chiefs an integral part of the SLPP nomenclature and binding them through individual rewards and personal loyalty.⁴¹

Arguably, this strategy was only the ‘second best’ option in the eyes of the party leadership, but the ‘first best’—total circumvention of the rural

⁴¹ Indeed, party loyalty remained low throughout the 1960s and 1970s and was substituted by patron-client networks (Tangri 1978: 173) that soon after became the foundation of an autocratic polity under Siaka Stevens and his successor.

institutions and direct rule—was systemically and logically unfeasible. This double move produced an ambivalent effect: an institutional instrumentalisation of chieftaincy for exclusionary political purposes in line with SLPP objectives, but also an increasing lack of popularity of the government among rural communities, which helped tip the balance in favour of the APC in the 1967 national election (Cartwright 1978: 136-145).

In the meantime, many tribal leaders in the capital city had remained unofficial allies of the colonial government, which was able to count on their support in dampening the aggressive mood of the urban tribal population during the widespread riots in Freetown proper in February 1955, when native groups, frustrated by banks favouring Lebanese and Indian businessmen and the colonial government systematically suppressing indigenous entrepreneurship, looted shops, destroyed middle-class houses, and attacked white-collar workers (Harrell-Bond et al. 1978: 162, Conteh-Morgan and Dixon-Fyle 1999: 64).⁴² In spite of gradual attrition, the capacity for social control wielded by urban headman had largely been retained because of the sheer size of the native communities in Freetown by the time (Harrell-Bond et al. 1978: 315), and the widespread perception was that chiefs continued as the “sole legitimate representative of traditional values.” (Kilson 1966: 67)

In return, “the nationalistic new elite, in its attempts to secure mass political support beyond the urban centres of its own origin, normally accommodated its political organization, methods, and policies to the strategic position held by Chiefs and local society” (*ibid.*) allowed some tribal leaders into the formal political system. This was exemplified by the dominance of tribal versus Creole politicians in the Freetown City Council after the council elections in 1957 and the cases of Temne headman Kande Bureh and Mende headman Paila who became Minister of Works and Housing in the same year and SLPP propaganda secretary in 1962, respectively (Harrell-Bond et al. 1978: 199-200, 249).

⁴² The riots spread to the north and south of the country in November (Banton 1957: 160, Conteh-Morgan and Dixon-Fyle 1999: 65).

The embeddedness of Native agents in dominant structural frameworks, typical of post-colonial countries, and their dependent yet significant involvement in national affairs to safeguard local influence by simultaneously engaging in higher-level political spheres has aptly been labelled ‘double politics’ (Barrows 1971). But in spite of political co-optation, the institution of urban headmanship in Freetown also had a profound *structuring effect* itself, as Harrell-Bond et al. (1978: 308) have argued convincingly. It eventually succeeded in transforming Freetown from a Creole dominated political space to a multicultural city of multi-actor political negotiation.

In the cultural arena constituted by the city, the presence of residents from the hinterland led to similar diversity—or competition, in the eyes of the Creole citizenry—through traditional religious practices, including secret societies, and the rise of alternative amusements such as public cinemas and theatre. By the late 1950s, masquerades and processions by mixed Yoruba-rural groups were a common feature of Freetown city life – culturally at least, ‘up-country’ had conquered the capital. In ‘high politics’ however, youth societies continued being demonised for another decade, and only during the early 1960s the newly formed APC began capitalising on their organizational experience for political rallying, thus including politically what remained yet to be included socially and culturally into the urban establishment. (Nunley 1987: 55).

During the 1960s until 1971, youth societies and APC leaders kept developing mutually beneficial relations, and in 1971, when Siaka Stevens was elected President, youth societies finally acted as an established player in Sierra Leonean politics, able to voice their concerns and shared interests—such as the attempted unity of various *Ode-lay* societies and their expansion from the city to surrounding provinces—directly to government officials who recognised the potential to align these claims with their own leaders’ aspirations for a one-party state.⁴³

⁴³ Even though the convergence between APC objectives and the interests of urban youth societies was unique in its magnitude, links also existed between the latter and other parties, notably the SLPP. The *Ambas Geda* society succeeded in establishing one of its members as treasurer for the SLPP, which was governing the country since its independence in 1961 and until the aftermath of the national election in 1967 when the governor-general asked Siaka

In sum, the history of party politics in Sierra Leone defies a categorisation into ‘mass’ and ‘elite’ parties common in post-colonial West Africa – not only because of the power concentration under one-partyism and the personalised leaderships of Albert Margai and Siaka Stevens (cf. Cammack et al. 1988: 85) but also because the real elite, the Creoles residing in the former Colony, had outmanoeuvred themselves, leaving political mobilisation to the urbanised *landvolk* (cf. Harrell-Bond et al. 1978: 200). The creation of the SLPP in April 1951 by Protectorate leaders, most of which stemmed from chiefly families,⁴⁴ had been the first direct confrontation with conservative Creoles, who eight months earlier had founded the National Council of the Colony of Sierra Leone to defend their “long-standing [...] supremacy in the modern sector of colonial life” by their eventually futile demand to grant independence of the Freetown colony from the Protectorate (Kilson 1966: 226-227).

This, in turn, triggered the emergence of a political counterweight, which eventually converged in the APC, the main opposition party nine years later, which—in the absence of the clear-cut class divisions typically found in capitalist Europe in the mid 19th century—formed similarly on ethnic lines (Temne, Sherbro⁴⁵) and socio-economic grounds (the regional deprivation of the North), and even capitalised on an originally Creole discourse of (increasingly socialism-inspired) modernisation and the necessity of detribalisation to counter not only the concentration of public benefits in the south, but also what was considered an essentially reactionist tribal position of the Mende-dominated SLPP in power (Conteh-Morgan and Dixon-Fyle 1999: 69-71, Kilson 1966: 253).

Stevens to form a new government (*ibid.*, 59, 203-204. The results of the elections were never announced; Mwakikagile 2001: 183).

⁴⁴ Barrows (1971: 10) characterises it as “a loosely-organized movement of hinterland peoples who mobilized politically not so much to oust the British as to assure that Independence would not bring rule by the Creole minority headquartered in Freetown.”

⁴⁵ Due to the strong degree of their community cohesion and their occasional collaboration with political subgroups opposing the SLPP, the Sherbro had repeatedly been denied an own urban headman by the native party, which at the time was controlling the Freetown City Council. (Harrell-Bond 1978: 254).

Interestingly however, both parties—in spite of their direct reliance on a large ethnic constituency in their respective province—were working to abolish the headman system in Freetown proper in order to ensure direct influence on the electorate, a position that was emulated by the military government that captured power in 1967. It was only in the mid-1970s that the institution of urban headmen was reinstated, partly because its abolition had merely pushed the structures into informality without reducing their effectiveness with regard to social and political obedience (Harrell-Bond et al. 1978: 18).

Before I proceed to the next sub-section, it appears helpful to provide an overview of the key urban management challenges in Freetown throughout the period covered. This is vital because many of them have persisted and are shaping politics in the post-intervention city, as CHAPTER FIVE shows. Moreover, these managerial challenges also illustrate—or have even furthered—the processes of separation and structuration in the city.

Dubbed the “white man’s graveyard” (Doherty 1985: 150) due to widespread Malaria, Freetown had undergone a segregation of residential quarters in 1908, with European officials moving to the west of the city centre where houses could be built on the hillsides, high above sea level. This labour dependent enclave was connected with the rest of the city through a tram line (Zack-Williams 2002: 296). Banton (1957: 18) notes,

“The change of residence had a most beneficial effect on the health of the officials concerned but, by removing them from the town, it broke their ties with the populace. The better climate enabled officials to bring out their wives and to create a small social world of their own—a process of self-segregation which was resented by the Africans.”

Already in 1906 a municipal ordinance had stipulated that ethnic in-migrants to the city were expected to join neighbourhoods made up of the same ethnicity, which did not only reinforce intra city segregation towards a ‘dual city’ (O’Connor 1983) but also served to increase the pressure on the urban land market, enriching further a small group of Creole land owners (Harrell-Bond et al. 1978: 96).

The quality of sanitation in these areas did not improve at all over the course of the following 50 years (Banton, 1957: 86). Soil erosion and deforestation during the post-war period worsened the condition for a steady water supply, with public demands during the dry season regularly outstripping availability (Jarrett 1956: 343-344). Struck by heavy rainfalls during three months and relative aridity (due to its geographical location) during the remainder of the year, planning for the Guma Dam 20 miles east of Freetown—whose completion took an almost incredible fifty years—was initiated in the 1950s (Jarrett 1956: 345). The mechanised provision of water across regular neighbourhoods was only introduced in 1961. It succeeded in slightly reducing the occurrence of intestinal and other waterborne infections (Roberts 1982: 43). This progress notwithstanding, in the early 1960s, the few non-native elite families that had remained in the city centre relocated to the far west of the city as a response to the increasing deprivation of the city and the continued absence of any urban development scheme.

Housing in the city remained similarly problematic an issue. It had first emerged on the public agenda in 1900 when a ‘City Improvement Act’ sought to ameliorate public health and to impose a system of planning and licensing. However, with the concentration of European residents in the far west of the city, this initiative immediately lost political clout and vanished. In 1939 and 1941, two slum clearance reports revived the issue by urging the demolition of slums and making provisions for alternative accommodation schemes. However, their only tangible outcome was a low-cost housing estate inaugurated more than 20 years later, in 1963.

In the same year, a comprehensive redevelopment plan was commissioned to an international architecture bureau. The architects presented a comprehensive vision for the city centre, including high-rise buildings, supermarkets, and a central shopping mall. Soon after, its components were called into question mostly because the bureau had not paid much attention to financial aspects. The same applied to an attempt during the late 1960s to develop “an officially accepted, comprehensive [infrastructural] development plan” to curb “uncontrolled growth” (Harvey and Dewdney 1968: 195), which ultimately failed to muster critical political support from national

authorities. Two subsequent reports authored by UN consultants took a developmental position by encouraging the use of self-help techniques and urging the acknowledgement of unemployment and readily available labour as opportunities for urban development. Neither had any impact. In 1983 a state-owned company finished 120 housing units for low-income families, a project that had been downgraded from initially targeting 500 beneficiaries. This was to remain the only notable and mainly symbolic concrete government measure of the decade.⁴⁶ The central government was placing its faith in market mechanisms and the private sector to 'right the spatial wrongs' and chose to ignore the distinctiveness of urban environments under conditions of underdeveloped capitalism (Simon 1992: 114).

Should one therefore conclude that no money was to be made with Freetown? Quite the contrary. During the decade prior to the outbreak of violence in 1991, Freetown experienced impressive population growth. Newly arrived residents had to encroach on private lands, build temporary shelter on hilltops, and spread out towards peri-urban areas in order to find a place to stay. Some tried to acquire legal status through the Ministry of Lands, yet in the absence of a coordinated formalisation campaign they had to rely on paying bribes, usually without gaining any tangible protection. As a result, land grabbing and illegal occupation became rampant (Abdullah 2002: 207; e.g. *Standard Times* 2006b).

As empirical data discussed in CHAPTER SIX proves, this is very similar to the challenge encountered in (post-intervention) Kabul. Rents in downtown Freetown increased fourfold between 1957 and 1976 even though the annual growth of the country's GDP during that period was below 2% (Doherty 1985: 160), and it was not unusual for wealthier strata of Freetown's society, mostly businessmen, lawyers and politicians, to invest in urban land and property. They would then rent out the villas to foreign firms or embassies with a good premium, thus using their control and preferential access to urban means of reproduction to capitalise once again on the wealth-generating propinquity characteristic of their initial place of accumulation

⁴⁶ For a detailed description of report findings and resulting (ineffective) policies, see Doherty (1985: 154-158).

but also increasing further the value of land and population density in the eastern part of the city, deemed inappropriate for property investments (cf. O'Connor 1983: 179, Simon 1992: 112).

An identical replication of this behaviour occurred with the arrival of international peacekeepers and reconstruction aid workers in the late 1990s when housing prices went up over night and landlords demanded foreign currency rents and a minimum two-year lease (Abdullah 2002: 210, cf. Keen 2005: 170-171). This again constitutes a parallel pattern to the one found in Kabul after 2001. Together they exemplify drastically the exclusiveness of the urban land economy in weakly institutionalised environments – a challenge that needs to be addressed by local policymakers and that carries clear normative implications, which shall be discussed toward the end of this study in CHAPTER EIGHT.

In addition to this supply side distortion and as highlighted above, mechanisms for making effective demands for urban services (such as labour organisations) had remained structurally underdeveloped as an effect of the largely non-capitalist economic history of Sierra Leone. Doherty's (1985: 159) argument that the “perpetuation of housing problems in Freetown [were operating] in the specific social and economic conditions of underdeveloped capitalism” is therefore compelling as it shifts the focus from supposedly ‘everyday’ concerns about management toward a historical analysis of structures that link the urban housing market with the national political economy. Supra-national patterns of economic governance thus manifested themselves locally, and did so to the detriment of equitable urban development.

Kabul: from beacon to burden

In 1901 when Habibullah took over from his father Abdur Rahman Khan to continue his centralist legacy, Kabul already is not only an old town stretching along the Kabul River, where some structures have survived from the early previous century, but also numerous newer neighbourhoods

making up the second and the third district. Habibullah favoured modern European architecture, and villas became the most frequent middle and upper class housing style (Schadl 2004: 16). His son Amanullah seized the throne in 1919 after Habibullah had been murdered during a hunting excursion. A brief diplomatic conflict with the British rulers in India and the aforementioned air raid on Kabul and Jalalabad rendered Afghanistan fully independent, and Amanullah was fully determined to, finally, make Kabul the capital worthy of a proud nation.

Unlike his grandfather Abdur Rahman, Amanullah Khan had been “born and raised in Kabul city and had virtually no contact with tribal Afghanistan” (Rubin 2002: 57). His development agenda was radical. Aided financially by loans from European state banks he tried to tackle simultaneously a land reform, tax harmonisation, infrastructure investments, and the improvement of schooling ratios. All four culminated in the subsequent declaration of the first Afghan Constitution in 1921 (Rubin 2002: 54, Johnson and Leslie 2004: 138-139, Grevemeyer 1990: 103-104).

In 1921, when Kabul was already housing more than 600,000 inhabitants, Amanullah’s government initiated the institutional creation of a municipal administration in Kabul (*Baladieh*, after 1964 *Sharwali*, cf. Viaro 2004: 154) based on existing staff working in a small office (*Safaie*) who had been supervising urban cleaning since its inauguration under Amir Shear Ali Khan (1859-1868).⁴⁷ Unlike its direct involvement in public cleaning and sprinkling, the office had also been collecting municipal taxes through an indirect system of appointed *wakil-e-gozars* (“neighbourhood advocates”) who were required to deliver their collections on a daily basis.

Three years later, a municipal law was passed that foresaw the establishment of 14 elected municipal councils across the country, mandating that elected members had to be literate, that the electorate had to register prior to elections, which were to take place in mosques, and prohibiting the

⁴⁷ Yavari d’Hellencourt et al. (2003: 7) contend that the renaming took effect much later, namely under Zahir Shah in 1964, when it was mentioned in the new constitution. I have not been able to verify this.

appointment of more than one male family member per election period vote (Yavari d'Hellencourt et al. 2003: 7-8). However, facilitated by widespread ignorance among urban residents about these constitutional changes, ensuing political practice usually disregarded basic democratic principles and replaced electoral processes with central government-friendly local leaders.⁴⁸

The subsidiarity principle was introduced as a tool of local governance and cities were entitled to a share of provincial revenues (which previously had to be forwarded in their entirety to the central government, as explained above), even though unmet municipal expenses still depended on the approval by the Prime Minister, a situation that was a constant feature of municipal finance in Kabul where public expenses regularly outweighed public incomes, thus strengthening the politico-economic leverage of national institutions over the capital city.

In spite of these practical limitations, Afghan cities can thus at least conceptually be considered the first and only spaces of experimental democracy in recent Afghan history (Grevenmeyer 1990: 237-238, cf. 391 fn. 74, Hondrich 1966: 226, Dupree 1963 cited in: Grevenmeyer 1990: 241). Indeed, had the institutional framework been followed, the impact of democratically governed cities could not be overestimated – both in light of the growth of urban centres since the 1920s and also the structural function that they played in transforming an exclusively agrarian society into a centrally administered polity (Grötzbach 1979: 31-33).

But democracy faltered, and tribal politics prevailed. Pushtuns were the dominant group in Kabul in local and national administration, while Tajiks as well as Uzbeks and Hazaras remained underrepresented. Similarly, in the evolving middle class of officials, Pushtuns and Muhammadzais were by far the most dominant groups, constituting what Rubin (1992: 82) calls “a bureaucratic class that lived (or aspired to live) in Kabul. This city developed upper and middle classes with Westernized or semi-Westernized lifestyles.”

⁴⁸ Grötzbach (ibid.) points out that the creation of Kabul Municipality preceded other comparable institutions in the country “roughly by a decade.” Here, a systematic introduction of municipal administration is credited to Amanullah’s successor Nadir Shah (1929-1933).

At the same time however, the central government was maintained mainly through subsidies by other governments, and consequently failed to confront and “alter traditional patterns of authority and economy in rural areas” (Goodhand 2004: 50). In order to service international loans, Amanullah committed himself to slashing remaining trade barriers in order to mobilise domestic resources and finance state-led accumulation. As a starting point, he sought to introduce the taxation of agricultural production,⁴⁹ which pitted him against provincial landowners who forcefully resisted the implementation of his policy (Rubin 2002: 54-55).

Before departing on an extended tour of Europe in 1928, Amanullah reinforced his pressure on tax collectors, which increased the hardship particularly in the districts surrounding the capital city. This prompted a local social bandit known as Bacha-e Saqao to embark on a march towards Kabul. Upon his entering into the city in 1929 he had himself crowned as the new Amir Habibullah. Yet only few weeks later he was deposed, and in October a member of the Pushtun *Musahiban* clan, Nadir Shah, seized the throne in Amanullah’s absence. However, Nadir Shah had to rely on a mercenary army consisting of several tribes to capture the capital city, and when these realised that he had no financial resources to pay for their services, they unleashed widespread looting and pillaging on Kabul “leaving [Nadir Shah] at the head of a state with neither army nor treasury.” Rubin (2002: 58) This dual ‘remote defeat’ gave momentum to the lingering conviction among Kabul’s urban intelligentsia that a social transformation of Afghanistan was too ambitious an objective and that the only effective way forward would be a “nation-state enclave, insulated in as much as possible from the traditional society.” (Rubin 1988: 1196)

Under Nadir’s successor Zahir Shah (1933-1973), urban growth was picking up as a result of the country’s first explicitly city-friendly development vision

⁴⁹ Model and experimental farms to balance the relative neglect of agricultural development as a result of the urban elites’ commitment to large-scale industrialisation had been established under Habibullah and were then reopened under Nadir Shah’s brief leadership from 1929 until 1933. Most of them were located in Kabul, displaying a similar geographical concentration as in the case of the rising number of middle schools for female pupils during the same epoch (Gregorian 1969: 318, 356; Arez and Dittmann 2005: 92).

(cf. Newell 1972: 74, Grötzbach 1979: 22-23). A fourth district was added in 1942, and seven additional districts followed roughly every four years up until 1976, including *Wazir Akbar Khan*, the first largely homogenous upper-class neighbourhood (Arez and Dittmann 2005: 41, cf. Najimi 2004: 79). In 1948, all processes of urban management were subsumed under the supervision of Kabul Municipality. During the following decade, the old city experienced large-scale destruction and subsequent bifurcation as a result of the construction of *Jade Maiwand* (the Maiwand boulevard) and four-storey commercial and office buildings lining its sides.⁵⁰ Prefabricated apartment blocks, often reserved for state officials and military officers and their families, were also erected in the old city, adding to its rapidly changing and increasingly disfigured image (Najimi 2004).

The rising demand for electric power necessitated the simultaneous provision by three hydroelectric plants in the surrounding mountains (Adamec 1996: 130). Due to resource scarcity but also as an effect of the focus required to ‘build the nation in Kabul,’ the government under Zahir Shah once again left more remote areas largely to their own control and adopted a more detached practice of “co-optation of autonomous local authorities through patronage” (ibid).

A simultaneous change in national and urban polity was then attempted through the 1964 Constitution, which provided an institutional framework for indirect participation through selected representatives in the National Assembly (*Shura-I-Milli*) and foresaw the division of legislative, executive, and judiciary functions of the state. This included the city level, mandating that the mayor of Kabul be elected in a direct and secret ballot for three years. Municipal elections were indeed held in several Afghan cities in 1966, which was considered a first step in creating a local structure below the national government. But ‘decentralisation’ was limited to a consultative role of provincial representatives and left legislative and executive functions untouched (Newell 1972: 181).⁵¹

⁵⁰ I am indebted to Ajmal Maiwandi who brought this spatial division to my attention.

⁵¹ This practice was followed until shortly after the Russian withdrawal in 1991. A year later, all community-based organisations were banned, and the Mayor and his deputies were

In a similarly state-led fashion, urban planning for Kabul had been driven by an assumption of steady but moderate growth due to the city's functions as a capital and the country's centre of higher education. Its industrial structure, too, contributed to rising population figures, as did its role in redistributing governmental incomes through formal and informal networks.⁵² The first master plan was completed in 1962 with a significant participation of Afghan planning experts. It made provisions for a city of 800,000 people, to be built over the course of 25 years.

A first revision of this initial plan appeared in 1971 in order to do justice to the growth of the city that was much faster than anticipated. This revised plan accommodated a total urban population of over 1.4 million expected by 1995, but again it had little impact. Its provisions—aiming at increasing residential density through large scale construction of housing units—were criticised for their ignorance of local preferences for more secluded homes that allowed a sharp separation between private and public spaces. This criticism found its expression in no less than 6,000 applications for individual property to the municipality in 1975 alone. In addition, most of the apartment blocks remained unaffordable for lower strata, and in particular migrants from surrounding rural provinces. Finally, the large scale construction envisioned by this revision ignored the limited capacity of both the construction industry and the financial capital available (Grötzbach 1979: 55-56, cf. Viaro 2004: 155).

Writing in 1979, Grötzbach noted that alternative proposals had been rejected point-blank by the municipality's city planners who already then adhered to a “virtually radical modernist” urban vision (*ibid.*, translation by the author). Zoning as a measure of city planning had only been introduced in the 1978 plan, a third attempt towards spatial governance initiated two years earlier and which was already strongly informed by Soviet style urban

appointed in accordance with the military *raison d'état*. Ever since, the Afghan President has appointed Kabul mayors without involvement of the urban electorate (Yavari d'Hellencourt et al. 2003: 10).

⁵² This pattern of moderate growth was altered with the Russian occupation, when Kabul suddenly became a relatively safe haven “for those who were seeking freedom *away* from religion” (van der Tas 2004: 67).

planning theory. This time, the planning horizon aimed at one million inhabitants but included a long-term projection of two million, but the municipality soon got caught up in preventing the construction of unplanned projects initiated by vested interests, and the planning steps laid out in the document became increasingly impossible to achieve in the context of the ensuing civil war.

Freetown: from independence to patrimonialism

Reinforced by the primacy of Freetown as an urban centre when compared to other urban settlements in Sierra Leone, the capital city a decade after independence had remained the focus of the political elites and the institutional machinery with which they attempted to govern (Barrows 1971: 2, cf. Riddell 2005: 116-117). In the political arena, the turbulent first half of the 1960s was followed by utilitarian alliances of constantly mutating cliques of military leaders in Freetown between 1966 and 1971 who were trying to alter national polity while preserving their clout within the internal structures of command (Barrows 1971: 217, 225-226). APC politicians increasingly succeeded in patronising youth societies for their political purposes (most members of the “red shirts”, the APC’s notorious youth canvass group, were also members of secret societies) but also did not forget that *Ode-lay* societies remained an important constituency in Freetown and beyond, carrying “the potential of exploiting an urban-based society that could establish branches and thereby enlist the support of youth in the rural areas.” (Nunley 1987: 215, cf. Keen 2005: 58-59)

In a strategic move to solidify one-party rule, local government institutions in the country were suspended in 1972 under President Stevens’ rule, followed by the abolition of town councils. One key informant for this study explained this strategy as follows:

“The administrative hierarchy in Sierra [...] was Siaka Stevens’ playground all over. He cut and pasted that thing like there was no tomorrow. He amalgamated chiefdoms, he split them – he divided and ruled. If he had one person who wanted to be a paramount chief but wasn’t, he created a new chiefdom so he became one. If there was a paramount chief that was not aggressively pro APC enough, he cut

his chiefdom to minimise the rule of that person. [...] The Western area is very different. Western Area rural, that is, the non-city part, is a rural district, which means that it has a district council, but it has only four wards. Nonetheless, the population in this district is big and it is a multimember constituency." (IBA-F8)

In parallel, the Stevens administration also reinvented tribal administration through urban headmen to undermine further the legitimacy of the City Council. The latter institutions' gradual decline was epitomised by its loss of control over investments for and revenues from municipal schools, markets, cemeteries, and public parks. In 1984, the President abolished the elected City Council and appointed a Freetown Management Committee by installing several of his political allies as councillors – a central government move that marked the final chapter of subsidiary polity in Sierra Leonean urban affairs.

During the remaining seven years until the beginning of the civil war, the urban infrastructure declined and depilated further, and water and electric power became the exception rather than the rule. The continuing contraction of social services and public revenues also led to an increased seclusion of serviced ghettos in the western part of the city and an intensification of housing competition more generally, to the detriment of the hundreds of thousands of poor residents (Abdullah 2002: 206, Zack-Williams 2002: 298).

Yet while funding for urban management was virtually absent, money was floating around. A modest recipient of international assistance until the launch of structural adjustment programs in the 1980s, Roberts (1982: 10-12) rightly points out that Sierra Leone had “always” (*ibid.*) been receiving foreign aid nonetheless, even prior to the establishment of the British Protectorate in 1896, whether the population benefited from it or not.

After the Second World War, US American organisations had reinforced their presence aiming to “stimulate the latent potential of the Negro,” “advance human welfare” through training in law, planning, and administrative capacity, develop contemporary tribal art and “creative expression,” and “strengthen national life” (*ibid.*). Additional resources were

flowing to support students in the “Athens of Africa,” as Freetown was known for hosting Fourah Bay College, to improve health and sanitation, and in contribution to general infrastructure development, particularly roads to the provincial centres. Socialist countries such as China and Cuba, previously quite unconcerned about Sierra Leone’s fate, joined this illustrious group led by British and US organisations shortly after the creation of the APC in 1960, thus contributing to a pattern of vivid exchanges.⁵³

By the mid-1970, Sierra Leone had received three standby agreement loans to cushion its budgetary crisis (van de Walle 1999: 121). President Stevens tried to increase the competitiveness of the export sector by keeping the prices of agricultural products artificially low—on average at 45% of its international market value—and introducing subsidies for imported food such as rice to ensure supply for the major urban centres (Riddell 2005: 119, cf. Keen 2005: 25-26). This indirect taxation of domestic agriculture was not only ineffective with regard to improving the country’s competitive position in the region, but also helped aggravate uneven development through “distributional grievances emanating from rural isolation”, as Davies (2000: 354) argues convincingly.

The shift from a capitalist-friendly pragmatic posture towards a socialist ideology and corresponding foreign policy—signalled by the recognition of Communist China and close links with neighbouring Guinea (Barrows 1971: 237)—also brought with it the centralisation of political power and a determination to extend state control to the private sphere (Roberts 1982: 108), a remarkable continuation of the colonial administrative legacy based in the capital city to the extent that “by design or accident, almost all major policy matters and decisions are taken in Freetown.” (Laggah et al. 1999: 180) Foreign aid—including donors as diverse as China, the US, the Gulf States and the Soviet government—was thus used to create a clientilistic one-party state, and its total amount was rising steadily, as the following chart (Grant 2005: 5) shows.

⁵³ During the politically tumultuous 1970s, Siaka Stevens was first protected by Guinean bodyguards, but following diplomatic disagreements both Cuba and China offered support to insure his personal security, which the President gladly accepted (Barrows 1971: 227).

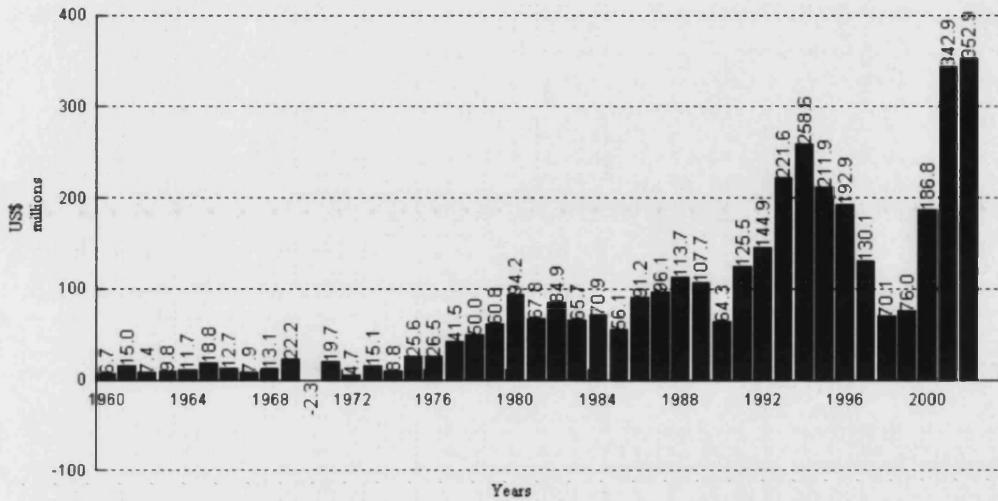


Figure 6: Total aid to Sierra Leone, 1960-2002

When Conteh-Morgan and Dixon-Fyle's (1999: 86) conclude that "economic necessity rather than any ideological or religious convictions [had become] the driving force behind the request for aid," this is foreshadowing a parallel between the aid pattern observed in Sierra Leone during the 1970s and 1980s, and the political manoeuvring of the Afghan government during the 1950s and 1960s described in the following sub-section.

Kabul: utopia and its demise

In curious discontinuity to the previous decades, the faultlines and venues of direct confrontation in Afghanistan of the 1970s were shifting away from 'the centre versus the periphery' or 'the state against the tribes', and toward a 'double localisation' at the city level. Educated youth groups—which included rural folk who had benefited from increasing mobility during the 1950s and identified themselves with the modernist agenda of Kabul's rulers—assumed a leading role in challenging the technocratically modern yet culturally still traditional government elites on both ideological and inter-generational grounds. (Shahrani 1986: 61, cf. 1972: 198-199)

This rising socio-political tension within the capital city dovetailed with tension at the village level. Villagers were pitted against local government officials deployed by the central government whose corrupt practices even outweighed the harsh rule of local land owners (who demanded up to half of the gross crop from their tenants but offered long-term perspectives through customarily institutionalised dependent relationships; Newell 1972: 31) and who “openly and ruthlessly squeezed the poor peasants, often in collaboration with village and community elders” (Kakar 1978: 205). This created a structure of conflict that amplified the opposition against the central government both nationally, that is, across urban-rural faultlines, and in its own ‘backyard’ (the capital city) and provided the explosive mix of secular discontent and religious mobilisation that culminated in the ousting of King Zahir Shah through a military coup in mid-1973 and the proclamation of an Afghan Republic.

In striking similarity to Sierra Leone, the commitment to financing of its development programmes through direct foreign assistance in the form of long-term loans and project credits also played a central role in this demise. The change from a tax-based economy towards an *étatist* agenda under Mohammed Daoud in 1953, coupled with the militarisation of the central government, perforated further the links of the administration in the capital city with their rural constituencies (cf. Rubin 2002: 279) and made the central government, which under Daoud’s leadership was remarkably successful in extracting aid monies from both power blocs (Westad 2005: 300), more dependent on external aid. Even though the administrative apparatus in Kabul had been enlarged with the objective to increase the control over the hinterland, relations became even more tenuous and villagers made extensive use of local dispute resolution and allocation mechanisms in order to avoid “extensive and costly relations with the government whenever possible” (Shahrani 1986: 61, cf. Grevemeyer 1990: 235).

While the first five-year plan in 1956 put a strong emphasis on physical infrastructure, particularly road construction, to enable industrial growth by indirect means (Bossin 2004: 90)—an approach again taken up under US American leadership in 2002, this time however employing Turkish

companies and using American equipment—, lurking agricultural productivity and only slowly increasing output by the industrial sector necessitated a downward adjustment of envisaged economic progress in the third five-year plan in 1965. This plan focused on boosting productive capacity through direct intervention by Kabul-based agricultural and industrial development banks, and increasing revenue collection through improving public records of land ownership and private incomes.

Even though productive capacity was thus enlarged, the output from state-owned heavy industry went into decline around 1967. The National Parliament, constituted after the declaration of the National Constitution in 1964, also strongly resisted an increase in land revenue taxation in order not to jeopardise support relations with rural strongmen. Indeed, Rubin (1988: 1189) pointed out succinctly that political representation of the countryside in the capital city-based Afghan Parliament was limited to land owners travelling “to the capital to use their influence to reduce unwanted state intrusion while working to get foreign aid spent in their districts.” (ibid., 1206) Illustrating a wholly negative long-term effect of this geographical separation on state-building (cf. Giddens 1987), the aforementioned factors also prompted a sharp decrease of national revenues, down to less than two per cent of overall government incomes, which coincided with a slump in incomes from taxation of individuals and businesses in the private sector (Newell 1972: 158-161).

Between 1950 and 1970, US\$ 1 billion was paid out to Afghanistan, 50% of it as loans, and by the end of the 1960s 2,200 foreign technical experts in military, technical and financial affairs from several European countries and the United States were operating in the country (Grevenmeyer 1990: 104). Between 1956 and 1975, the World Bank alone poured US\$ 230 million into the economy (Maiwandi 2002, Kazimee 1977). In the early 1970s, self-generated government revenues only covered 24% of all national development projects and depended predominantly on indirect taxation from import duties and customs, property sales, fees for public services, and profits from state sector businesses, whereas revenues from direct taxation on corporate or individual income and private land holding was minimal.

The value created by agricultural production, which accounted for an estimated 75% of incomes in 1977, was not taxed at all (Newell 1972: 154-155, Grevemeyer 1990: 104, cf. Rubin 2002: 162-163). Furthermore, as a result of the state-led model of development introduced in the early 1950s, private entrepreneurship was confined to trading activities, whereas the government was the main player in urban development and construction (Rubin 2000: 1791). In sum therefore, Newell (1986: 106) was right to underline the

“massive impact of foreign influences that have been thrust upon [Afghanistan] within little more than the past generation [consisting of] pressures of assimilation of alien skills, ideas, institutions, products, and funding have led to responses that suggest labelling of their political systems as derivative, not integral, states.”

Looking back at Daoud’s outreach towards external sources of funding, an Afghan minister was quoted as saying that the acceptance of “foreign morphine” in the guise of development loans had been the greatest mistake of Afghan economic and foreign policy; in 1971 the newly elected Prime Minister Abdulzaher named loan repayment as the crucial factor constraining Afghanistan’s development during his inaugural speech (Grevemeyer 1990: 104, 115).

Against this background of fiscal trends, a suspicion of a city-centred development approach of economically invasive forces during these decades of recent Afghan history seems justified. For instance, the failed strategic investment by the US American government into the Kandahar International airport in the early 1960s (designed to connect a secondary city to the regional network but ending up servicing only direct routes to the capital city) epitomises this priority as well as the largest Kabul-based bakery (financed and built by Soviet development aid) whose daily 64-ton production of bread, using US American wheat imports, eventually crowded out 220 small private bakeries throughout the city.

Another urban development project worth US\$ 11 million and financed by the USSR was the construction of the *Microrayon* housing project comprising

60 apartment blocks including a cinema, a mosque, a kindergarten, restaurants and shops (Viaro 2004: 155). An industrial park was established in 1965, hosting predominantly light industries such as it shoemaking, ceramics, garments, and electrical appliances. However, these goods were never meant to be exported, partly because of domestic demand and partly because of a relatively low quality.⁵⁴

In the late 1970s, the budget of Kabul Municipality was larger than the combined budget of all the other Afghan cities (Wiebe 1978: 74), another exemplification of the persisting allegiance to a centralist polity that backed up the national system of central control with a sub-national concentration of resource allocation in the capital city. Unsurprisingly, many outside Kabul remained hostile towards the ‘promises’ of urban life (cf. Hatch Dupree 2002: 982, Tajbakhsh 2001). The pattern of exclusion and rejection eventually nurtured its own opposition by creating a group of educated minority leaders of a wide political and religious spectrum, “ambitious men whose access to power was blocked. Through their participation in the state educational system and the time they all spent in the capital, they developed aspirations not only for themselves but for their nation.” Rubin (1992: 94) This argument is central indeed as it puts marginalised but educated and ‘nationalised’ groups in the city itself into the foreground of investigation. As we shall see in the following, agency for structural change was thus not only nurtured by rural insurgency against an alleged urban project of modernity, but also by very concrete actions taken *within the city*.

As an effect of the thaw in the Cold War during the 1970s, aid flows into the country from both the United States government and the Russian bureaucracy began to first stagnate and then increasingly ebb away (Sharani 1986: 60). Increasingly vociferous youth movements, stimulated by the declaration of the 1964 National Constitution—which in practice remained an exercise in “democracy from above” confined to urban centres (Boesen 2004: 5, cf. Grevemeyer 1990, Newell 1972: 78)—entered as “a new force

⁵⁴ Production continued until 1991 when outbreak of hostilities focusing on the capital city cut off supplies (Arez and Dittmann 2005: 48). By mid-1970, Kabul’s economy consisted of approx. 55% commercial activities, 30% handicraft, and roughly 15% services (Grötzbach 1979: table 7, cartographical annex).

into the political processes of the country" (Sharani 1986, cf. Dil 1977: 472) and demanded more political control and also specific policies to address widespread unemployment among urban university graduates.⁵⁵ Commenting on the political landscape in Afghanistan in the late 1960s, Newell (1972: 179-180) has remarked that the "failure to legalize political parties [had] prevented development of political organisations outside the official institutions formally created by the constitution," thus stifling electoral choice and political deliberation and fuelling instead a "potent and dangerous [...] polarisation of the political process."

Radical ideas both from the religious right (led by Professor Rabbani and including Gulbuddin Hekmatyar who later emerged as a central figure in *mujahedin* resistance and the post-*mujahedin* struggle over Kabul) and the political left (the communist *Parcham*, formed by urban Tajiks, and *Khalq*, which consisted mostly of rural Pushtuns; ICG 2005c: 2) were cultivated among students. While the city was still characterised by a general *air* of liberal thought and modernist visions, the government under King Zahir Shah banned political activity from the campus in 1968 and suppressed and imprisoned many leaders of Muslim youth groups. In 1969 it even closed the university to prevent further demonstrations (Rubin 2002: 141).

Attempts *within* the progressive urban elite to address the persistent imbalance between poverty in the countryside (and the urban periphery) and the wealth of urban traders and rural landowners had already been made under Amanullah. In 1966, the newly appointed Prime Minister Mohammed Hashem Maiwandwal had then delivered a starkly socialist tinted speech in which he urged to eradicate the remains of feudalism through a land reform. This was met with instant public acclaim among the urban intelligentsia but again upset landed elites. Maiwandwal had to resign a year later, and the land reform was only implemented in 1976 under Daoud who three years earlier had successfully staged a coup against Zahir Shah.

⁵⁵ Education to be obtained in Kabul city was not only a means to the end of employment; it was also the entry gate to a social network, which reduced transaction costs in dealings with all levels of the administration. Being able to signal the belonging to a group of *alumni* from a particularly prestigious school thus carried both social and economic value (Johnson and Leslie 2004: 37).

Only a year later, in 1977, the Daoud government was in a gridlock situation, feeling the pressure from the technocratic and bureaucratic elite on one end and from traditionalists and religious power holders with a large constituency in rural areas on the other. However, the latter provided less of an imminent political challenge compared to the increasingly popular urban-based communist and Islamist movements. This Communist movement was led by aspiring young politicians from both affluent urban (e.g., Babrak Karmal) and impoverished rural (e.g., Nur Mohammed Taraki) family backgrounds and also incorporated high ranking officials in the civilian administration and the military forces (Westad 2005: 299-300). In 1978, Daoud was overthrown by the communist movement led by the Khalq-Parcham party, which carried forward with a socialist reform agenda – in spite of the absence of a working class. Here again—as in the case of Sierra Leone—grand ideas of the time were to be implemented in a setting of grossly incomplete economic transformation.

One of the first major projects of the Communists was yet another land reform, which they sought to push through in a decentralised fashion by sending out young members of the student body and the party cadre in order to oversee its implementation at the local level. However, this strategy was met with fierce resistance not only by landlords but also by designated beneficiaries who simply did not believe that the central state would actually intervene on their behalf in case of local retaliation, and who therefore saw the policy as a dangerous encroachment on their tiny livelihoods. The first Islamist uprisings soon followed. They reached Kabul in August 1979 and culminated in February 1980—two months after the invasion of Russian forces on Christmas 1979—in the ‘Night of Allahu Akbar,’ a “largely spontaneous rejection of the regime and its Soviet sponsors” (Rubin 2002: 135, 186) involving students, shopkeepers, and workers.

The ensuing Russian occupation necessitated a greater degree of coordination and mobility among resistance groups (Grevemeyer 1990: 112-130), and it was precisely the detachment of national governance from local constituents that proved to be one a major facilitating factors for the

maintenance of a successful insurgency movement. The *mujahedin* demonstrated enormous talent and political sensitivity in displaying the occupying force as “infidel foreign invaders” based in Kabul and driven by an agenda of turning the country on its head (Westad 2005: 350, cf. Schetter 2006). Moreover—and contrary to previous revolutionary movements in France, Russia, or China—the *mujahedin* did not have to rely on domestic discontent for support; they were able to mobilise once again massive financial resources from the international system, this time in explicit support of a violent agenda.

In sum, no less than four different types of politico-economic faultlines emerged in both Sierra Leone and Afghanistan during the one hundred years from 1890 until 1990, all of which are characterised by an urban dimension—but not confined to it. *First*, the intra-urban divide between original Freetown settlers and immigrated indigenous residents from the provinces, which compares to the tension between progressive Kabul elites and those who migrated to the city yet remained rooted in rural traditions; *second*, there was the economic divide between urban Afro-Lebanese traders and rural paramount chiefs on the one hand and the indigenous population in both Freetown and the hinterland on the other, which was underpinned by the tension between Creole modernism and traditional chieftaincy in both urban centres and rural areas. A parallel can be drawn to well-connected Kabul traders and rural landowners in Afghanistan. *Third*, the ethnic division between the predominantly Temne north and the Mende south and south-east in Sierra Leone was co-determining capital city politics during several periods, for instance during post-colonial independence in the 1960s and as the foundation of Stevens’ patronage system in the 1970s and 1980s. Here again, Freetown emulated Kabul functionally as the local place of national ethnic politics. And *fourth* and finally, both cities served as entry points and hubs for international aid monies, and much of this money remained in the urban realm of power politics.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ This pattern was balanced (but not reversed) by US support for the *mujahedin* after the Russian invasion.

In light of these similar faultlines, much of the driving factors for the emergence of large-scale armed conflicts in both countries can be explained. Nonetheless, the following sections begin with analyses of sometimes competing interpretations of the causes of conflict. Because the war in Afghanistan preceded the Sierra Leonean insurgency by roughly twelve years, the previous sequence is reversed. This final comparative element of this chapter then feeds into the analysis of post-war politics presented in CHAPTERS FIVE and SIX.

Kabul: the eclipse of the centre

Following the political turmoil during the late 1970s, Kabul for the next twenty years underwent a backwards transition “from a modern urban centre to a phantom city” (Magnaldi and Patera 2004: 69 [author’s translation]) – a politics-laden city slowly came undone. At the end of this gruesome process was the “temporary eclipse of the centre,” as Glatzer (2005: 11) put it. And novelist Yasmina Khadra (2005: 105) wrote: “Kabul, the old sorceress, [was] lying [...] in the grip of her torment, twisted, dishevelled, flat on her stomach, her jawbones cracked from eating dirt.” Yet this was not only an outcome of the post-Russian internal factional war; it was equally due to the previous conflict, which was linked to international agendas. Glatzer (2005) has suggested that the fundamental mistake committed by the Kabul-based communists was to unsettle the inequitable yet stable rural balance and the desire of the urban elite to create an effective central state with sufficient political and economic control over the countryside, culminating eventually in “the Kabul state losing its countryside in the course of the 1980s” (*ibid.*, 12; author’s translation). This process was exacerbated by the activity of Russian troops outside the capital city.

The Russians regarded Kabul and the provinces in the east (towards Pakistan) and the north as its “strategic Afghanistan” – and waged a war against the remaining vast rural areas (Roy 1986: 189-190, cf. Cramer and Goodhand 2002: 895). The result was a brutal suppression of unruly villagers and also their recruitment into digging defensive system of tunnels in Kabul

(Hippler 2005: 26; Goodhand 2004: 51, Arez and Dittmann 2005: 102). In addition to this practice of forced resettlement and the arrival of war-induced internally displaced persons (IDPs) swelling the ranks of Kabul residents, urban development fuelled a further influx of rural migrants. Jointly these factors led to a doubling of Kabul's size to 1.5 million inhabitants within the decade of occupation.

This rapid expansion exacerbated urban poverty in the city and contributed significantly to the tipping of the balance between public appreciation of *versus* hostility toward the communist ideology. The Russian administered municipality tried hard to reduce the vulnerability of urban residents through a system of subsidies for basic foodstuff and fuel launched in early 1980, but inflation levels in the capital prompted Afghan middlemen to preferably serve markets in the nearby provinces. Even though this problem was recognised by the occupiers, it was unfeasible to seal off the city completely, as this would have had disastrous effects on food security. Together with the continuous outflow of financial revenues from small-scale production operating in the capital city to province-based resistance groups, this dilemma showed that Kabul had remained economically dependent on its hinterland provinces. Besides, it made obvious what was a basic contradiction between two strategic goals of the occupying force, namely "to isolate the countryside, and to normalise everyday life in the town," as Roy (1989: 171, cf. Rubin 2002: 139-140) points out.

International countermeasures were no less ambivalent in their stances and effects. Goodhand (2004: 42) argues that the ideologically grounded anti-government position of Western-sponsored INGOs during the first phase of humanitarian aid for Afghanistan was equally aimed at driving a wedge between rural recipients and Kabul-based supporters of the communist government, and that this aid policy did not only establish an aid pattern that "largely bypassed" urban residents but also helped legitimise military strongmen outside the capital city, thus weakening further the longer-term

prospects of constructing a viable state with sufficient leverage over its provincial constituencies.⁵⁷

Yet even during the heights of subsequent battles, first between the *mujahedin* insurgency and the Russian occupants and later between *mujahedin* factions, Kabul remained one of the three constituting pillars of the Islamabad-Kabul-Peshawar triangle from where some international aid organisations were operating (Magnaldi and Patera 2004: 81), even though the regularly changing fault lines of conflict *within* the capital city made the delivery of humanitarian assistance extremely challenging (Atmar and Goodhand 2001: 51, Marsden 1998). Indeed, after the Russian withdrawal the city had immediately become the target of several competing factions, and the subsequent fighting did not only kill an estimated 60,000 residents but also triggered dramatic out-migration.

That the city was thus a prime target in the ensuing battles is not surprising in light of the various faultlines carved out by the pre-war political economy. Apart from very tangible incentives to control and plunder this seat of power in aftermath of the Russian withdrawal in 1992, the symbolic value to the insurgency of destroying Kabul was substantial. As a result, “by the end of 1993, Kabul probably exercised less control over the territory and population of Afghanistan than at almost any time in the preceding century.” (Rubin 1994: 187). Based on the *mujahedin*’s expertise in maintaining mobile guerrilla armies to subvert the Russian occupation in Kabul, alliances were changing rapidly, and altered regularly (Rubin 2002: 241, 265). Kabul was factually divided into zones of control by different factions and commanders, as the map on the following page (source: Arez and Dittmann 2005, based on Dittmann 2003) illustrates.

⁵⁷ Besides, the lack of communication with the central government and a poor transport infrastructure forced civil service remnants in the provinces to engage in a symbiotic relationship with local commanders. The former needed to survive and the latter needed a minimum of personnel with administration skills to keep things just about running.” (ACSF 2004: 8, cf. Giustozzi 2003: 4)

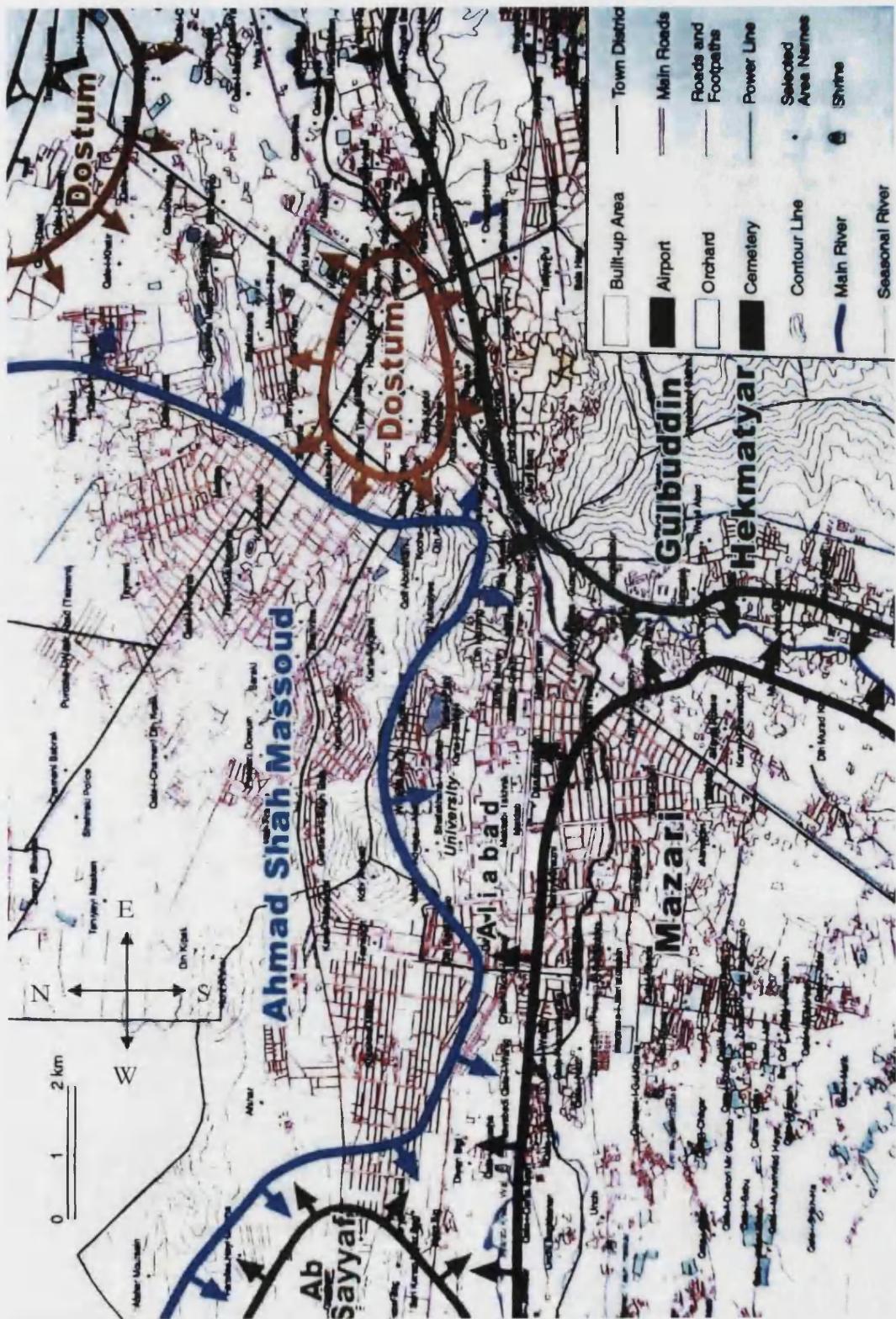


Figure 7: Zones of control in the struggle for pre-Taliban Kabul

Subsequent military offensives in March and August 1995 by a coalition of commanders against the well-organised troops commanded by Massoud, a leading Panj'sheri *mujahed* who controlled the north of the city, proved futile. Meanwhile on the international stage, agencies led by UN Habitat affirmed their commitment to “avoid quick fixes and the ‘dump and run’ syndrome” (Ward 1996) and to work towards “maximum use” (*ibid.*) of local resources to strengthen local institutions and to overcome “their perceived inefficiency.” (*ibid.*) At the outset of Taleban rule, UN Habitat then launched its Urban Rehabilitation Programme to “support the indigenous process of recovery of urban communities” (IoAAS 1996). The programme put an emphasis on participatory modes of planning and implementation and on the recovery of local institutions, and also acknowledged the dramatic need of housing as a direct effect of over three years of heavy shelling by various *mujahedin* factions (*ibid.*).

The capture of Kabul by the Taleban a year later was more the result of political dynamics and instability between warring *mujahedin* factions and less one of a coherent military or convincing political strategy by the intruders (Arez and Dittmann 2005: 115). Following an accord in May 1996, Massoud had to accept the appointment and entering of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, who had been shelling Kabul from 1992 to 1995, into the capital city as Prime Minister (Rubin 2002: 272-273, Ward 1996). When the Taleban forces subsequently captured Hekmatyar's military base south of Kabul in August, Massoud was pressured to provide troop assistance from his urban strongholds, which weakened his defence lines in the capital city and tipped the balance in favour of the advancing Taleban forces, who captured Kabul on 26 September 1996 against little resistance from Massoud's withdrawing units (Davis 2001: 56-68, Cooley 2001: 143-145).

But why were the Taleban so keen on conquering Kabul, given that their ideology was very much geared to rural areas? Roy (2001: 21) explains that a dual interpretation of the Taleban's strategy towards ‘reconfiguring Kabul’ is possible. On the one hand, Kabul was a ‘Babylon’ ready for purification, to be pushed ‘back to the roots’ in order to finally fit into an ethos of Afghan tribalism. On the other hand, a desire to anthropomorphise Kabul as a political

space and to somehow ‘punish’ it by way of causing suffering to those inhabiting it links back directly to the experience of Soviet occupation and the latter’s toleration by city based elites.

The resultant execution of these stances was indeed a “forceful imposition upon the city of distorted traditional, decentralized, rural values and lifestyles,” as Herold (2004: 313) has called the Taliban reign over Kabul. The city thus became the place where limitations to residents’ “right to the city” (Lefebvre 1996) were more widespread, more visible and more violent than probably anywhere else in the world. Urban cosmopolitanism was destroyed by a regime of prohibitions that minimised freedom of movement, to the extent that most women left the protective space of the house only in circumstances of immediate need for water or food. Urban *Mohtasibin* (“guardians”), an institution from Nadir Shah’s times, were reinstated; these were religious watchmen who had been one of the three constituting pillars for the creation of Kabul municipality, together with the police commander and the *kalantars* (Grevemeyer 1990: 236). But rather than helping maintain public order, they were now ensuring the strict adherence to the hardline interpretation of the *Qur'an* propagated by the new rulers of Kabul.

Short-term dependence of Kabul’s population from international aid agencies soon became a key feature of the Taliban rule in the capital city (cf. Johnson and Leslie 2002: 68). Before leaving the country due to worsening security in the 1998, the World Food Programme had been feeding roughly a quarter of the residents, and by December 1999 international staff were quoted estimating that of two thirds of the population was relying on immediate humanitarian assistance (Goodson 2001: 122).

Owing to the Taliban’s explicitly anti-urban ideology (no urban reconstruction of any significance was undertaken during their rule; Arez and Dittmann 2005: 148) and severe social control (Barakat 2002: 807), the balance between urban and rural also remained ruptured. The Taliban used forced migration from rural areas to the capital city, demonstrated by the case of the displacement of 200,000 mostly Tajik residents of the *Shomali* plain to Kabul in early 1997 “to create a dense Pushtun-settled ring north of

Kabul in order to make it clear once and for all that Kabul was a Pushtun city" (Schetter 2005: 69, cf. Marsden 1998).⁵⁸ This initial measure of forced resettlement soon developed into full-scale scorched earth tactics to ensure ethnic cleansing, when during the summer of 1999 the destruction of irrigation systems, farmland and shelter forced tens of thousands to flee either north to the *Panjsher* Valley – or south to Kabul where approximately 30,000 IDPs arrived before the winter set in (Johnson and Leslie 2004: 70-71, cf. Rubin 2003a: 569).

Yet the starker experience of physical vulnerability was still to come, two years later in the shape of the US-led campaign to 'liberate' Afghanistan from Taliban rule and following the attacks on New York and Washington, DC on 11 September 2001. In an attempt to avoid civilian casualties, carpet bombing was eschewed in favour of numerous precision attacks on urban infrastructure (radar sites, airfields, command posts, etc.) that supported Taliban resistance. However, most of these sites were surrounded by slums with large numbers of people and fragile housing, with the result that most civilian deaths in the war occurred in high population density areas of Afghan cities. Indeed, the very large number of small death tolls meant that the US-led bombing campaign was the most lethal per 10,000 tons of bombs dating back to the Vietnam era: between 2,214 and 2,571 civilians (Herold 2004: 316-317).⁵⁹

Immediately after the cessation of fighting, intra-city politics revived around the issue of ethnic dominance over either newly created or reinstated national ministries. Former allies of Massoud, a Tajik 'troika' comprising the Foreign Minister, the Defence Minister and the subsequent Minister of Education formed an "alliance of convenience [...] to consolidate their power further in Kabul, [...] inevitably leading to tensions with [President] Karzai." (Wimmer and Schetter 2003: 530) One respondent to the field interviews for this study explained such cooperation in the the capital city as

⁵⁸ Giustozzi disagrees that this was a deliberate policy and argues that the displacement was mostly the result of general insecurity; personal communication in August 2007.

⁵⁹ This paragraph is adopted from Esser (2007a). The variance is due to competing casualty figures.

“vying for credibility and power, which is not strange in the context of an evolving state. The central government is trying very hard to bring about change and new structures of government and at the same time correcting for initially giving too much power to the commanders. A lot of the restructuring is about municipalities.” (IBA-K1)

Still, hands-on political competition also manifested itself, primarily in frequent demands by the Tajik leaders for timely withdrawal of international security forces, a detrimental position to the one advocated for by the Pushtun President who enjoyed practically no military support in the country and who more than once has been referred to as “the mayor of Kabul” (Hersh 2004: 2), simply because his factual power does not stretch much beyond the outskirts of the capital city. To illustrate this claim, one participant in a focus group said, [4:]

“Our president is only of Kabul. The major warlords have an enormous influence in the regions. [...] There might be a commander, even a small, minor commander, but his influence is huge. [...] In cities, there are forces – if not local forces then the international forces. Some warlords have protested against the presence of ISAF [International Security Assistance Force]; they argue that they inflict cultural harm on the people, but the men in the streets definitely want them to stay. I cannot think of a situation without international security forces. There would be no security.” (CS-K3)

Kabul after the latest invasion is not the main distribution centre that it used to be in the past, with several provincial cities now rivalling its economic influence through their close locations to national borders and also the country’s economy disintegration and subsequent sub-regionalisation of provinces in the north and west during the Taleban regime, which led to the emergence of sub-regional trade blocs (Pugh et al. 2004, Rubin 2000); the city is nonetheless “the main channel through which reconstruction funds flow, of which, by definition, a substantial part spill over and stay in the city. No city or province in Afghanistan can offer a comparable package of incentives.” (van der Tas 2004: 68, cf. Lister and Wilder 2005) Hence it is not surprising that both local and national political agency in such a resource-laden setting is ubiquitous. However, before these agendas and actions in both Freetown and Kabul are laid out in CHAPTERS FIVE and SIX, we need to also consider Freetown’s fate during the armed conflict that dilapidated Sierra Leone during the past decade and look at both the intervening and immediate driving factors leading to its outbreak.

Freetown: why did the leopard come to town?

LEPET DON KAM NA TØN. (Krio proverb)

The leopard has come to town. [Problems from the forest have entered the city]

In their multivariate investigation of the drivers behind the adoption of neoliberal, market-oriented reforms in infrastructure industries in 71 countries and territories between 1977 and 1999, Henisz et al. (2005) find that Sierra Leone ranks among those experiencing the highest level of 'international coercion,' denoting the ratio of a given country's level of borrowing from the World Bank and the IMF to this country's GDP.

This is particularly noteworthy because Sierra Leone actually lost its right to access loans from the IMF in 1990 due to previously poor repayment rates. Even though the authors provide no specific conclusion on the Sierra Leonean case, the statistical results for the other eleven countries in this group are robust, rendering a hypothesis linking the scope of implementation of the neo-liberalism to Sierra Leone's rank in the debt/equity ratio. Even though Sierra Leone had been receiving structural adjustment loans from the early 1980s onward, the quality of fiscal policy did not improve. A study by the World Bank published in 1994 admitted that by 1991, Sierra Leone had still ranked among the countries with 'very poor' policies – in spite of a decade of Bank involvement. What is more, a follow-up study showed that the policies worsened further from 1991 to 1992 (World Bank 1994a and Bouton et al. 1994, Killick et al. 1998: 37).

At the country level, the World Bank itself was aware of the discrepancy regarding the perception of effectiveness of structural adjustments between country managers on the one side, and economic reality on the other. In 1995, a report cited an example where an adjustment credit for agricultural reform had been delayed by 240%, and its disbursements lagged 50% behind even though the task manager for the programme had indicated its satisfactory performance (World Bank 1995a, quoted in: *ibid.*: 29). Van de Walle (2005: 87) points out, "it seems clear that large amounts of aid did not

anticipate or prevent state collapse” in Sierra Leone, which had been receiving US\$ 25 per year per capita prior to the outbreak of the Civil War. How had this been possible?

Reno (1999) has shown that credits earmarked to increase economic efficiency through foreign direct investment (FDI)-driven privatisation and managed reductions in state-provided services were funnelled directly into high-level politicians’ pockets and then poured out to cronies and followers. Lacking his own political network and therefore desperately trying to create a loyal constituency, Siaka Stevens’ successor Joseph Momoh accelerated this process of stripping the state of its assets and used state-led and internationally financed privatisation as a deliberate process for personal empowerment (Pugh and Cooper 2004: 112-113, Conteh-Morgan and Dixon-Fyle 1999: 86) amid disintegrating patronage networks as a result of steadily increasing political maintenance costs. However, a stark misinterpretation of this process occurred at the international level as the IMF kept ignoring abuse of international funding, including the maintenance of armed gangs of loyal youths and illicit diamond miners, and interpreted it instead as a by-product of a process of increasing central state’s control over national resources, considered a key factor in boosting revenue generation (Reno 2002: 13). In November 1986, the IMF again authorised a standby credit over 40 million Special Drawing Rights (SDR). Shortly after, President Momoh declared the state of economic emergency, mainly to crack down on a financial black market. In 1990, the IMF unilaterally withdrew from its credit scheme (Zack-Williams 2002: 299, cf. Keen 2005: 31).

Van de Walle (2001: 111-112, cf. Reno 1999: 133) has argued that while the principled demonisation of fiscal engagement by international actors is misguided given their relevance for national cash flows and the steadiness of monetary aid to West African countries, a bottom-line evaluation of this engagement on state strength and political stability is still negative. Unlike common critiques of the amount of flows, van de Walle ascribes this finding to the “*process of donor-assisted adjustment* [emphasis in the original]. This process of micromanaging elusive changes under conditions of continuously

worsening public infrastructures helped keep regimes in power irrespective of whether policy reforms were undertaken (cf. Killick 1998).

As already pointed out above, foreign aid monies thus kept flowing in and benefited the Freetown-based political elite, but this influx did little to the worsening urban infrastructure. When the IMF stopped lending in 1990, the finally enforced austerity had dramatic effects on urban governance. The administrative apparatus in Freetown and most provincial centres was dismantled (Abrahamsen 2001: 89), which impacted directly on a significant share of previously city-employed residents. At the same time, cities in Sierra Leone served as main loci of public opposition against structural adjustment, with trade unions, student groups, and teachers associations at the forefront of organised protest (Francis 2001: 80).

Yet as much as this reading of the Sierra Leonean conflict as a partly *intra-city* driven phenomenon appears compelling, other interpretations do exist; they focus first and foremost on the rural-urban divide, calling Sierra Leone “a tragic case of self-perpetuating agrarian conflict” (Pons-Vignon et al. 2004: 26, 36). Similarly, Adebajo (2002: 79, cf. Abdullah and Muana 1998) underlines that this situation of political misrule and economic crisis

“combined with worsening socio-economic inequalities between a corpulent urban elite and impoverished unemployed youths in the countryside who had limited access to education and employment and were thus denied the opportunity of social mobility.”

These authors are not alone in their assessments of unemployed rural youths as a trigger factor of the civil war. Oche (2003: 172) has also proposed two related, mutually reinforcing trends; first, the drifting of young male groups either into a criminalized socio-structure in Freetown and other urban centres or into illegal mining in the diamond fields of Kono in the east, and second, the rise in student militancy, a result of both their exposure to new, mostly leftist ideologies and the political activism within their community as a response to steadily worsening local and national governance and the personalised rule of Siaka Stevens and his loyal successor Momoh. Similarly, Abdullah’s (2002: 212) proposition of a historical transformation from the urban divide between citizens and subjects toward a new urban “army of

subalterns” suggests that urbanised rural youth were a somewhat cohesive group.⁶⁰

Yet as much as the scores of native residents of Freetown during the pre-independence era had been (kept) fragmented internally and politically weak, so the contemporary migrants—whom Abdullah in a tremor of normativity views as “threatening to remake the city in ways that would be accommodative of their collective interests” (*ibid.*)—remained institutionally underrepresented. Therefore, rather than forging a new class of ‘urban warriors,’ the marginalisation and fragmentation of rural grievances were *not limited spatially to the provinces*, the pattern reproduced itself in the capital city as well. Rather than being subjugated by chiefs, rural-borne dissent in the city was prevented from surfacing politically by the ‘depoliticised’ (i.e., one-party) polity of post-independence modernity (cf. Keen 2000).

The involvement of youths in politics in Sierra Leone has a long history dating back to Siaka Stevens mobilising unemployed males from eastern Freetown to intimidate student groups inspired by Gaddhafi’s *Green Book*. However, the insurgency movement that in 1991 unleashed large-scale violence recruited its fighters not from Freetown but from rural areas, as Richards (2005) points out, thus rebutting the discourse of state *cum* city-sponsored thugs. Urban youths joined the conflict only later on with the establishment of the Civil Defence Force (*Kamajors*) following a successful act of civic resistance against advancing RUF units in Bo on Christmas 1994 (cf. Richards 1996: 153).

The view of the conflict in Sierra Leone as a result of pressures from the hinterland on the urban elite has been mediated further by Reno’s (1995) work on the role of Sierra Leone’s diamond industry. Herein, Reno highlights legal and illegal trading activities by miners in the east of the country who were linked to Freetown-based wealthy Lebanese. Indeed,

⁶⁰ He also notes that the urban institution of *pote*, a collective hangout by *rarray men*, a Krio term for marginalised, unemployed male youths living in cities (Hoffman 2005: 351)—often involving drug use—served to initiate and maintain alternative, and eventually violent, political discourses through a merger of “town and gown” (Abdullah 2002: 208, cf. Abdullah 1998: 667).

Lebanese businessmen thus profiting from rural extraction were a major source of private loans to sustain the central government's corrupt network (ibid., 135). But rather than emphasising rural suffering, Reno points to President Momoh's attempts to regain control of the informal diamond market to "manage the interelite accommodation processes" connecting urban and rural power holders (van de Walle 1999: 185, cf. Jackson 2004: 141). His failure, Reno argues, led to a gradual disintegration of the network of patronage relationships, thus decreasing monetary incentives for compliance with the central power system and incentivising politico-economic entrepreneurship at the sub-state level, particularly in the remote parts of Sierra Leone that were both resource-rich and abundant with those marginalised through the political structure of the 1970s and 1980s. Hence it was the dissolution of the neo-patrimonial state that gave momentum to a conflict acted out by marginalised citizens *in rural and urban areas alike*.

In April 1992, a group of junior army officers staged a coup in Freetown and installed themselves as the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC) led by Captain Valentine Strasser. Even though the international community tried to alienate the new military regime—partly as a reaction to the execution of 26 alleged organisers of a coup in November of the same year, the junta initially enjoyed substantial domestic support particularly from urban constituencies, which also found its expression in a voluntary clean up and beautification campaign ("Cleaning Saturday") in Freetown and other provincial centres (Conteh-Morgan and Dixon-Fyle 1999: 131).

The regime also managed to re-establish links with the IMF a year later. The latter demanded the implementation of a stabilisation program in exchange for continued financial support. Yet in conjunction with a diamond smuggling scandal, the subsequent redundancy of 30,000 mainly state-employed workers fuelled a reversal of public approval. The reaction among donors was an increase of diplomatic pressure on the NPRC with the aim of 'reconstituting democracy' (Zack-Williams 2002: 303-305). This stance notwithstanding, between 1992 and 1995 the NPRC is reported to have received US\$ 324 million from bilateral and multilateral donors (Keen 2005: 160), letting Keen (2005: 165) conclude that "emergency aid seems to have

served as a substitute for effective diplomatic action to address the humanitarian crisis.”

Similar to the challenge faced by INGOs in wartime Afghanistan, throughout the civil war in Sierra Leone their activity beyond the realm of the capital city depended on the security situation. At the same time, humanitarian action was a function of the political constellation in the context of the conflict, with political objectives consistently overriding humanitarian considerations. This was also reflected in frequent changes in the vitality and amicability of the relationship between the humanitarian assistance community and the United Nations missions operating in the country (Porter 2003, cf. Keen 2005: 40, Richards 2003: 34). Everyday urban life had already deteriorated significantly during the rule of the Strasser regime when looting became widespread and soldiers would simply pick young males from the street to ‘recruit’ them into the army (Keen 2005: 96-97). Corruption, too, had picked up, targeting already slim budgets and leaving lower ranks soldiers without payment. Both factors, i.e. the externally injected objective of fiscal austerity and the plundering of what was left, exacerbated the degree of insecurity in the capital city (*ibid.*, 100). The availability of small arms and light weapons made things worse, as Ginifer (2005: 15) points out. While it had at first ‘only’ decreased human security in the provinces, particularly in the South and Southeast, it also fuelled the concentration of IDPs in the capital, making crime the only resort to some of those starving.

By May 1993, over one million Sierra Leoneans had been displaced, and by March 1996 almost half of the population of then 4.47 million had been uprooted. Approximately 600,000 IDPs sought refuge in Freetown, inflating the city’s overall population from a pre-war level of 731,000 to roughly 1.3 million (Conteh-Morgan and Dixon-Fyle 1999: 129). “When the Creoles came, they recreated Freetown,” one interviewee for this study recalled, “this was the first destruction of community, as you would think of ‘community’ in Africa. And then, when the war happened, everyone fled to Freetown. This was the second destruction of community.” (NG-F6) Only marginally countering this inflow in quantity but with important implications for the

country's functionality, an exodus of the Freetown-based intelligentsia to Europe and North America fuelled the rapid disintegration of social networks in the capital city, with "social solidarity [being] much weaker in Freetown than in many other parts of the country." (Ginifer 2005: 15)

The state of the Freetown Municipality during the war years was dire. Already in 1990, ten out of 17 leadership positions had been vacant (British Council 1990, cited in: Rosenbaum and Rojas 1997: 535). When in 1995 a new mayor was appointed, the administrative structures were so weak (the municipal management committee met once a month only), local polity so fragmented, and national support so negligible (the central government contributed a mere US\$ 50,000 to the municipal budget in 1996; *ibid.*) that the only significant income, US\$ 2.5 million, derived from property taxes based on a 1952 property appraisal (*ibid.*). Even though national elections were held in 1996, a coup in May 1997 prompted the last member of the democratically elected national government to flee to Guinea. Indeed, Rosenbaum and Rojas (1997: 530) argue that it

"was in many ways highly symbolic that the Minister for Local Government was the last cabinet minister [...] to leave the country, for at the heart of the political and military conflict that for several years has held sway in the Sierra Leonean countryside, and only recently produced a convulsive violent outburst in the capital city, is a very strong current of centre-periphery conflict."

Shortly after 'collaboration came to town' [to paraphrase Keen 2005: 193], with the military rulers in the capital city inviting the leaders of the RUF to form a joint government, thousands of insurgency soldiers arrived within days, making Freetown the bizarre meeting point between hostile factions that, in reality, had been avoiding rather than confronting one another during most of the war (*ibid.*, 208-209).

But then, in January 1999 a sudden attack on and within the capital city by the rebel forces marked a turning point with regard to international attention paid to the conflict. "It was only after rebels breached the defences of the capital that the world of press took notice of the horrors and widespread violation of human rights by both sides in the civil war," Zack-Williams (2002: 308) points out. Before that Freetown, despite random acts of

extortion and looting, had remained a “bubble of relative normality” (Keen 2005: 168). Now, violence was everywhere. One resident, for instance, claimed to have made friends with the rebels that had settled in his neighbourhood after they had overrun half of the city on the January 6th, two weeks later, suddenly turned on him and cut off his forearm (cited in: Control Arms Campaign 2006: 9).⁶¹

In July 1999, the Lomé Peace Accord—“imposed”, as Zack-Williams (2002: 311) argues, on the Kabbah government by US chief negotiator Rev. Jesse Jackson in order to free the US and other western countries from having to commit troops to Sierra Leone—urged an immediate cessation of armed hostilities and provided a general amnesty, and even made provisions to integrate some of the RUF leaders in the new government. Three months later fighting erupted again, and in May 2000 the RUF took a battalion of UN peacekeepers as hostages.

Approximately 30,000 people demonstrated in Freetown for the release of the Kenyan and Zambian UN peacekeepers. When they approached the rebel leader’s house in Spur Road in the centre of Freetown, Nigerian peacekeepers fired warning shots into the air but were eventually unable to prevent the RUF leader’s bodyguards to fire into the crowd. 17 demonstrators were killed. This event, together with the massive influx of refugees, prompted the British government to agree to the deployment of a military contingent to protect the capital city (Hirsch 2001: 88-89, Keen 2005: 264). Soon after, a small contingent of approximately 300 British soldiers secured Freetown within days and subsequently also confronted and dismantled the various rebel groups in the surrounding provinces, leading to a comprehensive ceasefire agreement in November. Two months later, in January 2002, the end of the war was officially declared.

⁶¹ Small arms also leveraged the RUF assault on Freetown in early 1999, which inflicted massive killing among unarmed city dwellers and rural refugees. The RUF from 1994 onwards had had “an eye on Freetown and political power” (Keen 2005: 40), and an advance towards the capital city was one of their main military objectives. Remarkably, the South African mercenary company *Executive Outcomes* had been hired by the military government in 1995 to secure the capital city following several RUF advances; only afterwards the mercenaries also confronted rebel groups beyond the Western Area in order to enable national elections a year later (*ibid.*, 151-152). A detailed account of the attacks and defence of the capital city is provided by Ducasse-Rogier (2004).

The physical destruction in Sierra Leone was significant, with approximately 52% of dwelling houses destroyed countrywide. The highest level of destruction took place in the eastern provinces, especially in Kono (94%), Kailahun (80%) and Kenema (72%). Northern provinces suffered destruction of around 50% of their housing stock, whereas destruction in southern provinces affected approximately one third of dwellings. While thus moderate in comparison with other districts, the level of physical destruction in Freetown proper—in addition to over 7,000 civilian casualties within two weeks during the attacks on the capital city in January 1999 (Sesay and Hughes 2005: 56, Keen 2005: 228)—left 1,400 houses reduced to rubble, which led to the displacement of tens of thousands of residents, with estimates reaching from 22,000 to 51,000 people (ACF 2001: 19, Zack-Williams 2002: 310, NRS 2003: 3, Keen 2005: 247). The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA 2003a: 2-3) reported in mid-2003 that the Western Area district continued hosting “over 37,000 formally registered IDPs and returnees in addition to many other non-registered displaced who have sought refugee in Freetown over the past ten years.” In addition to the 20,000 estimated to have remained, INGOs expected another 10,000-20,000 ‘nonofficial’ IDPs to live mainly in Freetown and its outskirts (IDP Project 2003). “There is still at large number of people left in the city who have nowhere to go,” one respondent explained, “and who therefore stay in Freetown.” (NG-F10)

In the economic realm, a powerful indicator of war impact on the Sierra Leonean economy is the US\$ 100 million worth of diamond exports that The Gambia accounted for annually between 1996 and 1999 even though the country does not actually have any diamond mines in its territory (Böge et al. 2006: 56, cf. Heupel 2006). Confirming Reno’s argument, the most effective alliance between the capital city and provincial centres of resource extraction had been the collaboration between political notables in Freetown and paramount chiefs in diamond-rich districts who safeguarded personal patron-client relationships through the provision of security forces for areas where ‘upstream’ illicit diamond mining (IDM; necessitating more

sophisticated equipment) took place, thus creating stationary banditry with the active support of government actors.

On the contrary, in areas where diamonds could be mined through simple sieving, government security forces repeatedly and successfully dispersed illegal mining activities (Böge 2004: 30). As a consequence the cohesion between paramount chiefs in the former areas and their subjects was ruptured, which made them more prone to rebel recruitment, whereas the local influence wielded by chiefs in the latter areas generally remained intact, shielded by a discourse and experience of economic exclusion and stigmatisation by the central government in Freetown. Furthermore, the relative loss of financial income was counterbalanced in these areas by the preservation of local incomes as a product of previous centre-periphery competition (Reno 2003: 55), which constitutes—schematically at least—another parallel to the war economy in Afghanistan where areas that lost incomes due to the demise of Kabul aimed at compensating this loss through engaging in more local, sub-regional economic activity. In essence, warfare thus weakened the previous dominance of both capital cities despite the different degrees of direct involvement and destruction.

Chapter 5: Recapturing Freetown

The dynamics of a post-war city:

growth, contraction, and the politics of dispersal

Amid allegations of the opposition party being hindered in several rural districts in the South and South East of the country by paramount chiefs loyal to the SLPP (EC 2002: 8, 31) the 2002 presidential elections following the final cessation of fighting saw the SLPP as the clear winner. The APC and the Peoples Liberation Party (PLP) were the only opposition in national parliament, other political parties existed but had no significant political leverage. Once again demonstrating both the degree of political organisation in the capital city and its strategic politico-economic value, the Western Area, consisting of a rural district and Freetown proper, had been the most contested province in the elections. All parties had nominated candidates there, whereas only the SLPP, APC, and the Revolutionary United Front Party (RUF) had consistently been present in all other districts in the country (EC 2002: 13). And at least in public discourse, Freetown at the time was even more of a national centre than in the pre-war era, having grown substantially compared to pre-war figures, now covering the entire northern coastline of the Freetown Peninsula.

Indeed, population growth of Freetown proper was perceived as *the central challenge* by national ministries and international agencies alike. Consider the following statements by two interviewees for this study, both of them working for the national SLPP government.

“Fleeing the rebels brought them into the city [...] without any livelihood, so we have a social crisis at our hands in terms of crime and prostitution. All these developments are due to the chief influx of people. [...] The war is over. The greatest challenge of the government is how to reduce the population in this city. [...] The government is undertaking projects to re-enhance the people’s livelihoods in the areas, but there is this resistance of people to join their former localities. So *they are overcrowding continuously the city. How do you get them out of the city?* [...] A civilian government has to take into consideration the needs of the people, and at the back of their minds they have to remember that *these are the same people that will have to vote for you*, if you should be in power again. This is the sort of difficult situation that we find ourselves in.” (NPB-F7)

“The reason why so many NGOs work on shelters is because they want to incentivise people to come back to the community. This is really what is so difficult, and *this is where we need assistance. [...] The city is overcrowded.*” (NPB-F6)

But despite these and many other similar statements made by respondents from the international community as well as central government officials in 2004 regarding the size of Freetown having reached 1.5 million inhabitants (NPB-F1, NPB-F2, NPB-F7, cf. Elliott and Gilpin 2004: 2, McGoldrick 2003: 32; one respondent [NPB-F3] even echoed Abdullah’s [2002: 211] claim of “close to 2 million people” in a “city bursting at the seams.”), the national census in late 2004 counted only 786,900 inhabitants in the Western Urban district. This was a startling finding. Yet while most of the aforementioned commentators chose to simply ignore it, we cannot stop there; the serious misrepresentations require an explanation.

To begin with, the most convincing explanation for this drop is the ongoing resettlement from large IDP camps. But this managed deconcentration is offset at least partly by the ongoing in-migration into the city and surrounding wards (GoSL 2005a). The stated figure therefore also underlines a high degree of voluntary post-war relocation of IDPs. Mama (2003: 52) explains, “The dilemma lies in the complex movement and mingling of real displaced population and homeless people searching for space in Freetown [who] are considered by the government of Sierra Leone as non-IDPs while they consider themselves as left-out cases.”

At the same time, these statements could illustrate a reluctance to acknowledge the dynamics of urban growth and re-contraction and a resulting dramatisation of the perceived growth path, particularly among development practitioners. The chart on the following page provides an overview of the previous expansions and recent contraction.

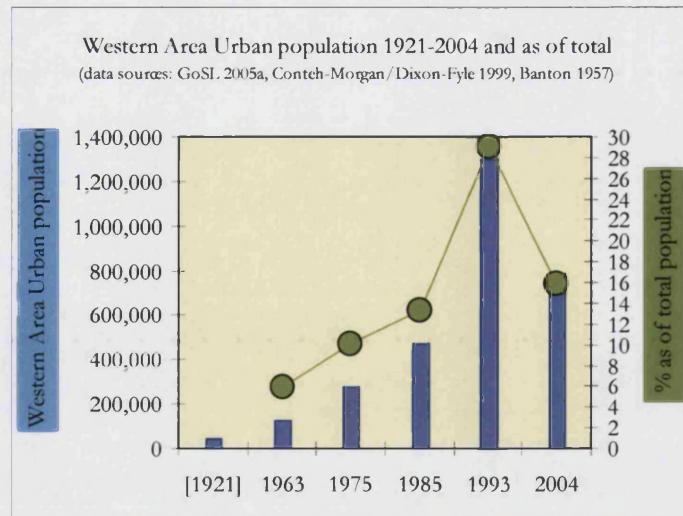


Figure 8: Western Area population 1921-2004 and as of total

If Freetown had indeed shrunk back so significantly from its size during the conflict, then official arguments suggesting the impossibility of measures to refocus attention towards urban recovery—in light of a hopelessly “overcrowded” urban space—must be reassessed. The undeniable phenomenon of urban growth may have been used and abused to promote certain development and reconstruction policies over others.

The national government, for instance, had a strong incentive to ‘de-urbanise,’ consisting first and foremost of a need for economic rehabilitation through rural agricultural production. This position was shared by many senior figures in the aid community. For instance, an international interviewee (IBA-F4) agreed in late 2004 that “the population has overgrown the town. [...] The challenge is to go back to the initial status quo, in which 80% of the people live and work in the countryside. So the key question is, how can people be convinced to go back? [...] Agriculture has to be the basic skill.”

This submission was beefed up by statements about urban service overstretching and the government’s objective to allegedly recreate a state of national social cohesion. But following Lowry (1990: 158, cf. Lock 2005), it is worth pointing to “the political consequences of urbanisation: population clustered on a scale that facilitates mass demonstrations and mob violence

against unpopular national policies or privileged groups.” That security was a factor in the political arena was confirmed by two interviewees. One of them illustrated this concern:

“Freetown used to have 600,000 inhabitants in 1990 and now has 1.2 million inhabitants in 2004. This [...] is a huge increase, and it is creating some urban problems of water and sanitation, housing, social problems in terms of safety nets and social relations. We know about this problem, and we know that it also has security implications. And we know that it will be more important in the city in the coming years. *Rural insurgency is unlikely without facilitation and institutional support.*” (NG-F7, cf. NG-F6)

It is of course easy to connect this and the previous statements to pre-war discourses in Sierra Leone, described in CHAPTER FOUR, on the ‘city suffering from rural in-migrants’ and the ‘rural insurgency *versus* urban enlightenment’ narrative. But whose agendas did they serve, what was the response, and at which levels of polity had this response been conceived? One ministerial employee explained,

“How do we really get rid of the excess population? Decentralisation is one of the strategies that the government has adopted. Because of overcentralisation, all aspects of social life are being found in the city, so the rural people also moved throughout the past years to the city. Because of this overcentralisation, we also had the *influx of youth into the city, but with the assistance of donors and central government*, the government will help the youths to go back to their respective villages or localities. I can tell you for free that *over 80 or 90% of the population in this town comes from the villages. From the provinces!*” (NPB-F7)

Later in this section we will see how this joint government-donor ‘supply of dispersal policies’ was also responding to a ‘demand for dispersal’ wielded by established urban dwellers (many of whom of Creole origin). Yet this apparent political response was of an exclusive nature and, while clearly serving central government’s interests, left key citizens’ (or “subjects,” as Mamdani would have it) concerns aside. To illustrate this claim, let us consider what the aforecited senior ministerial staff went on to say.

“[The youth] are the able people who are expected to work on the farms – they are all in the city, but you cannot drive them by force; it has to be motivated. [...] This is why government got about this decentralisation. [...] Look at the Millennium Development Goals, which we are working on now: there are a lot of prospects for rural development, [...] about food security, agro-industry at the local level, you talk about trade, electricity, hydro-electrical power, a lot of other areas, you know... that will make the youths to go back to the rural areas.” (NPB-F7)

The declared objective of the Sierra Leone government was thus to strengthen the agricultural sector. Yet a principled dichotomous view of urban growth and agricultural production would be unfounded (cf. Bates 2001). What is more, the fact that legal ownership of land was possible only in the Western Area intensified the reluctance against rural returns. This was exacerbated further by the death or forced replacement of half of the country's paramount chiefs, making it difficult for returnees to claim customary 'ownership.' Indeed, one ministerial employee (NPB-F5) submitted that "the political instability, the lack of institutions to accommodate managed investments, and the weak system of [land tenure are the] main three reasons for the lack of development that we are currently seeing in Sierra Leone." This perception that land mattered in the post-war urban economy was reiterated by a participant in a focus group of ministerial officials who said:

We made one attempt [...] of removing people from the slum areas into other parts of the city. One of the ministers, a lady, she went and identified a large area of land in Allen Town [area toward the rural district], demarcated it with portions, came and addressed the people at several locations and told them to go over there so that slum area would not grow. Believe you me, these people went over, some of them went – in less than a month they were all back in the slum! [...] The government provides a place for them to go, but they say, 'Oh, this is too far out of town...' They cannot trade. This is the problem." (NPB-F7)

Still, many senior government officials interviewed for this study questioned the validity, or at least the severity, of the land challenge. One senior central government official even made the following uncanny comment:

"It is not true that you cannot get land in the province. I am sure you are aware of the mining districts. Mining land is not difficult to obtain. Why are you not asking me about mining land? Mining land is easy to obtain. We have talked to companies, and they have said it is not an issue. Land is becoming a big collateral. People want to believe that land is becoming a big issue, a big constraint of development. And then it is becoming a cloudy issue. [...] People are being given land for a hundred years, so why do you want to buy it? What are you going to do when you bought it? The whole land ownership thing has been overrated!" (NPB-F3)

Working with this institutional landscape—as opposed to against, as in the case of simply transporting people back to the countryside—naturally

proved extremely challenging. The project manager of one of the few INGOs that attempted to do so explained,

“We had to start negotiations with each paramount chief of all the districts. [...] But then we would have left our beneficiaries without any leverage. This is why we took the long process of trying to legally acquiring the land for them. [...] There will be titling, which is, in a sense, a revolution in land ownership in Sierra Leone.” (NG-F12)

Yet partly because such schemes, as laudable as they were, were limited in their reach and partly because in a country in which most citizens are below the age of 35 the economic “promise of the city” remained a magnet, disincentives against a return to agricultural production were real. “Everybody wants to come to Freetown thinking that Freetown is Sierra Leone,” a local bureaucrat lamented (LPB-F3).

Newly arrived women and men wanted to become mechanics, doctors, rap stars or bureaucrats—much like during the post-World War II period (cf. CHAPTER FOUR)—, at least those who somehow garnered faith in the unlikely resuscitation of the Sierra Leonean pension system.⁶² Freetown thus continued being considered the place of hope for most of the country’s citizens who were ready to dare what Marchal (2000: 174) has referred to as “a blind jump into a dreamt modernity”.⁶³

Those who tasted urban life became addicted to it. “I really feel that at the moment, we have two peoples: people who live in Freetown, and people who do not live in Freetown,” one respondent pondered. “This is why we have so much migration into the city: its attractiveness comes from the desire to belong to the former group rather than the latter. [...] This even supersedes tribal structures.” (NG-F3) In addition, rural IDPs dwelling in camps close to urban centres realised, for the first time, the “extent to which they had been exploited by merchants. They were also exposed to better schools and urban amenities. This has fuelled a desire for substantial post-war rural change.” (Richards et al. 2004: 37)

⁶² Casual conversations with youngsters in the Freetown harbour area, 4–8 December 2004.

⁶³ Harvey (2000: 156–159) has called this public fixation on the primate city as a place of hope for a better life but also as the locus of temptation and evil “utopianism.”

While the urban area had a comparably high ratio of approximately 32,500 persons per health care facility, private clinics located in the capital city were easing the pressure on public health infrastructure substantially, and the ratio of patients per health practitioner was the lowest in the country, with approximately 80% of the country's doctors practising in Freetown (*ibid.*). Television stations and newspapers were equally concentrated in the capital city. Radio programmes were also aired from provincial centres, but print media—even though its credibility among the population is low—was largely confined to Freetown at the end of the war (EC 2002: 17).

Furthermore, the concentration of aid agencies based and active in the Western Area was substantial. A government survey in 2003 counted 75 major projects, managed by 22 different agencies, both multinational and non-governmental (NRS 2003). The map in the following page shows this density and also the locations of local and international organisations in February 2003 (courtesy of UNOCHA).



Figure 9: Location of aid agencies in Freetown proper

But this concentration did not mean that INGOs were focusing their relief programmes on the city and its inhabitants. One country director explained,

“Intervening as an INGO in the context of direct support in urban communities at this stage would be a very political issue. Perhaps in the future, *we might get criticised* because things were running in town if there had been the lot of assistance by INGOs: *it has an impact on the national situation, much more with a programme in urban areas than with something in the rural areas.*” (NG-F7)

Another INGO programme manager admitted,

“I guess the *real reason* why we do not have any urban projects is because we have a need for prioritisation: there are a lot of needs in the city, but there are even more needs in the countryside. [...] Actually, we do have something that is mainly focusing on the cities, which is *social marketing of condoms...*” (NG-F9)

Yet the scarcity of targeted urban support discouraged few. “In Krio, Salone is the word for Sierra Leone, but it is also the word for Freetown,” one international aid worker explained:

“When you go upcountry, people will ask you, have you come from Salone? In their minds, Freetown is Sierra Leone. But when they do come here and think this is a world of opportunity, it is not reality on the ground. The NGOs are pulling out, there are less jobs than ever before, [the price of] rice is as high as it has ever been, [the price of] fuel is as high as it has ever been – it is very, very difficult. It is much easier to live in the rural areas than before.” (NG-F6)

A widespread perception prevalent among rural youth in late 2004 was that the same circles that had been running the country prior to the war were again forming the elite in the post-war capital city, but that much like before and as an effect of institutional competition with the tribal chiefs, their share in rural governance was hardly felt (Gberie 2005). Indeed, part of the strategy to restore the legitimacy of the Kabbah government—and indeed the latter’s stipulation (Hanlon 2004: 4)—had been the reinstallation of paramount chiefs and customary courts outside major urban centres led by DFID, a key player in Sierra Leone’s ‘reconstruction’, which fed into a series of ‘community consultations’ across the country as the starting point for the national reconciliation process (Meijer 2000: 6, cf. Wierda 2006, Richards 2006). One international advisor defended this approach saying, “The SLPP is doing its best to forge new leadership, and they are developing this together with the paramount chiefs. I think this is completely fair in partisan

politics. The SLPP was very successful with this in the last elections: *co-opting the existing structures.*” (IBA-F6)

Operationally, the Ministry of Local Government and Community Development was instrumental in subsequent elections of paramount chiefs in order to fill the gaps in their ranks, which as an effect of natural mortality and the impact of the civil war had left 63 of the country’s 149 chiefdoms without a chief (NPB-F1). Reflecting on his ministry’s role in the process, the Minister of Local Government and Community Development emphasised in mid-2003 his awareness of the “vital role Paramount Chiefs play in the Maintenance of Law and Order and in the socio-economic development of their chiefdoms” but reminded that in the past, government interference in the appointment of the chiefs had created a serious distortion of its effectiveness (MoLGCD 2003: 3).

Jackson (2005: 57, cf. ICG 2003b: 17) notes that while this move made sense to guarantee local security, the process of reinstatement also marked a foregone opportunity to make a reform of the chiefdom system a central component of reconstituting local polity in Sierra Leone, and the subsequent 2004 Local Government Act strengthened—rather than checked—the local power of paramount chiefs, as long as they co-operated with local councillors. In an uncanny manner, this situation resembled the power arrangement in post-1973 one-party Sierra Leone (e.g., Tangri 1978: 169-171), leaving the boundaries between cooperation and co-optation once again blurred. In contrast, the establishment of a District Council for the Freetown area was considered an equally urgent matter given that the district, unlike the rest of the country, did not have a local polity based on paramount chiefs (ICG 2003b: 18). Nonetheless, an unpublished “Handbook of Local Council Wards in Sierra Leone” (Conteh 2003) explicitly juxtaposed a “Western/Modern component” of local governance comprising of elected councils with a “traditional component” (*ibid.*, 2) denoting the system of chiefdom administrations. It also specified (added in handwriting) that the “role of Tribal Headmen in the Western Area is limited to advising the central government in Freetown on matters *relating to the traditions of their respective ethnic groups.*” (*ibid.*, 3; emphasis added)

Another central area of concern, the oversupply of skills in petty production and the dominance of informal employment known from pre-war times continued posing serious challenges. The most important facet of this employment structure was the virtual absence of employment opportunities for youth, a category that according to national statistics comprises of citizens up to 35 years. This dovetails with restricted *de facto* access to political decision-making and resulted in cultural and social alienation of sub-groups, particularly young men (e.g., Waddington and Mohan 2004: 230-231). Sierra Leone at the time of field research was rampant with INGO-driven skill upgrading projects but this was either not targeted at agricultural skills or, where it was, young men found this skill set unattractive: “The young people are really embracing our offers”, a programme manager said, “but basically they all want to open a disco, with the help of micro-finance [laughs], or to become taxi drivers. They are dreaming of urban life.” (NG-F4) Again mirroring the situation before the war, other areas of economic activity offered equally limited opportunity and had remained under firm control by ethnic minorities. The Fulahs and the Lebanese have a lot of power,” one observer (IBA-F4) argued, and another respondents said,

“The Fulahs are now the suppliers to the Lebanese. When a Sierra Leonean is trying to import rice, they are powerful enough to prevent the ship from entering the harbour. Then they will go to the person and say, ‘If you want to sell this rice, you can only sell it to us. And here is the price that we pay’...” (CS-F5)

Contrary to the rigidity of these economic structures however, adult-child relationships had been uprooted severely during the war, exacerbating the lack of support available to youngsters. One international aid worker explained, “Children come back to their community and their parents may know that they have committed atrocities. Children themselves would have been under command from other children; their pecking order has changed. (NG-F11)” Still, “you always end up talking to non-youths,” another programme (NG-F4) director grumbled,

“younger people in the meetings are not allowed to talk. And when you ask the chairmen, What are you doing for youth?, they say, ‘We are building bridges for them.’ But then you ask them, ‘Why does this benefit them?’, they say, ‘Well, they are building them’ [sighs]. It is these experiences that are driving young people into

the city. It's a status issue: you don't get land, you don't get anything up country, so you go to the city. But that's a dangerous development: they dream of the city, and then they see that is nothing here either. That makes them really angry, and they revolt against the *obrigkeit* [~higher authorities].”

Large parts of the population had drawn their lessons from systematic abuse of young fighters during the war; they regarded young countrymen gathering and hanging out in the main cities as a threat to security and therefore welcomed their dispersion – rather than recognising them as stakeholders and including them in the country's transformation towards peace. Thus conditioned by the “image of troublemakers” (CS-F10), the inclusion of the country's youth was informed mainly by a loose affinity of national politicians to a short-term economic approach resting on agricultural production and not by translating the international non-governmental language of rights and empowerment into legislature and policy (cf. Kemper 2005, Olawale 2004: 5).

The power of aid: dreams and deeds of institutional modification

At the time of field research for this study, there was quite some talk in Freetown among high-level bureaucrats and well-travelled national politicians about the need for foreign direct investment to upgrade infrastructure and productive assets, yet the poor state of the economy, which had been stagnant for the previous two years, prevented any major successes.⁶⁴ The focus on redeveloping the primary sector also created an impediment in that it diverted attention away from creating more upscale investment opportunities. What is more, the government's objective of food security was not a product of political deliberation at the national level. Quite the contrary, the World Bank—through backroom dealings in 1991—had ordered a radical stop in rice imports in order to curtail high-level corruption and to jumpstart a domestic food industry from the scratch, thus conveying,

⁶⁴ There have been exceptions. The three most sought after hotels in Freetown, *Bintumani*, *Country Lodge* and *Mamba Point* have all been renovated with foreign investment, but with the exception of the Chinese-financed *Bintumani* revenues flow directly into the accounts of foreign businessmen (cf. Buch 2004). The fourth relatively habitable hotel (*Mammy Yoko*) was hosting the UNAMSIL administration.

at least indirectly, an *ex-post* adjustment of national provision policy after the end of the civil war (Griffiths 2003).

Of course, in light of the dire poverty in the countryside, self-sufficiency and food security were legitimate objectives (and a focus on agricultural livelihood strategies their logical consequence). On the other hand, it is unclear how this could feed into a capital-driven growth path. The administrative capacity of traditional authorities urgently needed to accompany a process of local development was overshadowed by weak accountability. This also constituted a serious challenge regarding the taxation link that the government and the donors were trying to establish within the traditional power system.

The creation of a tax net covering at least the economic and political elites has been pointed to as one of the crucial components of a post-structural adjustment policy agenda for Sub-Saharan Africa (Rakner and Gloppen 2003: 94-96). Yet in Sierra Leone there was great reluctance on the part of city-based national and international administrators to admit that local capacity might ultimately be too low.

In 2000, the first World Bank Economic Rehabilitation and Recovery Credit had been paid out by the World Bank to the national government. In 2003, the third *tranche* of this credit scheme was authorised, and the World Bank argued that the government had already begun moving “from the transitional phase of peace building to the medium-term phase of Sierra Leone’s strategy of poverty reduction, founded on good governance and economic growth,” which would require critical resources to consolidate “progress made in governance,” including the decentralisation of the polity, and “empowering local agencies to manage the delivery of basic services throughout the country.” (World Bank 2004, cf. Berewa 2005) This sounded as if the post-war challenge had already been overcome. But it hadn’t, and the Bank was supposedly quite aware of this.

An Implementation Completion Report by the World Bank (2003) on a major credit scheme on urban water supply, authorised in April 1992 and

launched in June 1993, had come to a devastating conclusion. It rated not only the outcome of the scheme as unsatisfactory and its financial and technical sustainability as unlikely but also criticised both the Bank's and the government's performance. According to the authors, the project was constantly at risk, mainly due to the government's failure, and urban consumers' inability to pay for water consumption throughout the project cycle, but also due to a lack of technical support by the government regarding the implementation of cost recovery mechanisms such as metering. The authors also admitted that the scale of water provision in Freetown, while unsustainable, might have created artificial hurdles for the resettlement of urban IDPs dwelling temporarily in the capital city in light of the even worse state of water provision in other provincial towns (*ibid.*, 16).

Simultaneously, there was growing awareness among the public that post-war development schemes led by the IMF and the World Bank such as the HIPC initiative were failing to address spatial axes of the conflict, thus neglecting a key underlying structural cause (Riddell 2005: 126). Short-sightedness of financial relief was impacting on the country as a whole, partly a result of a “belief [among the IFIs] in the separateness of the economic and political spheres [which] means that their programmes do not address the fundamental inseparability of these domains” (*ibid.*, 127).

Equal neglect was portrayed by some national bureaucrats. In an interview with a senior government official, a curious understanding of local development as an apolitical endeavour emerged. According to the respondent (NPB-F6), ownership in development would be achieved through joint planning and implementation, while local political processes that link up to national political dynamics were left unconsidered, and this in spite of major donors such as the Bank considering ‘civil society’ a key pillar of the post-war development strategy (World Bank 2005c). Creating “community infrastructure” entailed primarily the construction of health facilities and schools and not the creation of fora through which people could exert voice, protest, and hold officials at all levels accountable. Similarly, in spite of demonstrating extensive knowledge of political

structures, a respondent (LPB-F4) pointed to the crucial role of improved organisational structures and data management supported by UNDP.

DFID had to eventually modify an initial request for proposals (RfP) for “a public awareness campaign designed to inform the general public about the objectives and benefits of privatisation” in autumn 2005 and instructed the eight bidding companies that the “communication support” solicited through the contract should abstain from promoting privatisation on ideological grounds and should only disseminate factual information to increase awareness and facilitate consultation on the “options for any private-sector development in Sierra Leone’s public utilities.” (Pallister 2005) All told, thorough analyses of overarching *problematiques* of institutional diversity and political struggle lost out more than once against visions of improvement and ‘development’ that embraced technocratic and not political solutions.

Yet while Moore (2001: 909) is right in claiming that primitive accumulation, nation state formation, and democratisation remain “uncompleted tasks” across Africa, it was not ‘anti-statism’—of which he accuses the international aid community—that hampered economic and political development in Sierra Leone. Quite the contrary, aid agencies were heavily involved in reconstructing the state, particularly at the local level. Decentralisation was the joint donors’ recipe for all *gusti*. “In early 2003, that was when *we launched the government’s agenda*, and when *we realised the potential of decentralisation*,” one staff member of an international donor agency recalled (IBA-F6). And a bureaucrat working for a bilateral development agency explained,

“A lot of communication here [in Freetown] is very informal: [name of bilateral agency head] will call up [country representative of multilateral agency], or so. It’s a bit of a microcosm. I think it’s too casual, too lax. What I want to do is to approach a couple of key governance people and urge them to form a governance group, around functional areas. It’s actually quite bad that this isn’t happening. [...]

I mean, to justify to situation, there are so few donors. [...] Two years ago we and the [World] Bank went out on two different things: central reform and decentralisation. The deal was struck to work both on each. So when they left Freetown that was the deal, but then a presentation was made to the Bank’s board, and they decided to focus on decentralisation. So we were caught on the back foot. So we then said, ok, we are going to focus on government reform through direct

budget support. And we also knew that the EU was coming along with their 8 million € package for decentralisation reform support, and the Bank was really blasting away with all their work on local councils.” (IBA-F3)

Ultimately this was meant to benefit the capital city as well: “Freetown is supposed to be locally governed, and it was [prior to Stevens’ one-party state]. But during the war Freetown has become the object of national forces. Do not forget, Freetown used to be free: free land.” (IBA-F4) Hence even though CHAPTER FOUR has shown that national capture had begun much earlier, some international agencies did indeed demonstrate awareness of the constrained scope of local decision-making power in the capital city. But this did not change the fact that institutional change toward the local level of polity was conceived, formulated, and implemented not as a result or via a discourse of local and national organisations, but as a grand project of international agencies.

Following a Multi-Donor Governance Roundtable Meeting held in August 2002, the national government in collaboration with UNDP and DFID had established a task force on Decentralisation and Local Government Reform in October of the same year in order to cluster their efforts and, with the support of the President, to increase the pressure on the national government’s ministries. The task force produced an internal policy paper (UNDP 2003) that is, according to one interviewee (IBA-F3), best understood as the foundation on which the donor agenda for the decentralisation process in the country was built in the following two years.

This document justified the urgency of moving forward with decentralisation as the “cornerstone for stimulating economic growth and development in the *rural* areas. [emphasis added]” Even though the authors admit an “infrequent presence of some important line ministries” during the drafting process, they conclude that the Government of Sierra Leone had been committed throughout “in order to forge a national consensus on local government matters.” (ibid., 8)

The paper argues further that “local government institutions are expected to play a leading role in all aspects of post-conflict development and Sierra

Leone” (ibid., 14) and recommends indirect elections of mayors and chairpersons of local councils (ibid., 29). The document also reiterates the “hereditary and highly honoured” institution of chieftaincy (ibid., 32), concluding that “the system is an integral part of the political system [of local governance] in Sierra Leone” (ibid., 33) and that it is in the central government’s interest to give chiefs the authority to manage local affairs without undue interference by the central bureaucracy (ibid., 34).

The subsequent Local Government Act from 2004, which overruled existing legislation on local polity including the Freetown Municipality Act from 1973, mandates that local councils “shall be financed from their own revenue collections, from central government grants for devolved functions and from transfers for services delegated from Government Ministries.” It also urges local councils “to make adequate efforts to collect revenues from their own sources.” These sources include local taxes, property rates, licences, fees and charges, and shares of mining revenues.

Until the end of 2008, tied grants for each devolved service are to be appropriated on a monthly basis to local councils by the Parliament, based on a recommendation by the relevant line ministry, (the Ministry of Local Government and Community Development in the case of Freetown⁶⁵), and “based on principles of equity” and considering “expenditure needs, local revenue capacity, and the financial and administrative performance of the councils.” During the transition period, the Act endows the Parliament with the right to “specify the functions on which these tied grants must be spent, so as to ensure that national priorities and standards of service are met.” The councils have the right to appeal to the relevant ministry in case of dissatisfaction with the distribution. The final decision rests with the Minister who is required to make public the reasons of his finding (GoSL 2004, Part VII, paragraphs 45-51: 27-29).

⁶⁵ Freetown is specified in the Act as the *only* city in the country, whereas Bo, Bonthe, Kenema, Koidu and Makeni are defined as towns, governed by town councils. Together with Bonthe, which historically has a similar colonial history as Freetown, the capital city is hence the only urban district for which the Act does not foresee the involvement of Paramount Chiefs as ex officio members of the councils (GoSL 2004, First Schedule, Local Councils, Part II: 62).

But the Act also carries major political implications. One local administrator complained,

“The Freetown City Council is governed by an Act that was passed by [national] parliamentarians, and almost all of these parliamentarians are SLPP. Given that they have passed this document, they should not stifle the operations of the council. Still, the climate is that those who are holding on to the past try not to release the past to those who have taken over the power.” (LPB-F3)

Another local bureaucrat argued,

“It says that the Minister may devolve such functions that deem suitable. In other words, if he doesn’t want to, he won’t. You can see from the devolution plan at its spans from 2005 until 2008. Some of the real issues will not be devolved until 2008, and this council is only for four years. By the time that the real issues will be tackled this council will not be in place anymore and they will be left for the next council. When it comes to the next election, they will say, they haven’t done anything.” (LPB-F4)

The Government of Sierra Leone also approved the creation of a Decentralisation Secretariat funded by the World Bank and DFID. Its main objectives were to develop a comprehensive decentralisation policy and program for the country, ensure the harmonisation of this process with existing legal and regulatory frameworks, the coordination and monitoring of sector devolution plans, to push a joint local governance strategy with the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Local Government and Community Development, to support capacity development at the local and the central levels, and to report regularly to the central government on the progress in decentralisation (Decentralisation Secretariat 2004). Said one of the Secretariat’s most senior officials,

“If we did not have money, then the government would do it their own way, but now that we have been given a large chunk of money, the government works with us. [...] My blessing is, the President is interested. [...] We used to have local governments, but then everything was abolished through Siaka Stevens. So the president thinks, they took it away when I was at school, so I am going to bring it back. I’m going to be in the history books when they will be written. So I am riding on this opportunity.” (IBA-F7)

Jackson (2005: 51) points out that while the precise intra-organisational debates around the necessity and procedures of decentralisation within the national government are extremely difficult to recollect, some of the

goodwill by high-level officials can be explained first by the pressures that donors put on the bureaucracy in support of President Kabbah's proposal to disperse power from the capital city, and second by the resources that could be expected from primarily the World Bank and UNDP.

Similarly, Fanthorpe (2001: 381) has contended that the Ministry of Local Government and Community Development constituted a direct response to the “good governance” agenda favoured by the World Bank and other influential donors,” which had prompted its inauguration by the SLPP government in 1998. In sum, the historical trajectory of administrative structures in Sierra Leone thus led from tribal fiefdoms to colonial centralisation, to decolonised decentralisation, to dictatorial one-party state, to a remote rebellion eventually leading to factual statelessness, and from there, back to an externally designed decentralised polity (cf. Eßer 2007b).

‘Peace parties’: depoliticising cross-spatial politics

The Local Government Elections in May 2004, a cornerstone in the donors’ decentralisation timetable, were heavily promoted and supported by the international community, including most INGOs. “No one [in the international community] is going to give direct support to any one political player, given the country’s recent history with a one-party state. [...] But I don’t see party politics as a particularly destabilising factor here. This place has to vote,” one international advisor argued (IBA-F6).

Agencies embarked on sensitisation campaigns to educate voters about the procedure and duties of elected councillors and to close the experience gap caused by the absence of formal local government institutions in the country since their abolition under Siaka Stevens in 1972 (e.g., CARE International 2004). A central bone of contention in this context of re-establishing decentralised polity in Sierra Leone was the question whether local elections should be held on a partisan basis. The 1991 constitution made provisions for presidential elections, parliamentary elections and local council elections to be conducted on the basis of political parties, coming into force at a time

of one-party rule (NPB-F7). Arguments in favour included that it would be impossible to disentangle local candidates from their party affiliations and that it would harm the nascent democratic system to exclude parties. The APC was strongly supporting this view. Its chairman told me emphatically,

“The APC is not a new party; we are performers. The people know us; they know what we can do. We held the city in 1968. In 1964, the founder of our party was the mayor of Freetown: His Excellency Dr Siaka Stevens. The city knew that things were happening. He had been giving power through the ballot box, and within one year things were happening. [...] We are out to set an example. We are optimistic. We are committed to decentralisation. We are committed to devolution.” (NPB-F1)

The appointment form for new APC councillors did, in fact, include questions on prior engagement and previously held positions and urged applicants to testify as to whether or not they would be prepared to “truly and publicly defend the APC Party at all times.” It also asked them to provide a description of their personal character, a police clearance, income-tax clearance, and three relevant references (APC 2004). Yet what it failed to ensure was a minimum understanding of urban issues and administrative procedures.

Counterarguments against partisanship revolved around a potentially marginalised opposition and, in the words of a high level UNDP representative, a “belief that Freetown would otherwise dictate candidates and policies coalition.” (ICG 2003b: 19) Both donor agencies and a loose coalition of civic and non-governmental organisations operating from Freetown (the ‘National Election Watch’) supported this agenda based on internationally financed and coordinated consultations with communities (cf. NEW 2004). One of the coordinators explained,

“The consultations that took place in March 2003 were about the question whether the local election should be partisan or non-partisan, about the procedure of the elections, an about mini-consultations about how to do it. The idea was to have town hall meetings. We invited NGOs to present five representatives and all the local associations to do the same in order to get around, a bit at least, the paramount chiefs. [...] The discussion proceeded through different stages. Sometimes they spend half an hour talking about how the council should be named [laughs], but it was very instructive... *it gave us an experiential dimension and an idea of the political structures.*” (IBA-F6)

Naturally, the SLPP-dominated national administration had its own stake in the process. One senior ministerial official argued,

“Let me first of all say that at our ministry... really supervises these city councils. What we have done, we have been sensitising them that even though the elections for these councils have been on the basis of political parties, their primary objective of being in these councils is to bring about development in their localities. Therefore, when they go to deliberate on developmental issues for their localities, they should not retain the concept of political parties.

Candidly, when you look at the political manifestoes of the two major parties, it is all the same. It is all a matter of one having red, and the other having a green colour. But the overall objective is to bring about development to the nation. The incentive is reflected at the national and at the local level. You see, we do not want to incorporate in our people that when you contest on a political party basis, you go to a council, even if the opposition comes up with something sound, you will just say no. That would be negative politics. Politics should be positive for the development of the people.

So we have to sensitise them. Initially, when these councils were sworn in, these kinds of issues came up fast. But gradually, they are dying down. The realisation building up that they should work for the development of their localities. Come 2008, for the next round of politics, then you can go and wave your colour, whatever colour you want, war that is the red sun [APC] or the country [SLPP]; it will be for the electorate to decide.” (NPB-F7)

The elections produced astounding results both nationally and at the local level. The APC lost in all but two districts of the country, but it won Freetown proper by an impressive margin. The map on the following page illustrates this skewed outcome (own illustration based on UNAMSIL 2004b; districts governed by the APC are marked in light grey, black squares indicate major towns). Table 3 then summarises the resulting composition of the Freetown City Council in the Western Area District (Urban).

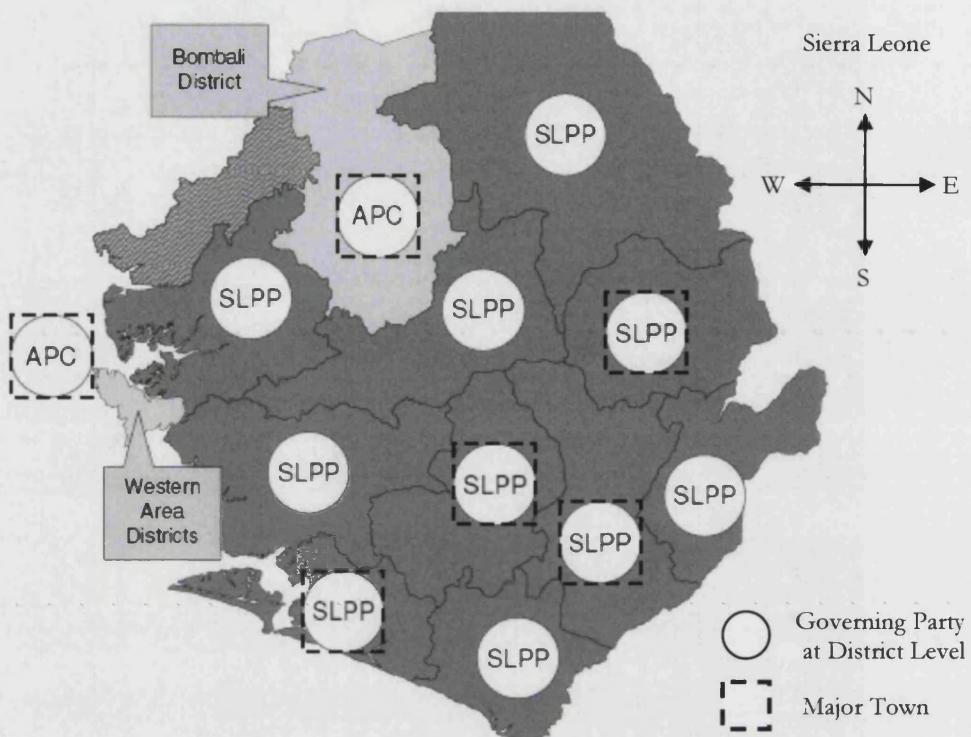


Figure 10: Local Government Election results 2004: country level

Freetown City Council Elections May 2004: Results							data source: UNAMSIL 2004b
Party	SLPP	APC	GAP	PDP	PLP	independent	total
Candidates	32	32	1	6	24	69	164
Winners	4	28	-	-	-	-	32

Table 3: Local Government Election results 2004: Freetown

This contrast appears astounding. Several explanations have been brought forward, including reactions to felt aspects of an “urban penalty” (UN Habitat 2006b) such as the urban cash economy, but also the argument by some, including opposition leaders, that Freetown’s residents were more “enlightened” than rural folk:⁶⁶

⁶⁶ In defiance of my own assumption prior to the field research in Sierra Leone, the influence of city-based secret societies and lodges on the election result was considered marginal by interviewees (cf. Nunley 1987). One informant noted, “Secret societies do not really directly influence the parties. They do not structure themselves around political parties; they have their constituency across the political spectrum. [...] These societies have an influence over the people, but not directly on the parties.” (LPB-F6)

“People were being discouraged to go out on the street, so they expressed their protest in voting for the APC. Cost of living has risen significantly recently here in Freetown, so people really felt the burden.” (NG-F2)

“[1:] This was a protest vote. At the time of the elections, the national government was not performing. The price of fuel went up twice, and costs of basic foodstuff also increased. So the people protested against the government and sent a message to them. [...] This was a Western Area phenomenon; because the bulk of the population is literate they could exercise their right – as opposed to those in the provinces who are mainly voting on tribal lines.” (CS-F3)

“[2:] The people in Freetown [...] are the barometer of the country; they represent the true picture. *The people in the hinterland do not have much education.* Sometimes they do not even understand the interests of their communities. [...] The chiefs are governing the provinces, but they are the manipulators of the SLPP and the elections. [...] Here in Freetown, you have all the education. [...] All the newspapers are being published in Freetown; there are no provincial newspapers. People are more aware here in Freetown. So when it came to the Freetown City Council elections, there was very little the SLPP could do.” (NPB-F1)

“The government is stealing more now than before,” one local interviewee lamented, “now that there is a lot of donor money coming in. [...] Within six months you can see all over the city how houses are being built. [...] Where is all this money coming from? This is what the people ask.” (CS-F4) And yet another respondent said,

“The ministers, they are building houses for millions of Leones, on the hillsides. In Signal Hill, this is a new Freetown. They should set up factories for the youths, but for their self-interest they are just building a house, and then they go to Mecca and drive around in vehicles, while the rest is going to suffer. Even though our country has been experiencing war, our government has no interest in us.” (CS-F3)

At the same time, scepticism prevailed as to whether the local City Council would garner enough political leverage, ‘in spite of’, as some respondents put it, the fact that Freetown is the capital city. To many in the international community, this did not appear problematic. One informant went even further by claiming that national politics had been sidelined across the country:

“The people in national parliament in Freetown have a vagrancy problem. They never go back to their constituency. But with the correction of local government, this is no longer important. It was important six months ago, but it is not important anymore, because *there is really no issue in this country today of import to local communities that is not covered by representatives in the local council.* This problem is being solved. [...] There is a subsidiary now. [...] *In terms of government, national parliament was never relevant to them before, and it is definitely not relevant now.*” (IBA-F8)

In a statement to the international media released immediately after the elections, the APC chairman emphasised that the victory in the capital city should be seen as a first step towards taking over the government at the national level (*Africa Research Bulletin* 2004). This position was also reflected in a pamphlet produced shortly after the announcement of the party's local victory: "We entreat our noble councillors to consider the choice of these positions as a great responsibility, challenge and honour on behalf of our APC Party in the service of our country. [...] Whatever decisions and conclusions our party takes should be in the national interest and must stand the test of time." (APC 2004) In an interview with him, he reiterated this stance: "We have the city council. [...] We're going to choose this as a role model case for development. [...] As a party, we are ready to back our councillors. This is our support to Freetown, for the people of Freetown. We are really backing the Mayor." (NPB-F1)

It was also a vociferous call for partisan competition in and on the capital city, as one interviewee forecasted: "It is a chance for APC to sensitise the population on the lack of changes, the lack of improvement, and to show them in town that they confront the situation." (NG-F7) Another one was more sceptical and argued,

"[2:] It is quite likely that the SLPP will withhold funding for the city council in order to prevent them from having a second chance. It is not certain, but it is a possibility. The APC in the City Council is poised to do a lot of work, to make up for their past misdeeds, and because they want to try their level best." (CS-F3)

Unsurprisingly, the national government was not pleased with losing political control over the capital city to the opposition party. A high-ranking SLPP member told me,

"The Freetown population are floating voters. [...] They change sides all the time. [...] It depends on how you are able to reach them. We keep saying to the donors, you have to be careful how far you are pushing the government. If you push us too far the people will protest. We are a reformist government..." (NPB-F3)

Soon after the local election, the political conflict over the capital city went into full bloom. In July 2004 a newspaper framed the conflict as follows.

“The general hope of the traders now is that since there is an All Peoples Congress mayor, they would be protected by his patronage. Their perception is that since most of them voted APC, it should, as gesture of a reciprocity [*sic*], to protect them from being persistently whisked off the streets by cops. [...] If traders on the other hand become stubborn and infest the streets again, then that would generate anger from the general public and incidentally all ills plaguing the city would be heaped on APC. Of course the ruling SLPP will say, ‘We told you. These are the people you were dancing for’. If [the Mayor] succeeds it will determine APC’s success in 2007 and if he fails, then APC would take the bottom part of the ladder and SLPP will stay where it is.” (*The Independent Freetown* 2004)

The Mayor’s office recognised this dilemma early on:

“There’s the reluctance by the government because they do not control the councils and the Western Area. And because they do not control these councils, they think that there should be no support given to the local councils here. They say there should be no preferential treatment given to the municipal council; all councils should be the same. But when you look all the multinational corporations and all the business infrastructure, whatever exists in the capital city is bigger than what exists in the areas, because of the capacity of delivering services and the number of the population, but the government is saying that Freetown and the rest of the country is the same. Is that possible? That is not possible. The reason why they say this is because they’re not in control.” (LPB-F5)

SLPP-led ministries defended themselves against such allegations, saying, “Do not forget that for the past 30 years the government was performing his functions. So it is difficult to just give them to the city council.” (NPB-F3) Another ministerial official joked, “The Freetown City Council has absolutely no capacity to conduct planning functions. What you would have to do is to transfer all [national] ministries to the local level.” (NPB-F5)

“You heard the mayor of Freetown shouting, ‘government has not giving this, government has not been giving that’,” a national bureaucrat recalled,

“but now I think they are starting to understand, because come 2005, the actual devolution will start. We are going through the act. [...] In 2005, it will be worked out. [...] The instrument will be going to action, and copies will be made available to all councils, so they will see in 2005: These are the functions that will have to be devolved by the government ministries to the local councils, and *it is not public functions, but the technical stuff, finance, logistics that is going to these functions*. [...] This is why we have our development partners like the World Bank, like DfID, UNDP, the EU; *they are teaching us to build the capacity of these councils for readiness for the absorption of these functions*.” (NPB-F7)

Of course this power struggle between the local and national levels did not go unnoticed among international agencies and even triggered candid

admissions such as that Freetown was “still largely planned and run by national ministries.” (CS-F5) Yet in spite of their decentralisation agenda, some also seemed to view the capital city as a special case, to be held to different standards:

“The thing with Freetown is that because it is the capital, I don’t think it is ever going to be a representative model of local government. [...] People up-country are going to look at the local councils for solutions to everything, agricultural and development, roads, everything, whereas in Freetown, the definition of what they’re going to hold the council accountable for will be much more limited to specific functions. [...] People say, ‘Oh, the Mayor of Freetown has such a hard job.’ Well, actually, I would say it’s much easier to be Mayor of Freetown than it is to be the chairman of a local rural council, where holistic solutions are expected. [...] Different governments decided differently on the jurisdiction of Freetown City Council, an appointed body. You know, *it is an instrument of national governance, in a sense.* I would venture to say you should not consider Freetown City Council as a local government. Maybe in the future, it will be.” (IBA-F6)

The fact that the Council was facing fierce opposition from national bodies was played down repeatedly:

“One of the challenges of urban governance is that they the Council can only deliver services that are ‘coloured’, that would help them get re-elected. [...] If I were mayor, I would be careful. I wouldn’t play the politics. I would try to get things done, not just say, ‘we are APC’ or whatever.” (IBA-F5)

Another international observer also admitted implicitly his bias towards political homogeneity, saying, “In councils where there are SLPP and APC representatives there is more difficulty working together; corporation is easier for councils in more homogenous areas. [...] For example, the Bo Town council, which is purely SLPP, this one is doing a good job.” (IBA-F1)

Celebrating the first anniversary of the Freetown City Council after its re-establishment in 2004, the Special Representative of the Secretary General of the United Nations for Sierra Leone called on the Mayor and members of the council to fight corruption, act transparently, and “serve as role models by imbibing the culture of accountability, tolerance, social justice and the rule of law.” He did not go into any detail about the political constellation impeding the effectiveness of the Council. However, the chairman of the ceremony, a former national Minister of Information, made a rather ambiguous remark about the need to embark on projects that would

“safeguard” the relevance of the Council for the next local elections in 2007 (UNAMSIL 2005c).

After all, redistribution was not really the key driver of the polity reform programme. In an interview conducted with senior officials in the Ministry of Local Government (NPB-F7), there had neither been explicit nor implicit mention of devolving power and resources or strengthening local structures. The sole thrust of the decentralisation project appeared to be the deconcentration of the population away the capital city.

This interest dovetailed with international agencies’ scepticism of anything political, and in particular any political process connected with partisan agency and domestic organisation outside the commonly donor-defined realm of ‘civil society’. This stance against an “unorthodox” or even “unacceptable” traditional postcolonial African civil society shall be looked at more closely in the following section.

International institution-building live:

forging the national through the local

The nature of civil society in West Africa, as Jusu-Sheriff (2004: 269) points out, is much more intertwined than some multilateral organisations are ready to admit. The promotion of non-state apolitical actors and ‘local partners’ with the aim of creating a depoliticised counterpart to a depoliticised polity therefore means matching a twisted perception of political reality with wishful thinking.

Recent evidence from crisis states in Africa demonstrates that the voluntary sector grows faster in areas in which complementary activities and structures under direct state control receive priority funding from donor organisations (van de Walle 2003: 20). In other words, strengthening civil society does not necessarily depend on funnelling resources into the sector, but can be an effect of a tangible commitment to rebuilding the state, thus calling into question the common proposition that direct monetary support to civil

society actors was necessary to discipline the central state in order to bring about grass roots-driven accountability.

As already touched upon in previous sections, the history of civil society in Sierra Leone had been one of a sequence of slowly increasing vibrancy in Freetown, forced contraction as a result of national superimposition, indolence during the war, and eruptive post-war re-emergence. During the Siaka Stevens regime between 1968 and 1985, authoritarian rule had dismantled much of what a highly politicised public arena after the country's independence in 1961 had built. However, not even halfway through the armed conflict that began in 1991, several non-state groups began exerting pressure on the government and the insurgency. Shortly after the cessation of fighting, groups such as the Sierra Leone Labour Congress and the Association of Journalists helped mobilise voters for the presidential election in 2002 (Jusu-Sheriff 2004). One respondent told me that they had a radio programme

“[1]: which is called “Let Di People Talk”. It is broadcasted live from the British High Commission. [...] Anybody can just walk into the hall, listen to what the ministry is doing, and ask critical questions. [...] The idea is to create space for political dialogue so that the people know what is going on and to encourage them to engage in interaction.” (CS-F3)

Similar activities initiated by *local* groups could be observed in the areas of human rights, including for war wounded and amputees, and youth employment, which often served to transfer information from the periphery to the capital city. (Jusu-Sheriff 2004: 282) The Amputees' Association (Image 2 in annex 3), a group of war victims succeeding in occupying a plot of private land in a high value neighbourhood, was a telling example of local groups circumventing local polity and instead capitalising on their proximity to national authorities by using the urban infrastructure such as print media and the presence of international correspondents (Esser 2005).

“[1:] We have just been abandoned by the government,” their leaders proclaimed, “which is why I continue going to the newspapers, go to the radio, to tell them that we are here, we are still alive. [2:] We have been marketed. We are a zoo where you can find different types of animals. Do

you know, a zoo?” (CS-F3) The association was articulating its demands very effectively, including a claim for immediate payouts of US\$ 3,000 per member (roughly 15 times the average annual GDP per capita) during a meeting with the Attorney General and the director of a trust fund to mediate the suffering of the amputees and war wounded (Fofana 2005b).

Such local pressure on national bodies may appear surprising; it was made possible mainly because of the specificity of the issue of mutilation. Sierra Leoneans wanted “to turn the page and not put up with these people anymore,” one INGO worker explained,

“this is why the government would like the people to leave the camp. [...] But you cannot come one day and throw them out, so the government is in a really difficult position. [...] There is still a big sign in front of the camp come up reading “amputee camp”. Nobody can touch the sign. If you touch the sign, you ... [mimics throat cutting]. [...] Within a minute, you would have a lot of people around and they would kill you. You cannot touch it. So, this camp remains an amputee camp. [...] It is a very political issue. It is at the level of the President; Ministries cannot decide on this issue without involving the President.” (NG-F10)

Asked what the role of the Freetown City Council was in this, the response was muted. “I think they are formally involved in the evacuation and the closure procedure, but I haven’t seen them a lot.” (*ibid.*)

A peaceful general strike in January 2005 highlighted once again the vibrancy of civic actors in the capital city (cf. Donini 2005 et al. 2005: 48), and it is in this context that recent efforts to externally induce or ‘create’ civil society in Sierra Leone by way of foreign grants and programmes have to be reassessed.

Certainly, the success of the concept of civil society as a framework of aid delivery in Sierra Leone can only partly be explained with external imposition or conditionality. A domestic pull was equally prevalent and effective. Reflecting on her experience in West Africa in the early 1990s, Obadare (2004: 158, cf. Ferme 1999: 180) recalls:

“Everyone with one grievance or another against the state (also generally understood as the government) rallied in the name of civil society. [...] Civil society also seemed to suggest something about civility, an element that was believed to be

in short supply in the overall relations between the state and society across the sub-region.”

Furthermore, the emergence of the civil society discourse and the momentum that it created opened up opportunities for private resource accumulation for those societal strata who had been suffering greatly from the contracting public sector under structural adjustment programmes. Obadare (*ibid.*, 159) again: “[T]he idea was also a godsend for a cross-section of an economically wounded middle-class in search of personal, not even group, salvation.”

Not surprisingly then, the ‘NGOisation’ of the country began in the capital city where resources were abundant and close enough to be captured, and employment in an NGO promised a stable income during the transition period (Ambrosetti 2003: 14-15). “We should very critically look at the work of NGOs,” a local bureaucrat urged, “some of them are trying to take advantage of the situation.” (LPB-F3) Against this background, Obadare (*ibid.*, 157,) emphasises the persisting validity of Mamdani’s distinction between “an urban ‘civil society’ and the subjetivisation of the rural mass.”

Did post-war civil society in Sierra Leone bridge this gap?

The accusation of a persisting urban bias in non-monetary aid to Sierra Leone had first been made in the context of the 2002 Presidential Elections when the international community focused its information and sensitisation campaigns on urban centres, leaving mobilisation of rural voters to local NGOs (Sesay and Hughes 2005: 46, 136, cf. McKeown 2003: 10). By mid-2004, international observers had noted that human rights organisations were still active mostly in Freetown whereas “rural villagers [had] little access to their services”, urging the international community to provide more resources into the facilitation of an independent domestic capacity (Douma and de Zeeuw 2004: 4, Sesay and Hughes 2006: 261). Yet building western-friendly civility was one task; building local leaders was another. A local civil society leader explained this ‘agency gap’ as follows.

“The international organisations, most of all, have made sure that we are in this transition phase towards a state. A space was created for all these groups [of civil

society], these coalitions, to form. [...] [Now] there is a need to move towards trying to create leadership. We have done all these things, but there is this gap. And this gap is leadership: not about having workshops, but engaging the right people. This is a huge gap. [...] This is the point where these coalitions have started to fade. [...] The whole process of democratisation and state building is questionable because of the problem of leadership. [...] The issue is not whether or not the space is provided. *The space is provided now. But we need to provide a lot of opportunities for them to emerge.* When I'm saying the space has been provided, I'm talking about the situation that contrasts the pre-war situation. Now, the government does not impinge so much, but we do not have people who want to take advantage of this space.” (CS-F9)

Outright attempts by foreign organisations to hijack part of civil society also occurred. One local informant recalled the following experience:

“We told [name of INGO] very clearly that they are not coordinating human rights activities here. They cannot coordinate, not facilitate, not supervise us. [...] We do not want [INGO] as a human rights organisation, even though we appreciate them as providers of aid and relief. [...] We cannot allow [INGO] to come in and violate our own national standards in human rights, our own national pride. What it does is it undermines the relevance of existing structures. They argue that they want to build the capacity of existing structures. Well, we already have a national movement for human rights, why don’t they support it?” (CS-F8)

In the meantime, most non-urban Sierra Leoneans continued thinking and arguing based on a ‘subjectivised’ discourse. For instance, a paramount chief in Grafton, a large former IDP camp fifteen miles east of Freetown, connected the language of citizenship to traditional relationships, saying that when talking to a minister, he would act “like a child going to the father. [...] We are looking up to the President and the Minister of Land to assist us with land to develop ourselves.” (LPB-F1e) This illustrates that *in spite of formally decentralised structures* hierarchy remained a powerful perception of the practice of governance and was seen as a promising channel to achieve something for local communities facing new threats in the shape of post-war economic plans. “The [central] government cannot allow these people to just settle here,” a local official told me, “they have to move them out to allow the people to establish their business and to develop the country.” (LPB-F2e) This was also confirmed at the ministerial level: “Our position concerning Grafton is that we need their land, for any kind of development.” (NPB-F5) “Concerning Grafton Camp,” another member of the national administration explained, “one of our strategies is to not encourage people

to stay on this land. It is not the law, it is just a strategy. [...] Our main line is, 'If you want to have land you have to go to the provinces.'" (NPB-F3)

Local development or national power?

The politicisation of urban services

While this competition and conflict around institutional adjustments were taking place across polity levels, the state of affairs of both urban government and urban services in Freetown remained dismal (cf. Arimah 2003). A proposal from April 2004 (Elliott and Gilpin 2004) commissioned by the City Council requested a budget of US\$ 320,000 from international funding sources to upgrade the infrastructure of the Council (computing hardware and software, electric power supply, photocopiers, furniture, and utility vehicles). This came at a time when the Municipality looked more like an abandoned primary school than the administrative centre of a capital city (Image 3 in annex 3). Said one local official,

"It is a shell of what it should be. When you look around you, this is not what you would expect. [...] If you can't get any revenues in, there's nothing that government you can do. And you cannot bring it in unless you have qualified staff and proper property evaluation, and then you can have the clout, financially, to affect the development. Other than that it is impossible, we would just be trying to survive." (LPB-F6)

The Elliott and Gilpin proposal stated that the implementation of the scheme should be expected to have "wider implications and cross cutting impact that would spill over to the country, as a whole, since Freetown is the Capital City" (ibid., 2). It also argued that the council's current staffing level of 210 core employees was insufficient to exercise effective governance, including local revenue collection, and that "serious inadequacies in terms of institutional capacity" existed, apparently using the term 'institutional' as a euphemism for human resource quality (ibid., 16).

The proposal failed to attract donors' attention. International priorities at this time were on 'promoting democracy' and not strengthening local political bodies – even though one would expect the latter to be linked to the

former. Indeed, the manner by which I obtained the aforementioned proposal is a telling example of this preference. Asking a staff member of a bilateral development agency about its work on urban issues, he began searching several binders and stacks of papers on his desk, mumbling:

"I am just thinking, is there actually anything that we are doing in urban areas? No, there is apparently nothing. I mean, if anything we are going the other way by improving chiefdoms and the restoration of traditional power, and how does this sit with the new local councils; what threats does this present in terms of power and traditional law and so on?"

[continues searching]

No, nothing. Whether it's too big, you know, that's the question. Maybe we should have a consortium on urban issues. [...]

Well, that's really a very interesting question, why not the urban areas? Well, maybe most of the things we propose to do will eventually also benefit the urban areas, I mean, the whole capacity building we are involved in. *Most of this is based in Freetown anyway.* [...]

After the war there have been a couple of studies pointing out the need for infrastructure, also of local councils in Sierra Leone, and one of the follow-up ones was on the City Council [pulls out a ragged copy of the Elliott and Gilpin study; laughs]. Oh, seems it has not really been used recently... You can have this copy." (IBA-F3)

My observation of a council meeting in early December 2004 brought to light not only some of the most pressing issues in urban management in Freetown but illustrated as well the fundamental challenges that this reconstituted level of government is facing in the capital city. Following the opening ceremony, several councillors complained that the administration had refused to authorise the payment of rebuilt education facilities. The Mayor reminded the councillors that the municipality had never given its formal approval for these projects, which two councillors denied vociferously.

This debate fed into a discussion on land ownership. The position of the council leadership was that some tenants would have to be removed from their current dwelling because their occupation was illegal. Immediately, three councillors jumped to their feet and provide lengthy explanations of why they would oppose such a move in their ward. One comment by an

observer in an earlier interview came to my mind; she had argued the councillors had in fact

“never focused on long-term issues that address development. The interest in projects has only been so far in that had allowed them getting a slice of the cake. This has been a force, a very strong determining force of politics and governance at the local level. [...] The Mayor will need some support by the councillors, but many of them want to continue the old way, and they cannot be checked. [...] Some of them say that their predecessors just came to enjoy themselves, but quite a lot of them still have the same view: that Freetown is a market where they don’t have to pay.” (LPB-F6)

One of the most senior civil servants that I interviewed in Freetown had uttered the same frustration saying,

“As a civil servant I don’t like to be talking about politics. From my experience in the council, which I chair, politically they are all preaching, let us work together, let us work towards development in the city, but practically, it does not work that way. Whatever happens, if you belong to the party, you belong to the party. When it comes to implementation though, they look at the situation and say, if the opposition succeeds, then we will have problems in the next election.” (LPB-F4)

Later on in the same Council meeting, the Mayor urged the councillors to focus on the devolution plan, which at this point had already been delayed by two weeks. He explained, “Only if I have received such a plan from every ward, then I will be able to negotiate with the ministries.” While the councillors agreed and reacted with spontaneous applause to an announcement by the Mayor saying that he would be willing to enter into fierce negotiations with the central government, their subsequent questions reflected no knowledge of the requirements to be met. The Mayor explained, “Look at all the functions that you are not yet performing and then try to think which ones you would be able to take over.” In an attempt to help refocus the discussion, the Chief Administrator of the city then suggested that a mission statement be agreed on in order to define priorities and guide the policy process. Suddenly jumping up, one of the councillors expressed his scepticism about the proposal arguing that the council should “not make new laws.” Here again, it became clear that the mission statement had little potential to guide any kind of local policy-making process and was much more an application of ‘donor language’ to the working of a city council that

was still struggling with the very fundamentals (cf. UNIOSIL 2006). One World Bank staff member complained,

“Look at the Freetown City Council: they could be making money on a daily basis; the problem is how to collect it. There is a revenue base, but there is no functioning system for collecting the revenue. What they will tell you is that they spend most of this money for salaries. But our focus has to be on improving services. This said, the biggest problem is really building capacity. [...] Many of the councils in the countryside have called for this. But the city council here in Freetown has not called for it at all.” (IBA-F7)

In a study commissioned subsequently by the Bank (Mwesigye 2006) to examine the untapped revenue potential of the City Council (mind again the earlier ignorance towards the local study produced by Elliott and Gilpin 2004), political willingness within the council itself was singled out as the most important factor to boost efficiency of tax collection before outside funding should be supplied.

“While there is no doubt that a city such as Freetown does and will require transfers from government [and while] it is technically feasible to collect additional revenues with modest outside inputs, the most critical finding is that FCC will require exertion of substantial and sustained political will at the highest level before it can even begin to do so.” (ibid., 2)

Indeed, the study concluded that “[n]o amount of external funding and intervention is going to cause any meaningful change until the institution itself has decided it is time to change (ibid., 11; underlining and bold font removed).” Certainly the starker shortfall in terms of local resource mobilisation is apparent in the area of local tax collection. In 2005, the City Council collected in a mere 11.55 million Leones in local taxes—less than 1% of the potential revenue estimated at 1.2 billion Leones (ibid.).

Revenue Source	Actual 2005 Collections (Le)	Potential Collections (Le)
Rates	719 million	1.20 billion
Markets	606 million	1.38 billion
Trading Licenses	66 million	430 million
Local Taxes	11.55 million	1.20 billion
Property Rents	7.9 million	244 million
Total Revenues	approx 1.41 billion	approx 4.45 billion

Table 4: Actual and potential revenue collection of the Freetown City Council

The author of the study points out that while “this does not appear real,” the situation can be explained by a tax base of 2,309 contributors (as of 2005) out of an overall population of almost 800,000, which is due to the virtual absence of usable tax records at the ward level as a result of both administrative neglect and the legacy of a decade of war (*ibid.*, 9).

Following the urban riot in November 2004 that had made me reflect on the possibility of an untimely death while writing e-mails in a downtown Internet café (cf. CHAPTER ONE), the Freetown City Council was eager to demonstrate compassion with the widespread discontent over the lack of socio-economic prospects and basic services among the urban population in general and young people in particular and quickly condemned police brutality.⁶⁷ Frustration was fuelled primarily by an unresolved battle between the City Council and several national ministries over the responsibility for urban garbage collection, but also by traffic congestion, worsened by Freetown’s shoreline location. Moreover, facing regular power shortages, the vast majority of the population could not afford generators and goes without any electric power at all.

In January 2005, the World Bank and the IMF pressured the national government on the grounds of its constitutional duty to take responsibility for public utility bills to make an advance payment of 1.3 billion Leones to the National Power Authority (NPA) in order to ensure minimal level of provision for the first three months of the year (*Standard Times* 10 February, quoted in UNAMSIL 2005b). The situation worsened over the course of the following months due to increasing prices for fuel, which reduced further the purchasing power of Freetown residents reliant on generators (Fofana 2005a). Facing a budgetary constraint, the NPA could only point toward capacity enlargement and argue that the situation would improve significantly upon the termination of the *Bumbuna* hydroelectric plant close to the capital city, envisioned for 2007. However, in light of the fact that the plant has already been under planning and construction since the late 1960s,

⁶⁷ Personal communication with a civil rights activist in Freetown, 9 March 2005.

the scepticism among urban residents that corruption in the public apparatus would further delay its completion is comprehensible (cf. BBCNews 2005c).

A post-war rise in urban crime in Freetown also prompted the police to ban combat fatigues from the city (BBCNews 2005d), not only to foster an atmosphere of civility, but also to address regular accusations of residents that members of the notoriously ineffective police force (Paris 2004: 223) had been acting as ‘piefs’ – police and thieves at the same time, incorporating an enhancement of the war-time new ‘sobels’ (soldiers by day and rebels by night, a term coined by the Freetown *Daily Mail*, cf. Donini et al. 2005: 43, Keen 2002).

The “biggest challenge” in terms of urban management (NPB-F3), however, was considered to be street cleaning and waste disposal. Historically a function of the appointed Management Committee, in 1996 the national government had entrusted the Ministry of Health and Sanitation with garbage collection and disposal in the capital city, helped by German GTZ engineers – arguing that the war-affected municipality would benefit from being relieved of this duty (NPB-F2). During the war, garbage collection had become “a political tool,” one local civil society informant told me:

“UNDP and the World Bank wanted to put in some resources and to create some investments. [...] [A key] Minister asked us to pilot this process [...] [to] ensure that it would be a community garbage collection process. And that we would get all the support needed. [...] In the end [...] what they wanted was kickbacks. All the projects here are designed to give some kickbacks to the officials.” (CS-F6)

Bureaucrats in the Municipality were keen on assuming responsibility for this service: “You see mountains of garbage in the city,” a city manager said,

“Once the Council has enough budget for garbage collection, it will have to think about dump sites, vehicles, and manpower. [...] It remains one of the major areas to be devolved. Once it has been devolved, the council will be in the position to deliver that service. [...] Devolving this function to the council would also involve devolving resources, so council would very much been a position to perform it.” (LPB-F3)

But political considerations at the national level had priority over achieving local effectiveness. A participant in a focus group of civil rights activists explained:

“[3:] Garbage collection is clearly a crucial issue, because there is a public outcry. There is filth all over the country. People are looking at the issue with suspicion, and there is some politics going around that. Traditionally, it is the role of the city council to take care of garbage collection. The government is looking at it from another perspective. If they allow the city council to handle the issue, and if they handle it effectively, people will say, this APC dominated city council is doing so well. The SLPP cannot see to let that happen.” (CS-F3)

In 2003, responsibility had been passed on from the Ministry of Health and Sanitation to the Ministry of Youth and Sports created in 2002, the national entity with the smallest budget (NPB-F2), partly on the grounds of an assumed employment opportunity for potential young voters to be harnessed through the implementation of large-scale manual cleaning schemes. “If any future planning can be undertaken in Freetown in terms of rehabilitation of economic activities,” an NGO worker explained, “we have to occupy the youth.” (NG-F7)

A senior official in the previous Ministry in charge said that he was crossed about this transfer of power, arguing that he would have favoured ‘devolution’ to the City Council:

“We were pushing that, because we attended conferences where people tell us that as long as this function is with national ministries, they will find it very difficult to support us. Whereas when this function is with the municipality, donors will come in and assist. [...] The World Bank sent us to Guinea, to a conference. There, we were told that all that the ministry was supposed to do is to advise and supervise. [...]”

Look at the city of Freetown now. Garbage is littered almost everywhere. We had to come to the conclusion that the Ministry of Youth and Sports must find it very difficult to deal with this problem. So it is not better than run than when the Ministry of Health and Sanitation were collecting it. We gave them all the vehicles: five skip tracks, four dump trucks. But when you go to their parking lot, you will hardly find vehicles that are now working.

The government wanted us to supervise the process. Our role was to supervise. But they refused. They refused to be supervised. [...]. Apparently the youths, they do not want to be supervised by other people.” (NPB-F4)

The move also sparked criticism from local human rights activists. One of them warned,

“A good package for young people would include medical care and a guarantee that there would be paid regularly. It would also include proper tools to collect the garbage. Doing it with your bare hands is very unhealthy. There’s a lot of risk involved. They are misusing these people. You do not know what people have thrown to the garbage. Lots of people here have HIV.” (CS-F6)

Soon after, a report for the World Bank published in February 2004 had recommended the creation of an independent institute, heavily subsidised by the Bank, to assume a coordinating function for waste management and garbage collection in the capital city (Sood 2004). The involvement of private sector activity was urged as a central pillar of a partnership strategy involving “local organizations such as area municipalities, citizenry, civil society groups, private firms and other actors including international donors.” The author of the report concludes, “Experience in other countries has shown that the governments have also led effective partnerships.”

Yet as much as the study provided a detailed image of the collapsed state of waste management in the city (Image 4 in annex 3), its conclusions demonstrated once again a wishful thinking approach to urban management by advocating cooperation based on theoretical assertions rather than on the political reality on the ground, which was marked by interorganisational competition and partisan hostility traversing different levels of polity resulting in exactly the “limitations of local discretion” caused by institutions of local governance having become the “target of central influence” that Page and Goldsmith (cf. CHAPTER TWO) envisioned.

In January 2005 the Mayor filed a written complaint with the Ministry of Finance accusing several councillors of illegally transforming garbage dumping sites into private areas for urban development projects and asking for forced eviction of those settling on the sites, arguing that the “reconstituted council doesn’t have either the technical or human competencies to effectively address the present situation.” (quoted in *Concord Times* 2005a). Even though the willingness to hand over the responsibility to provide cleaning services from the Ministry of Youth and Sports to the

Freetown City Council had been restated by the former in early December 2004 (*Concord Times* 1 December, quoted in: UNAMSIL 2004a), in February 2005 the Council publicly declared that it was unable to execute this task due to the lack of basic logistics and funding, for which no support had been received from the national government (*For di People* 10 February, quoted in: UNAMSIL 2005b).

This statement came less than two weeks after one of the leading domestic civic rights NGOs had issued a public statement bemoaning that no priority had been given so far to waste disposal in Freetown compared to targeted proposals in this regard in other parts of the country (*Awoko* 27 January, quoted in: UNAMSIL 2005a). Two weeks later, a grant from the World Bank for US\$ 2.8 million to the central government to support cleaning activities in the city was rejected by the City Council on the grounds that financial control would not be devolved to them, but would remain with the Ministry. On the same day, the Mayor complained in public about the practical inaccessibility of an additional US\$ 350,000, earmarked as an emergency waste fund, because of retained central government control over it (*Standard Times* 2005b, *Concord Times* 2005b).

The purchase of a sophisticated cleaning vehicle under dubious circumstances during the war years also continued fuelling public debate (Image 5 in annex 3). The Freetown City Council, without ever putting it to use, had handed it over to the Ministry of Youth and Sports in 2004. Even though the Minister had made it clear that he would prefer reselling the vehicle to buy simple equipment, the buying agent company offered to provide training for two operators, which was never carried out. Following public inquiries about its whereabouts in May 2005, the vehicle was found in the backyard of the Ministry, cannibalised and vandalized. Neither the Ministry nor the Council leadership felt responsible. In March 2006, the City Council eventually received a 3.2 million Pounds Sterling refund for the machine. A subsequent council session to discuss the use of these funds ended in a stalemate, with half of the councillors voting to utilise them to pay terminal benefits to deceased councillors (*Concord Times* 2006c). One commentator exemplified the political weight of the garbage collection

quagmire when he asked, “with the politicisation of garbage collection, people are already wondering if the APC town council could not clean the city, then what political guarantees could the citizenry repose in such a party to run the affairs of the state for that matter?” (Bayratay 2005) Two months later, after an unsuccessful council session to determine the use of the suddenly available funds, the National Traders Multi-Purpose Union Sierra Leone, a loose association of low income petty traders, decided to embark on an autonomous cleaning exercise in the Central District Market area of Freetown in an effort to, according to its leader, “ensure that business is conducted in a clean and healthy environment.” (quoted in Concord Times 2006e). Business interests saw on-the-spot action as the only response to a managerial stalemate caused by incompetence as much as by interorganisational competition for political credit.

Remarkably, the only area of agreement between the City Council leadership and national ministries appeared to be the question of slum and squatter area clearance. Both parties emphasised that the problem consisted of 27 different dwelling sites that all shared poor sanitation and high levels of crime, eventually having to make way for urban development projects. Yet shortly after the appointment of a new Acting Mayor, Rosaline Foarde, in April 2006, the eviction of several dozens of petty traders and the demolition of their stands in the city centre caused a public outcry. The City Council leadership rejected accusations of having ordered the move (Concord Times 2006d) but soon after admitted that it did in fact play an indirect role in the incident in that it had received complaints by registered traders about illegal trading activity in the area. The traders had apparently offered to destroy the stands in an arbitrary move, but an unidentified member of the Council seemed to have acted faster by ordering the demolition, which also affected some of those who had filed complaints (Standard Times 2006a). During a subsequent gathering on National Housing Programs in May 2006, the Mayor of Freetown argued that dwellers would need to be relocated as they were “not meant for the city.” Illustrating national instrumentalisation of international policies, the Deputy Minister of Works and Housing even made direct reference to the World Bank-commissioned Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP) which, in her words, “oblige to undertake decisive

action to reduce slum dwellings as a priority.” (as quoted in: *Standard Times* 2006c). It thus became apparent once again that in the absence of clearly defined areas of cooperation, interests at different levels in Freetown align on-the-spot, but they are usually aimed against the weakest constituents of the urban economy that possess no political weight or lobby.

Freetown after the storm: international ‘success’ and local reality

The last UNAMSIL troops left Sierra Leone in December 2005 (Doyle 2005) in what was widely considered one of the most effective peacekeeping missions in the UN’s history (Eide et al. 2005). Comparing the experience to the British involvement in the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan, “Sierra Leone has been a success,” *The Economist* (2007b: 23) seconded.

After the departure, high-level international staff continued considering the rigidity of the *rural* institution of chieftaincy and its friction with *rural* district councils as the main drivers of potential conflict (IBA-F6, cf. Jones 2005). True, many newly elected rural representatives who had not also been headman were reportedly unable to exert power (due to a constant challenge by existing tribal institutions) while also finding themselves unable to gain leverage in the political centre, i.e., the capital city.

There however, a *twofold challenge* of equal magnitude prevailed, but this one went largely unnoticed by the international community. First, the extreme scarcity of self-generated resources made both local and national policymakers dependent on supra-national funding. Second, the function of the capital city not only as the largest urban agglomeration in the country but also as the centre of *national* politics through multi-level competition over policy-making supremacy (both via formal and informal channels) imposed tight limits on the scope of effective policy deliberation for the city itself.

Based on her reading of the single-party national elections in 1986, Ferme (1999: 184) had come to the conclusion that

“the discourse of democratization and reform that has engulfed Sierra Leone and other African states seems to favor the concentration of electoral [national] politics in urban centers. [...] Future elections might restrict voters to a choice of parties, not individuals, and this might shift competition for political patronage and office from the local constituency to the party headquarters in Freetown.” [emphasis added]

Against the background the aforementioned *dual function* of Freetown this comment foreshadows the claim of an ‘overdetermined’ city, which will be discussed in detail in CHAPTER SEVEN. Certainly, political reality only a few years after the end of the war (but almost twenty years after the publication of her analysis) proved Ferme right. In January 2005, the press reported that the Mayor had fallen out with his deputy as the result of general disagreement over their respective authorities, displaying first signs of severe tension within the opposition party at the local level (*Standard Times* 2005a). The councillors had also made critical statements about the Mayor’s ‘know-it-all’ attitude and complained about his personal manners during council sessions. In one instance, Radio UNAMSIL, the UN-run local radio station reported that the Mayor had referred to the councillors as “dogs with their tails between their legs” and had refused to apologise, arguing that he was “saying the truth” (quoted in: *Standard Times* 2005c).

In a move to cover his own political back, the country’s SLPP President claimed in April 2005 that the conflict between the national government and the city administration had been resolved amicably and spoke out in support of the City Council saying, “I would like to emphasize that government will provide the necessary support to the Council to ensure that Freetown could once again become a city we can all be proud of.” (quoted in: *Concord Times* 2005c). But in October 2005, the SLPP’s Secretary-General publicly initiated the political battle for the 2007 presidential elections in the urban arena (Image 6 in annex 3) by launching a vocal attack on the opposition party by blaming them for being unable to clean the capital city and arguing that this shortcoming demonstrated “the ineptitude of the APC to take care of very basic problems.” The failure to deliver, he said, had resulted in a loss of “moral authority to take care of the country.” The Mayor quickly dismissed the accusation, calling it “rubbish” and “small boy kind of talk” (as quoted in *Concord Times* 2005d).

Two weeks later, the leadership of the City Council complained about the tax levy imposed by national customs on two vehicles that the council had purchased to alleviate the alarming environmental pollution in the city. The Mayor accused the government of “sabotaging the efforts of the Freetown City Council to keep the city clean.” His statement was sidelined by a high level APC representative arguing that the garbage removal discussion was merely a component of a larger strategy by the SLPP to diminish the chances of the opposition party in the 2007 presidential elections (*Corrioko* 2005a). Another two weeks later, the mayor again spoke out in public, blaming poor and corrupt law enforcement for the insufficient mobilisation of market dues and other potential sources of income for the City Council. He added that the income from dues, which at the time was only paid by approximately 5% of the traders, was insufficient to cover the expenses of the Council in light of the continuous reluctance of the central government to devolve financial assets.

In January 2006, the Chief Administrator of the City Council admitted that public confidence had been lost as a result of constant infighting between councillors. “The Council has been politicized and is plagued by personality conflicts. I have a difficult job. There are others who try to frustrate my efforts. There were no criteria set for selection of councillors so this makes it difficult to work with them as part of a management team.” Then she revealed that the Council’s Development Plan had been rejected by the Decentralisation Secretariat, denying the council access to one billion Leones from the central government. The head of the Secretariat justified this rejection with the inertia of the local institution, saying “City Council never participates in anything. Even their own development plan, they had not cooperated with any ministry” (quoted in: *Christian Monitor* 2006). Only one day later, the chairman of the APC in January 2006 joined the ranks of high-level national politicians publicly criticising the Mayor for his ineffective management of the City Council (*Concord Times* 2006a) in what constituted the first signal of intra-party conflict cutting across political levels.

Chapter 6: Regulating Kabul

The Afghan beehive: needs, profits, and the politics of aid

In his writing about the reconstruction of Afghanistan Sultan Barakat (2002: 814) has fielded the argument that one of the most immediate dangers lay in an unequal distribution of project monies “between the poor rural majority and the competing claims of the more vocal, visible and accessible urban minority.” It was therefore “vital that neither Kabul, nor the other strategic urban centres become the sole beneficiaries and every effort should be made to maximise the benefits and coverage of all the different geographical regions, with a view to reaching the majority of the population that continues to be rurally based.” (ibid., cf. AAC 2002)

No doubt, this concern was timely in 2002. Following the ousting of the Taliban, the political centralisation project of the occupation forces—led by the US Military and complemented by NATO troops—was paralleled by non-governmental organisations’ reinstated dichotomy between *decision-making* in headquarters either far away from Afghanistan or concentrated in the country’s capital city and *implementation* “in the provinces”, the ‘site’ of greatest need (cf. Stockton 2002: 29). This also comes to the fore in Rondinelli’s (2004: 13) recollection that “one of the most difficult challenges” in the country’s reconstruction process was the channelling of large amounts of money without being able to rely on a central government with national authority. In their aim to support

“nation building lite, [...] assorted teams of nation-builders are frenetically working on development frameworks, national plans, feasibility studies, aid-tracking systems, employment strategies, and the like. [...] The beehive feeling of Kabul makes the contrast with the rest of the country even more stark. [...] The further from Kabul, the thinner the aid presence becomes.” (Donini 2004: 137)

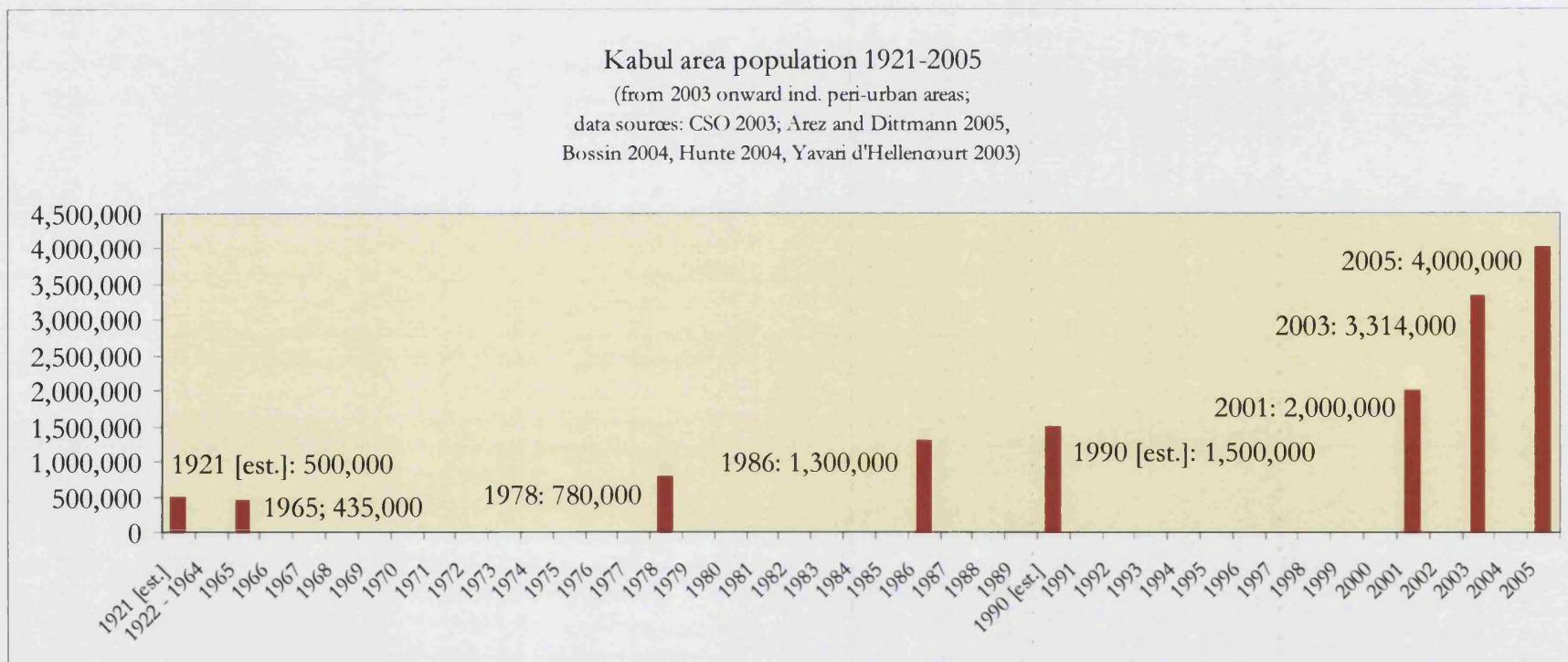
Yet this was only partly true. After announcing its first operation in Afghanistan in April 2002, the World Bank made sure that a larger share of monetary assistance was funnelled into public works and housing projects to assist the reconstruction of rural villages than the amount spent on

emergency infrastructure reconstruction Kabul and provincial centres (Rondinelli 2004: 24). No question, Kabul seemed relatively better off. In mid-2003, about 45% of staff members of the Ministry of Health and almost half of the country's hospital beds were still located in the capital city (Khabir 2003: 623). Maternal mortality in Kabul, while still much higher than the averages of most other countries, was only a tenth of the rates experienced in the most remote provinces (Bartlett et al. 2005). Internet cafes were open in five urban centres, but main television stations were still based in Kabul and Herat (as of March 2005). The only medium of communication available across the country was radio, whose legacy as a source of information and propaganda had begun in 1940 with the creation of *Radio Kabul* (later renamed *Radio Afghanistan*; Hatch Dupree 2002: 981, cf. Altai Consulting 2005, Kumar 2006).

At the same time however, Kabul underwent a process of dramatic urban concentration (cf. Bertaud 2005). One interviewee urged, “You cannot see Kabul as Kabul only – Kabul is also the deprived areas everywhere in the country.” (NG-K8) The chart on the following page illustrates this acceleration of capital city growth during the post-war years, a trend that is probably unprecedented in recent world history, even when compared with fast-growing cities such as Dhaka, Lagos, Karachi, Jakarta or Mumbai.⁶⁸ The map on the next page then shows the expanse of the city in December 2005 (courtesy of UN Habitat).

⁶⁸ Growth rates in these cities vary between 6.17% and 3.13%; UNDESA (2004: 8).

Figure 11: Kabul area population 1921-2005



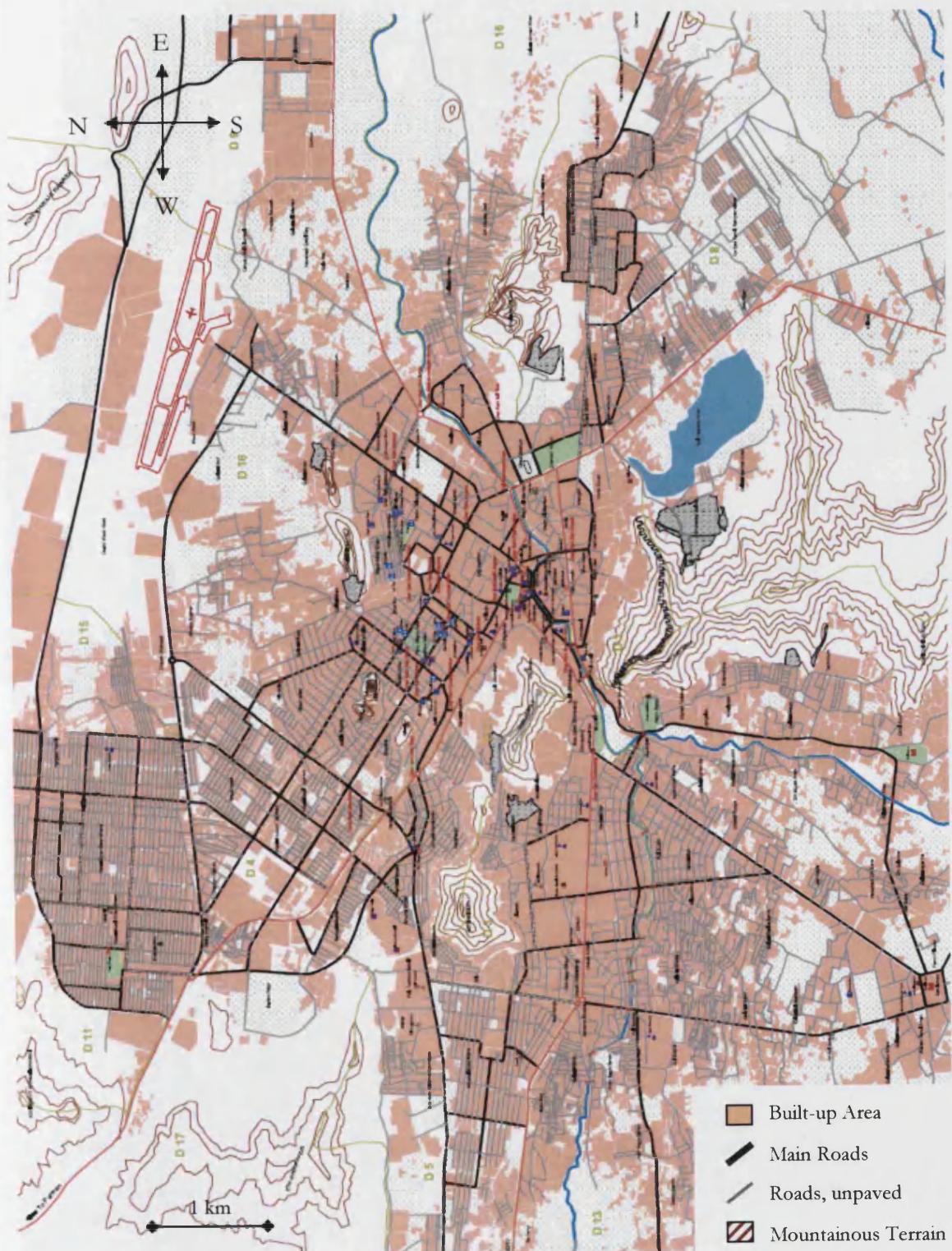


Figure 12: Kabul in 2005

Resonating with demographic and financial trends presented in CHAPTER FOUR, one key informant explained,

“Kabul’s dominance has been the product of post-1945, particularly 1955, the pattern of foreign aid. The urban budget in 1953 was about \$17.5 million, it suddenly jumped up because of the \$100 million that the Soviet Union provided in 1955, this brought with it a large expansion of the bureaucracy, and the bureaucracy was predominantly central in Kabul. The trend of the last years is just opposite. Other cities are all moving in terms of land prices, in Herat, Qandahar, or Jalalabad, or Mazar are all matching Kabul.” (CS-K1)

For sure, other cities were catching up. One interviewee commented,

“The trafficking routes come through Herat city. [...] It affects the city because most people involved in trafficking live in cities. Most people involved have built huge houses and have big cars on the roads so the living standard has come up as a result of the income from the poppy trade. [...] Even the farmers have been able to buy tractors and have dug tube wells and have generators. So it has a significant effect on the standard of living.” (IBA-K9e)

But Kabul remained by far the largest city. Migration into urban centres accelerated further between 2003 and 2005, constituting a “unidirectional flow”, according to one researcher (Opel 2005).⁶⁹ Nearly half of the 997 respondents to a recent survey on labour migration in Kabul, Herat and Jalalabad had arrived less than a year prior to being interviewed, and the predominant motivation for relocation was the scarcity of employment opportunities in rural areas and the perception of cities as offering more promising livelihoods (Beall and Schütte 2006, NPB-K1).

Amid such growth, Kabul was groaning under the increased demand for the most basic services. Reliable electricity has only recently found its way to the semi-peripheral neighbourhoods and some still remain without power. Sewerage systems remain overburdened, which is major source of preventable illnesses and hardship, particularly for more vulnerable residents such as children, widows and the elderly (Image 7 in annex 3). The UN had to issue a cholera alert in June 2005 (UNAMA 2005). Roads are in poor

⁶⁹ Yet while overwhelmingly directed *toward* urban centres, migratory patterns were not exclusively one-way streets. Some Afghans were in fact leaving the capital city after unsuccessfully trying to find a job in the allegedly booming urban economy and collapsing under the continuously soaring rents of up to US\$ 200 for a three-room mud built house in an informal area (McDougall 2006, Salahuddin 2005).

shape and are notoriously blocked for the better half of the day. Yet at the centre of household concerns were rising rents and costs of living, rampant unemployment, and lack of sanitary services (Beall and Esser 2005b). As a humanitarian aid specialist put it: “In Afghanistan, disaster drives urban growth.” (IBA-K3, cf. UN Habitat 2002: 4) The ghost-writers of urban policies for the Afghan government, UN Habitat has ever since been pushing the importance of these matters (cf. TISA 2004a: 10).

Returnees had had a clear preference for relocating in urban areas in order to maintain a standard of living known from eastern Iran, Peshawar and Islamabad in western Pakistan, or elsewhere. Female returnees, in addition to urban services and education opportunities, also perceive cities a more secure environment (Yavari d’Hellencourt et al. 2003: 4). While some improvements regarding the standing of city dwelling women within their own family had been observed by Amnesty International after the cessation of armed fighting, this contrasted starkly with a largely unchanged situation in most rural areas, exacerbated by the slow re-establishment of *sha’nia*-based justice systems outside urban centres (AI 2003b: 7, North 2005a). In some cases, women that had been victims of forced marriages fled to provincial centres or even the capital city in order to seek assistance from international agencies (NRC 2004).

Analyses of the discrepancies between urban centres and the Afghan countryside also pointed to increased opportunities for women’s participation in cities through their integration into the work environment, educational institutions, and civic interest groups (Thier and Chopra 2002: 906). For those most vulnerable, such as widows, cities offered better physical protection in the absence of family and easier access to aid schemes (Yavari d’Hellencourt et al. 2003: 5, cf. Kamal 2004).

An entirely different constituency, three years after the official end of the war Kabul was also filled with expatriates. Indeed, the international aid scene dwelling in the city had repeatedly been accused of living a peaceful and sometimes luxurious life in their “cosy offices” (Koelbl 2005) in Kabul. An

Australian journalist (Beeston 2006, cf. Ladurner 2005) described this life in a ‘hardship duty station’ in poignant words:

“Dusk is falling, and around Kabul the cocktails are being shaken, the delicacies prepared and the city [...] is about to enjoy another night of revelry. The four-wheel-drives of the international aid agencies prowl the backstreets of the upmarket Wazir Akbar Khan district, crowding the entrances to the bars, restaurants and nightclubs that have sprung up there. Despite power cuts, terrorist attacks and the haphazard nature of Afghan life, Kabul is booming. A typical evening for foreigners begins with a discussion about where to meet for drinks and then whether to eat Italian, Thai, Indian, French or Lebanese food. Afterwards there are bars and pool halls run by Russians from Tajikistan, and for those so inclined, brothels packed with Chinese prostitutes.”⁷⁰

It took time until markers of the magnitude of urban poverty and urban vulnerability managed to find their way onto research and policy agendas. Only when practitioners realised that mere presence of aid organisation in cities was often equated with urban development, the latter gradually gained momentum. And due to the lack of arable land, dwindling water resources, and shrinking rural livelihood opportunities coupled with the return of refugees and shift of internally displaced people to urban areas, urbanisation was likely to continue rising. Urban centres and their surrounding areas were thus experiencing “continuing widespread humanitarian needs,” as an international disaster specialist told me.

Kabul Province had also experienced one of the sharpest rises in wage levels, together with Mazar-I-Sharif in the North (CSO 2006: 14). On the labour supply side, higher incomes from dependent agricultural activity closer the capital city were relativised by higher commodity prices. The cost of basic foodstuff such as wheat grain in Kabul City and Kabul Province was among the highest in the country, but unlike other high price areas in which underlying factors were linked to insecurity and poor infrastructure, the price level in and around the capital was due to higher living expenses of those involved in the supply chain, including commercial property rents (*ibid.*, 4). At the bottom line, higher incomes did therefore not automatically translate into a higher standard of living or more food security; on the contrary, the

⁷⁰ A crackdown on prostitution in the capital city was eventually undertaken in February 2006, when 46 Chinese prostitutes working in several ‘guesthouses’ were arrested by the police (*AFP* 2006).

terms of trade of urban and peri-urban residents living close to the capital city were not necessarily better than those dwelling in more isolated areas (ibid., 18), an illustration of what UN Habitat has now come to call the “urban penalty” (UN Habitat 2006b). “This disintegration of relative prices conditions a disintegration of the normative framework,” as one observer puts it (Gerner 2006).

The donor rhetoric of Afghan cities as engines of growth, while conceptually appealing, thus missed the reality of vulnerable urban populations. Earlier attempts, upon the victory against Taliban forces, to encourage rural returns can be considered an implicit admission that the importance of a coherent policy to boost economic growth in urban centres had long been underestimated. Even four years after the termination of major fighting “a very real confusion” (NG-K3) persisted over the responsibilities of various local and national players with regard to urban management and development, “which effectively paralyses any serious urban development initiative.” (ibid.)

Of the 16,830 city hectares of usable terrain encircled by steep mountains, only 1,000 ha had not already been used for construction as of mid-2004. This extreme density in the Kabul River Valley, exacerbated by burgeoning informal settlements, was the background for a US-led envisaged construction of a satellite settlement in the north of the city centre, towards the *Shomali* plain. An aid worker explained,

“We have been directed by the US Congress to spend a lot of money on urban IDPs’ housing, and we worked very hard to get MUDH [Ministry of Urban Development and Housing] to donate some land for an urban upgrading approach. [...] For political and financial reasons the US government is wanting to spend the money, but it will be difficult to get the rest of the satellite city to develop around it, to provide the sustainability of the place.”

This endeavour exemplifies the notion of cross-level ‘axial governance’ fielded in this study (cf. CHAPTER SEVEN) as it found immediate support by high-level staff members in Kabul Municipality’s planning department, which got excited both about the approach to focus on planning new areas rather than engaging in the messy upgrading process pushed by UN Habitat

with the support of major INGOs, and about the obvious budgetary opportunity underlying this construction project.

Yet a staff member of the bilateral donor organisation pushing the project also criticised this initiative, calling it an unviable “Le Corbusier’s dream” and a “real estate deal,” claiming that the cost per family would be ten times the average cost of usual shelter solutions, and accusing influential Afghan investors of buying cheap land in the designated area with the aim of reselling at profit to the government.

Lucrative deals with urban land were indeed to be made. Private capital, both from external accounts and generated through legal and illegal economic activity within the country, was driving the physical reconstruction of Kabul (Magnaldi and Patera 2004). The former Minister of Finance, Ashraf Ghani claimed that “in Kabul alone, US\$ 1.6 billion have gone into investments during the past four years. We need to have a strategy of urban growth.” (Presentation at Chatham House, London: 26 September 2005) Claims made in unison by a number of INGOs that resounded in early 2002 in the context of the financial deprivation of local institutions to support newly arrived urban dwellers *in kind* through the provision of building materials, while rightfully seeking to capitalise on the ingenuity of war-tested Afghans, helped sustain the risky heterogeneity of building quality (in the case of earthquakes or heavy rains; cf. Magnaldi and Patera 2004: 100). What is more, it was also politically counter-productive in that it amplified the problem of informal construction, thus playing into the hands of control-maniacs dominating Kabul Municipality and weakening the leverage of both local and national interest groups advocating a more participatory urban planning process. Besides, *in kind* support also hampered the resurgence of a competitive construction market, thus putting even more strain on small scale carpenter businesses. These had already come under pressure by calls by politically well connected construction companies to curb informal construction and to implement and enforce building regulations, arguably to

slow down construction of small scale informal settlements on high value land in favour of more profitable large scale projects (cf. Basharat 2005).⁷¹

Widespread tenure insecurity was exacerbated by rising rents (Beall and Esser 2005a: 35, cf. World Bank 2006d). Afghan power brokers and organisations with international currency snapped up undamaged property, forcing poorer Afghans into informal settlements ([Image 8 in annex 3](#)). The economic losses of such shifts are dramatic as long as the money and labour invested in these constructions does enter the formal economy through settlement formalisation (Schacher 2004: 74). Johnson and Leslie (2004: 164) have therefore aptly called the urban real estate market “one of the starker examples” of post-war roving banditry by key government figures. “[F]rom the clerks in the municipality who deal with building permissions, to the ministers who quietly offer visiting donor missions and their house to rent (payable offshore, of course),” all levels of local and national government had a role to play in this *bazaar*. Incentivised by the readiness of international development actors to pay New York-level rents, officials extricated both private and public lands by capitalising on the factual power bestowed on them by their official positions (Courtney et al. 2005: 22). A hundredfold leverage on initial ‘investments’ in pseudo-formal documentation from the municipality was the norm, and occasional investigations into cases of corruption-backed land appropriation have regularly been outpaced by the speed of construction on redistributed allotments.

Over the course of the past one hundred years, a shift toward the northwest of the city has taken place with respect to the spatial concentration of upper middle-class and upper-class residents. Whereas the old city used to be the preferred location, these income groups moved to *Shar-i-Naw* to live in the proximity of the royal family during the 1940s. Paralleled in its standards only by the creation of *Wazir Akbar Khan*, the neighbourhood remained the first choice until the late 1990s, when due to the widespread destruction of the city centre those who could afford it moved further northwest in an area

⁷¹ Micro credits aimed at incentivising local upgrading in Kabul also proved largely ineffective because in light of unclear tenure, funds were often used instead to mitigate against sudden survival needs arising in a post-war, deprived local economy (cf. Magnaldi and Patera 2004: 101-102).

called *Qala-i-Malik Tashoor*. Not only has this area undergone a trend towards a gated community, with private security and exclusive supply of water and generator electricity; the spatial shift is also coupled inseparably with the “invasion” of international aid agencies that has driven into the two upscale areas. This concentration drove up prices within months, making subletting of private houses one of the most profitable sources of income in the country (Arez and Dittmann 2005: 145, cf. Brynen 2005: 239, Magnaldi and Patera 2004: 105). “As in cities from Dili to Freetown,” Chesterman (2002: 41-42) explained shortly after the capture of Kabul by the US-backed Northern Alliance, the rental market “has exploded, accompanied by dubious evictions of existing tenants to make way for more lucrative foreign occupants.”

One respondent (NG-K3) urged structural reform, saying, “We cannot continue to portray the ongoing theft and rendering of government land, manipulation of official distributions and uncontrolled—often illegal, underserviced and unproductive—speculative development by powerful commanders on as an inevitable consequence of the war.” Still, another informant rejected the notion that more external aid was needed:

“My submission is that Kabul has an unbelievable amount of potential, but the type of imagination that is necessary to harness this space... I can see making two billion dollars for the government from proper production of space in Kabul without any problem. Kabul does not need foreign aid to put it together. Kabul needs imagination, management, and relentless dialogue to be able to do it.” (CS-K1)

Nonetheless, the majority of buildings erected all over Kabul after 2002—where tens of thousands of mud houses that still remain to be connected to water and power circuits—circumvented the pressing public need for appropriate housing, addressing instead higher-level demands from the increasing number of wealthy ‘businessmen’ and creating “pockets of opulence” (Witte 2005), wealthy neighbourhoods with glittering mansions, Iran-style (Image 9 in annex 3). Older neighbourhoods such as *Wazir Akbar Khan*, one of the more sought after residential areas in Kabul, were increasingly rivalled by new construction projects in *Sherpur*, a former settlement razed and redeveloped in a strongman-backed case of land-

grabbing and redistribution (Suhrke et al. 2004: 45). One respondent explained this conversion of physical capital into political capital as follows.

“There are two types of markets [in Kabul]. One is that money, new money, is replacing old ownership, because of the rise of prices and because of the very large number of immigrants who come and make a windfall profit. Ownership is radically changing. [...] Second is outright seizure, the conversion of political office into control of space. The land scandal in *Sherpur* is one example where people literally translate their positions in office into acquisition. There was a public outrage, the President was outraged, there was some inquiry and some remedial action, but the fact remained that those people really gained. [...] *Political capital got converted into ownership, and this is long-term*. And modalities to be found in this context are in the politics of construction of space, and there, there has been radical shortage of imagination.” (CS-K1)

Without doubt, the economic boom in Kabul is also financed by drug money (Rubin et al. 2004: 13). Asked about opponents of settlement legalisation, one respondent cited drug lords, arguing that “opium is coming [to the city] with a vengeance” – crime had become an *urban* phenomenon: “it’s not just the bad guys in the hills.” (IBA-K3) The reinvestment of incomes from production and trade in narcotics has now even become public policy, with one provincial governor talking openly about an “informal amnesty” for drug lords willing to end their involvement in poppy cultivation and ‘leave their money at home’ in order to help kick-start construction companies and small industrial plants (Cooley 2006, cf. World Bank 2006b: 23). The statement of a high level non-governmental official touched succinctly on this issue:

“Urban real estate prices cannot be separated from circulation of money that I made in a criminalised economy. That demand is very high. The price of an acre of land in some parts of Kabul now is US\$ 1.2 million. Why shouldn’t the public at large benefit from this? So I would like a model of production of land that... a transparent auction of land, and out of that we make €2 billion, €3 billion. [...] The elite will provide the tax base for helping the poor. [...] A formalisation of the illegal settlements [is necessary], because there is no way in the world that the state is able to handle that. The problem is the politics, or the mental models of a place like [UN] Habitat: they take poverty for granted, and they take slums for granted. I don’t buy that model. I want to look at cities as radical centres of growth and as places that are liveable, and as places where there is money. [...] This is not a zero sum game.” [...]

Urban growth actually in one way is a tax on the drug economy, and I really think we should go for a country strategy of a model for the production of space that taxes the high demand for land as a way of funnelling gains that are derived from a criminalised economy, but that economy cannot be prosecuted. So, one way is to actually harnessing into a model of urban production, spatial production. Kabul’s problem

is not shortage of money, it is shortage of imagination. [...] What is lacking is a coherent model of spatial production: definition of the partners in that model, and ensuring that the current holders or owners of land are treated as stakeholders and not deprived of the benefits." (CS-K1)

This would mean dealing with warlords as legitimate business partners. Not so far-fetched an idea, as some of the most prominent human rights violators have already gained comfortable seats in the national parliament.

Historical evidence suggests that similar structures also played a role in state-building in other regions. Charles Tilly's (1985) narrative of state formation in Western Europe is that three major aspects of statehood, namely physical force, capacity of extraction and territorial control, have been at mediaeval warlords' disposal. Yet the key difference with the situation in Afghanistan is that these mediaeval warlords did not have to contest permanently with a central government, while admittedly weak, which continues to be buffered substantially by international forces, both politically and militarily (cf. Mackinlay 2000, Giustozzi 2000). Furthermore, as Jung (2003: 20) points out, warlords of the present day do not depend on local economies to market their extractions as they are well-connected regionally and, as in the case of drug markets, even globally. "The crucial linkage between protection and extraction is therefore severed," explains Jung (ibid.), "and [the] parallel markets of violent expropriation and liberal accumulation coexist." Some former commanders had been extremely successful in integrating themselves and their clans into the urban political economy of the capital city, such as Marshall Fahim, a *Panjsher*, and Sayyaf, a former university lecturer and religious conservative leading the Sunni *Itebat* faction and exerting significant informal power over the Supreme Court (Johnson and Leslie 2004: 163).

What, then, was the scope of controlling such warlords?

A 'benevolent politics, strong private sector' vision (e.g., Esman 2004: 163) on Afghan reconstruction has been the favourite approach of the key external actor, the US Government. Together with democratisation and security, this liberal stance serves as one of the three key pillars of the international strategy to prevent Afghanistan from plunging back into factual anarchy. This view was summarised rather stunningly in October 2002 by

the former US Undersecretary of Treasury for International Affairs, John Taylor (cited in: Heffron 2004: 58). Contemplating the implications of “storefront after storefront [in Kabul] selling uncut logs, bricks, mortar, trials, shovels” in front of a forum at the Council of Foreign Relations he concluded: “I could only imagine the huge improvements in productivity and the better life that pre-cut lumber and cheap saws could bring; perhaps foreign investment by firms like Home Depot could some day be the agents of such change.”

Some of this desired private investor-driven construction is indeed happening, yet without the alleged trickle-down effects. In November 2005, Kabul saw the opening of its first five-star hotel, the *Kabul Serena*. Rooms started at \$250 a night, roughly five times the monthly salary of an Afghan civil servant, and peaked at \$1,200 for the presidential suite. During its inauguration ceremony, President Karzai branded the project a role model of urban development, suggesting that the hotel form the new centre of the capital city (AFP 2005). Only a few days later at the inception of the Kabul City Centre, developed by the non-Afghan Safi Group of Companies (SCG) which purportedly enjoys the high level support of an influential ex-minister, Karzai made a very similar remark, calling the centre a “quantum leap forward” in Afghanistan’s efforts to encourage private investment (GoA 2005b). In the same month, the Afghan government was accepted as an adjoining member to the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (GoA 2005c).

Additional post-war FDI into the capital city’s economy has so far been focusing on construction materials, telecommunications services, agricultural fertilisers, and solar technology (Heise 2005, Chuang 2006).⁷² Tourism has been suggested as one of the more promising sectors for FDI, in spite of the risk of “McDonaldisation and Hiltonisation”, which would eventually eat up the competitive advantage of Afghanistan as an adventure tourism destination. This would require targeted investments into marketing material and basic infrastructure, measures that so far had been hampered by both

⁷² In February 2006, Ariana Television—emitting from Kabul—went international by establishing permanent screen broadcast to the USA via satellite (ATN 2006).

the security situation and different priorities of international and national investors (Woznicki 2005). Yet large scale infrastructure reconstruction comes with a price tag attached, as demonstrated by the 2003 offer of soft loans by a multilateral funding organisation to finance one of the government's top priority projects, a highway from Kabul to Kandahar, which according to one of the most eminent analysts of Afghan politics was capable of "lur[ing] Afghanistan into the debt trap" (Rubin 2003b: 10) – once again, one is tempted to add (cf. CHAPTER FOUR).

Heffron (2004: 65) is therefore making an important observation when he points out the irony of coalitions between "local recidivist forces [...] with apolitical, neoliberal" ones acting on the country's cities in the name of economic development to favour the restoration of an exclusionary structure that promises higher yields for foreign investors, over more equitable reconstruction. Indeed, the *absence of formal political affiliations* among high-level technocratic cadres installed by President Karzai has been singled out as a success factor for "extending the authority and capacity of the Kabul government to the provinces." (Thier 2004: 56)

Yet the influx of foreign capital seeking non-governmental local agents for implementation has led to a creation of parallel institutions vis-à-vis a still embryonic state. Two INGO project supervisors explained, "[1] We are moving up in *creating structures*. [...] It is at the beginning. We are telling them, 'You need to strengthen your shura by supporting people whom you trust.' [2:] In district six, the first talked all the different shuras, and then we gradually managed to convince them that they need a district level representation." (NG-K5). In another organisation, respondents were similarly keen on pushing institutional change, but disagreed on whether this would be easier or more difficult in Kabul when compared to the "rest of the country":

"[1] We are currently thinking about federalising all the different kinds of representative bodies that we've been helping to create. In the countryside, it will be easier; it is a relatively homogenous landscape at the local level. And when you consider the fact that the National Solidarity Program is operating there, which has only recently begun to target peri-urban communities, then you can easily add two and two together. It will be easier to scale up. [...]"

“[2] I think this is not true. The education level in the city is much higher [...]. Also, the community representation structures here are much closer physically to government ministries. [...] Here in the city everything is denser and direct.” (NG-K6)

And while institutions were altered, structures of rent-seeking and distribution remained linked to local “potentates, tribal leaders and notables [who] are bringing together the families who are dependent on them into local user associations [...] and creating relations of dependence and partnership with intermediaries in NGOs in the capital.” (Wimmer and Schetter 2003: 532) This linking of the urban with the rural creates a new form of non-state clientilism—“strengthened by the financial resources of the international donor community, and obstructing the stabilisation of the state authority and legitimacy.” (ibid.)

Seen against this background, it is no surprise that rural-based politicians, alias former commanders, have continued harnessing the frustration of rural folk over the slow pace of rural rehabilitation as a means to “political profiling” against the central government (Paasch 2005), most visible today in the East and South of the country but prevalent in the relatively more stable North and West as well. Nonetheless, disgruntlement over the low percentage of aid monies benefiting Afghan institutions rather than being channelled through international agencies and companies is also rife among the poor in urban areas, and the vigour of widespread frustration among the population in general led to high-level politicians increasingly advocating direct budget support in order to strengthen the central government structure (McMahon 2005).

Responding to my question on whether donors had enough faith in the ability of senior Afghans to make effective policies for Afghanistan, a project leader employed by the municipality answered,

“No. The policies are driven by donors. These are donor-oriented policies. [...] Many of the people that have been living here during a long time have completely been ignored. [...] They do not speak English, but they are educated: they are engineers, doctors... They are not corrupt, but unfortunately they are totally ignored. It’s a discriminatory approach against the people who stayed in Kabul, whether they were members of the [Communist] party or not.” (NPB-K1)

Similarly frustrated by the imposition of foreign schemes and personnel, a ministerial staff member suggested an innovative way out, arguing, “The problem with the donors is that they are pushing their own advisers. My proposal would be a tandem: for every international adviser, we should get five exile Afghans. It is better to have an Afghan expert and a translator than having an international expert and a babysitter.”

Land in a post-war city: myths of an institutional green field

One interviewee for this study struck me with his comment that Kabul was “*not a green field on which one can plan as one wishes*. The current status of land distribution is unclear, but one has to distinguish between private and encroached public land. Private sub-selling means that this is, then, at least technically not informal anymore.” (IBA-K6)

In fact, two competing mandates and even more agendas (including those of international agencies) for land administration in Kabul after the first Bonn peace conference existed. MUDH, replacing the previous Ministry of Housing Building and Town Planning ([Image 10 in annex 3](#)), promoted a private sector model in relation to land and property development, even though the formal private sector is still relatively small, employing well below a quarter of the labour force and run mostly by returnees and local ex-commanders (Mumtaz 2004: 143). Simultaneously however, Kabul Municipality sold large tracts of land to municipal and ministerial staff in hopes of eventually generating future revenue sources.

The MUDH had been created immediately after the cessation of large-scale fighting in early 2002 (Yavari d’Hellencourt et al. 2003: 7-8). One respondent explained, “The initial strong hesitation to invest in urban areas [by the government] was first addressed at the September 2002 conference. [...] This is changing right now, slowly, through World Bank and [UN] Habitat.” (IBA-K2) MUDH’s duties included the formulation and implementation of the national urban development policy, the development of urban master

plans across the country, and supervising adequate service provision and ensuring the adherence to quality and safety standards in the context of larger construction projects. An institutional conflict with Kabul Municipality was thus engrained in its mandate, and ever since its creation it has been regarded as an institution of relative potential and progress among the international community, and as a direct competitor by the senior municipal bureaucrats. The Municipality was tasked with the responsibility to implement the policies and plans of line ministries, yet so too is MUDH—in its defining legislation, the ministry is charged with “formulation *and* implementation of urban development policy. (GoA 2005a, emphasis added).

In early 2003, the Special Property Disputes Resolution Court was divided—through a presidential decree—into two parts: one for Kabul, and one for the rest of the country, the former renamed the “Central” and the latter the “Provincial” court. One informant explained, “The Supreme Court anticipated more cases in Kabul than in the rest of the country, so this chamber got 10 judges and a director, whereas the provincial chamber only got six judges and a director.” (LPB-K5)

However, in practice informal residents in Kabul made little use of it because of its inefficiency and financial constraints. Instead they turned to international agencies for help. 49% of all land disputes to which one INGO provided legal assistance involved coercion at different levels of government, 13% of them commanders, 16% government officials or people from political parties or powerful judges, 13% problems with the municipality, and 7% of them were ‘pure corruption’, unresolved because of bribes demanded by the municipality or court officials (NG-K2). The same respondent also illustrated the poor state of the legal administration system: “Even when you get a court order or a municipal order it has to be enforced and that is not functioning. The police will not necessarily enforce it. There are other people telling them not to enforce it (*ibid.*).”

While this is one illustration of the vibrancy of informal channels, several others existed. Property and land transactions also took place through customary mechanisms such as the *shura* and *jirga*. While these historically

grounded institutions were important given the absence of effective courts and factual rule of law (cf. Sharif 2004: 93), they were also problematic in that participation is restricted to men, they tended to exclude particular groups and interests, and they were susceptible to manipulation and corruption.

What was needed to accompany the process of *de facto* “informal formalisation” (NG-K7) of rapidly growing neighbourhoods in unplanned urban areas was “political support for a process of selective, phased amnesties for those ‘squatters’ who have built adequate shelter for their families on government land, that is, the hillsides in Kabul, and who can prove continuous occupation for a given period – so that their status can be regularised.” (NG-K3) But this was a highly political matter. Said another respondent, “The problems do not come from a lack of laws, as some say. It is the misuse of the existing laws. People just grab the land, and then the laws are not applied.” (NPB-K3)

Together with ten bylaws and regulations on specific urban functions such as cities service taxes, rental rules, land acquisition, and settlements, and settlements, the Municipal Law of Afghanistan (IEoA 2000), decreed during the final months of the Taliban regime and invalidating the previous Municipality Law No. 732 from 1990, was the central constitutional reference point for the organisation of urban polity and finance in the country. In the following, some of its key provisions will be discussed.

Article 5 defines that municipalities’ activities need to be based on the city master plan whose design and amendment is spearheaded by MUDH and its provincial offices. Municipalities’ role is confined to control and supervise implementation. Article 6 mandates that the Mayor of Kabul is nominated by the ‘Emirate Authority’—a Dari term for the Taliban state—, thus rendering Kabul Municipality a part of the central government. Article 11 specifies an ordinary budget funded from 45% of fixed revenues of the municipality. This share may be increased in order to cover basic services, a decision for which approval by the Ministry of Finance must be sought. The remaining 55% of local fixed revenues are to form the Development Budget

of the municipality. In exceptional cases, the central government will contribute to this fund out of its national development budget. Yet while the Law thus provides a rough framework for the financing of urban affairs, it does not specify any particular conditions to be employed by the national government in order to assess the quality of municipal proposals. Constitutionally however, Afghan municipalities are independent entities that can, but do not have to, rely on national financial support.

Responsibilities and authorities of municipalities in the country are listed under Article 16 of the Law. The total of 44 positions include “taking measures to construct streets, playgrounds, public toilets, public baths (*hamam*), markets and civil and cultural centres through private investments in planned areas,” (5) “setting prices of houses based on regulation,” (9) “taking measures for the distribution of land for construction of houses and commercial areas based on relevant regulation”, (10) “land acquisition based on land acquisition law,” (16) “seeking voluntarily assistance of people for taking part in sanitation, greenery and other useful urban services,” (19) “collecting taxes for the city services according to the law,” (23) “inviting and convening meeting[s] on delivery of city services,” (26) “making suggestions in regards to constructions of traffic infrastructure in the city,” and (37) “prevention of construction of unauthorised buildings in collaboration with security forces in the region.”

In its concluding remarks, Article 19 specifies that the municipality “can give appreciation awards to business classes whose behaviour has been compatible with Islam and who have performed their duties to citizens well and properly.” Finally, Article 20 points out that the police, transport authorities, and water and energy supply agencies “are obliged to help [the] municipality in order to implement [the] city master plan and other public services.” In 2003—in accordance with Article 111 of the 1964 national constitution—, an additional Electoral Law for Municipalities (TISA 2003) was passed, mandating that mayors of all municipalities be elected indirectly by the members of municipal councils every three years.

In December 2004, one of the two most senior international advisers to the MUDH circulated a discussion note criticising the insufficient scope and focus of the Municipal Law in Afghanistan and urging substantial amendments (Anonymised 2004). Besides rightly pointing out unclear areas of jurisdiction between the urban and the national levels in the context of master plan implementation and the regulation of development activities, the note advocated explicitly in favour of granting greater autonomy to the Municipality to manage urban land as a valuable asset. It also suggested the acquisition and implementation of computerised Land Information Systems, the setting up of “clear norms for sale of land by municipality [...] through [an] transparent auction process,” regularising and tightening plots, naming of streets and numbering of properties as the basis of valuation, and developing a strategy for emergency releases of land to IDPs.

Its main critique, however, zeroed in on the lack of specificity in the Law in terms of private economic development. The note specified that “municipalities should not be involved in construction of residential houses, as this can be much more effectively done by households and the private sector.” The note went on to urge that “by law municipalities should be obliged to develop policy and programs for poverty reduction” and exhibit a clear commitment to participatory governance and argued,

“a lot more needs to be stated in the Law to institutionalise citizen participation and to define the relationship between the civil society, community organisations and municipalities. [...] Similarly, a set of guidelines for private sector participation in urban development and management has to be developed and included in the Law.”

In its final part, the note provides for an “Expert Committee or a Task Force” to hold consultations and present its recommendations to the government in order to make the “Relevant Government authority take [...] up revision of the Municipal Law.” *International agencies were thus on an explicit mission to change institutions.* This was nothing new in the global arena of international development ‘assistance’; what made it special and noteworthy nonetheless was the fragile and highly dynamic environment of structures

and players in which these attempts took place. The following section will substantiate this point.

The city as frontline:

institutional rigidity and interorganisational competition

The immediate post-war work focus of Kabul Municipality had been set on the renovation of office buildings and representative structures, predominantly with the financial support of international agencies, rudimentary traffic management through the construction of several roundabouts, and lobbying for large-scale housing construction schemes. Urban infrastructure renovation, including the rehabilitation of urban roads, was usually done in conjunction with INGOs, with the Municipality taking what it liked to consider a ‘supervisory role’ (cf. Soave 2004). In 2002, it reportedly had 3,105 workers on its payroll, compared to a total of 792 central government employees charged with supervising and executing urban construction work across the country, with 306 of them working outside the capital city (CSO 2003).

Rather encouraging, the Municipality displayed a basic understanding of its role in the process of urban economic development by trying to maintain the flow of traffic and clearing up areas of illegal or hazardous trading activity along the Kabul River and main intersections, albeit in autocratic and sometimes arbitrary moves. Two participants in a focus group (NG-K5) recalled, “[2:] The television showed a demonstration in front of the municipality. There were a lot of shopkeepers whose shops had been demolished by decree of the municipality in order to make way for road development. [1:] They demanded a solution from the mayor.” Another commentator added, “When the mayor took out these wholesalers away, there was a lot of resistance from commanders, from people with money: they were offering him a lot of money, but he did not accept it.” (NPB-K1)

Nonetheless, “weak urban management” was regularly brought forward as one of the major post-conflict challenges, an area that had received relatively

less *direct* support by international agencies. As outlined above, most regenerative efforts in the urban realm in Afghanistan had been either in physical reconstruction or indirect, through the concentration of relief agencies, their administrations and the resulting demand for skilled and unskilled labour in cities (Djallalzada 2004: 21).⁷³ A local observer wrote in 2002, “The third floor of the Kabul municipality office is a scene of absolute chaos. There is hardly any room to move or breathe as hundreds of desperate Afghans cram the corridors, all shuffling and jostling in their efforts to reach the property office and discover if—at long last—they have been allocated a precious piece of land” (Saeed 2002). Three years later, one respondent still submitted, “The management in nearly all departments and municipalities is really a disaster. They do not know what each other are doing so they are really not informed. In addition from the ministries, which are involved in urban issues, there is no coordination. [...] You cannot blame them because they have to run so rapidly and change what they have learned 25 years ago. But *there should be the possibility to overrule them.*” (IBA-K4)

A study by Beall and Esser (2005a) found respondents repeatedly positing that the ‘municipality people [such as workers, waste collectors or tax collectors] have never come to this neighbourhood.’ Furthermore, “whereas the majority of male respondents said they trusted in their *wakil-e-gozar* [neighbourhood representative appointed by the Municipality], female respondents regularly demanded more say in local decision-making processes. [...] Several respondents also complained about the self-interest and ineptitude of their representatives.” (ibid., 29) For instance, while I was shadowing a meeting of *wakils* with municipal staff one of the *wakils* stood up and said, “If you want me to work on behalf of the community, you should pay me. If you have an imam in the mosque, and now one gives the money, then he will not pray. If you have a shopkeeper, but no one pays him anything, then the shopkeeper will stop selling things. So you will have to pay me for my job.” (NG-K5)

⁷³ Small cash-for-work projects in Kabul usually peaked during the winter season. For instance in 2005, the municipality administered a scheme providing work for 30 days to 2,000 people at a cost of around US\$ 250,000 donated by bilateral agencies (HAAG 2005).

Yet by and large, *wakil-e-gozars* continued having a significant impact on the voicing or oppression of citizens' concerns. Some former representatives used their local political platform to become members of the post-Bonn *Loya Jirga* through the endorsement by the municipality (Breshna 2004: 44). Nonetheless, frustration and confusion about roles and responsibilities among local representatives was widespread. Said one participant in a focus group, “[1] We are poor, the Municipality is only for the warlords. The warlords can force service provision, we can't. We cannot tell the municipal employees that they do a bad job. We don't dare. They all belong to the powerful ministries and factions that in charge of Afghanistan.” (LPB-K9) Residents in Kabul also stated that they were expected to pay a premium for procedures such as registration for housing and neighbourhood upgrading, being received by an official, or obtaining public services. Public officials thus seek to support their admittedly meagre income (between US\$ 35 and US\$ 200 per month). However, this type of corruption is particularly worrisome, for three reasons. First, it undermines further the already weak confidence of residents in the system of urban management. Second, it reduces the prospects for establishing sound taxation systems, thus significantly depleting the municipal resource base. Last, and most significantly, it reduces the asset base of already vulnerable people (Beall and Esser 2005: 31-32; Schütte 2004b).

Though generally committed to working with local bodies, agencies implementing urban projects at the community level in Kabul were acknowledging the challenge that lied in addressing the priorities at different levels, including the sub-city (district) level, a “very time- and resource-consuming [endeavour], often leading to the slowing down of the programme” due to economic opportunities arising in the context of project implementation and staff members “almost immediately [coming] under enormous pressure for favours from the city and district municipality officials.” (MercyCorps 2004) Service provision as a key function of the state was “a relatively new concept” for Afghanistan, with the state until early 20th century mainly administering tax collection and military order through its local representatives in the provinces. As described in CHAPTER FOUR, under communist rule a well-trained cadre of bureaucrats at the provincial level

reported regularly to the central government, but the transmission of information to the centre was arguably more important than the provision of local services (Thier 2004: 56).

UN Habitat had initiated a task force on urban development in mid-2003, comprising of the Ministry of Finance as the lead negotiator and high-level representatives from Kabul Municipality and the Ministry of Urban Development and Housing. But regular meetings of so-called ‘urban focal points’ produced little more than incidental crisis management and failed to render an analysis of the politico-economic situation and on this basis, derive strategies for cooperation and implementation (NG-K3). External finances made available by the donor community have even been suggested to constitute “an overpowering and dominating force in shaping urban development – with the main, decisive element very often being nothing other than the need to speed up the ‘flow of funds.’” (Knapp 2004: 101).

My field interviews confirmed this allegation. One senior official of a bilateral agency boasted: “*We decide* what messages are to get out, to whom, when and why and it is all coordinated with the media. [But] the central government does not have a well functioning political machine” (IBA-K10e) This tension between donors and indigenous implementing organisations was wide-reaching, with the latter caught up between excessive ‘inclusion’ in the form of holding consecutive meetings and the constant pressure to produce reports, and exclusion as a result of remaining distrust on the part of international donors regarding the loyalty and capacity of national and especially local actors (Brynen 2005: 242, cf. Stewart 2006).

At the end of 2003, Kabul Municipality then underwent what Arez and Dittmann (2005: 151) call a “paradigm shift” in its personnel with the reappointment of former Mayor Ghulam Sakhi Noorzad who, during his previous leadership in the late 1970s, had acquired a reputation of not being corrupt and possessing technical understanding (NG-K5). His quest was to resume work on his “long-deferred dream” (Cloud 2005), the implementation of the Soviet designed master plan from 1978, when Kabul had approximately 780,000 inhabitants – as a “means of policy reduction”, as

one respondent argued (IBA-K2). Noorzad's vision was one of wide main streets, shiny ministries based on Russian drafts ([Image 11 in annex 3](#)), and orderly neighbourhoods. "The level of government-encouraged private sector development is insufficient," an international agency staff member argued, "The municipality wants to re-acquire all the land and then develop it. This is completely unrealistic and would also be utterly unaffordable." (IBA-K6) Another interviewee illuminated the functionalist role of urban development saying, "The only sense of accountability from the Mayor of Kabul is that he wants to do things and be seen to be doing things *before the elections*. He is a Karzai appointee and is under a lot of pressure to do things, as is USAID to support him. [...] This is one of the reasons we have a municipal assistance programme." (IBA-K1)

Alarmed by the ongoing influx of rural residents, temporarily in the context of labour migration but also permanently, and (then already outdated) survey by the Municipality conducted in 1999, which found 58,614 housing units—almost half of the city's housing stock—in 'informal areas', the Mayor acknowledged the lack of housing as one of the foremost challenges of urban management in the capital city, but considered forced resettlement of more than 3 million residents as a somehow more feasible policy option than amending the planning framework laid out by a 28-year old map. Trying to explain this position, one senior municipal bureaucrat argued that Kabul was "only for one million people. The recent growth of the urban population is unnatural" (LPB-K2)

Hence the municipality insisted on implementing the outdated master plan and concentrated its own development efforts in planned areas. One of his senior staff explained, "We cannot and must not change or destroy the current master plan, but rather use it as our framework." (LPB-K3) Municipal staff thus displayed a clear lack of political will to address service provision in informal settlements (LPB-K9, cf. Schütte 2005: 25) and did "not see with a keen eye intervention in these neighbourhoods as it conflicts with greater development plans and increases the risk of newcomers settling in." (ACF 2004: 13) Interference on national players into local matters was widespread: "[2:] The Mayor once told us not to work in district ten, because

it does not belong to a planned area. He took his master plan and said, 'If you work here, I will take action against you.' But the previous Minister of Planning, Younos Qanouni, wanted us to work there, so eventually we started working nonetheless. Qanouni is now one of the major opposition leaders." (NG-K5)

Informality also prevented the implementation of a coordinated garbage collection procedure. The municipal official in charge complained, "The unplanned areas are my biggest headache. 4-5 families live in one house. It is very difficult to collect the litter there. So they take the rubbish down to the collection points in planned areas, and that only exacerbates the problem." (LPB-K2) At the same time, national authorities were frustrated by the Municipality's inactivity on the issue, as the following comment by a ministerial department head illustrates: "We tell all the families to put their garbage into the bins, but then there are no bins. My department is not responsible for putting bins everywhere. The Municipality should do that, but they have different priorities [...] The Ministry of Interior helps us pushing environmental infringements, but there are no significant interfaces with the Municipality." (NPB-K10)

Outright misunderstandings were also ripe. One senior municipal planner complained, "I am sceptical of this 'empowerment' idea. [UN] Habitat claims to empower the Municipality. But we cannot destroy the illegal houses in this area because we now need the approval of three different ministries, which we don't get. We have requested police and military to protect the destruction process, but we don't get any. So the Municipality cannot proceed as it has to, according to the Master Plan. This is not empowerment if Habitat does not give the Municipality the autonomy to act!" (LPB-K7)

In 2004, Kabul Municipality lost its authority to approve plans to the MUDH, which has caused a great deal of frustration among municipal bureaucrats. One respondent argued, "Look, the Mayor has the same position as a minister, and Kabul is the national capital. The power the city has needs to be balanced with good services. [...] MUDH should really

focus on provincial centres and decrease its involvement in Kabul affairs.” (LPB-K4a) Another one complained, “The MUDH makes the plans, the Municipality executes. In the current situation, this division of work is not acceptable. We need planning authority in the municipality as well. [...] It’s strange: cities like Jalalabad, Herat and Kandahar want more input and guidance from MUDH but don’t get any. We want to get less and obtain more freedom instead, but they keep telling us what to do.” (LPB-K3) Municipal staff argued that they themselves should be in charge of the city and demand a massive increase in funding in order to develop neighbourhood by neighbourhood, guided by the old master plan or, as they argue, a new plan still to be drawn (NPB-K1).

Apart from planning authority, financial resources were a key issue. “The main problem is that the Ministry of Finance does not give us money. In the past, we simply needed an approval from the Ministry of Planning, but now we need to have our activities approved by the Ministry of Rehabilitation and Reconstruction, the Ministry of Planning and the Ministry of Finance, and this leads nowhere.” (LPB-K4b) Yet what the respondent did not touch on was the reason why the situation had been changed, namely as a result of the Municipality’s approach and reputation.

Even among senior ministerial staff, there were signs that a linear, apolitical vision of urban development was prevailing – sometimes coupled with activities for private gain. One department head interviewed for this study handed me a colourful business card on which a company selling cars and property was advertised, after which he proposed visiting one of “his” construction sites. (NPB-K7) With striking similarity to comments heard in Freetown, he also admitted that urban development could also be a means to another end: “What I’m really hoping for is decongestion or deconcentration, with which I mean that people are going back to the province.” (ibid.) While showing me a map of a Kabul district, an international informant reported saying to the Minister of Urban Development and Housing,

“Look, I brought this to you last week, if this is not urban planning, then what is? This is a planning document, and there are many more down there.’ [...] We need to be constructive. We have to rely on them as counterparts. It is frustrating sometimes, but you have to get past this wall of [four names of highest level staff], and then you have [names of department level staff], and many of them are deeply good people: surveyors, planners. Not all of them straight, some of them got mysteriously wealthy, but sole to the earth people who have technical skills. [At the MUDH] you have a lot of kids with PowerPoint skills who can zip-zap around and place nice icons, but we have to look behind and underneath it and say, ‘Have you done your homework, what is your growth rate, what is your agricultural land projection, and so on.’ So you have these presentation skills together with the old guard planning convictions, so you put two and two together.” (NG-K3)

A senior figure in MUDH stated, “Based on the Master plan we can study, survey, plan, design – this is a clear mandate for us. We don’t need the communities for information.” (NPB-K8) According to another source at this level, urban development would progress from initial surveys and updating maps to liaising with NGOs and other authorities, developing laws and building codes, to then developing an implementation program in consultation with communities and private investors (NPB-K2). One international aid worker joked, “There is a wonderful congruence between the Russian trained and the Islamic rote learning about ‘this is how it is because it says it in the book’. Questioning it is hopeless. And then there is the hierarchical stuff layered on top of this about if the minister says this then it must be so.” (IBA-K5) Nonetheless, some space for planning surprises apparently remained. One head of a ministerial department said in the midst of dramatic gaps in public housing, “We are currently working on a trading centre with 18 flats in the first district of Kabul. This will also include a conference hall. We are also building a mosque in the Parwan province. We see ourselves as designers.” (NPB-K7)

Shortages of housing and service delivery attracted greater attention among international donors and agencies from mid-2004 onward (cf. Mohammad 2004). A national urban policy began to take shape through the development of the National Urban Programme (NUP; cf. TISA 2004a, 2004b). The NUP attempted to provide a framework for informing ongoing urban activities at the community level. With six sub-programmes focused on a wide range of topics, the NUP is ambitious in scope and not without problems. Yet the

process of policy deliberation was far less participatory than the provisions made by the policy itself:

“Let’s face it: they never had to sell the NUP to the people. [...] There is always going to be this kind of sealing for the time being where people’s feelings are being locked out. [...] It is a very imposing process, pushing it down on people. If the donors are dumping huge amounts of money, then what is the government going to do, and what is in for the people? [...] The whole NUP consultative process was very patronising. ‘How we going to approach land...?’ This idea that you can draw a policy in two weeks is completely out of context. This whole workshop process: completely inattentive and culturally insensitive [...]. And then, where was the lead after the workshops? The Ministry of Finance? I told the minister, ‘there is nothing that is not in the NUP!’ [...] Some parts are really contradictory: they are talking about an enabling environment, and then they talk about provision of housing...” (NG-K3)

What is more, the pressure exerted on the programme by the President’s office and ISAF was massive. One interviewee explained, “It is very difficult for donors to push capacity building. It is very frustrating to do development in a highly political environment.” (IBA-K1) Another one was more explicit:

“The president says ‘the only thing that matters is getting projects going on the ground’ and this is because the peace and the political project depends on this. So this is behind the NPPs [National Priority Programmes]. We were advised by planners from ISAF who told us about ‘means and ends’ [...] They said ‘*we are not interested in how you get there, the means and mechanics, just where you end up.*’ [...] There is no end state in the urban sector, it is all process and the end state constantly changes. In some of the other national priority programmes people had similar doubts though but the young ones did not feel confident to challenge them. [...] We set up a planning team to define the five projects and what to do over the ten years as instructed by the military. We came up with the six sub-programmes of the NUP. We had to expect that they would go ahead with or without us anyway and there was a big time concern as they were going so quickly.” (IBA-K5)

“It is an evolving process for the municipality and ministry as well and it is ‘make it up as you go along’ and hope you can deal with the future unanticipated needs later,” another international advisor explained. “In some cases it is easier to do development here than elsewhere because there are no rules, but they can come back to shoot us. *We can get Karzai to issue decrees about this land or that project and those beneficiaries, but it is not a guideline or a rule book in the end.*” (IBA-K1)

Try again, fail better: reinventing urban reality, the second⁷⁴

In April 2005, the US Agency for International Development issued a draft Statement of Work (SOW) in which it outlined large scale urban development projects in the area of water and sanitation to be implemented over the course of several years (USAID 2005). While its general premise regarding the need to invest in Afghan urban infrastructure was certainly justified, every single section suffered from virtual ignorance of any kind of in-depth research undertaken on the capital city and major urban centres during the period of 2001 until 2005. Throughout, the statement was misinformed in its empirical basis and hesitant in its conclusions, making assumptions where sufficient data had already been gathered. For instance, it did not mention corruption in land distribution, nor did it specify the political actors in the urban arena, it misinterpreted the legacy of the master plan (whose existence it denied), it failed to raise political competition over planning supremacy as a major constraint to urban management, instead singling out “cultural attitudes” as the critical factor, and it presented no feasible concept for reconstituting urban polities in order to achieve what it calls a “harmonious reconstruction of municipalities”.

Programme experts from several INGOs working in the area of urban management submitted detailed comments on the paper, and a month later the SOW was withdrawn (NG-K6). But not only this specific proposal drew substantial criticism; the general approach of weaving development into external military control went down badly with some, as the following statement shows:

“I went to an opening of a mosque renovated by the US Embassy. [...] They were occupying the mosque, because it was raining outside, and they put the American flag right in the middle of the mosque, with a big sign saying ‘The United States gave you this...’ I walked in and was frisked by the dogs and people who looked like robots but probably were humans behind dark sunglasses and their protective stuff, greeted a guy that I had been working with, and walked out again. [...] It is just propaganda that comes with a whole ‘neighbourhood lock down’: ‘Don’t go out on the roads, don’t go out on the roofs...’” (NG-K3)

⁷⁴ I have taken the liberty to emulate the title of Cramer’s and Goodhand’s (2002) publication.

Yet the largest post-Taleban urban development scheme for the capital city was submitted for bidding in July 2005. The Kabul Urban Reconstruction Project (KURP), developed by a World Bank consultant and issued by the Ministry of Economy, was the first holistic endeavour comprising of area upgrading (including ‘unplanned’ neighbourhoods), land tenure regularisation, engineering and management support, beefing up the financial management capacity of Kabul Municipality, upgrading structural planning skills and providing a more fruitful investment climate for urban projects, the rehabilitation of main roads, and the implementation of a traffic management system.

One respondent commented, “The World Bank is sensibly putting land management in with the upgrading process. *It may not be a legal paper according to Afghan law but it is a start towards tenure security and you harmonise it all later.*” (IBA-K5) However, the project background information made no mention of the diversity of existing players in the urban political arena, stating instead “Afghanistan’s urban vision [...] for well functioning cities with inclusive, inefficient, and self-sustaining management systems” (GoA 2005a: 44), basically a reiteration of the formulation by the local UN Habitat office developed during a high level workshop on “securing tenure” in June 2004. The project was heavy on (foreign-facilitated) training, but light on political analysis, emphasising the need to strengthen technical and financial management capacity in order to empower local administrative structures. Community mobilisation was mentioned in several occasions as “the most important principle” (ibid., 69), but was regarded as an input factor for delivering needs based upgrading, not as a political resource to build a legitimate counterweight to the remaining grave lack of accountability of the local polity.

In spite of such efforts by the Bank and bilateral agencies, UN Habitat remained the key ghost writer of Afghan urban policy, explaining strategies, outlining processes, initiating technical projects, and organising and hosting conferences. The text for the second phase of the NUP, covering 2006-2009, exemplified this when it outlined that the programme would

“seek to strengthen the institutional and legal framework to create an enabling environment for good urban governance and management. It will pay particular attention to the ‘urbanisation’ of poverty, to urban policy generation and to devising instruments that supports poverty alleviation. This support will be provided within the scope of a co-operation agreement that has been signed between the Ministry of Urban Development & Housing on behalf of the Government of Afghanistan, and UN-HABITAT. UN-HABITAT is also working in close partnership with the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Interior, Kabul Municipality and other provincial municipalities” (UN Habitat 2006a).

Once again, donor language had been applied to post-war reality. As one informant recalled, during a meeting with a multilateral organisation a high-ranking government official suddenly got up and proclaimed, “Listening and understanding are the preconditions for ownership. I do not understand what you are talking about. You need to explain things better if you want us to have ownership.” (IBA-K5) His conclusion was drastic:

“[UN] Habitat is good at the preambles but not the realities. [...] Their proposals are all about mobilising people. They are not ‘at the coal face’ and they are pissing in the wind. *My main interest is seeing projects happen. It is the only way to get things done. I do not agonise about the politics and compromises we have to make.*” (IBA-K5)

In 2006, the World Bank office in Kabul began to buy into the logic of leveraging urban land as a state asset. It embarked on an agenda for land registration, scheduled to be piloted in late 2006 and rolled out in 2007 and 2008, and included the sale of public land in major cities in the poverty reduction strategy for the country, based on a governmental survey “of all urban and peri-urban land that it owns.” (World Bank 2006b: 14-18) Of course the Bank did not break its commitment to market-driven recovery and mandated that the government “use the revenue from the sale or lease of public land [...] to provide the infrastructure and incentives for the private sector to build low-cost housing to be sold or leased to middle and low-income families.” (ibid., 18)

Mirroring the international agenda in Sierra Leone in a remarkable manner, these were considered a vital steps to “reduce migration to cities” (ibid.) and to ensure that “urban development happens rationally [sic] and sustainably (ibid., 42).” The Bank’s strategy concluded by letting the national government argue,

We should not achieve our goal of reducing poverty through raising agricultural productivity at the cost of driving unemployed rural people into cities where there is little employment, housing, or sanitation. Hence our efforts at promoting agricultural development will be balanced by support for the development of rural industries and productive activities in small towns and regional cities, away from Kabul. Even if we succeed in slowing urbanization, however, it will continue, which requires us to find resources to improve the infrastructure in our cities and provide improved housing and urban amenities on a very limited budget. (ibid., 19)

Unlike the situation in Freetown where growth was *assumed* to serve political agendas, the fact that Afghan cities were growing and would continue doing so was thus acknowledged. What continued being absent was an acknowledgement of the conditioning impact the highly politicised ‘urban arena Kabul’ would have on the strategy to accommodate this growth. Instead, the Bank clung to a debatable mix of ‘technical governance’ measures arguably constrained by financial resources. This budgetary constraint was certainly real with respect to the national income; it subsequently became somewhat less acute at the supra-national level, following the most recent donor conference for Afghanistan in London. There, the ‘pro-urban’ shift in priorities by international financial institutions also another expression in a rising share of direct support measures to build government effectiveness, using existing channels like the national budget (World Bank 2005b, 2006a). In this vain, a major bilateral agency announced that would invest US\$ 500 million [500,000,000] into urban development in Afghanistan. Yet what might have appeared to give reason for optimism was once again driven by a vision of “urban development in Kabul to look like a *tabula rasa* type of planning situation. It is basically the same approach that the Russians took... Here we go again.” (NG-K3) In sum, neither the Bank nor bilateral donor agencies—and not even UN Habitat despite its openness to local processes—was ready to engage, actively, with the politics that cut through the different levels and layers of polity, all of them present in the capital city.

Centralism and the pillars of peace: appeasing war by imagining democracy

With reconstruction thus misconceived, the second leg of the international effort to ‘develop’ the country should be given equal consideration. This second pillar was the creation of a nation state and its ‘democratisation,’ and it again had a crucial urban dimension as Kabul for over two centuries has been the declared centre of this—to borrow from Anderson (1991)—“imagined [Afghan] community.”

As outlined in CHAPTER FOUR, only two main societal institutions had historically been *binding* the city and the countryside. First, the bazaar connected rural producers with urban clients. Second, unlike educational institutions, whose graduates have rarely returned to their rural origins, religious establishments such as mosques and Qur'an schools (*madrassas*) were attracting rural students (Yavari d'Hellencourt et al. 2003: 3). Hence if at all, the current nation-building exercise finds a historical precedent in the post-Amanullah reign of the Shah clan during which the first Constitution was written, national holidays were introduced, and contacts between rural areas and foreign areas were encouraged, facilitated by the Afghan Tourist Bureau established in 1958 (Hatch Dupree 2002: 981).

In 2005, the central government announced its plan to renovate the *Darulaman* Parliamentary Palace constructed during Amanullah's reign as a symbol of nation and democracy, more than 75 years after the former King's modernisation campaign had crumbled under fierce traditionalist pressure (Synovitz 2005). The adoption of a nationalist discourse in Afghanistan by parts of the population is linked to the individual experience of displacement by approximately every second Afghan at one point during the Russian occupation, the following civil war, and the international military campaign against the Taliban, which was instrumental in creating a popular spatial-national consciousness, with both internally displaced Afghans and international refugees coming to perceive nationhood as the new smallest common denominator (Schetter 2005: 60, cf. Saeed and Nasrat 2005). At the

same time expectations generated by the concept of nationhood in Afghanistan varied greatly between different educational levels, a phenomenon that coincides with spatial location. Whereas the idea receives emotive acclaim from many younger educated city dwellers, ‘nation’ for rural, usually uneducated residents mainly denotes their weak embeddedness in a state bureaucracy. (Johnson and Leslie 2004: 137) “Since many ‘new ideas’ emerged from Kabul and tried to make inroads into provincial and rural areas, anything coming from beyond the known confines of the community is treated with suspicion.” (ACSF 2004: 29)

Additional resistance against the nation project conceived by international agencies and a Kabul-based intelligentsia—aided by pan-Islamic forces under Pakistani leadership—came from the southeast of the country inhabited by Pushtun tribes among whom the idea of a unified Pushtunistan, which would include areas beyond the Afghan-Pakistan border, has since lost little of its popularity, in particular in light of the recent alienation of Pushtuns from key functions in central government, which has been suggested as one of the key threats to long-term stability (ICG 2003a, Goodson 2001: 179, Banuazizi and Weiner 1986: 8, cf. Schetter 2005: 63-65).⁷⁵

The evolution (or resurgence, as proponents would argue if they ignore the conflicts around nation-building already outlined in CHAPTER FOUR) of national citizenship in Afghanistan was hampered further by the ethnic and tribal fragmentation of the population. A process of an incremental emergence of a feeling of state-bound togetherness envisioned by authors such as Mouffe (1993: 84-85, 1992: 235-26) as an alternative to forging citizenship through the ballot box was therefore out of reach, for the time being. This is so despite the need to ‘be present’ in Kabul, for both political and economic reasons. As one respondent put it, “[2] Kabul is considered a win-or-lose place – either a peaceful political battlefield, or a violent political battlefield. [...] Think of our civil war, when Kabul was divided into zones...” (CS-K3) Another interviewee supported this view and illustrated it as follows.

⁷⁵ Admittedly, the current president is a Pushtun, but is widely regarded part of the expat community, not representing the old school of Pushtun tribal values and social norms.

“I think that we are still in the process of centralisation. You have to centralise before you decentralise. The problem is, once you centralise, will you really decentralise, because the people in Kabul will have all the power. So far, they don’t, because they are still people controlling the provinces. [...] The problem is that this decentralisation process is creating a lot of tension. If, as a rural community, you cannot partake in the system in Kabul, then you are seen as a complete loser.” (NG-K1)

At the time (and still very much so at the time of finishing this study, given the worsening security situation outlined further below in this chapter) there was no reason to believe that the state would be able to assume any kind of developmental role by acting through its local representations (cf. Cramer and Goodhand 2002). But it would do even less so in a possible federation of smaller entities. In fact, the evolution of a unified nation could arguably be justified most compellingly, if at all, by the structure of economic resources on which Afghanistan could build a viable economy on. Trading activity in water, hydropower, and some agricultural goods such as grapes (Afghanistan used to provide 40% of the world’s raisin market in the 1960s and 1970s) all point to the necessity of institutional facilitation of economies of scale (cf. Naby and Frye 2004: 215). Politically, granting provincial leaders more *de jure* autonomy on top of their already far-reaching *de facto* autonomy would have had disastrous consequences at the time (Lister 2007: 10).

In light of these reflections, it appears fair indeed to posit that decentralisation in the Afghan context would indeed exacerbate further the “centrifugal” tendencies (Goodhand 2004: 52) present both prior and after the recent wars, precisely by weakening central ministries and inhibiting national strategic planning (Brynen 2005: 243). An additional disjunction also existed between the centralisation of decision-making in Kabul and the simultaneous creation of local institutions buffered by massive international financial aid, such as through the National Solidarity Programme (NSP, cf. UNOCHA 2003b). Its main purpose was to weaken the link between local citizens and local traditional institutions of power in order to facilitate the connection between local communities and the central state. The NSP concept was certainly not unique to the case of Afghanistan. If one leaves aside the local names, acronyms and abbreviations, the similarity to Hohe’s

(2005: 62-68) description of the community empowerment and community council establishment process in East Timor is striking. Yet Johnson and Leslie (2004: 189-191) have also argued that the National Solidarity Programme ultimately served to weaken the central state because of its failure to incentivise and institutionalise accountability, while at the same time falling short of bolstering sub-national decision-making due to its circumvention of provincial or district-level power holders – in fact the two key objectives it had been set out to achieve.

There are, of course, exceptions. For instance, in one district of Kabul Province, tailoring shops were built and equipped, to the benefit of the communities (LPB-K9). But Boesen (2004: 58) also found that local hierarchies remained intact in spite of the NSP, with elders, landowners and *mullahs* getting elected to local NSP councils. The NSP thus suffered from an inbuilt “risk that they may reproduce existing structures of politics, power and dependency.” (*ibid.*) Scepticism concerning the sustainability of the programme once the massive foreign budget is spent (e.g., Suhrke 2006: 19) is therefore diligent.

In sum, at the time of research there was “really nothing that can be decided in the provinces,” one academic observer pointed out, “the supply of posts and positions is concentrated here in Kabul; everyone who wants to participate in this fight has to come to Kabul, physically.”⁷⁶ And indeed, in line with traditional patterns of holding court it is still common for rural Afghans to travel long distances to Kabul with the expectation of being able to meet a minister or even the President to complain about local circumstances and, regularly, demand the replacement of specific senior bureaucrats (e.g., Giustozzi 2004: 2). Following a popular criticism of inaccessibility, Hamid Karzai once had to explain in a radio interview to calm down enraged citizens that their patience was needed, but he did not discourage them from embarking on such journeys, arguably because it is in the interest of the national government to demonstrate its willingness to deal with provincial conflicts at the centre (*Radio Afghanistan* 2005).

⁷⁶ Antonio Giustozzi, presentation at the American Institute of Afghanistan Studies, Kabul, 4 May 2005.

Suhrke et al. (2004: 16) conclude, “With much international attention focused on Kabul, [...] the different realities in most the provinces continue to challenge the centrist approach.” What is more, leading intellectuals argue that it is precisely the connection between the provinces and the centre that needs to be strengthened – but this is to capacitate policymaking in Kabul, not to empower the periphery: “The space of governance has to be reinvented in Afghanistan, and at the heart of this is reporting. Every province, every district, has to report to the centre on a regular basis. [...] We have to develop matrices of governance where a mechanism of binding the provinces to the centre takes place.”⁷⁷

Pressure by the US-led coalition to hold immediate national elections after the liberation of the country was resisted by the United Nations and the endeavour eventually postponed until 2004, which was considered evidence for a learning process within the organisation that arguably manifested itself as well in the reversed sequence approach taken in Kosovo, where elections were conducted from the municipal level upwards (Reilly 2004: 11, Wimmer and Schetter 2003: 535). In spite of repeated delays, “[p]ressing forward with elections without having first begun the process of building these institutional foundations—including a central government with authority beyond Kabul [...]—is a recipe for continued instability in the country that has no experience with democracy and a long history of violent, zero-sum competition among regional warlords,” as Paris (2004: 127) argues. And Johnson and Leslie (2004: 158-159) indict,

“If the international community imagined a peace agreement, so too it imagined a state; both with what it was (*a terra nullis* on which they could set to work from scratch) and what it should become (a liberal democracy), [thus ignoring] a territory staked out by powerful players who have their feet in the past and their eyes on the future.”

The subsequent parliamentary elections for an Afghan Parliament (*Wolesi Jirga*) in September 2005 were welcomed by most international actors as the “conclusion of the Bonn agreement political transition plan.” (US State Department 2005) The Afghan President found more emotional words

⁷⁷ Ashraf Ghani, presentation at Chatham House, London, 26 September 2005.

during the inaugural session in December 2005, saying “Let me tell the world that Afghanistan is rising *from the ashes of invasion* and will live forever. [emphasis added]” Many others were less convinced. A youth movement leader submitted the following response:

[2:] “Sometimes, democratic structures simply legalise the illegal efforts of some people, like... let’s be straightforward: Rashid Dostum. He is a warlord. [...] What this system [democracy] did was giving him legitimacy. [...] We have a saying in Pushtu: “The donkey is still the same donkey, only the carry bag has changed...” Only his name has changed, from Warlord to Parliamentarian.” (CS-K3)

The seat distribution in the lower house had been determined by population estimates, with Kabul Province occupying the largest share, 33 seats, and the three smallest provinces Nuristan, Nimroz and Panjsher each getting two. The political landscape in Kabul and the country as a whole at that time was highly fragmented. Over 100 political parties were active, and another 40 had applied for registration. “Many of these parties are quite fractionalised,” one respondent explained, “they do have programs, but these are very general. You cannot differentiate between their programs. It is mostly intellectuals within Kabul City that run them, but they don’t have any constituency.” (NPB-K1) Still, some parties had a focus on mobilising urban voters, such as the Republican Party of Afghanistan (*Hizb-e Jumburi-i Khiban-yi Afghanistan*), the National Solidarity Movement (*Nazhat-e Hambastagi Milli*), and Afghan Nation (*Afghan Millat*; ICG 2005c: 7). The same interviewee explained,

“As political parties develop, they are agenda will also include urban development. [...] This is the beginning of a general trend: the nascence of political movements out of city based shuras. [...] Within the Parliament, we can do very little with regard to urban development directly, but hopefully with the coordination with the municipal council that will be elected, we will be able to achieve something. Through the Parliament, we can impose on the government changes in municipal polity. We are going to have to have a coalition with them; without a coalition, it is impossible to work with the municipality. The mayor of Kabul is not cooperating with the Parliament, he won’t be. [...]”

We have to work very closely with the Ministry of Urban Development [and Housing]. They are allies. We can bring them closer to the Parliament; we can develop programmes for them. [...] This will probably look like a political bloc, rather than a formalised institution. It will be around issues. If some think that we should remove all the blockades of the coalition forces in Kabul to clean up the streets, or even to remove all the military bases from within the city boundary... For this, I could get the support of other parliamentarians!” (NPB-K1)

Partisan candidacies were possible, but political parties had been discredited so substantially as a result of the failed attempt to establish communism in the country two decades earlier that in the end, almost all candidates preferred running individually, backed by ethnic or tribal loyalties. Two members of a focus group explained, “[2]: In the history of Afghanistan, with all the parties that had power, we have made a terrible experience with parties. We are not happy to choose candidates who try to run on a party ticket.” [3]: “It could be a disadvantage to be a member of a party. People want good government.” (CS-K2, cf. Witte 2005b). Of course, there were exceptions: “Among older *Kabulis*, political parties have a strong constituency – among the returnees probably not. The refugee vote is a mystery to all analysts, what is clear is only the importance of this constituency. [...] It is much easier to target the old *Kabuli* constituency, because it is much more established.” (NG-K1)

Yet with only 36% of registered voters, the turnout in Kabul was significantly lower than the national average, which was 53%, and even more sluggish in comparison with the 75% turnout for the presidential elections in the previous year (BBCNews 2005a). The most commonly cited reasons for this reluctance was the oversupply of candidates (cf. Birsel 2006), including suspected war criminals, and the undersupply of information on priorities of programs (where they existed) and the general frustration among the urban population—“a palpable air of disillusionment”, as the ICG (2006: 4) puts it—generated by the immediate proximity to the riches that the reconstruction process has generated for a small minority (cf. Biswas 2005). What is more, pro-urban coalitions were an option, but not guaranteed:

“I would like to think that some of the 33 members of the newly elected parliament have leverage on deciding how urban development in Kabul is being approached [...] but I think there is a bit of a danger of going back to the shape of government that the country had in the 1950s and before, when people use their representative, tribal representatives or whatever, to put pressure on the government to get something for your local place, jobs and clinics and all that. Politics had multiple entry points, particularly vertically.” (NG-K3)

Provincial councils had been elected simultaneously, but their responsibilities would remain confined to “participating in development” and “advising

administrators”, as the national constitution specifies opaquely in its article 138, leaving a question mark particularly behind their relationship with the Kabul-appointed provincial governors and thus bearing the “risk that a potentially effective mechanism for local government might be forever marginalized” (Tarzi 2005). One commentator even argued that candidates had “no idea of their role, responsibility of powers once they are elected.” (Rashid 2005) Not surprisingly then, during the first meeting of provincial council members in March 2006, the protest against this institutionalised powerlessness was vociferous. The Speaker of the congregation and head of the provincial council of Kabul Province explained that apart from appropriate meeting facilities—two rooms for up to 30 delegates in the case of Kabul Province are currently the norm—, members wanted genuine oversight over provincial policies, the right to remove or appoint district level personnel, and effective control of budgets (IWPR 2006a).

The enlightenment argument that has been fielded to explain the capital city based opposition movement in Sierra Leone certainly falls short in the case of Kabul, where one of the most powerful warlords and leader of the Sunni *Itehat*, Abdurrab Rasul Sayyaf, finished the political race for parliament on fifth place, gaining himself a comfortable seat in the new system. Even more, during the first session of the house, Sayyaf, who thanks to his continuing political proximity to the current president has multiplied his war-won wealth by reinvesting it into housing development projects in unplanned areas acquired directly from the central government under obscure circumstances, missed the additional honour of being elected Speaker of the House only through a razor-thin defeat, losing 117 to 122 votes in favour of the leader of the ethnic opposition, the Tajik *mujahed* Younos Qanouni (Witte 2005c). In spite of this denial of ultimate triumph, Sayyaf nonetheless is a picture book example of the fusion of the economic and the political sphere in a highly fluid polity. In Herat—the second most important city economically—, the absolute power wielded for decades by Ismail Khan, one of the earliest *mujahedin* and authoritarian ruler of the border city and its surrounding districts, was challenged successfully—surprisingly even to informed observers—by a female aerobics instructor sporting a “beguiling campaign poster”, as *The Economist* (2005) put it smirkingly, suggesting that

“perhaps politics in Afghanistan can become more ordinary than people imagine.” In essence however, more in-depth knowledge of political agendas was reflected neither in the comparatively low turnout in cities nor—while anecdotal—by such ambiguous results.

This mixed bag notwithstanding, the theme of Kabul as the locus of frictions between modernist and traditionalist forces had lost nothing of its significance (cf. Poya 2005, Sands 2006). Kabul’s radio stations were being controlled meticulously by city-based religious authorities, including the Ministry of Religious Affairs, but nonetheless scored occasional successes. For instance, Radio *Qarabagh* once cited letters from listeners complaining about the city’s mayor using a teachers’ day ceremony to make political statements praising the *mujahedin*. The mayor was quick to deny the allegation and asked a local *shura* [religious council comprising of *mullahs* and elders] to intervene. The *shura*, however, eventually ruled in favour of the radio station (Kumar 2006: 266, cf. Mojumdar 2005). In light of these frictions, an image that characterises the competition over public values as a fight between ‘the urban’ and ‘the rural’ would be a starkly simplified representation of social reality in Afghanistan. Quite the contrary, these standoffs were taking place *within* the capital city. In such a diverse environment, apolitical and secular notions of a ‘city-based Afghan civil society’ that would effectively balance and check the power of the state and its enemies at various levels are evidently unrealistic.

Such hopes ignore the social prestige that religious scholars continue to enjoy among *both* rural and urban populations, and while particularly urban residents are often dissatisfied with the remaining social hierarchy, advice by religious *shuras* is not easily ignored (Johnson and Leslie 2004: 40). Furthermore, is not unusual that *shuras* become vocal against government decisions or even individual officials. The three circles of power—clans, government, and religion—are not eclipsing one another; there is overlapping but also redefinition and repositioning. An assumption that religious structures and their priorities are somehow identical with state structures, both united against the citizenry, would therefore be misguided both conceptually and empirically. In fact, assistance by international actors

to city-based secular organisations have regularly turned out as indirect business development, supporting ‘suitcase NGOs’ and refusing to acknowledge the opportunities that lies in a little-understood religion-based civil society.

In sum, a depoliticised approach to civic revitalisation in Afghanistan such as through the equation of farmer organisations—which are motivated economically—as civil society (Rondinelli and Montgomery 2004: 233) appears ahistorical. The concept’s transferability is rendered limited in a social environment of networks that are oriented around extended family ties and ethnicity rather than clustering dynamically around specifically defined public interests. What is more, if the social capabilities embedded in tribal and traditional structures were to be excluded *ex ante* (Schmeidl 2004), then efforts to ‘build a civil society’ in Afghanistan are even doubly misguided.

When failure is bad: the Afghan leopard is getting hungry again

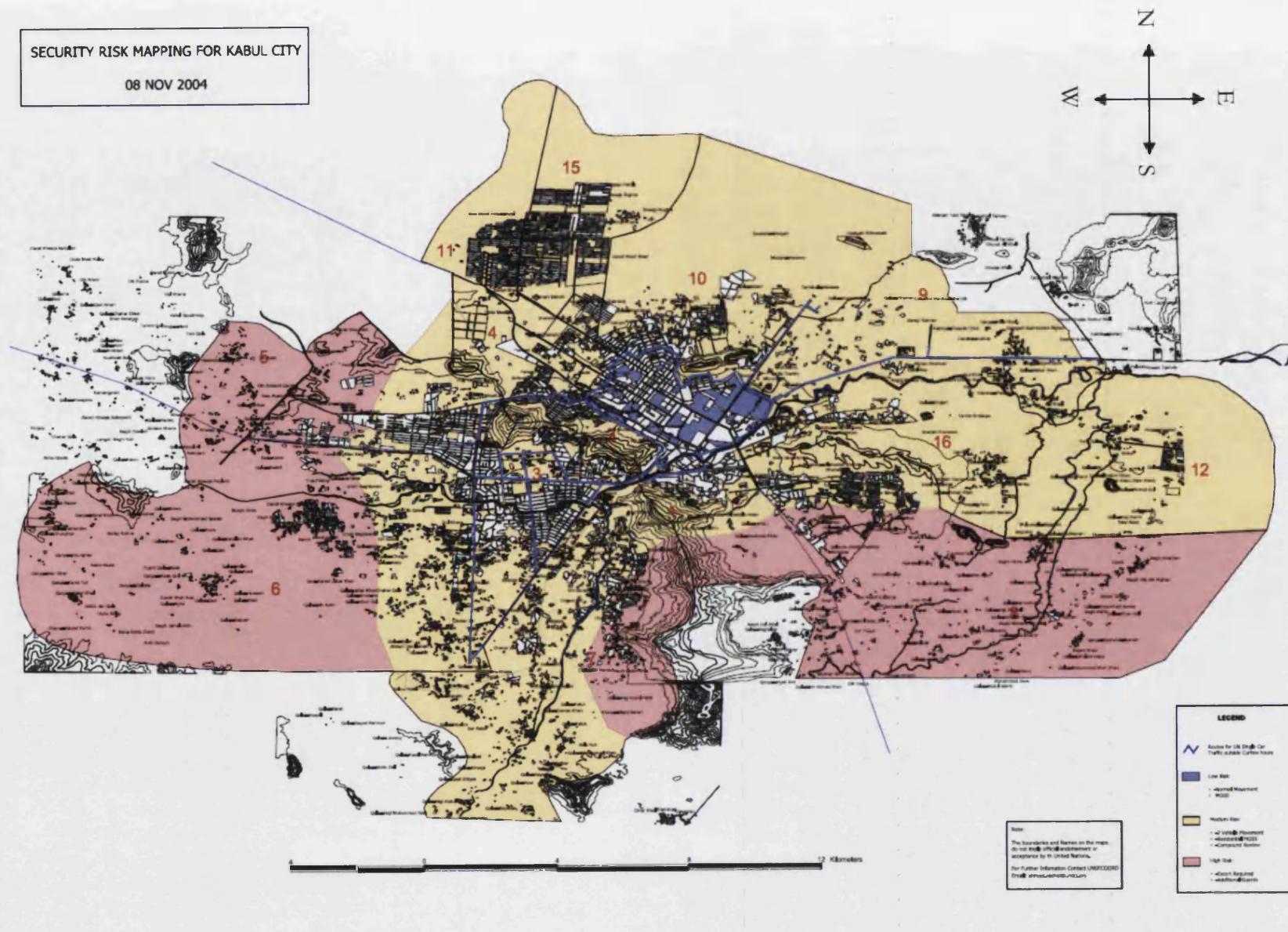
In addition to these conceptual flaws—and indeed common to conflict environments in general—civic activity in Kabul and beyond was also hindered substantially by a fragile and subsequently worsening security situation. The choice of Kabul as the seat of ISAF headquarters contributed to the creation of a “protected enclave”, a manifestation of the international community’s priority to “[p]rotecting and promoting fledgling institutions of the [central] state [...] rather than security for the population.” (Goodhand 2004: 76, ICG 2005b: 7, cf. Rubin et al. 2005: 36). One informant in Herat argued, “Herat is well off, but in Kabul it is more like 50-50. And those well off in Kabul are well off partly because ISAF is there protecting everyone, and from the per diems of international agencies.” (IBA-K10e) ISAF tried hard indeed to win the city residents’ goodwill by supporting physical reconstruction and even publishing a newspaper in Dari (and English!) to publicise their work ([Image 12 in annex 3](#)). Still, the allocation of a disproportionate amount of resources and attention to maintaining security in the political centre also created opportunities for insurgency in the periphery and fragmented the process of increasing countrywide security

“along a rural-urban axis” (Sedra and Middlebrook 2004: 8, cf. Rubin et al. 2005: 70).

This does not imply that the city was a safe space. Criminal activity made it unwise to roam around after nightfall. During the day, security was maintained through the presence of several dozens of ISAF peacekeepers in military vehicles speeding through the city. Even though *reported* homicide rates were lower in 2002 than in many large Western cities (ISAF 2004), the dark figure was estimated to be a multiple of the official number (cf. Esser 2004b). As one journalist put it, “Kabul is not really a city, but a wilderness in urban decoration.” (Zekri 2003, author’s translation)

In 2004, the situation in Kabul worsened significantly for Afghans as well as foreigners. Most of the city’s districts were considered unsafe for international staff. The ‘Kabul City risk map’ depicted on the following page and published by UNAMA in November 2004 illustrates this. The small blue areas were the only ones considered at ‘low risk’, yellow areas were assessed to be medium risk, and red zones were out of bounds.

Figure 13: Kabul City risk map, November 2004



Since then, the numbers of robberies, abductions for ransom, and bomb attacks have been on the increase (cf. ANSO 2005a). Suicide bombings—previously unusual in Afghanistan—have targeted urban centres. Kabul, Kandahar, Herat and Jalalabad had the highest incidence rates (BBCNews 2006, Evans 2006, Paasch 2005, North 2005b, 2005c, 2005e). Occasionally very rural ‘tools’ would be used to create havoc, such as in the case of a donkey-borne bomb exploding in Faizabad City in December 2005, aimed at the military target but damaging an off-road vehicle used by an INGO without causing human casualties (ANSO 2005b).⁷⁸

The Afghan President also saw himself confronted with public complaints about the quality of police in the capital city that remained under national authorities such as the National Security Department and the Ministry of Interior. He responded by pointing to the difficulty of the task but avoided to discuss the dissolution of policing authority to the city level, or heterogenising the police force (Radio Afghanistan 2005). The ethnic division of public service organisations is probably most visible in the case of the police and security apparatus, in which approximately 80% of officials are Tajiks (Khabir 2003: 622; Esser 2004b). Police forces based in the capital city and in particular their senior officers had remained disconnected from the rest of the country due both to a lack of technical equipment and unclear governance structures, with local commanders often also claiming the function of local policing (AI 2003a: 28).

Amnesty International documented that a former military leader, General Salangi, operated as the *quasi* head of Kabul police, commanding a ten thousand strong force and wielding “much actual power”. At the same time, General Jurat, the ‘Head of Security and Public Controls’, was controlling his own force of 4,000 policemen that focused on controlling main public infrastructure and regularly erected checkpoints within the city (ibid., 8). In addition, several former military commanders managed to maintain policing powers in their neighbourhoods. The reputation of urban police forces continued to be poor, partly an effect of the recruitment practices prevalent

⁷⁸ No further information was available about the donkey. Its demise must be assumed.

during the first two years after the victory against the Taleban. “Many armed men have been systematically drafted into the local police force, both because of an acute shortage of security personnel and in order to control them and prevent further criminal acts. However, Afghan policemen, many of whom are paid irregularly [US\$ 17 per month in mid-2004], commit a significant number of the criminal acts in Kabul.” (Esser 2004b: 34)

The public in lead nations in the reconstruction effort in Afghanistan became increasingly worried amid the ineffectiveness of current strategies, exemplified in *The Independent*’s full front-page accusation that the recipient government continued to be “trapped in its own fortified compound in the capital” (*The Independent* 2006: 1). In February 2006, Kabul witnessed its first full-blown bank robbery in the post-Taleban era when six robbers escaped with US\$ 320,000 killing one policeman and injuring a guard and a child (*The Daily Outlook* 2006). Political violence reached a new peak in March 2006 with the assassination attempt of the newly elected Speaker of the upper house in the middle of Kabul city centre, killing four bystanders. According to high-level Afghan government officials, the attack had been organised by the Pakistani intelligence service ISI in order to destabilise the new political system (Bokhari and Morarjee 2006).

Embedded in an upsurge of fighting between government troops, coalition forces and insurgent groups in the south of the country, in May 2006 Kabul experienced the most serious rioting since the fall of the Taleban. Following a road accident involving a US American truck, approximately 2,000 protesters chanted anti-government slogans, burned vehicles, and marched towards the upscale neighbourhoods of *Shar-i-Naw* and *Wazir Akbar Khan* where they threatened international staff and ransacked offices of several INGOs. 16 protesters were shot dead by local police and, allegedly, also by hastily retreating American troops. One police officer was killed as well. Over a hundred demonstrators were injured (Gall 2006, IWPR 2006b).

The President himself was quick in blaming the incident on the insurgency movement, calling the incident a tragic accident taken advantage of by the “enemies of Afghanistan” (quoted in: CNN 2006), and the Senate Speaker

claimed to have seen “red flags” and concluded, “It appears that the communists also played a role in this.” (quoted in: *Pajwok* 2006) Events in the aftermath suggested that political power play had indeed fed into the outbreak of the riot. A commander from the *Shomali* plain with a blotchy human rights record, Amanullah Gozar was appointed police chief for Kabul as a demand by the representatives of the rioters. Soon after President Karzai was criticised publicly by the German Government, who is training the police, for this appointment. At the same time, both scale and vigour of the riot have also been linked convincingly to the “excruciatingly slow pace of change” (*ibid.*) regarding the (non-)progress of development in the capital city, giving rise to a common feeling of neglect by and mismanagement of international aid expenditure among its residents (Leithead 2006). This perception constitutes a readily exploitable and growing basis for political agency, and *Jamiat-e-Islami*, a prominent traditionalist faction in the national parliament was singled out by several analysts as a “likely culprit” of sending groups of agitators and instigating the masses, thus creating several epicentres of protest in the city (TWPR 2006c).

By the time of completion of this study, the situation had worsened. In June 2007, a suicide bomber drove his dynamite-packed car into a bus carrying three dozen policemen, all of whom were killed (*BBCNews* 2007a). This was the most devastating attack that struck Kabul since the ousting of the Taliban six years earlier. It also marked a strategic shift by the insurgency whose fighters were moving away from all-out assaults in open terrain, intensifying instead their suicide attacks within the capital city as a crucial means to weaken the central government and also as an expression of their renewed desire “to surround Kabul and eventually capture it.” (Simpson 2007, cf. *BBCNews* 2007b). Predating this most recent escalation, an already known charge (ch. Hersh and CS-K3 in CHAPTER FOUR) of President Karzai as “*a type of Mayor of Kabul* [...] insofar as control of territory is concerned” was revived by former US Secretary of State Albright (Albright 2006; author’s translation). Soon after, Pakistan’s leader Pervez Musharraf invigorated this image by claiming that Karzai was “the best man for Kabul [...] but he doesn’t understand Afghanistan.” (cited in: *The Economist* 2006b: 36) While these comments were uttered under the impression of resurfacing

countrywide unrest, they epitomise the political arena that was, and is, Kabul (cf. Gotsch 2004: 130). Tragically, the crucial question of how to make Kabul work for its inhabitants amid worsening security and facing the dominance of a private sector-driven, apolitical narrative has remained unanswered.

Chapter 7:

Trial, error, and the reconceptionalisation of urban analysis

The politics of polity and policies: what do the empirical data tell us?

A comparison of constitutive factors of society that remained attached to the post-war urban sphere shall serve as the entry point to our empirical and theoretical synthesis. While not benefiting urban economic development in Freetown directly, political power (at the national level), social attractiveness, military might, and—to some extent—economic resources proved ‘spatially sticky’. Even after the conflict, decision-making power was retained in the urban arena as a result of propinquity as well as fragmented constituencies in the provinces. Socially, the predominantly young population of Sierra Leone still regarded the capital city as the place where opportunities were ‘lying on the street’. And with regard to military control, the national government went unchallenged. Indeed, only economic power remained divided between urban non-Sierra Leoneans, a handful of political entrepreneurs, and international mining companies.

By contrast, only two of these factors were predominant in Kabul. One has been the politic-economic power to coordinate reconstruction—the capital city as the centre of the nation-building project, locus of cooperation, collusion and coercion between international and national policymakers, and hub for aid distribution—, yet not the power to control the process country-wide. The other factor lies in the social dimension, exemplified by a significantly greater degree of civil liberties and relatively broader service coverage. Conversely, an overwhelming amount of indigenous resources is dispersed and non-taxable by the centre (e.g., drugs, contraband, provincial commanders controlling border trade), and military power is wielded by international forces and applied to provinces hosting resistance forces and illegal production, particularly in the East and the Southeast of the country where insurgency and the drug trade are often linked. Even security in the Kabul depends largely on international forces.

Not surprising then, in light of these differences in post-war polities in Sierra Leone and Afghanistan contemporary governance reform agendas for the two countries were diametrical. As CHAPTER FIVE has illustrated, the declared appeasement strategy for Sierra Leone was a quest for decentralisation through the creation of 'better' institutions at the local level, whereas political and physical reconstruction in Afghanistan, outlined in CHAPTER SIX, had been informed by the proverbial allegation that the national government's leverage hardly extends beyond the capital city's borders.⁷⁹ Here, international measures have focused on countering the economic *de-facto* decentralisation of Afghanistan deriving mostly from rural poppy incomes and illegal customs. This has been sidelined with neo-nationalistic moves, including the repatriation of the late king to Kabul and the proclamation of the late Shah Massoud as the father of the nation (suggesting a state of mind that he hardly displayed when defending the Tajik-held *Panj'sher Valley* against invaders, including other Afghan tribes). It has also manifested itself in the NSP, which sought to empower local communities *vis-à-vis* provincial power holders and seeks binding them, through direct local budget support, more closely to the national centre and its ministries.

These differences also found expression at the city level. When we apply Clarke's (1987: 112-114, cf. CHAPTER TWO) policy response framework to Freetown and Kabul, we see how institutional dynamics regarding incentive structures for responsiveness by the municipalities in Freetown and Kabul differed. In Freetown during the past three decades, the historically rigid majority for the APC, in conjunction with the central state-imposed period of an appointed urban management board, created a lack of civic leverage. After the recent polity reform however, the constitutional framework in Sierra Leone regulates, at least *de jure*, both the tasks and the financial discretion of the municipality, and city politicians and municipal officials are struggling to preserve a minimal degree of political leverage *vis-à-vis* the national state. In Kabul, democratic structures at the municipal level have yet

⁷⁹ The degree of physical destruction in the course of violent conflict differed starkly as well. Kabul was mostly reduced to rubble, whereas in Freetown only a few neighbourhoods were affected severely.

to be implemented, and until recently a highly autonomous municipality continued operating under planning norms of the Soviet regime. However, change has been happening here as well. While still insulated from electorate pressure, the Municipality has been incentivised—and partly forced—to stabilise its budget and compromise on its initial degree of autonomy as a consequence of its devotion to outdated strategies of urban development. How can these parameters be interpreted?

Even though I have outlined in the sub-section on Urban Regime Analysis (URA) in CHAPTER TWO why Kantor et al.'s (1997: 349-350) framework to analyse different types of regimes in industrialised cities can only to a very limited extent be applied to non-democratic, non-capitalist environments—the authors themselves conclude that their “framework suggests caution in attempting to transfer policies to cities with very different structural soils (*ibid.*, 371)”—, some key parallels of this present study with their analysis are striking and appear to reinvigorate Robinson's (2006) argument. When Kantor et al. argue that Detroit be characterised as a '*dependant private, vendor regime*' city where popular participation is low, coalitions are confined to “government and a few businesses” (as opposed to being open to parties, unions, and residents at large), the “mode of public-private cooperation” is “business-led” (i.e., not party or social movement-driven), and the “policy agenda for collective benefits” is “selective, including side payments”, it would be ignorant to deny a conspicuous similarity with post-war reality in Kabul. A similarly arresting observation can be made in the case of Freetown. Following the taxonomy by Kantor et al., Naples is classified as a '*dependent public, clientelist regime*' city based on the observation that (effective) popular participation is (again) low, coalitions are limited to “party elites” organised around “patron-client relationships”, public-private cooperation is party-led, and selective benefits and side payments are embedded in “manifest corruption” (*ibid.*, 369) – isn't this rather analogous to the situation found to prevail in the capital city of Sierra Leone?

Yet I argue that acknowledging these admittedly surprising parallels without seeking to elucidate further the underlying drivers of such constellations would fall into precisely the same 'localist trap' of URA that I have already

pointed to in CHAPTER TWO. It is obvious that in the two cities investigated, the degrees of political and socio-economic dynamics over the course of the past two decades would render a potential hypothesis of 'stable urban regimes' with little explanatory power. Particularly in the extremely fragile polities in regional zones of conflict looked at in this study, the role of international agents in strengthening or weakening the state and its organisation and institutions at various levels has been essential, and this limits the ordinariness of post-war politics in Freetown and Kabul.

Moreover, despite these justifiably different classifications responsive measures by international actors in both settings were remarkably similar, thus confirming suspicions of—at least in part—a blue-print approach. During the first years of 'peace', urban development had not been a priority in either of the countries. Resources had been channelled into the creation of rural livelihoods, even though the scale and scope of urban management challenges was alarming in both cities. Moreover, while colonially induced physical segregation between foreigners, Creoles, and native hinterland migrants has indeed been a factor in the formation and spatial development of Freetown—and as much as this legacy lives on until the present day through the built environment—this does resemble the trajectory of spatial patterns in Kabul, characterised by the rise of several distinguishable neighbourhoods which, also because of rising rents driven by the 'need for space' among international organisations, constitute *de facto* exclusive urban quarters, both in the past and even more forcefully so in the present, as an outcome of the post-war urban economy.

In addition, the crucial "regional dimension" (Pugh and Cooper 2004) of both conflicts exemplifies two similar geographies of power. Both central governments are located in taxable voids, with diamonds in Sierra Leone either mined illicitly and exported through circumvention of the capital city (both financially and physically) or by benefiting foreign stakeholders in international supply chains, and opium in Afghanistan crowding out potential 'cash crops' for the rural population and the central administration and, because of its illegality, being shipped out of the country via the nearest border crossing (cf. Rubin et al. 2004: 7).

At the same time—in Freetown and in Kabul—, patronage networks financed by international aid were *orchestrated from* (but not concentrated in) the cities. Political links to the rural constituency provided traditional participants in the political arena located in the capital city with crucial leverage to compensate for their lack of policy support by donor agencies (cf. Rubin 2002: 66-69). With massive flows of aid money being channelled through the two cities, urban rent-seeking by non-urban actors—be it at the micro level through continuing in-migration, through existing patronage networks or through ‘high politics’ in the form of national institutions’ capture of financial flows, appears to constitute another parallel.

Migdal’s (1988: 33) contention that state leaders are not only constrained by state structures, but also by actors in the political economy that do not necessarily operate within the realm of the state (he cites chiefs, landlords, bosses, rich peasants, clan leaders, etc) thus resonates forcefully with the findings of this study even though the latter had been set up to focus primarily on *urban, not national*, politics. But as the empirical investigation has shown, separating lines between these two spheres in capital cities in fragile states are fuzzy.

Important against the background of this argument and also the aforementioned debate on whether Freetown and Kabul are rather ‘extraordinary’ cities is the recognition that deliberate attempts by national authorities to hinder or capture local politics is not a unique phenomenon. Both for budgetary reasons and in order to control potential or actual political opponents, the dissolution of local government on accusations of mismanagement or ineffectiveness has been a strategy pursued by many other national governments in sub-Saharan Africa and beyond, and Stren (1989: 32-35) exemplifies this through the case of the suspension of the Nairobi City Council in 1983. Stren concludes that these manoeuvres visualised the “contours of the central-local struggle that is endemic within political systems in which substantial *institutional* resources have been developed at the local level. [emphasis added]” While in a different context, it appears intriguing that Stren focuses on institutional resources (as opposed

to economic resources), which appears to make his conclusion even more poignant for the case of post-war cities where economic recovery is only just beginning but where institutional legacies from pre-war times exist and persist, as demonstrated in the previous chapters. Likewise, the call for physical deconcentration in order to deconcentrate poverty and political opposition away from capital cities—as described here in the case study of Freetown—is not unprecedented; it resembles the gentrification agenda for North American and Western European cities during the 1980s and 1990s.

Yet a key question in the context of this study's comparative perspective is whether the political potential that is inherent in the thorny process of implementing such a policy can be harnessed by local agents in a post-war context to the same extent as it has been observed in some cases in economically and politically more institutionalised settings (cf. Goetz 2000). In light of population dynamics and dire poverty, this appears unlikely in general; in the cases of Sierra Leone and Afghanistan it has certainly not happened. Despite the diametrical direction of politico-spatial planning in Freetown and Kabul, my research has unearthed significant cleavages *between* city-based groups that can be traced to pre-war times, as well as structures that favour a small group of the countries' elites. These, too, have strong pre-war precedents. In sum, 'the city' and 'the hinterland' cannot be characterised as a sharp dichotomy. In both Sierra Leone and Afghanistan there have been manifold connections between the two spheres, and important power struggles have taken place *within* the capital city.

Of course it would be foolhardy to deny that basic infrastructure and service provision in urban centres is better. Even so, the basic point here is that there was no "poor countryside-rich city" pattern. This is also partly true because of forced migration and internal displacement during the various eras of large-scale violence, which greatly increased the pressure on urban systems. One key informant in Kabul argued,

"Kabul now has a new group of residents who have come from other cities or from the surrounding areas, and they are undergoing a rapid process of urbanisation, but the question of whether they are really urban yet in terms of the old definition of Kabul—and I'm not defending the old definition, I am saying this is an analytic

problem—and what is the social capital that was found around neighbourhoods and networks, and how that can be redone is an empirical question in need of investigation.” (CS-K1)

We can thus infer how Smith’s (1996) ‘post-Liptonist’ argument of an *intra-urban division* informs our journey to reformulate urban analysis for post-war cities. But as CHAPTERS FIVE and SIX have shown, donors’ priorities were clearly focused at other issues and, certainly with regard to sequence, also at other levels of polity. In Afghanistan, both national and provincial elections were a non-partisan endeavour, with agencies fielding the argument that the concept of parties had a negative connotation after the negative experience under imposed communism, and that the appeal of political parties was low anyhow. This was endorsed immediately by the country’s President who had made previous remarks on party politics as a cause of war and instability, officially on the grounds of operational ease (i.e., vote counting and the communication of results to the mostly illiterate electorate) and protection against ‘warlords’—potential contenders—exerting influence through bribery and coercion (ICG 2005c: 6). In Sierra Leone, the reinstatement of President Kabbah in 2002—including his cabinet of “discredited (recycled) SLPP politicians” (Zack-Williams 2002: 309) thus essentially putting “the same old men [...] back in power” (Hanlon 2004: 11)—after his ousting in 1997 was almost as safe an assumption as the US-concerted installation of President Karzai in Kabul, as were high level appointments of SLPP dignitaries in Sierra Leone and leading commanders in Afghanistan, thus frustrating the emergence of a “loyal opposition” in both countries (Paris 2004: 224). Through local elections in May 2004, UNAMSIL then aimed at decentralising political decision-making while, indirectly at least, helping the national government de-concentrate the population away from the capital city. Local structures of representation were being established and, presumably, strengthened, but even though inter-institutional competition in rural areas was recognised by international agencies as a key challenge, the fact that local polity had remained tied to the national level was neglected (Fanthorpe 2006). Winning the City of Freetown as the final puzzle piece had been a central electoral objective of the SLPP. As CHAPTER FIVE has explicated, the international community had been fighting to achieve non-partisanship but failed eventually. The outcome of this election, a landslide

victory of the SLPP everywhere but in the capital city and one rural district, sparked the revival of local politics as much as it complicated it. Newly elected rural representatives remained largely powerless locally due to existing structures while simultaneously finding themselves unable to gain leverage in Freetown, the centre of power and the hub of external resources. The same happened to most urban representatives, including the Mayor, who were blocked by a national political structure operating not only *in* and *from*, but also *on* the city (cf. Sharp 1997, Lupsha 1987). These constellations seemingly problematise donor driven fast paced ‘re-democratisation’ across layers of polity in post-war recovery settings. It is paramount to point out in this context that the success of those in Sierra Leone who supported partisanship *cannot* be blamed for the politically charged situation that emerged from it. Quite the contrary, the underlying cause was the presidential election—partisan, of course—against which donor and UN agencies had had *no objections*, and the subsequent support given to the national government of SLPP President Kabbah, whose victory had been predictable. Arguing in favour of non-partisan local elections two years later was then not only a conceptual inconsistency on the part of the international organisations (in collaboration with actors from the donor-sponsored ‘civil society’) but also misled in analytical terms: Why would citizens—politically weakened already and unhappy with the slow progress of reform and recovery—accept the depoliticisation of their ‘life world’ with its many wants and institutional deficiencies (cf. Ottersbach 2003: 33-34)?

Quintessentially, it was this situation of immediate socio-economic crisis and the function of Freetown as the place of aid disbursal and national policymaking that renders Peterson’s (1981: 109-130, cf. CHAPTER TWO) rationale, which explained low citizens’ involvement and interest in local politics by “political parties [...] not structur[ing] conflict, issues [...] not hav[ing] as burning an importance, and candidates [...] not ambitiously compet[ing] for office (*ibid.*)”, *pointless* in the context of urban governance in fragile states. This specific context constituted two environments marked by distinctive incentive structures, shorter time horizons, and a greater number of players not only at the local (urban) and national levels but involving a multitude of international interests as well. Arguably, this nexus of agency

and resources in times of political crisis also seems to justify attaching the label of peculiarity to the characterisation of Freetown and Kabul. Both cities thus appear ‘extraordinary’ *to some degree*. But neither is everything is ‘out of order’, as the counterfactual questions to be asked and answered in the following sub-section reveal.⁸⁰

Counterfactuals:

what if there had been no recent international interventions?

We can begin by asking whether the Freetown City Council would have had the same configuration without the post-war involvement of international agencies in Sierra Leone’s different layers of polity? Clearly this appears unlikely. There would have been no local elections at the point when they were held, and it is also doubtful that the President alone would have been able to push the decentralisation agenda forward through the jungle of political resistance within the national line ministries. Furthermore, the elections were framed by a new municipal law that was entirely the product of collaboration between two major development agencies.

Would Kabul Municipality have had the same relative leverage within the national political landscape and with regard to accessing national funds? Even though financial means for decentralisation programmes were stepped up after 2005, the agenda had initially been a smokescreen; the real challenge was to appease the periphery and to bind provinces to the centre – local empowerment-related interventions (e.g., the NSP) changed little in political practice. In the capital city, international donors clearly voted with their feet and wallets (as a result of the insistence by the municipal leadership on what has been perceived outdated planning methods and the poor reputation of mid-level the bureaucrats). Therefore the relative autonomy of the Municipality *vis-à-vis* other actors in the urban arena would arguably be

⁸⁰ Note that this hypothetical reasoning presented below does not serve to validate the three working hypotheses derived in CHAPTER ONE. To them we will turn afterwards, in the subsequent section of this chapter in which the extent to which these hypotheses can be confirmed or require modification, or even rejection, is reviewed.

greater; at the same time, this would have probably changed little, given the lower amount of short-term funding.

Would the structure of city-based non-governmental agency in Freetown and Kabul have been the same without the involvement of international agencies and INGOs? The structure of civil society in both cities would arguably be more dominated by ethnic (Afghan) and ethno-regional (Sierra Leonean) features, and it would likely be concerned about issues closer to political agency, rather than mainly becoming externally funded non-state service providers.

Finally, would the scale and scope of urban infrastructure have been different without the involvement of international agencies in both cities? In Freetown, water provision would arguably be even more unreliable; however, in other areas of urban services such as electricity and waste collection, no significant changes could be expected. Furthermore, given the absence of large-scale physical reconstruction schemes driven by international agencies and funded with outside money, the physical landscape in Freetown can be assumed to have appeared largely the same. In Kabul, initial funding focused mostly on rebuilding a national institutional infrastructure of local governance and on satisfying short-term needs through the provision of emergency housing, cash for work schemes, and food aid. Donors were later on moving towards rehabilitating physical infrastructure and preserving Kabul's physical heritage as well. However, in the area of urban construction, the vast majority of funding for small-scale rehabilitation was coming from private pockets, including reinvestment of profits from illegal activities outside the city, and the relatively low commitment of non-Afghan funders suggests that a significant part of housing and small-scale business infrastructure would not have looked much different. Here again donors have had a visible yet not dominant impact on urban physical reconstruction.

Theorising cross-level agency: paths, paces, and overdetermination

There is no way of denying that the historical review in CHAPTER FOUR challenges the suggestion of an exclusively *war-induced* reversion of urban fates in Sierra Leone and Afghanistan, as fielded by hypothesis (A).⁸¹ Both countries had been recipients of substantial foreign aid prior to the most recent armed conflicts at the end of the past century, which I have argued in the same chapter even served as a considerable trigger factor for the outbreak of fighting. At the same time, attempts to restore urban functionality in Freetown and Kabul after the conflicts have indeed been overshadowed by resuscitated agendas of nation-building and national democratisation, which limited the scope of stimulating taxable urban production and sustainable urban development.

In Sierra Leone, even though per capita financial assistance was lower than in most other recent interventions (cf. CHAPTER THREE), *from an in-country perspective* these flows reached new heights after the defeat of the RUF and the ousting—temporary at least, at the time of editing this study—of the Taliban. The resulting decrease in relative political leverage of local players in urban affairs resonates strongly with Giddens' (1981: 170-171) claim that “[t]he notion of resources can be applied to connect the structural study of domination with the analysis of the *power relations* involved in social systems.” Thus, *time*—together with *space* and *agency* one of the three key components of my analytical framework (cf. CHAPTER ONE)—does appear to play an important role for this analysis. Yet a war-induced change in a direction as sketched in hypothesis (A) cannot be confirmed. Political landscapes marked by agendas and actions cutting through layers of polity have indeed limited the scope and the effectiveness of local governance in Freetown and Kabul, but this had been the case for a long time prior and war as an ‘event’ therefore did not constitute a watershed as attributed to it by hypothesis (A), and also as implied by figure 2 in CHAPTER THREE.

⁸¹ “The political leverage of capital city-based actors has been correlated positively with the historical emergence of the nation-state project, but as an effect of war, urban pro-development politics are overshadowed and paralysed by national recovery agendas and supranational strategies to (re)create the nation-state. The initial correlation has been reverted.”

This feeds into the structural aspects of this enquiry, which have been addressed by hypotheses (B) and (C). The empirical evidence presented in CHAPTERS FIVE and SIX (and in conjunction with the hypothetical scenarios discussed in the previous section of this chapter) suggests that hypothesis (B)⁸² pointed into the right direction, yet the politico-economic histories of both cities fail to confirm it in its entirety. To explain this contention, let us revisit the argument presented in the section on case selection in CHAPTER THREE. There, it was proposed that if ‘accelerated structuration’ in Freetown was found to have occurred during colonial times as well, “then this would weaken hypothesis (B) [...] because colonial rule in the past may have had a very similar (if not stronger) effect on local and national institutions, thus rendering the relative leverage wielded by foreign intervention and post-war governance on altering institutions and structures diminished.” This was exactly the case, as CHAPTER FOUR showed, and it was epitomised in Sierra Leone by the colonial practice of ‘divide and rule,’ both with respect to space (north *versus* south at the country level plus the physical separation in Freetown) and regarding urban agency (non-natives *versus* natives). But does this render colonialism as a strong explanatory variable? In CHAPTER THREE I went on to argue that “[c]onversely, if the historical analysis of colonialism does not explain sufficiently the institutional landscape in Freetown in the present, then one can argue that alternative forces seem to play a role as well.” (*ibid.*) And indeed, the investigation of Kabul’s history demonstrated that the structuration of a capital city—by local, national, and supra-national players—had begun over a century ago via a foreign-inspired, elite-led process of modernisation and increasing indebtedness – but without any colonial rule.

This observation needs to be digested thoroughly. What it implies is that while caution is warranted in order not to overestimate the structuring effects of post-intervention processes in light of similar periods prior to the most recent armed conflicts, explaining such periods of accelerated

⁸² “The political leverage of local actors and institutions in post-war, post intervention cities is limited sufficiently through interorganisational competition with other institutions at other levels of polity that agency by coalitions with sufficient financial means gains enough leverage to alter local institutions and policies in a process of ‘accelerated structuration.’”

structuration with a colonial legacy would equally miss the point. Much as my prediction made in CHAPTER ONE that “[i]f space matters [...], it might do so differently in different politico-economic contexts,” we can conclude that *structures* have indeed mattered for *agency* in both settings, but that the *sources* of these structures and institutions were not identical. In other words, colonialism was *only one way* of structuring urban governance over time; there were other ways, too.

The aspects of this finding that pertain to the impact of colonial rule are backed up very well by existing knowledge. Theorists of governance have argued that the brevity of penetration of ‘modern’ polities into traditional societies was *sufficient to upset the latter*, but too short and shallow to replace them (Clapham 2001: 85-88). This claim is illustrated neatly by the case of Freetown. As much as during the early years, the urban colony itself had been structuring and thus conditioning the economic and social (under)development of the hinterland, the failed economic integration of the country (after the formal annexation of the hinterland and subsequent independence) into the international division of labour and, later on, during the institutionalisation of neo-patrimonial structures did not only parallel “the demise of Freetown as an important commercial and intellectual center”, as Zack-Williams (2002: 314) has argued, but have also conditioned the persistent powerlessness of local governance in Freetown. Twenty years after independence the process of decolonisation had in fact worked to the *detriment* of the city’s inhabitants—certainly with respect to the Creoles—, and the “gap between those who manage national affairs from the urban centres—in ministerial buildings, parliamentary chambers, and executive mansions—and those who remain in the many rural communities, [had] become wider.” (Roberts 1982: 124).

Here again, we can see how little the initial hypothesis of ‘war as a watershed’ captures social reality in historical perspective, and hence has to be refuted. The pattern clearly ‘survived’ the war.⁸³ As a result, exploitation

⁸³ Arguments suggesting that post-war states be conducive environments to the establishment of “modern statehood” due to the “lower level of frictions” or even a “polity

of *both* rural *and* urban residents—i.e., practically the entire population of the country—continues despite a history of spatial politics in Sierra Leone that has led from a hinterland-dominating urban colony to a neo-patrimonial nation imposing itself on its capital city through an uneasy coalition between a politics-embracing governing party and an international community obsessed with achieving non-partisanship. Indeed, “the situation *now* resembles the situation *before* the war,” one interviewee stressed. Thus emphasising structural continuity rather than rupture, he noted,

“One of our consultants recently said, ‘This is not a post-conflict situation, this is a conflict situation.’ Post-conflict, development, appeasement – whatever you call these phases, in the end it doesn’t matter. It only matters to donors. All this is a donor driven structure: ‘Let’s just add another layer of administration.’ [...] But if you write something critical in your own reports to alert them, they just delete it. Just delete it! Gone.” (NG-F4)

CHAPTERS FIVE and SIX have also shown that the *leverage* that international agencies have had recently over urban institutions cannot be neglected. For instance, the wars in both countries proved to be catalysts for the institutionalisation—i.e., the process of ‘instantiation’ of rules and resources in social systems—of a private sector, ‘anti-politics’ driven approach to urban management, orchestrated by international agencies. The same is true for legal frameworks regulating urban affairs. Furthermore, both amounts and relative distribution of *resources*—defined by Giddens (1981: 171) as “the ‘capabilities of making things happen’, or bringing about particular states of affairs”—changed as a result of foreign post-war involvement. But to a significant extent, structuration of both urban polities had been an element of Sierra Leonean and Afghan politics for the past one hundred years and beyond. The weight of these observations thus inflicts severe scratches on hypothesis (B); while it remains correct in its general thrust, it has clearly underestimated the impacts of pre-war interactions between political actors across different levels of polity.

What we must turn to now is an explanation of the *nature* of agency framed by structural and institutional settings in both countries, captured initially by

vacuum” (Rudner 2005: 19 [author’s translation]), can only be explained with an insufficient understanding of political realities (cf. Bastian and Luckham 2003).

hypothesis (C). *Space and agency*—the second and third components of the analytical framework of this study—have been shown to matter given the manifold cross-scalar processes in the two post- intervention cities. But rather than agency and resultant alteration of structures taking place as an outcome of international agencies’ use of “authoritative and allocative resources” (Jabri 1994, cf. CHAPTER TWO) in interaction with genuinely urban, i.e., local actors—as predicted by hypothesis (C)⁸⁴—, the restructuration of Freetown and Kabul has been happening ‘remotely’ through cooperation, collusion, and coercion between international and *national* actors.

Before I move on to visualise this astonishing discovery in figure 14 a/b and to analyse its implications for the reconfiguration of urban analysis in fragile state contexts, I shall dwell a little longer on substantiating this claim of the ‘international-national’ determining the ‘local/urban.’ Recalling the urban functions outlined in the section on urban policies and politics in CHAPTER TWO (i.e., production, service provision, equity, and security), I am going to analyse in the following the ‘locations’ of policymaking for five concrete issues of urban planning and management. The investigation of local economic development (LED) covers the first function outlined; housing/residential planning and urban services (here: water/wastewater and garbage collection) cover the second and third function. Social cohesion—exemplified here by the issue of IDP re-integration—arguably intersects with the equity function of cities but also has a security component. This component will be taken up as well by a brief comparison of policing authorities in both cities.

We should note at this point that the fulfilment of two of these five areas of governance and management (urban services and residential planning) are impacting primarily on the city and its inhabitants themselves—positively as well as negatively, the latter through increasing the appeal of the city and thus incentivising additional in-migration (a dynamic quite different from the situation in developed countries)—whereas the other three (LED, policies to

⁸⁴ “Urban policies and politics in the two cities are determined mainly by the interaction of international and local actors.”

address the displacement challenge, and security) commonly also create positive externalities at the provincial or even national level. Herein, the case of urban security and its implications for the country is probably the most debatable one. The rationale for attributing greater spatial leverage to it here is that while in Afghanistan the main and acute security threat insurgency is rooted in the provinces, it would be difficult to dismiss the likelihood of all-out war if Kabul wasn't secured by ISAF. In Sierra Leone the line (if any) between 'urban security' and 'security in the rest of the country' has been even more blurred throughout history (e.g., urban gangs, political thugs, and the 1999 attack on Freetown launched practically from 'within,' as described in CHAPTER FOUR). When adding evidence of urban insecurity in other regions destabilising entire countries (Davis 2007, Koenig 2007) or—conversely—helping defuse tensions beyond the urban realm (Beall 2007a, Bollens 2007), and also accounting for the fact that warfare is urbanising and 'new' forms of war are both targeting and benefitting from urban density (cf. CHAPTER TWO and in particular Beall 2006), the aforementioned classification of the security function appears justified.

Figure 14 a/b on the following page visualises the loci of both policymaking and policy impact *in practice*, i.e., as observed during the field research for this study and as described in CHAPTERS FIVE and SIX. The location of each hexagon in the grid thus depends on the 'impact level' on the horizontal axis and the spatial 'location of policymaking' on the vertical axis. In line with a decentralisation *cum* subsidiarity rationale, the green area in the figure visualises the *O-hypothesis* denoting that urban policies that benefit *mainly* the city and its inhabitants should be formulated at the same scale, namely the local/urban level. By contrast, if an urban policy can reasonably be expected to also produce externalities, then the policymaking level should be higher, involving provincial or even national decision-makers. Given the focus on post-intervention cities, we also need to include an additional level in order to account for international actors.

Figure 14a (following page on the left) locates the levels of policy deliberation and the impact levels of resulting policies in Freetown and Kabul. Whereas impact levels differ relatively little (small differences are due

to the simple fact that Freetown and Kabul are different cities embedded in different countries), policymaking locations do vary in some areas. For example, if we recall the case of garbage collection in Freetown (cf. CHAPTER FIVE) where the issue is subject to fierce interorganisational competition, we see the difference between this situation and the one in Kabul where garbage as a task is tackled by the Municipality – yet only in those neighbourhoods that are recognised as ‘formal.’ At the same time, we may recall from CHAPTERS FIVE and SIX—and therefore also see in 14a—that LED policies for both cities were forged beyond the urban level.

Figure 14b (on the right) allows for a direct comparison of the two cities. Because all hexagons—obviously—remain in their positions, figure 14b can tell us that while some functions in Kabul were being dealt with locally (e.g., garbage collection and also IDP integration, to the extent that it actually existed), not only were policies that produce ‘higher level’ externalities but also policies that have an impact primarily on the city itself, by and large, conceived *outside* the green area, i.e. not where one would—normatively speaking—expect related deliberations to be located.

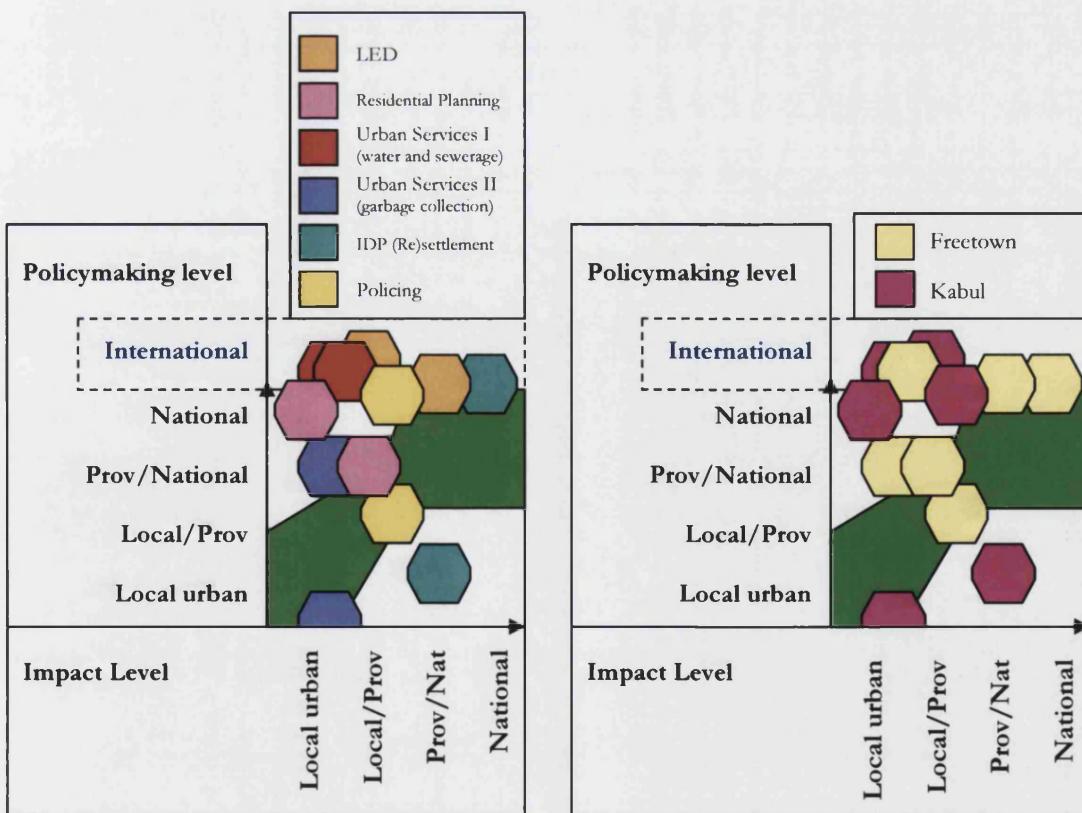


Figure 14: Locating policymaking – (a) functional comparison and (b) inter-city comparison

The two illustrations visualise the concentration of urban policymaking ‘above the heads’ of stakeholders with a primary interest, as residents, in seeing the functions of Freetown and Kabul—as cities—fulfilled. Again, this is true also for those policies whose impact is felt almost exclusively in the urban realm. These ‘sovereign conflicts’ (Beall 2007b) over the two cities are crucial findings in that they provide substantial momentum to the proposition of ‘overdetermination’ introduced in CHAPTER ONE. However, in defiance of hypothesis (C), figures 14a and 14b also show what has already been described in detail in the empirical CHAPTERS FIVE and SIX, namely that urban governance in the two post-intervention cities has been determined to an overwhelming extent through the interaction of international with *national—not local*—actors. As CHAPTERS FIVE and SIX have demonstrated, this was certainly due to different incentives. In Kabul the underlying reason was municipal staff lacking technical capacity and suffering from a dubious reputation of corruption. On the contrary, in Freetown donors felt committed to supporting the national government run by the SLPP, thus staying away from engaging with the APC-led city council. Here, post-war politics around national matters remained spatially concentrated in the capital, but the task of governing the city itself was suffering from the reluctance to hand over resources to a City Council that would potentially destabilise the new national ‘democracy’ – at the expense of enabling more effective local governance in Freetown.

Moreover, a second dimension of overdetermination comes to the fore when we focus on the comparative perspective that figure 14 a/b offers. The three functions for which the policymaking location differs substantially between Freetown and Kabul are garbage collection, IDP (re)settlement, and policing. These are precisely the functions which, in CHAPTER FIVE on post-war Freetown, we have found to be highly politicised. Partisan politics across spatial layers of local vs. national constituencies thus contributed to the state of overdetermination in Freetown, which—as figure 14b shows—is even more pronounced than in Kabul, thus problematising and indeed refuting contrary perceptions that characterise Kabul as an even more ‘remote controlled’ setting.

I visualise these insights in a synthetic manner in figure 15 below. Its general composition already known from CHAPTER TWO, it enables a dynamic view on the proposed impact of such cross-level agency on urban structures. In essence, what figure 15 demonstrates is that interorganisational interaction in post-intervention cities in fragile states that serves to catalyse changes in urban institutions or alters urban actors' autonomy *vis-à-vis* the national government does so from 'above' – either indirectly (light green arrows, *via* X_3) or directly (yellow arrows from X_2). We should recall at this point that we are using 'autonomy' in a positive conceptualisation, in accordance with the definition by Wolman and Goldsmith (1992: 45) provided in CHAPTER TWO. For instance, simply blocking policies conceived by international agencies is not synonymous with autonomy as it is applied in this study as long as this resistance does not also result in an independent and positive impact on the well-being of urban residents (*ibid.*).

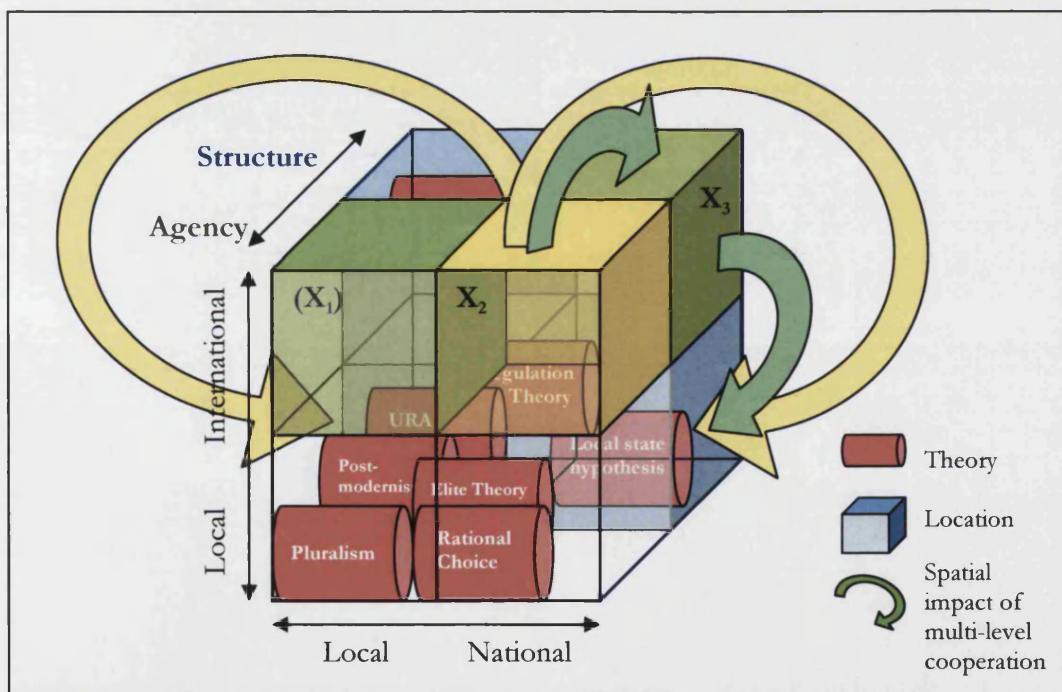


Figure 15: Learning from trial and error: revisiting hypothesis (C)

What becomes visible as well when studying this figure is the emptiness of cubes X_2 and X_3 —much like cube X_1 as focused on in CHAPTER TWO—as no existing theory of urban politics 'fills' them. In the context of the theoretical development agenda embraced by this study, this is highly intriguing. Let us

recall that at the outset of this investigation I hypothesised (C) that the theoretical void to be filled would be located in X_1 , i.e., in the area of international-local interaction, and not in X_2 or X_3 . However, my empirical analysis of post-intervention politics in Freetown and Kabul shows the need to reconfigure urban political theory for these and comparable settings elsewhere, namely in the area of *international-national* interaction. This, then, is the task to be tackled in the final section of this chapter.

Reconfiguring urban analysis:

the concept of ‘tri-axial urban governance’

Given the insufficient applicability of existing theories of urban politics to post-war intervention contexts substantiated by the empirical analysis provided in this study, and also in light of the emptiness of boxes X_2 and X_3 , how can this theoretical gap be overcome? Let us recall how I have explained the rise of the concept of ‘urban governance’ in CHAPTER TWO. Against the background of urban-national competition, I have argued that the “relevance of urban governance is not self-contained, but a distillate of the perception or observation of ineffective and inefficient resource allocation at the national level and its negative impact on urban life.” This rationale also seems to fit trimly into a post-war intervention context.

A governance-driven analysis that cuts through levels of polity eases the pressure to identify—at any price—urban regimes, elites, or potential *fata morganas* of signs of residual capitalist structures in the city. Instead, it redirects the focus on investigating the *relations* between institutions and agency at different levels on how these affect the quality of life and the political leverage of urban residents, thus freeing up intellectual resources for an analytical accommodation of cross-spatial political processes. An emphasis on cross-spatial governance (rather than intra-regimes, elites and the like) also jives with recent propositions to *reconsider* urban regimes as only *one* possible ‘mode of governance’ (Mossberger and Stoker 2001: 818). Governance is thus the overarching category including, but not limited to, the structures examined by existing theoretical literature.

Now, if we chose to adopt urban governance as an alternative framework for the analysis of city politics in fragile states, it would appear crucial to distinguish between different meanings of the concept as a normative model, empirical object, and theoretical concept. As Pierre (2005, cf. Bache and Flinders 2004: 195-196) explains, governance can denote a *prescriptive* approach to social relations—Welch and Kennedy-Pipe (2004: 130) argue almost sarcastically that “the very idea of ‘policy arenas’ begs a question that it would be better to leave open, namely: whose policy?”—expressed most prominently by the cry for ‘good governance’ (e.g., UNESCAP et al. 2007) but can also be understood as the *result* of an enquiry, thus constituting a finding and not a framework. Third however,

“[a] governance perspective on urban politics directs the observer to *look beyond the institutions of the local state* to search for processes and mechanisms through which significant and resourceful actors coordinate their actions and resources in the pursuit of collectively defined objectives. [...] Urban governance makes *no prejudgment about the cast of actors involved* in shaping the urban political agenda, nor does that make any assumptions about the normative direction and objectives of the governing coalition.” (ibid., 452; emphasis added)

This fulfils exactly the characteristics that are necessary—given the empirical data presented—to reconceptualise urban political theory in order to allow it to capture the political reality in the settings looked at in this study. Against this constitutive background and the discussion of the data provided earlier in this chapter, one would want to posit emphatically that a revised analytical framework needs to retain its politico-economic thrust while being more explicitly spatial. Such a revised framework would need to account for institutional multiplicity and interorganisational competition not only *within*, but *beyond* the city level. This is so because political axes that transcend the urban and even national politico-economic spheres have served as powerful determinants of urban structures and institutions (the local ‘wheels’, following this logic) in Freetown and Kabul. First, there is an axis linking formal and informal urban institutions; second, another axis is connecting—again predominantly through competition—the agendas of city-based actors to national government agendas, and third, an axis evolved that renders vital urban functions being governed ‘remotely’ through

collusion between national and supra-national interests and organisations.

This study therefore suggests speaking of ‘tri-axial urban governance.’⁸⁵

In the realm of theory, the notion of ‘tri-axial urban governance’ also captures the observation of cooperation, collusion and coercion *across* levels of polity, thus superseding ‘localist’ concepts from the pluralist, elitist, or post-modernist corners as well as approaches focusing on the determining influence of national structures like the ones put forward by Marxist and post-Marxist theorists. At the same time and unlike the concept of ‘multi-level governance’ discussed in CHAPTER TWO, it is explicit in its acknowledgement of the intersecting and traversing nature of urban governance through axes that combine local, national, and international levels of agency and structure. Of course, a comparative study of two cases—even when looking at six concrete policy areas and their impacts on both cities and thus generating twelve distinct ‘events’—cannot thwart the *small N*-problem (cf. CHAPTER THREE). However, the conceptual rigidity of ‘tri-axial urban governance’ for the two cases investigated here appears solid, and this alone should serve as an encouragement for testing it in other settings of fragile statehood. While concrete propositions for such tests will be outlined in the final part of this study, CHAPTER EIGHT, the general question guiding these enquiries could therefore read as follows:

- At which levels (local, national, through direct international intervention or, in its most extreme form, ‘remote control’) do political agendas for post-intervention cities (a) originate, (b) at which levels do they play out and how, and (c) how are these agendas linked to the production and allocation of both indigenous and supra-national resources?

⁸⁵ The only *analytical* uses of the concept of “governance axes” that I have been able to find are related to mapping options for environmental governance, e.g., in a forecast of environmental challenges (Office of Science and Technology 1999) and in a publication on scenario planning for climate impact assessments (Berkhout et al. 1999).

We should note as well that the central assumption of hypothesis (B), namely an axis linking local with international agency, has not been substantiated. In Kabul there has been some political interaction between these two levels of polity, but the policy outputs or institutional changes that these interactions have produced are neither comparable in magnitude nor in leverage to the three axes drawn above.

Chapter 8: Critique and ways forward

Making cities work by embracing local politics

In the analysis provided I have tried to address Soja's (Soja 1989: 155, cf. CHAPTER ONE) critique of Giddens "dip[ping] into empirical analysis at will and without commitment to any but his own framework of interpretation." I have done so by working towards an amalgamation of empirical analysis with *different* interpretative frameworks in order to understand the 'not-so-light footprints' (cf. Paris 2004) that external actors of 'reconstruction' are leaving on city politics and urban governance while trying to bring about "development and prosperity for all," as Abrahamsen (2001: 14) rags, through enthusiastic agendas of 'decentralisation' and 'empowerment'.

In review, my analysis of secondary and primary data reveals a significant explanatory value of *space* while also confirming the importance of *time* as analytical categories. Unlike the colonial rulers of Freetown and the indigenous reformers of Kabul, today's key players are equally central to the institutionalisation of governance, but are not stationed permanently at the loci of their interaction, and hence are not subjects to the norms and codes that they have devised, implemented, and reinforced. Thus, contrary to the attempts of British colonialists to detach themselves completely from 'the natives' and their failure to absorb what was then an 'Afghan void' and to remote-control it from Kabul or, better even, from India, intervention by international actors today is feasible in principle without making potentially painful long-term commitments 'on the ground.' Remote control is possible (cf. Risse 2005). Under this impression, it seems fair to speak with some confidence of a 'second spatial turn' as already suggested at the beginning of this thesis. Unlike Cockburn's (1977) 'local state,' cities in fragile states do not reflect the structures of national and international *capitalism* but bear the structural outcomes of cooperation, collusion, and coercion between central government and international actors in the name of 'reconstruction.'

My proposition of externally driven structuration should not be equated with conspiracy theory. International organisations do not aim at ‘taking over’ post-war countries, and the ongoing debate among academics and practitioners about how to leave the lightest footprint possible and also work toward a politically responsible withdrawal is not a *façade* of a hidden agenda. Yet this absence of intention does not contradict the evidence of tri-axial urban governance and its impacts on the city. Arguably, the key to understanding the processes of tri-axial urban governance in fragile states lies in analysing the *conceptual* flaws, and not the intentions, of international actors’ agendas. These entail the prevailing obsession with presumably apolitical strategies, the distrust in local capacity, the lack of clarity with respect to committing to a long-term process, and the apparent conceptual dearth between the two positions of ‘institutionalisation before liberalisation’ on one end (cf. Paris 2004), and liberalism *cum* nationalism on the other. In the absence of alternative approaches, it is no surprise that initially optimistic predictions regarding the extent of achieving ‘local ownership’ (Chesterman 2002: 41)—not only of development, but also of governance structures—have been frustrated in both countries.

At the same time, while Pierre’s (2005: 459, cf. CHAPTER SEVEN) definition of urban governance as an *analytical* tool is opportune, one may nonetheless also want to reflect on how the findings of this study can inform policymaking in and for post-war intervention cities—and potentially others as well—on the normative plane. Urban regime analysis, for instance, has equally been pushed recently towards more normative grounds (Stone 2005: 328, 334-335). While substantive multi-sectoral foreign involvement in conflict contexts does seem to render ‘target’ cities ‘extraordinary’ with respect to resources at stake and ensuing political pressures as well as priority policy areas, this does not negate the insights from ‘ordinary’ cities; rather, the resultant reduction of local political space and pre-determined policy options serves to amplify Robinson’s (2006) call to take urban politics seriously. This will be necessary to widen the straightjacket of *de facto* economic structures and discourses beyond the city level and to harness, to the extent possible, ‘the pragmatism of developmentalist approaches’ (*ibid.*). But rather than being guided by a private sector driven ‘equality of

opportunity,’ the compromise sought must include measures to achieve greater “equality of agency” *across* levels of polity (cf. Rao and Walton 2004: 359, 367, cf. Satterthwaite 2005, Mollenkopf 1989, Moe 2005), even more so because contributions on the options for dealing with fragile states continue maintaining an outside fixation, exercised either through fiduciary management or by exerting direct influence and supervision of policy-making in all areas of social and economic significance. Andreasson (2005, cf. Krasner 2005) explains,

“Even in instances of emphasising (internal) agency over structure as do Bates [1981, 1999] and van de Walle [2001], the process of privileging external solutions remains firmly rooted at the ideational and discursive levels, whether or not it is the objects of development themselves who are to adapt to and implement these solutions.”

Conversely, political mobilisation is not an objective; political monitoring is suggested instead to act as an early warning mechanism to cushion the operational autonomy enjoyed by international organisations (Klingebiel 2005). Such ‘external views’ that also purport the inevitability of remote-controlled governance without properly investigating *ex ante* the political diversity on the ground and potentially resulting opportunities for local leadership is rendered highly dubious in light of the findings of this study. Exceptions from this pattern exist. Where ineffectiveness of international aid for post-war reconstruction has not been explained with ‘technical problems’ during the implementation phase, focusing instead on the reliability and visibility of political will, analyses have indeed demonstrated shortcomings by *international agencies* rather than local partners or institutions (e.g., Goodhand 2004: 50-51). Yet with respect to the political processes across different levels of polity that are taking place around concrete policies for the city, much remains to be explored. This thesis has tried to narrow this gap. Certainly, there is no need anymore to search for a rationale. In his discussion of urban reinvention in Africa, Bouillon (2002: 86) puts this candidly: “[T]he local town in its physical and administrative reality is the first locality/local-city, as it occupies the bottom levels of [...] political communities.” This serves as yet another reminder of Bollens’ (2006) characterisation of urban places’ potential for peacebuilding with which this study has been introduced. But their implications are translatable into

practice only if “‘tougher’ notions of public space” (Robins 1993, cf. McCann 2002: 78, Holston and Appadurai 1996, Holston 1995) are embraced – not only in theory, but also in practice. The channels for co-determining the creation of workable cities from below thus remain an area of trial and error. Harvey (2000: 184) has recalled Foucault’s notion of the urban *heterotopia*, introduced in his *Order of Things* (1970) and later also applied to political spaces (1986), as an alternative space of “choice, diversity, and difference.” Yet the vital question is how this *heterotopia* could be made to fulfil the functions that make a city viable and economically sustainable, in particular with respect to a robust local tax base. ‘Classic’ answers to this would be straightforward indeed: no urban *bourgeoisie*, no democracy (Moore 1966). Still, a developmental role of *municipalities* would have to be balanced by furthering political inclusion and demonstrating a commitment to service provision even under the most deprived conditions due to the simple fact that the poor tend to benefit less from sudden increases in urban economic outputs but overproportionally from increased efficiency and coverage in service delivery (Amis 2002: 109).

Of course, reconstructing the city while neglecting rural areas would not only be unsustainable but also potentially sow the seeds for new outbreaks of violence (Magnus and Naby 2002: 196). However, in light of the prevalent focus on rural areas in the two cases investigated, one is reminded of Mamdani’s (1996) proposition to bridge the rural and the urban by transforming the nature of power in *both* spheres, and in a democratic and non-coercive manner. Similarly, Johnson and Leslie (2002a: 871) have pleaded for an approach to reconstruction that recognises both rural and urban needs. It is clear that income opportunities in rural areas in the countries discussed here are worse than in the two capital cities. Nonetheless and in light of the strong urban appeal, Richards (2005: 586) suggestion that development policy should concentrate on creating agrarian incomes for youngsters is rendered questionable,⁸⁶ and options that lie in the urban rather than the rural economy need to be taken much more seriously.

⁸⁶ Rather odd, this is also echoed by the same author’s (1996: 163) conclusion that “[c]itizens of weak but modern state in Africa need and deserve room for creative manoeuvre if they are successfully to build islands of security and archipelagos of peace with the limited material resources at their disposal.”

Implications for policymaking

The significant degree of political friction in Freetown and Kabul coupled with the importance of the two cities for national politics and development renders any sustainable progress towards ‘peace’ unlikely if the novercal treatment of urban governance observed in 2004 and 2005 remained the *modus operandi* of both national and international actors (cf. Homer-Dixon 1999). Yet we would fool ourselves if we ignored that the latter’s focus on strengthening *structures*, exemplified by calls to “redouble their efforts to build effective state institutions” (Paris 2004: 224), is very much in line with the expectation of global organisations.

A recent UN report (UN ECOSOC 2006: 8) declares, “Promoting effective decentralization continues to be a core element of the UN-Habitat strategy to strengthen the capacities of local authorities as first-tier providers of basic services, to improve local governance and to deepen democracy at the local level.” Still, this study suggests that any such efforts will only be effective if political agendas and agency at all levels is acknowledged. This would require a determined turn in donor policy. The key factor constraining this seems to be the fear of ‘the political’ and the resulting argument that ‘stability’ is needed instead.

Such a preference among bilateral and multilateral donor agencies after the cessation of violent turmoil is understandable, and it mirrors the hopes of the millions living in these countries. But its translation into anti-political practice is highly questionable. For instance, the international community’s goal of “restoring” local polity in Sierra Leone (e.g., UNDAF 2003: 10) accepted the danger that the structural violence emanating from the large-scale exclusion prior to the outbreak of hostilities in 1991 be replicated. Resembling the findings of this study, Jackson (2005: 56) therefore rightly felt “alarmed” (*ibid.*) by conversations

“with government officials who see the pre-war period as some kind of perfect system that needs to be rebuilt and to see this reflected in some donor reports. It is closely linked to the denial of the war itself within Freetown [...] in that there is a belief that during the war the bureaucracy somehow heroically kept the country going in the face of barbarism.”

This laudable critique by a senior international civil servant notwithstanding, the same normative agenda also governed reconstruction in Afghanistan. Schetter (2006) argues,

“Without doubt, Afghanistan nowadays resembles a large ‘re-education’ camp in which numerous [international] organisations are trying laboriously to spread and institutionalise modern values and norms, even though this is effort is proceeding in parallel with a devaluation of Afghan self-esteem. [author’s translation]”

How such approaches can possibly create viable countries and cities remains dubious. Still, the concept of ‘tri-axial urban governance’ helps us understand where and why city politics in post-war intervention settings originate and how it plays out. There is some evidence of development agencies acknowledging a need for national governments to “let cities go” (ADB 2006: 2). Yet they remain reluctant to translate this claim into the sphere of political agency. It is one of the “truisms of political economy” that aid is a “source of power and enrichment,” as Brynen (2005: 244) points out. But the challenge is really that the political consequences of this characteristic feature of aid is not always understood by agency personnel on the ground “whose analyses may be shaped by either the universalist, non-discriminatory, need-oriented ethos of humanitarian relief work, or by the technical parameters of their particular sectoral specializations.” (ibid.)

Likewise, in his article on designing democratic institutions in ethnically and politically divided societies, Horowitz (1993: 36) has described the risk that existing incentive structures of politicians are not being taken into account when devising modifications (one could call this an *ex-ante* deficiency). As this thesis has shown, international actors were relatively more worried about newly designed institutions that might, later on, fail to take effect (which could be called an *ex-post* deficiency). Brynen’s (2005: 246) warning that it would “be ludicrous, however, if Afghanistan were held to a level of apolitical economic planning that would be alien to most donor countries or UN member states” therefore touches on a fundamental challenge of post-war urban recovery, and it is indeed vital “to find ways of doing things that contribute to sustainable social and economic development *as well as* political

consolidation, to patronage *and* institution building, to both peace *and* prosperity. (ibid.)” While ideal type solutions would require interventions at all levels, scarcity dictates their scope and scale, and requires prioritisation. In a context of resource constraints and high political stakes at the national level (both ‘at home’ and in the intervention country), decision-making matrices of international actors are facing a set of awkward questions: Should services be massively stepped up to increase public well being? Should public policy focus on achieving inclusion and work towards equity? Or, should investment be facilitated to boost productive capacity? Moreover, does urban policy need to focus on all urban functions, or is prioritisation more effective? Is it necessary to accept that asking these questions imply possible trade-offs with national stability?

Kabul’s development potential can be maximised only if residents’ concerns and priorities are taken seriously. If Kabul is to fulfil key urban functions as a city, namely to serve as a centre of economic recovery, to generate sustainable livelihoods for residents and in-migrants, but also to develop into a place where residents possess and use “political capital” (Beall 2005b) by shaping debates and participating in representative decision-making, then “new modes of flexible planning need to be developed. [...] While infrastructure-based development projects are important, so too are approaches to urban development that build the capacity of modern urban governance by encouraging citizen consultation and participation.” (Beall and Esser 2005b: 1) All actors involved in shaping governance therefore need to recognise the political nature of the process and try to work towards coalitions that do not only give consideration to their own priorities, but also improve the prospects for flourishing urban centres without restricting residents’ freedom to revert to both voice and public control. As this study has shown, the experience of disinterest or exploitation by the central state served as triggers that fuelled uprisings among the rural population. A dual strategy is therefore necessary to anchor productive assets within the urban realm but also to generate additional value for the national economy with the help of capital city-based institutions that coordinate a countrywide process of economic recovery.

The general thrust of this conclusion also applies to Sierra Leone. A reform of local property laws, particularly in the context of the illegal occupation and investment restrictions, would not only have implications for rural livelihoods (cf. van der Veen 2003: 102-103), but also for the urban economy (cf. Roberts 1982: 301). This suggests that controversial agency by local actors in the context of scarce resources, while vital, is unlikely to produce only ‘winners’ (cf. Khan 2002, Skinner 1972). As for managing urban growth, Stren’s (1989: 307-308) conclusion that municipalities will have to accept and *address constructively* the “likelihood of continuing inflow” is an important insight for managing growth in Freetown. Rather than adopting anti-urban approaches and considering human resource flows as a target of antagonistic policymaking, in-migration needs to be understood as a spatial manifestation of the dominant capitalist discourse and the resulting perceptions of economic opportunities in the urban realm (cf. O’Connor 1983: 57, 142). The task is thus to accommodate and capitalise on growth, and not to send citizens back into rural underdevelopment.

Implications for further research

In light of the critique brought forward in this study against the trajectories of decentralisation and recentralisation strategies in Sierra Leone and Afghanistan, respectively, the need to ‘re-empower’ city-level politics, and the conceptual step toward cross-level analysis, Young’s (2000: 230-235) extension of Frug’s (1993, 1999) notion of ‘decentred decentralisation’ is intriguing. Young advocates inter-city coordination at the regional level in order to address the imbalance between wealthier and poorer neighbourhoods *within* cities, and to thus overcome the limited responsibility of decentralised units beyond their narrowly drawn ‘legal borders’ through a practice of ‘relational autonomy.’ This concept takes into account virtues of kinship, history, and proximity by altering the local institutional framework through the integration of inter-level negotiation rather than an exclusive reliance on legal hierarchies between the centre and local. In regional war zones, such ‘horizontalisation’ of development may appear unfeasible at first glance. Yet this renders the concept even more tempting in post-war

intervention contexts. With donors often linking active citizenship to the challenge of service provision—presumably because of an assumption that increased ‘community cohesion’ and ‘social capital’ would somehow ‘jump in’ for a lack of publicly provided services—Young’s perspective on rights and citizenship raises an interesting entry point for further research by asking to what extent there could be a conflict between the focus on nation building on one hand, which inherently emphasises individual rights in the context of an imagined collective, and the collective task of rebuilding communities on the other (cf. Lowndes 1995: 171-174).

Furthermore, if in spite of related critical observations made over the course of this study all cities could nonetheless be “considered within the same field of analysis” (Robinson 2006: 170) and if policy interventions in any city could therefore inform meaningfully policymaking elsewhere, then it would make sense to test the proposition of ‘tri-axial urban governance’ in settings comparable to the ones chosen for this study. A windfall gain of such efforts would be that the *small N*-problem that the present study has encountered could thus be addressed. Two alternative approaches come to mind. The first approach would be a rather intrepid endeavour, namely to translate lessons learned in Freetown and Kabul to a city in which the political, economic, and social institutions are substantially *more* efficient and equitable (e.g., in an industrialised country). Conversely, conceptual transfer appears more likely through a second approach. This tactic would test the conceptual validity of ‘tri-axial urban governance’ in other cities in fragile states. As a starting point, it may focus on cities on which in-depth research is already available, including for instance Kigali (cf. Mamdani 2001), Kinshasa (cf. Trefon 2004), Grozny (cf. Gall and de Waal 1998), Colombo (cf. van Horen 2002) or, tragically, once again Beirut (cf. Hanf 1993, Khalaf 1994). By thus applying ‘plausibility probes’ (cf. CHAPTER THREE), this second approach would open up expedient opportunities for reflection and refinement of the arguments developed in this thesis.

Appendices

Annex 1: Guideline for semi-structured interviews

Guideline for semi-structured interviews
with municipal and ministerial staff, local and national politicians, urban residents,
IDPs, grassroot organisers, businesspeople, and international aid workers in
Freetown and Kabul

(1) The city in *flux* or *stasis*:

- ✓ Has this city changed over the course of the past twenty years? If yes, how?
- ✓ What have the main issues and conflicts been before, during and after the war, and which roles did you/other city-based actors play in their contexts?

(2) Priority assessments:

- ✓ What are the political, economic, and social development issues and challenges that affect urban recovery, e.g.
 - Polity: system of governance, political activism and freedom of expression
 - Employment opportunities and income generation
 - Security of land tenure, access to land and housing; role of planning regimes
 - Basic services: water, sewerage, electricity, security, public transport, education
 - Social inclusion, support networks, reintegration of perpetrators and victims
 - Other factors or developments

(3) Current state and history of politics and coalitions: diversity of links and leverage between local, national and international governmental and non-governmental institutions:

- ✓ Source of and leverage in agenda-setting by different actors
- ✓ Accuracy of needs assessments and impact of aid delivered
- ✓ Formal and informal structures and institutions of responsibility and representation:
 - Who deals (or doesn't deal) with which issues?
 - On which behalf do these parties claim to act?
 - Which interests do they represent?
- ✓ Effectiveness of formal and informal accountability relationships
- ✓ Which actions and sacrifices have actors made to achieve their goals, and why?
- ✓ Quality of communication and cooperation in concrete reconstruction efforts
- ✓ Has cooperation, where happening, mainly been facilitated/constrained by financial, organisational, ethnic, political or interpersonal factors?

(4) Additional issues that the respondent would like to point out or comment on

Annex 2: Overview of interviewees and data coding

Sierra Leone - # of informants:	62	Afgh. - # of informants:	60	total # of informants:	122
Sierra Leone - # of data events:	43	Afgh. - # of data events:	43	total data events:	86
Sierra Leone - # of interviews:	37	Afgh. - # of interviews:	37	- of which interviews:	74 (86%)
Sierra Leone - # of focus groups:	6	Afgh. - # of focus groups:	6	- of which focus groups:	12 (14%)

	Freetown				Kabul			
	code	type	function	location and date	code	type	function	location and date
		I - semi-structured interview FG - focus group		(F=Freetown)		I - semi-structured interview FG - focus group		(K=Kabul)
National Politics/ Bureaucracy	NPB-F1	FG	national opposition chairman	F: 1 Dec 04	NPB-K1	I	MP for Kabul City (<i>Wolzi Jirga</i>)	K: 3 May 05
			national opposition secretary general	F: 1 Dec 04	NPB-K2	I	nat. ministry, urban advisor	K: 3 July 04
			national opposition regional chairman	F: 1 Dec 04	NPB-K3	I	nat. ministry, advisor, land tenure	K: 20 June 04
	NPB-F2	I	national minister	F: 8 Dec 04	NPB-K4	I	nat. ministry, senior advisor, policing	K: 21 June 04
	NPB-F3	I	national ministry secretary	F: 30 Nov 04	NPB-K5	I	deputy national minister	K: 26 June 04
	NPB-F4	I	national ministry, dept. manager	F: 6 Dec 04	NPB-K6	I	nat. ministry, urban advisor	K: 24 June 04
	NPB-F5	I	national ministry, dept. director	F: 30 Nov 04	NPB-K7	I	nat. ministry, dept. director, housing	K: 14 July 04
	NPB-F6	I	national coordinator	F: 30 Nov 04	NPB-K8	I	nat. ministry, dept. director, water	K: 3 Nov 04
	NPB-F7	FG	national ministry, permanent secretary	F: 26 Nov 04	NPB-K9	I	nat. ministry, dept. director, public health	K: 3 Nov 04
			national ministry, dept. director	F: 26 Nov 04	NPB-K10	I	nat. ministry, dept. director, environment	K: 3 Nov 04
Local Politics/ Bureaucracy	LPB-F1e	FG	paramount chief (supports opposition)	W. Ar.: 23 Nov 04	LPB-K1e	I	municipality, senior management (Herat)	27 July 04
			local council member	W. Ar.: 23 Nov 04	LPB-K2	I	municipality, dept. director, sanitation	K: 3 Nov 04
			local council member	W. Ar.: 23 Nov 04	LPB-K3	I	municipality, dept. director, construction	K: 22 June 04
			local council member	W. Ar.: 23 Nov 04	LPB-K4a	I	municipality, dept. director, policy	K: 22 June 04
			local council secretary	W. Ar.: 23 Nov 04	LPB-K4b	I	municipality, dept. director, policy	K: 3 Nov 04
			paramount chief's scribe	W. Ar.: 23 Nov 04	LPB-K5	I	provincial court chairman	K: 10 July 04
	LPB-F2c	I	district doctor, appointed by ministry	W. Ar.: 23 Nov 04	LPB-K6	I	district repres., partly unplanned area 1	K: 28 Oct 04
	LPB-F3	I	city council, middle management	F: 1 Dec 04	LPB-K7	I	district repres., partly unplanned area 2	K: 31 Oct 04
	LPB-F4	I	city council, senior management	F: 8 Dec 04	LPB-K8	FG	district <i>shura</i> rep., planned area 2	K: 31 Oct 04
	LPB-F5	I	city council, leader	F: 8 Dec 04			district <i>wakil-e-gozar</i> , planned area 2	K: 31 Oct 04
Internat. / Bilat. Gov. Agencies	LPB-F6	I	city council, senior management	F: 1 Dec 04	LPB-K9	FG	district <i>shura</i> rep., unplanned area 2	K: 31 Oct 04
	IBA-F1	I	World Bank decentralisation analyst	F: 22 Nov 04	IBA-K1	I	internat. advisor 1 to nat. ministry	K: 6 Aug 04
	IBA-F2	I	UN specialised agency, head, statistics	F: 17 Nov 04	IBA-K2	I	UN specialised agency, urban progr. mgr.	K: 22 June 04
	IBA-F3	I	bilateral agency, governance advisor	F: 26 Nov 04	IBA-K3	I	bilateral urban emergencies advisor	DC: 23 Mar 04
	IBA-F4	I	UN specialised agency, country rep., IDPs	F: 23 Nov 04	IBA-K4	I	internat. contractor for bilat. agency	K: 8 Aug 04
	IBA-F5	I	bilateral agency, decentralisation advisor	F: 22 Nov 04	IBA-K5	I	internat. advisor 1 to nat. ministry	K: 6 Aug 04
	IBA-F6	I	UNDP senior advisor	F: 29 Nov 04	IBA-K6	I	internat. advisor 2 to nat. ministry	K: 4 Jul 04
	IBA-F7	I	World Bank decentralisation advisor	F: 6 Dec 04	IBA-K7	I	UN specialised agency, chief techn. adv.	K: 19 June 04
	IBA-F8	I	UNAMSIL advisor	F: 19 Nov 04	IBA-K8e	I	UN specialised agency, provincial mgr. (Herat)	27 July 04
					IBA-K9e	I	UN specialised agency, regional coord. (Herat)	26 July 04
Non-Gov. Sector (service delivery)					IBA-K10e	I	bilateral agency, regional representative (Herat)	25 July 04
	NG-F1	I	INGO advocacy coord. multi-sector	F: 29 Nov 04	IBA-K11e	I	UN specialised agency, head of reg. Office (Herat)	25 July 04
	NG-F2	I	INGO programme asst., peacebuilding	F: 26 Nov 04				
	NG-F3	I	local NGO director, multi-sector	F: 3 Dec 04	NG-K1	I	internat. consultant (for research INGO)	K: 6 May 05
					NG-K2	I	INGO, legal advisor, refugees and IDPs	K: 5 Aug 04
					NG-K3	I	INGO, programme mgr., urban architecture	K: 3 May 05

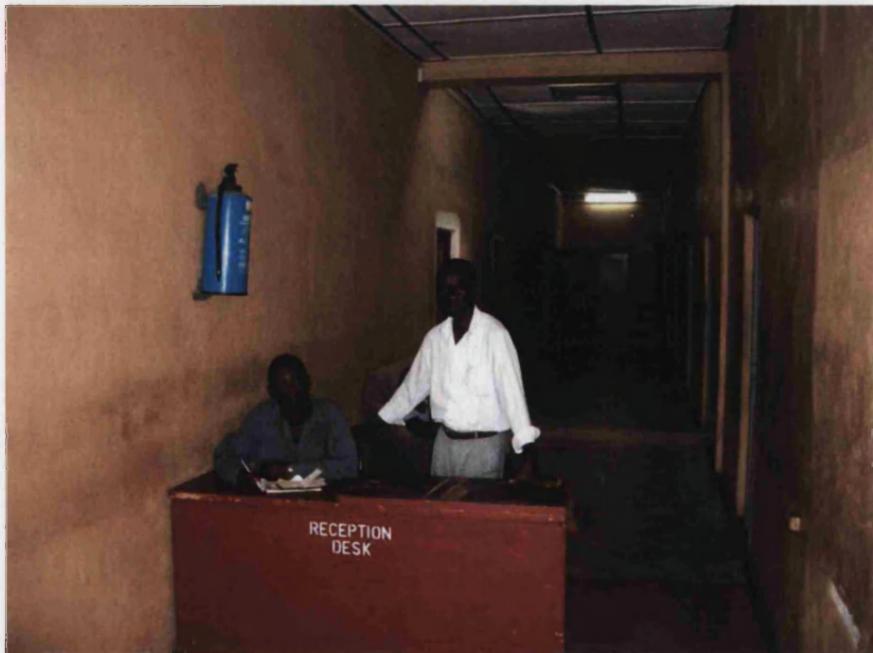
	NG-F4	FG	bilateral aid agency: country rep. bilateral aid agency: progr. coordinator bilateral aid agency: project manager	F: 30 Nov 04 F: 30 Nov 04 F: 30 Nov 04	NG-K4	I	UN spec. agency, country rep., refugees	K: 2 Aug 04
	NG-F5	I	INGO country director, multi-sector	F: 3 Dec 04	NG-K5	FG	INGO senior programme mgr., multi-sector INGO project supervisor, local governance	K: 27 Apr 05 K: 27 Apr 05
	NG-F6	I	INGO country director, rehabilitation	F: 29 Nov 04			INGO project supervisor, infrastructure INGO project supervisor, cash-for-work	K: 27 Apr 05
	NG-F7	I	INGO country director, food aid	F: 6 Dec 04	NG-K6	FG	INGO programme manager, cash-for-work INGO project manager, education	K: 11 May 05
	NG-F8	I	INGO country director, multi-sector	F: 26 Nov 04	NG-K7	I	INGO asst. country director, multi-sector	K: 23 June 04
	NG-F9	I	INGO progr. manager, governance	F: 22 Nov 04	NG-K8	I	INGO country director, micro-finance	K: 17 June 04
	NG-F10	I	INGO country director, disability	F: 29 Nov 04				
	NG-F11	I	INGO country director, children	F: 2 Dec 04				
	NG-F12	I	INGO advisor, refugees and IDPs	F: 7 Dec 04				
Civil Society (civic/ political focus)	CS-F1	I	civil rights organisation, former chairman	F: 3/5 Dec 04	CS-K1	I	senior academic, former nat. minister	K: 15 May 05
	CS-F2	FG	self-help group, chairman	F: 5 Dec 04	CS-K2	FG	local (urban) <i>shura</i> representative (male)	K: 30 Apr 05
			self-help group, chairlady	F: 5 Dec 04			local (urban) <i>shura</i> member (male)	K: 30 Apr 05
			self-help group, secretary general	F: 5 Dec 04			local (urban) <i>shura</i> member (male)	K: 30 Apr 05
			self-help group, financial secretary	F: 5 Dec 04			local (urban) <i>shura</i> member (male)	K: 30 Apr 05
			self-help group, public relations officer	F: 5 Dec 04			local (urban) <i>shura</i> member (male)	K: 30 Apr 05
			self-help group, member	F: 5 Dec 04			local (urban) <i>shura</i> member (male)	K: 30 Apr 05
	CS-F3	FG	civil rights organisation, progr. officer	F: 26 Nov 04			local (urban) <i>shura</i> member (female)	K: 30 Apr 05
			civil rights organis., asst. progr. officer	F: 26 Nov 04			local (urban) <i>shura</i> member (female)	K: 30 Apr 05
			civil rights organisation, project officer	F: 26 Nov 04	CS-K3	FG	youth movement leader 1	K: 14 May 05
	CS-F4	I	civil rights organisation, director	F: 7 Dec 04			youth movement leader 2	K: 14 May 05
	CS-F5	I	lawyer, former committee chairman	F: 19 Nov 04			youth movement leader 3	K: 14 May 05
	CS-F6	I	youth movement leader	F: 6 Dec 04			youth movement leader 4	K: 14 May 05
	CS-F7	I	religious body, national gen. secretary	F: 7 Dec 04	CS-K4	I	civil rights organisation, chairman	K: 16 June 04
	CS-F8	I	human rights movement, nat. leader	F: 7 Dec 04				
	CS-F9	I	academic researcher, local university	F: 6 Dec 04				
	CS-F10	I	youth movement coordinator	F: 6 Dec 04				

Annex 3: Images

All photos have been taken by the author.



1) Youth riot in Freetown, November 2004



2) Freetown Municipality in December 2004



3) The Amputees' Association in Aberdeen Camp, Freetown, December 2004



4) Going shopping in Freetown, December 2004

MAYOR WANTS PROBE ON LE500 MILLION SWEEPER



white elephant moulders at Blackwood garage

The Mayor of Freetown, Winstanley Bankole-Johnson has refused to accept the non-functional street sweeper which former City Council chairman Henry Ferguson claims to have bought for close to 200,000 pounds *probe*

According to very reliable sources, the new City Council is now demanding a full government inquiry into how Ferguson raided

City Council pension funds held in the U.K. and why both the Local Government minister Siddique Brima and Vice President Solomon Berewa gave their approval to this scheme.

Illegal

A former City Council solicitor told our paper that technically it was "wrong and illegal" for government to have given a guarantee allowing Ferguson to raid the U.K. pension fund.

A pension fund is established to cater for pen-

sions. Any other use of the money is illegal".

The City Council's former legal adviser, Nicholas Brown-Marke, wasn't consulted before the pension fund was raided. Meanwhile the "white elephant" of a street sweeper is parked at the

Blackwood Hodge garage in Kisumu Dockyard.

A British expert, who works for UNAMSIL, said the machine was not suitable for Sierra Leone.

"Whoever bought it failed to take cognisance of the specifics of Sierra Leone's rubbish problem."

Foday Mannah - trapped in house lie

was it a bank loan - or money he saved?

The general manager of the National Power Authority, Foday Mannah, has given two conflicting accounts of how he obtained the money to build two houses at Goderich simultaneously.

In our last issue (no 278, Friday November 13, 2004) we exposed the fact that Mr Mannah, who took over running of NPA in 2002 on State House directives, (the NPA Board did not approve him at his first interview), was building two mansions near MM CET in Goderich. When we contacted Mr Mannah to probe him over how he got the money, he claimed to have saved \$5,000 "from the time I was working in America".

However he also told our ace reporter *Hakarr Koroma* that he had taken out a bank loan to purchase the Goderich land and begin construction.

Meanwhile neighbours have exposed Mr Mannah's eccentric housebuilding style.

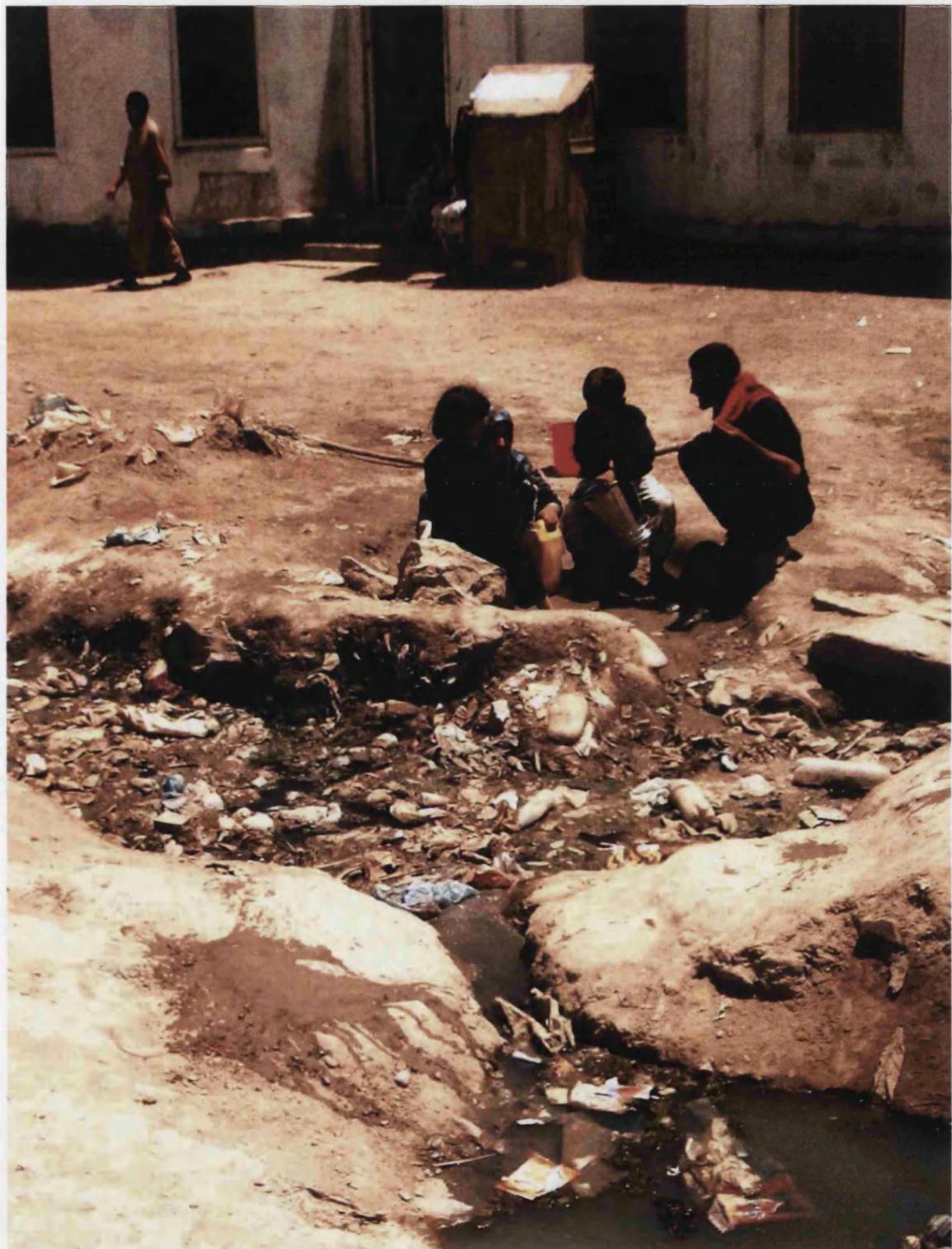
"Whenever he returns from a trip abroad, he changes the architectural design of the buildings. Apparently he wants his houses to look like the latest models in South Africa, Libya or wherever he goes," a neighbour told us.

Mr Mannah said he's only changed the structure once.

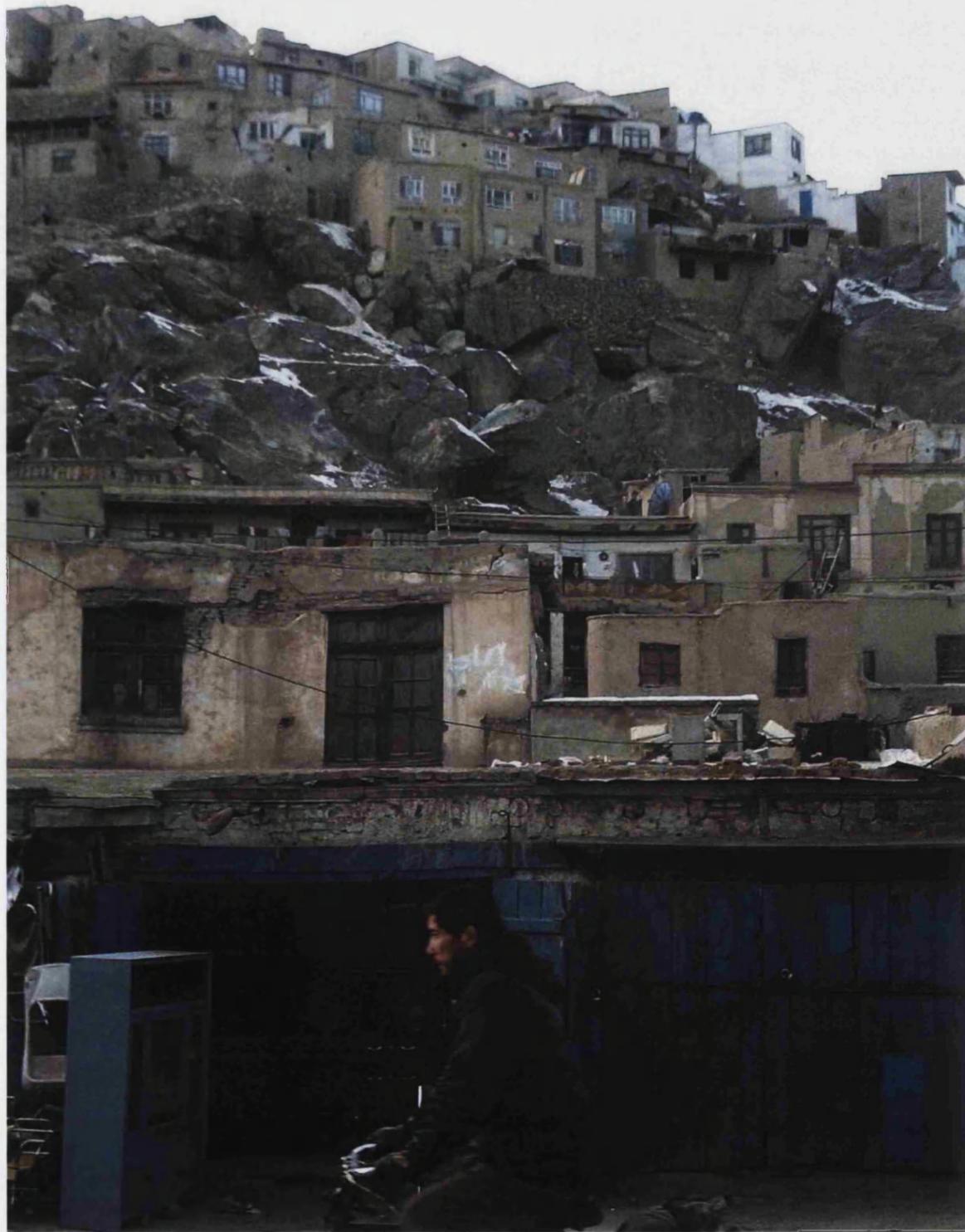
5) The 'white elephant' (PEEP! Magazine, 1 December 2004, page 2)



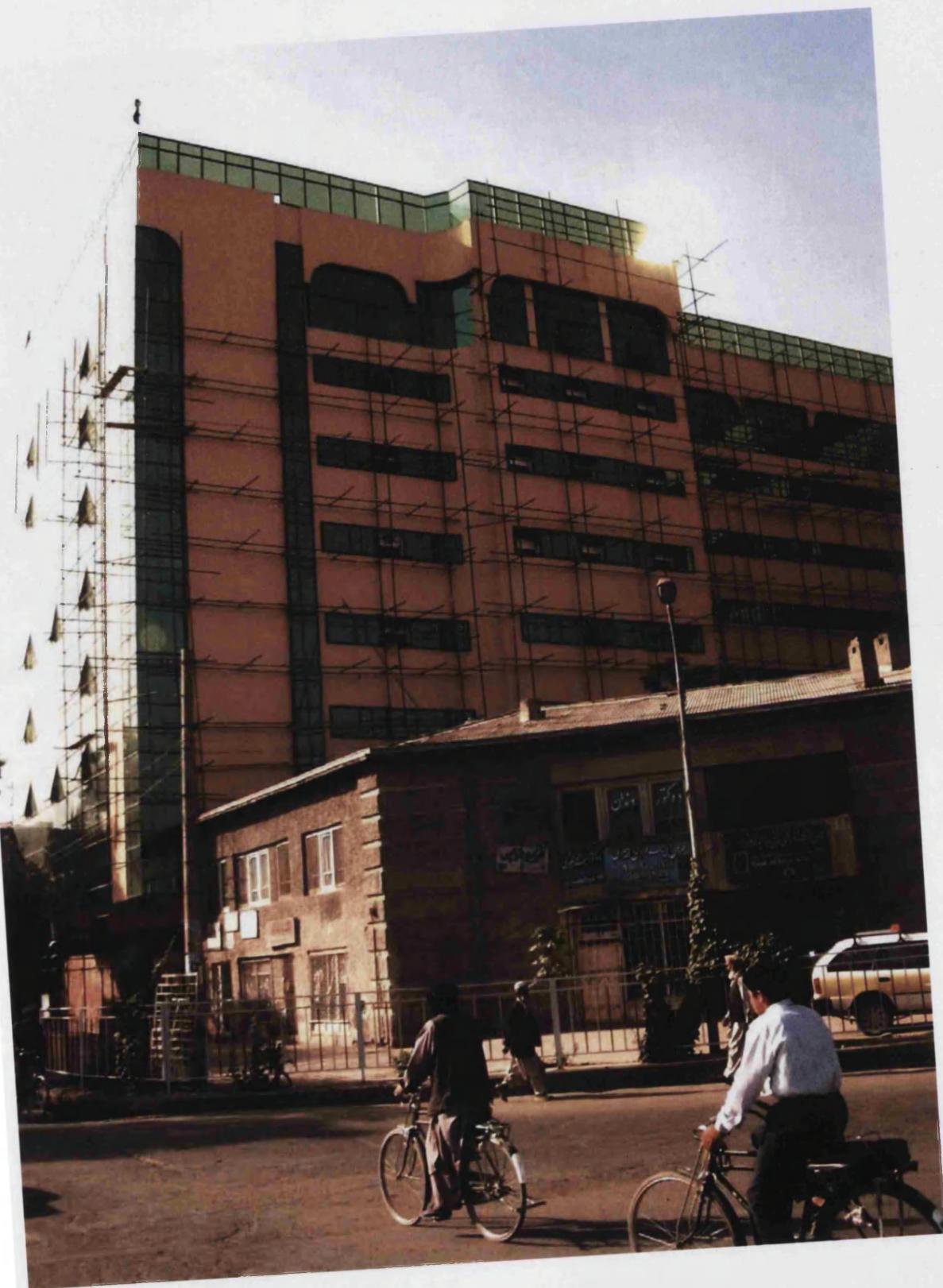
6) Opposition billboard in the capital city, Freetown, November 2004



7) Sewerage crisis in Kabul, July 2004



8) Hillside settlement in Kabul, January 2005



9) A new style for Kabul, May 2005



10) What became of the ministry? Kabul, June 2004



11) What is wrong with a 16 year-old plan for a Ministry of Nationaliti [sic] and Tribes?
Kabul, July 2004

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⁸⁷ Sources from press agencies, press releases, newspapers, magazines are listed on pages 311-315.

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