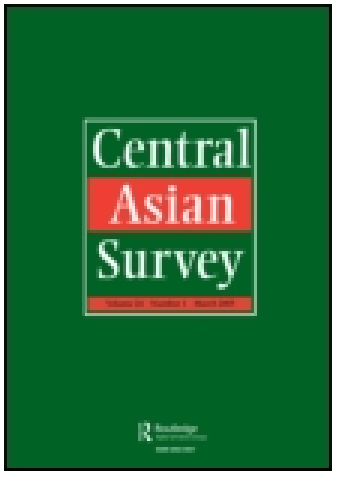

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The illumination of marginality: how ethnic Hazaras in Bamyan, Afghanistan, perceive the lack of electricity as discrimination

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The illumination of marginality: how ethnic Hazaras in Bamyan, Afghanistan, perceive the lack of electricity as discrimination

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In Afghanistan ethnic Hazaras are a group with a long history of marginalization, and even outright persecution, mainly because of their Shi'a Muslim faith. Only after the international intervention in 2001 have socio-economic opportunities started to open up for Hazaras. Hazaras, however, maintain a strong perception of still being considered second-class citizens, claiming to be overlooked by the Afghan government and allotted fewer funds by the international development community. This paper examines Hazara perceptions of marginality with reference to one issue: the lack of state-provided electricity in Bamyan province, which many consider the Hazara homeland. Anti-government protests in Bamyan often revolve around this particular issue, and the demand for electricity has become part of the permanent landscape, through a lantern sculpture in Bamyan's main square, as well as through the experience of living one's everyday life with a lack of easily available electric light. The lack of electricity becomes an embodied, daily reminder of perceived subordination to other religio-ethnic groups and the feeling of being left behind by the international community.

Keywords: Afghanistan; Hazaras; development; electricity infrastructure; landscape; ethno-religious marginalization

> Karzai, shame on you and your corrupt government!
> In the center of Bamyan people are still suffering from lack of electricity!
> Tonight is very cold, and it is the first night of the hunger strike![1]

The quote above was posted on Facebook in March 2013 by a friend and informant I had interviewed and accompanied to many protests by civil society organizations and events in Bamyan, Afghanistan. I was nearing the end of 18 months in Bamyan, where I conducted research with civil society activists who are involved in a struggle for improved rights for Hazaras, an ethnic group in central Afghanistan. These activists employ a number of methods, such as marches, which they base on United States' civil rights-era protests, and handing out pamphlets and posters. Memorialization events are held to remember one of many massacres or incidents which targeted Hazaras, such as during the civil war period, the Taliban period, or today in Afghanistan and Pakistan. On-going efforts are being made to reclaim a history that many Hazaras believe has been lost or manipulated by those in power, and to advance Hazaras' position in the Afghan state. The issues of infrastructure, in general, and electricity, in particular, have been given considerable attention by activists since the US invasion, and have become symbolic of Hazaras' perceived underdevelopment, as was illustrated in the opening quote, referring to the chronic lack of electricity. When I first arrived in Bamyan, I found that protests often started, or finished, at Alakain (Lantern) Square, where a giant lantern sculpture was on display.[2] 'Why a

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lantern, as opposed to some other symbol, to serve as your main gathering point? Was there any particular significance?' I asked activists. The answer was almost always the same: 'Our biggest problem is lack of electricity, so this was the focus of one of our first protests.'

At night in Bamyan, the darkness serves as a physical reminder to the inhabitants which leads many to believe they are kept in an underdeveloped state, illustrating Madeleine Reeves' (2011, 307) assertion that 'places are lived', and in Bamyan, that living is experienced as one finds oneself inhabiting a place of darkness as soon as the sun sets. During the day, the reminder is not so obvious, but Bamyan University cannot operate as many computers as are needed (and sometimes none), while only those offices with enough funds (in practice generally those with foreign or foreign-funded organizations) have regular electricity. Additionally, few industries are able to operate. No electricity being provided by the state in Bamyan means that no type of heavier industry which relies on electricity, for example, any sort of factory work, is possible. Construction work, wood working and blacksmithing using flame and bellows all exist. But nothing more industrial is possible, so that Bamyan appears as a relic of the past, with most residents relying on simple agricultural techniques for subsistence, with few options to move towards a more promising economic future based on industry. The people are very aware of this and believe that without state and international community cooperation there is little they can do to help themselves. Jeanne Féaux de la Croix (2011, 487) wrote of a hydroelectric dam in Kyrgyzstan: 'This is not a credible place; this is truly a miracle of technology.' For Hazaras, the only such miracle, that is, the only such large-scale infrastructure visible are the glaring lights of the Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) run by New Zealand, a military base whose technology they are excluded from. Such miracles are, from their point of view, for others to experience, even as Hazaras fight for inclusion. What Hazaras seem to be seeking is not simply access to electricity, but also access to modernity, and a feeling that they have achieved parity with the rest of Afghanistan. The type of electric supply they dream of is something large-scale that will bring industry, and which will allow them to advance in order to help them contribute, as full members of the Afghan state, to the development of the country as a whole. The type of electric supply they dream of, it seems, is something that would alter the landscape, the world in which they live, bringing it from a life of subsistence farming to something modern, developed.

Stephen Feld and Keith Basso posit that 'places become sites of power struggles' and that 'ethnography's stories of place and places are increasingly about power struggles' (Feld and Basso 1996, 115). For the Hazaras in Bamyan, this manifests itself in issues of historical memory and ethnic identity. For example, they assert that they are the descendants of an ancient Buddhist civilization of Afghanistan and by extension can claim what are essentially indigenous rights in Afghanistan, in particular in the central highlands region of the country. Infrastructural landscape, most obviously the distribution of electricity, is symbolic of such power struggles, as it is emblematic of development or lack thereof. This is particularly painful in the case of Bamyan, a landscape whose place name – according to some interlocutors – means 'shining light'. Staying in the dark at night, and maintaining the belief that other ethnic groups in similar regions are not experiencing such darkness, reaffirms Hazara beliefs that they remain the most disadvantaged, the most oppressed, group in Afghanistan. Being kept in the dark[3] comes to be a sort of prison one cannot break out of. For the Hazaras, the lack of electricity is a visible reminder of a playing field that, politically and economically, is not level. To be sure Hazaras are not the only ones who experience a lack of electricity or other infrastructure. The point I am making is that Hazaras choose to see this as an intentional and instrumental act of the state apparatuses in order to further disenfranchise and marginalize them as an ethnic group.

This article is based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Markaz Bamyan and surrounding districts during the summers of 2010 and 2011, and a 12-month period in 2012–13 for the

completion of my dissertation in the field of anthropology. During this time, while researching Hazara ethnic identity, I also carried out numerous interviews with inhabitants concerning the developmental and infrastructural problems in Bamyan. Protests addressing electricity problems directly, they reported, were common when they first started such actions until about 2010, when they came to believe that the issue was simply not getting attention. However, it remains a constant theme woven throughout their activist work. Activists were usually young men and sometimes women who had at least a high-school education, although this was not always the case. Many worked in various non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Markaz Bamyan (Bamyan Centre), many were university students, and some worked for local government apparatuses, although I did meet others of all ages and from all walks of life. I also carried out numerous interviews with inhabitants concerning the developmental and infrastructural problems in Bamyan.

In this article, I will next briefly discuss the historical origins, experiences and perceptions of marginality as experienced by Hazaras. This is necessary to understand in order to perceive the ways in which collective trauma has led to a suspicion against the state and other groups within Afghanistan that many Hazaras view as antagonistic. I will then explore the ways in which my informants came to see their lack of electricity as a symbol of social exclusion, and the ways that electricity as a symbol of exclusion is perceived through landscape features in Bamyan. I will continue with an overview of aid delivered to Bamyan in general, and the electricity situation in Bamyan as it stood during the time of my research. Finally, I will discuss Hazara perceptions of the most well-known electricity projects in Bamyan until the time of my research, and whether they are viewed as successes or failures by the population in Bamyan. To conclude, I will return to the issue of marginality, landscape and electricity and put forth the idea that residents of Bamyan are seeking not simply electric light but entry into modernity by way of more advanced industry and hence an end to marginality.

The Hazaras and marginality

Before addressing the issue of energy, electricity and infrastructure in Bamyan, the historical context of the Hazara people within Afghanistan must be briefly addressed. Many sources claim that Hazaras make up 9–10% of Afghanistan's population, making them the third largest ethnic group in the country, after Tajiks (roughly 27% of the population) and Pashtuns (42% of the population),[4] while others claim Hazaras constitute at least 20% of the population.[5] The Hazara homeland, known as Hazarajat or Hazarestan, is located in the central highlands of the country and adjoining areas. The dominant narrative concerning the origin of Hazaras posited by most scholarly historical books on Afghanistan and written by non-Hazaras has long been that they are descended from Mongols, who in the 13th century invaded what is now Afghanistan (Bacon 1951). There is some linguistic support, provided by Bacon (1951) and others, and referenced by Hazaras I met in Bamyan as well, for this possibility. Hazara Asiatic physical features also seem to support this possibility. Yet many Hazaras today, particularly in Markaz Bamyan, are at least partially rejecting this theory as their main identity marker. Rather they maintain that they are a mix of Mongol and earlier inhabitants of the region, or that they have very little Mongol blood at all (Poladi 1989; Mousavi 1997). My own research showed that many Hazaras are trying to establish themselves as the indigenous people of not only Hazarajat but also much of Afghanistan, in order to strengthen a vulnerable position within the Afghan state. Many of my informants claim descent from the Gandharan civilization that built the giant Buddha statues in Bamyan in the sixth and seventh centuries CE. Through a relationship to this historical landscape they highlight a direct connection to this region which they believe will strengthen their legitimate claim to the territory. In the late 1800s, after a series of wars and rebellions, much Hazara land was

redistributed to other Afghan groups by the state. Disagreements over the ownership of these areas still exist and contribute to an on-going anxiety that Hazaras might, in the future, suffer further loss of land or displacement. Non-Hazaras who feel they have a right to the land may invoke the idea that as 'Mongols' Hazaras do not belong on that land anyway. Hazaras hence try to counter by laying an ancient, pre-Mongol claim to the land.

This understanding of Hazara autochthony is useful to look at through the lens of 'ethnoscapes', as used by Conrad Schetter (2005) rather than with the original usage introduced by Arjun Appadurai (1996).[6] Schetter follows the ideas of Anthony Smith (1996), defining ethnoscapes as 'the belief shared by ethnic groups in a common spatial frame of origin' (52). Hazaras remember a homeland from which they were driven out, mainly by the encroachment of Pashtun and possibly Tajik migrations, or through political struggles that resulted in the loss of land. The imagined homeland of the Hazaras is hence much greater than the current land occupied by Hazaras. This vision of their ethnoscape plays two roles. First, Hazaras have a difficult time reconciling with groups such as Pashtuns, who have defined imagined homelands that overlap. And second, this vision reinforces Hazara perceptions of past and on-going marginalization and social exclusion.

There is more clear documentation of Hazara history after they were forcefully incorporated into a centralized Afghan state by Amir Abdur Rahman in the late 1800s. Until this point, Hazaras, although their land was nominally within the Afghan state, generally had a high degree of autonomy.[7] Any group such as Ghilzai Pashtuns, Nuristanis and Uzbeks that had operated with some autonomy were considered a threat to Abdur Rahman's power and affected by this campaign (Barfield 2010, 160). At the time, Hazaras were living in a very homogenous region in a defendable, contiguous mountainous area in the centre of the country, which would have made them seem particularly threatening to centralization. Hazara social structure had been agriculture-based, with a feudal and tribal social system, governed by local *mirs*, *khans* and *begs*.[8] All these actors lost their power and were replaced by Pashtun and Tajik rulers, or in some cases Hazara arbitrators, after Abdur Rahman's campaigns, thus effectively dismantling the entire social system (Mousavi 1997, 91–92). As the majority of Hazaras are Shi'a Muslims, the operations carried out against them were particularly harsh, as they were conducted with the help of a sectarian religious division to mobilize the Sunni soldiers and others acting against Hazaras in the name of *jihad*.

Between 1888 and 1894, Hazaras carried out three unsuccessful uprisings against the state, followed by severe reprisals. Hazaras were sold into slavery – between 1892 and 1894 alone 9000 Hazara men are reported to have been sold into slavery in Kabul. They could be killed with next to no pretext, particularly as some Sunni mullahs are said to have issued *fatwa*s stating that killing a Hazaras would guarantee one's entry to paradise (Mousavi 1997). Large tracts of Hazara lands were confiscated, and Pashtun Kuchi nomads were invited to use Hazara lands as summer grazing pastures (Ibrahimi 2009). Taxes levied against Hazaras were prohibitive, sending many into irrevocable debt. Pashtun and Kuchi traders offered Hazaras goods at such a premium that each year debts grew higher, which resulted in further acquisition of Hazara land to pay off the debts (Ferdinand 1962). Mousavi maintains that half of population was displaced or killed (Mousavi 1997, 136). Hazara activists currently estimate that at least 60% of the population was killed or forced out of its homeland during Abdur Rahman's campaigns. There is the possibility that some of these numbers are inflated, but enough credible sources (e.g. Mousavi 1997; Poladi 1989; Karimi 2011; Ibrahimi 2012, to name but a few) exist to indicate that the effects on the population, whether through exposure to violence, later economic policies that favoured other groups over Hazaras, or forced migration, were considerable. The effects of what seems to many to be a repetition of historical Hazara oppression today is not without consequence. An activist at a protest I attended against killing of Hazaras in Pakistan told me, 'This is a genocide. It started

with Abdur Rahman, it continued with the other kings, the mujahedin, the Taliban, also in Pakistan … it is always Hazaras who are targeted' (January 23, 2013).

In the years following this conflict, Hazaras became part of an established lower class among Afghans. Very few had opportunities to attend school or university. Those in Hazarajat for the most part scraped by as subsistence farmers. Markaz Bamyan, the commercial and administrative centre of Bamyan, was controlled, economically and politically, largely by Tajiks with close state relations (Canfield 1973). The many Hazaras who fled to large cities, especially Kabul, Mazar-e-Sharif and Herat, found themselves restricted to a servant/manual labourer class (Mousavi 1997; Karimi 2011; Barfield 2010). Politically, Hazaras were excluded, and in fact the borders of Hazarajat were drawn so that only one province, Bamyan, was Hazara majority.[9]

During the Soviet invasion (1979–89) and civil war period in Afghanistan (1992–96), Hazara political groups underwent a period of conflict followed by consolidation under the party Hizb-e-Wahdat, which was headed by cleric and political figure Abdul Ali Mazari (Harpviken 1998). Hazara political and ethnic consciousness grew and became more unified, both under Wahdat and among the diaspora, particularly in Quetta, Pakistan, a city that has long received Hazara migrants (Ibrahimi 2012). After the United States-led intervention began in 2001 and 2002, with the removal of the Taliban and installation of a new government, Hazaras took advantage of the chance to improve their situation, particularly through education. Numbers of Hazara boys and girls attending school are thought to be higher in comparison with other ethnic groups,[10] while at the same time Hazara political and community leaders are very vocal in demanding equal rights.

Assessing Hazaras' status today is difficult because whereas in the past discrimination has been generalized, in the last 12 years opportunities provided by the occupation and post-Taliban period have given more advantages to *some* Hazaras, although the idea of Hazaras as second-class citizens is maintained. Social exclusion is now more difficult to detect and measure, since even if some Hazaras are successful in fields of education, government and business, this does not mean that all Hazaras are able to take advantage of these opportunities. When Hazaras in a particular location such as Bamyan latch on to an issue such as electricity as symbolic of greater problems, it can be used to understand one part of a group's reaction to something so ambiguous as the concept of social exclusion. Social exclusion does not affect group members in the same way or to the same degree, as it is not necessarily institutionalized. Therefore, examining the symbolic meanings acquired by electricity in Hazaras' understanding of social exclusion thus illuminates their exclusion more generally. The relation between current lack of electricity, exclusion and past suffering was recently highlighted by a friend in Bamyan, who was also an activist and a university student, as we discussed the 2013 Afghan football team win of the South Asian Football Federation Cup. This was heralded as an important moment of unity for Afghanistan, a moment that could be celebrated by an Afghan nation. When I mentioned this, Hassan said:

> What Afghan nation? We Hazaras know a dark history of deprivation and genocide. There is no justice and equality! People all over Afghanistan are celebrating, but we Hazaras are forced to celebrate by the light of our cell phones. The building of a nation for all groups is what the government keeps talking about, but there can be no nation until the government distributes assets equally and stops ignoring smaller ethnicities and tribes. Until then, there will be no nation! (September 14, 2013)[11]

Hassan was not explicitly speaking of electricity, but he clearly referenced the lack of infrastructure, particularly electric infrastructure, as he moved from the topic of celebrating by the light provided by a cell phone to the topic of unequal distribution of resources to be used for electricity. The event that brought on this declaration, the celebration in Afghanistan for its football team's victory, was for him meaningless because of the darkness, and this meaninglessness was underlined by the meagre light produced by cell phones. Hassan made clear that darkness to him was

both metaphorical in referring to Hazaras' situation in general and literal in that they had no electric light. Hassan also alluded to the general social exclusion of Hazaras through the feelings that moment created. He felt excluded from the national celebration as a Hazara, yet what reminded him of this exclusion was the lack of electricity. This reminder caused him to recall the historical roots of Hazara social problems, topics one might not normally put together. But for Hassan, electricity had become the trigger that raised these issues. It was, for him, both a continuation of the oppression suffered by Hazaras in the past and a symbol evidenced in the landscape, as he tried to celebrate in the streets in the dark and found himself frustrated.

Landscape in the place of shining light

In Bamyan, people are attuned to the land around them, as are people everywhere, and they read a history in that landscape. Yet because of the specific historical contingencies in the region, Hazaras both remember events that happened during the years of conflict and recall a more ancient past. An attachment to certain features of the landscape serves to root them in a history that established them as legitimate, and even original, inhabitants of the area, rather than interlopers who do not belong, a claim which non-Hazara informants put forward when questioning Hazaras' right to live on the land they inhabit today. Electric light is a feature of the landscape, and hence plays a role along with other landscape features as people seek to establish themselves in a particular piece of land, or a particular ethnoscape. Empty holes where Buddha statues once stood, the ruins of the old bazaar, sites of massacres and battles, all hold meaning. As Hazara activists and the general population of Markaz Bamyan read the landscape, they also read the full darkness that comes after sunset, broken only by the bright islands of non-Afghan outsiders, the lights of the PRT and of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) headquarters, for example.

For Hazaras in Bamyan, these features of the landscape remind them not only of their past, but also of the tenuous position they perceive themselves to occupy in the Afghan state. Referring to those living in the hills of West Virginia, Kathleen Stewart (Stewart 1996, 137) writes:

> The detritus of history piled high on the local landscape has become central to a sense of place emergent in re-remembered ruins and pieced together fragments. […] Far from being a timeless or out of the way place, the local finds itself reeling in the wake of every move and manoeuver of the centre of things.

The same description could be applied to the mountains and high plateaus of Bamyan. For the Hazaras living there, the historical landscape through which they move becomes a physical reminder of identity. In the niches where ancient giant Buddhist statues, destroyed by the Taliban, emerged from a cliff face, they see their heritage, a heritage they believe to have been assaulted along with the statues. In the ruins of Shahr-e-Gholghola, or the city of screams, they see more destruction of their heritage – paradoxically at the hands of those same Mongols that many see as their ancestors.[12] Various sites mark massacres where Hazaras have been killed, either by Taliban or other political entities that have opposed the Hazaras. The place in which they live not only contains reminders of the past, but also evidence of the current situation, in which Hazaras believe that they remain a persecuted minority and that the state ignores them intentionally, focusing valuable resources on peoples it favours because, as I was told repeatedly, they are not Hazaras and hence more valuable. Other times, they remember that the centre, that is the state apparatus, lashed out and destroyed people, landscape and livelihoods – Amir Abdur Rahman, the *mujahedin* government of Rabbani, the Taliban, all targeted Hazaras. Sitting with several informants and discussing Hazara history, they switched easily between tales of over a century ago, to the civil war in Afghanistan, to the problems experienced under the current government, and back. Haliq told me, 'Abdur Rahman killed us and took our land, Massoud killed us in

Afshar, the current government watches as the Taliban kills us, and does not provide protection for our roads, does not help us!' (February 10, 2013). They were teaching me about their history as they spoke, but the history was tied to the land of Afghanistan and to their suffering. They wanted me to know that their people had experienced a chain of events designed to shut them out from any real power, any control over their destiny. Physical reminders became important – both the ruins of giant Buddha statues and the darkness that surrounded them at night, as they told this story.

The lack of light at night, as well as permanent monuments such as the lantern sculpture in Alakain Square and power lines that stretch along streets but do not bring electricity – some international development organization's good intention that was abandoned – also serve to reinforce perceptions of marginalization and victimization. Sometimes the link between landscape, electricity and history was brought into relief. One friend and informant, Farid, who worked with the PRT on development issues, came to my house for dinner with me and my husband in April 2013. As we relaxed on pillows after dinner, talk turned to a project planned by the state-owned Chinese Metallurgical Company (MCC) project. Farid began by discussing how this project would give only 10% of its output to Bamyan, an amount he viewed as unfair. Furthermore, this is the company that will excavate the Mes Aynak mine, where a treasure trove of Buddhist statues and artefacts have been uncovered and which will be destroyed as copper excavation continues (Dalrymple 2013). As discussed above, the identity many Hazaras favour relates directly to a past tied to the Buddhist period in Afghanistan. To informants such as Farid, China thus seemed to be offering them very little – electricity that would not meet their most important needs – in exchange for the destruction of their heritage, and what they see as one of their links to the land. Mes Aynak is located in Logar, not a Hazara-inhabited area but a region that the staunchest proponents of Hazara indigeneity claims was stolen from them. Receiving what they believe to be a basic need not from the state but from a Chinese company that would destroy their heritage is further evidence to them that they are intentionally forgotten by the Afghan state.

Overview: aid and electricity in Bamyan

The electricity situation in Markaz Bamyan was nearly untenable while I conducted my research. Almost everyone had at least a weak solar panel or battery, but few had any power source more effective than this, which provides only several hours of weak electricity a day, perhaps enough to run one television and charge a couple of cell phones. Many of the most impoverished still relied on oil lanterns, although this was seen as a last resort as it is considered dangerous and old-fashioned. Some paid into a local generator project, in which one neighbourhood member buys a generator and maintains it, and others pay a fee. This was not a popular solution because – should there be a problem with the generator – the owner may simply not attend to the repairs; something that happens fairly often. Outside of Markaz Bamyan, the National Solidarity Project (NSP), an Afghan government programme created to foster development, promoted micro-hydroelectric power in the many rivers that flow from the mountains. A report carried out by CDA Collaborative Learning Projects, which included a research project in Bamyan, indicated that rural Afghans are generally happy with the NSP ("Listening Project Field Visit Report Afghanistan" 2009). My own informants indicated that they found the NSP favourable, particularly in Fulladi Valley, as well as the village Saidabad, both a short distance from the centre. 'Here in Fulladi, we have strong electricity, we have strong light in several rooms,' said one young man, a friend who worked as a journalist (November 19, 2012). A grandfather from Saidabad I visited to discuss the recent history of Markaz Bamyan stated: 'We have enough electricity for lights and to power a television' (December 2, 2012). A common theme when discussing development and in particular projects to provide electricity was that although some people

might have electricity, the fact that Markaz Bamyan, where real political, educational and infrastructural development should be taking place, seemed to remain underdeveloped, pointed to politically motivated exclusion.[13] Many inhabitants expected underdevelopment in remote, rural areas, but believed that the seat of government should be more modernized, as it was from this place that development, economic and educational opportunities for the entire region should stem.

In Afghanistan less stable conflict-ridden regions receive more aid, and stable, calm regions such as Bamyan often receive less aid, because of the importance placed on winning 'hearts and minds' of people away from the insurgency. Aid delivered through PRTs can often be delivered with military, as well as development, goals in mind – with military often taking precedence. In Bamyan, stories (whether accurate or not) abound about other regions that have secure access to electricity – Herat, Parwan, Nangarhar.[14] A 2008 report carried out by the Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief and Development (ACBAR) indicated that there is some truth to these perceptions. This study points out that if Helmand, a hotspot of Taliban insurgency, had been a state, it would have been the fifth largest recipient of aid. Volatile Nimroz, Helmand, Kandahar, Zabul and Uruzgan receive an amount of aid two to three times greater than other, more stable provinces (Waldman 2008, 5).[15] The same report points out that as aid distributed through the government is disbursed outwards from central government, it tends to remain in urban rather than in rural areas – Kabul, for example, accounts for 70% of the national operational budget (12). It is clear that smaller, rural areas with relatively good security such as Bamyan often receive less. How does Bamyan compare with similar rural regions, however? In 2007–08, Bamyan ranked 11th out of 34 provinces in per-capita donor spending. Nimroz was awarded about US$450 per capita, Bamyan about US$200 per capita, and at the low end Wardak at around US$50 per capita (15).[16] These figures, taken at face value, indicate that it is not discrimination against Hazaras per se that decides which areas receive more or less money. After all, while Wardak does have a considerable Hazara population, the majority are Pashtuns.[17] How these funds affected overall development in each region is not clear. It is possible that a province such a Bamyan, described by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) as 'one of the poorest, most mountainous, and agriculturally least productive areas' in Afghanistan ("Regional Profile for Bamyan" n.d., 1) might make improvements with reasonable aid amounts when compared with the rest of the country, and yet starting with such a disadvantage, residents comparing themselves with others might perceive discrimination. And if discrimination is known to exist anyway, residents might be more likely to blame problems on this rather than on other factors.

The point is, for Hazaras in Bamyan underdevelopment was *perceived* to be the result of a systematic discrimination, and lack of electricity was a glaring reminder of this. Again and again my informants' narratives in Markaz Bamyan on these issues overlapped when I would sit with them and interview, have group discussions or just chat. As I sat with activists protesting the targeted killing of Hazaras in Quetta during a hunger strike outside the UNAMA Bamyan headquarters, frustration mounted and activists spoke over each other. 'We are the people who built the Buddhas, but today, a genocide takes place against us. The state would give all our land to nomadic *kuchis* if we do not fight. Look at the conditions in which we live!' said Jawad, referencing lack of electricity, lack of school facilities and poor roads in the region (January 13, 2013).

However, in the numerous protests I took part in, very few addressed the issue of electricity directly, contrasting with the themes of earlier protests described by civil society activists that focused more exclusively on such development issues. Civil society activists seem to have moved on at first glance, to newer issues, such as the safety of the roads to Kabul which have over the past several years deteriorated considerably, because their protests concerning electricity did not seem to be making progress. As other problems are discussed, electricity invariably comes

up. When activists address problems relating to the quality of Bamyan University, they focus on books, teacher training and the subjects available to students. And yet the activists, many who are themselves students, almost always then move on to the problems of electricity, a problem which proves too great to overlook. 'How can we connect to the outside world?' one student, Arifa, not a member of the core group of activists but someone who did take part in protests from time to time, asked. She went on, while we relaxed in her rented room after eating lunch together:

> The university does not have enough electricity access to supply computers for us, but those of us with laptops cannot charge them. We cannot study more than a couple hours after it grows dark. If it is a cloudy day, our solar panels do not charge at all, and then we have nothing. (May 3, 2013)

Parents also expressed these concerns. A neighbour, and a highly involved activist, who is also a mother, Tahra, said, 'My children want to read at night. They need television so they have some idea about the outside world, to help them in their education, but we do not have a strong enough solar panel to allow them to do these things' (April 15, 2013). Through these narratives, people were telling of trying to recover from the discrimination they faced, but with the belief that this discrimination is on-going.[18]

For others, the electricity problem was expressed as a safety issue. Mothers were afraid of children falling into stoves because of poor lighting. People fear using oil lamps because of the risk of fire. Most do not go out after dark because the rugged terrain is dangerous when it is difficult to see, and criminality has been on the rise as the security situation slowly declines. For still others, industry is the biggest concern. An informant, and activist, who, when not working during normal business hours at a small local radio station, sought to become an entrepreneur, was frustrated because he lost several business opportunities. 'Bamyan is well known for its potatoes, and a foreigner had visited to see if investment in a potato chip factory might be a possibility. The lack of electricity led him to decide to abandon the project. At the same time,' sighed the entrepreneur, 'Herat makes ice-cream, cola, all sorts of goods, because of its reliable power supply' (February 12, 2013). The same individual also hoped to become involved in the mining of marble, but again, lack of electricity for processing put a halt to his plans.

Attempts and failures to solve the electricity crisis in Bamyan[19]

During my time in Bamyan, I relied almost exclusively on solar power for electricity, which provided about three hours of power each evening, just enough to type field notes. Some foreign offices use generators, particularly for their guest houses at night. But these are all individual initiatives. Local Hazara concerns focus on the lack of state-provided electricity to Bamyan. The state, as well as several international development organizations, has made attempts to provide electricity, but all have yet to deliver to the Markaz at the time of writing.[20]

During a meeting in his small office, the local representative from the Ministry of Energy and Water discussed his misgivings about a project (briefly mentioned in my conversation with one of my informants, Farid, above) in Kahmard district, to the north of Markaz Bamyan, being implemented by a state-owned Chinese company (Chinese Metallurgical Company – MCC). MCC plans to begin with coal extraction, which will later be expanded to other types of mineral extraction. The coal will be used to create power plants which will run the Chinese mining efforts and provide electricity to Bamyan. Each district of Bamyan would get a substation. But when I asked whether the representative thought this to be a beneficial project, he said, 'Absolutely not. The Chinese are only thinking of themselves.' The actual amount of electricity that goes to the residents of Bamyan will be quite small, the main point being to operate the Chinese extraction industries (which, he added, will likely employ Chinese, and not local, workers). Plus, he worried that coal would create too much pollution. 'Why should we rely on coal,' he asked, 'when we have so much water?'

And yet, solar panels and generators are considered by many organizations to be a good alternative to large-scale projects, such as dam building, which in other regions of the world have had mixed results – pushed through by the centre, they can result in environmental problems and cause people to lose land in flooded areas, although for some in Bamyan, such as the Ministry of Water and Electricity official I spoke to, they represent a real solution to the problem. Several civil society activists told me of projects that intended to use these alternative types of technology, rather than larger scale projects, with the worry that such smaller projects would not bring major development to Bamyan. The Aga Khan Foundation wanted to bring electricity to the nearby Fulladi Valley area using generators (Ghafari 2011). The project was destined to fail, activists said, because the inhabitants of the villages of Fulladi Valley could not afford to pay for the fuel needed for generators. Likewise, during one of my first visits to Bamyan, a USAID representative was very excited to discuss a proposed plan to bring electricity to Markaz Bamyan using underground generators.[21] This project fell apart in the planning stages, I later found out, when discussing it with government officials in Bamyan. 'That project never would have worked, it was a waste of time,' stated Akbar, affiliated with the local Provincial Council. 'Petrol is too expensive for our people' (March 27, 2013). A New Zealand-funded project was working to bring large numbers of solar panels to Bamyan (*Bakhtar News* 2012). They were, however, not intended to serve Markaz Bamyan, but rather the villages of Saidabad, Hyderabad and Saroa-e-Syob. While these villages are very close to the centre, people again felt that it was catering to individual households and not designed to foster real economic development, for example, by targeting areas where businesses are located. In Bamyan, it is very clear where businesses are located in the bazaar and where private households are located. They generally do not overlap. Another informant, Daoud, who had worked with development projects at the PRT doubted the efficacy of either of these types of electricity sources. 'Generators cost too much,' he said. 'Solar panels, however, are almost always not of the best quality, and break after a few years' (April 13, 2013). He had serious doubts as to whether the international community would have any interest in replacing broken solar panels – as the panels were for household use, they would not promote economic growth, in his opinion, and many people would, several years from now, still not be in a position to buy their own.[22]

The official with the Ministry of Energy and Water in Afghanistan who I interviewed made it clear he did not have much hope for the development of electricity in Bamyan. He said that the NSP is in fact building a generator for Markaz Bamyan, which will be used by local businesses. Would this foster the development those in Bamyan told me they sought? No, was his straight answer. The businesses would have to have enough capital to use electricity from the generator, which, being paid by the kilowatt, would be quite expensive. But it would only be strong enough to power lights, and maybe computers and copy machines. It would by no means sustain any sort of industry. The expense also meant that students at Bamyan University, almost all Hazara, would also not benefit. Female students not from Bamyan live in dorms or rent private rooms, and usually have to supply their own solar panels. The quality of the panels is very poor, as they are able to scrape together little money for their purchase. Male students do not have dorms and are not able to rent rooms, as culturally it is not appropriate for a non-family male to live in one's household. They rent tiny rooms behind bazaar shops, with little heat and little access to electricity. Some use solar panels, but with as many as 12–15 people packed into a tiny room, they have no more than a few hours of light and maybe the chance to charge their cell phones.

What most informants, like the ministry official, said they would like is a large-scale infrastructural project that will deliver electricity without the problems of generators and small-scale solar power: in other words, a dam. All who knew about the long-planned Tupchi dam project stated unequivocally that it should be completed. Plans to build a dam in Tupchi,

just outside of Markaz Bamyan, have been considered since before the wars in Afghanistan began, during the government of Daoud Khan. To the people of Bamyan, building a dam and creating a strong source of electricity is the obvious answer. It would be proof that the state is, in fact, working for them. From their standpoint, it would be solid, it would become part of the landscape, and it would make use of a part of the landscape that so many are familiar with – the rapidly flowing streams that run from the melting mountain snow. I felt that this sort of solidity, of a project that would be born from the landscape and become part of the landscape, seemed to dispel the anxiety created by the problems experienced by the unreliability of other electricity sources. The poetic aspect of this, a new, solid part of the landscape that would drive away the ephemeral, and yet harmful, darkness, was appealing. Among those I spoke with, there seemed to be hope that if this was done, something so solid and unbreakable built, one of Féaux de la Croix in-credible places, miracles, that this might be a true indication from the government that years of exclusion might be ending. Rumours of a plan to continue with the Tupchi dam project abound. One informant said they went to a talk in which a US Embassy representative discussed the project. The representative for the Ministry of Energy and Water said that a German NGO, Integration, was conducting surveys to look into the feasibility of the dam project. He had little hope, however. It seemed as if Hazaras in Bamyan, who had been waiting possibly 30 years for the project, did not believe it would actually materialize.[23]

Conclusions: meaning of the lantern in Alakain Square

To conclude, I will return to the lantern statue displayed in Alakain Square. The lantern holds a very important place in the minds and imaginations of Hazara activists and residents living in Bamyan. It represents an early attempt on their part to demand social justice, in the form of electricity. And yet, it has also come to represent a closing of opportunities, and the further marginalization of Hazaras on the part of the Afghan state and, perhaps, those international organizations that work with the state. It has also become an important feature of the landscape of Bamyan and as such is a constant reminder of what is lacking and what they hope for, as individuals 'read' the landscape they traverse each day.

Several of the most prominent civil society activists installed the lantern in Alakain Square in 2009, after walking with it through the length of the bazaar in a protest march.[24] The lantern itself is large – about the height of a man, almost 2 metres, and sits upon a dais. The initial point was only to bring attention to the issue of not having electricity. A smaller version of the lantern was given to Farouk Wardak, the Education Minister, when he visited Bamyan, and asked that it be delivered to Ismail Khan, Minister of Water and Energy, as a sarcastic 'thank you' for his services. Giving small lanterns to officials who visit Bamyan has since become a repeated action for civil society members. The activists then decided they would seek a larger audience. They created another large lantern statue and delivered it to the US Embassy in Kabul, with a letter asking that it be sent to President Barack Obama. The activists told me they wanted to send the lantern so that they could 'light the way' for Obama to improve his policies in Afghanistan. It would, they said, 'illuminate' better policies for Afghanistan, policies that would treat minorities more fairly, as much of what the United States was doing was seen as well-intentioned, but misguided.[25] The lantern was, of course, never given to Obama. The activists who sent the lantern believe that Karzai blocked the movement, and he is responsible for hiding the truth about the situation of the Hazaras from the United States, one more way of taking part in a continuation of centuries of social exclusion, they say. Today, this second lantern is on display at a restaurant in Kabul. The owner of the restaurant, a woman, donates proceeds to programmes for drug addicts.

Activists say that the lantern for them became a symbol of democracy, in a land where democracy does not work. The lantern was not delivered, they say, the light was extinguished, and they

have not been given their full voice in the corrupted democratic process. The original lantern still stands in Bamyan, a now permanent-seeming aspect of the landscape, and Hazaras still congregate around it in protest. For some, it continues to stand mainly for electricity. For others, it takes on different meaning. Some see it as a reminder that through illumination of the mind through education Hazaras can succeed. Some see in it the danger that oil lamps cause, and a reason to continue to fight for electricity. For those who installed it, it stands for hope and broken promises. When international intervention in Afghanistan began, Hazaras believed they might have a chance to live equally with other Afghans. They then saw the funnelling of development projects to areas gripped by insurgency. They tried to gain attention with the lantern, but in the end these attempts did not lead to significant improvements. In some ways, the hopes for the lantern were extinguished, as Markaz Bamyan struggles with development. In other ways, however, the lantern, and the lack of electricity it represents, remains a rallying point around which Bamyan activists gather and continue to try to fight against all sorts of perceived injustices. In fact, the lantern, a permanent part of the landscape, serves all these purposes. Initially it symbolized Bamyan's lack of electricity, and it has never lost that meaning. But other layers of multiple meanings are laid upon it as it serves as both a possibility for hope for the future and a reminder of a history of social exclusion.

Notes

1. A Facebook post of an ethnic Hazara civil society activist announcing the start of a hunger strike by civil society members to protest Hazara inequality in Afghanistan.
2. The lantern, according to local civil society activists, was installed in 2010 in a protest led by several lead civil society activists in Bamyan. It was intended to bring attention to problems of electricity specifically and, more generally, to the underdevelopment experienced in Hazara areas.
3. In Dari, the phrase *dar tariki negoh kardan* has a similar connotation to the meaning of the phrase in English.
4. Currently, there are no reliable state-provided figures that can be used to determine percentages based on ethnicity in Afghanistan. A census was carried out in 1979, before 30 years of war and upheaval changed the face of society, with millions both externally and internally displaced, as well as millions killed. A census was carried out in 2013 that intentionally avoided questions relating to ethnicity and mother tongue, so as not to upset the balance of power currently in the government. For Hazaras, who believe they are undercounted, this decision reinforces the belief they are intentionally marginalized by the government. For this reason, scholars must rely on other sources, which are not always in accordance. For instance, see *The CIA World Factbook* (https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/af.html; accessed on September 4, 2013); IndexMundi (http://www.indexmundi.com/afghanistan/demographics_profile.html; accessed on September 4, 2013); and Civil Military Fusion Centre (https://www.cimicweb.org/Documents/CFC%20AFG%20Social%20Well-being%20Archive/CFC_Afg_Monthly_Ethnic_Groups_Aug2011%20v1.pdf; accessed on September 4, 2013). After having spent extensive time in some of the largest Hazara enclaves in Afghanistan, Bamyan and West Kabul, the low figures of 9–10% seem unlikely.
5. See Library of Congress Country Studies (http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+af0037; accessed on September 4, 2013).
6. Appadurai defines ethnoscapes as people who migrate, move and travel for extended or short periods of time, so that which was once local becomes global in nature. Media, technology, commerce and other global forces connect those thus scattered, making them into a truly global force (Appadurai 1996, 306). Appadurai's concept is useful to understand the connections of Hazaras in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, as well as asylum-seekers, refugees, students and others in Europe, Australia, India and the United States, individuals and micro-groups that make use of technology to interact with and influence each other. In fact, the wide use of social media, such as Facebook referenced in the opening quote above, is made use of by these widely dispersed individuals so that they still maintain a feeling of being part of the same group, of taking part in politics and ethnic and cultural developments. Hazaras nearby in Afghanistan and far away in Europe or elsewhere made certain their voices were heard upon any important event: elections, protests, and so on.

7. This autonomy was actually dependent upon locality. Areas closer to Kabul, including Bamyan, did offer some sort of tribute to Kabul, but involvement in day-to-day affairs seems to have been minimal.
8. These terms are used somewhat interchangeably to refer to tribal leadership positions.
9. Since the formation of the most recent government under Karzai, a second Hazara majority province, Daikundi, was established from part of Uruzgan province. Hazaras also hope that the Hazara majority areas of Ghazni might be established as a separate province, but this has yet to materialize.
10. With no reliable census or statistics concerning ethnicity available in Afghanistan, it is difficult to provide hard data to support these claims. However, it is clear, when spending time in Afghanistan, that Hazaras do value education as a way to improve their situation, and that there are fewer restrictions against children going to school because of insurgency, the necessity to seclude girls, and so on (e.g. Oppel 2010).
11. While many Hazaras in more rural areas, and many students, might not be able to watch such a game, enough people did have solar or generator electricity to power a television for several hours in the evening. Watching would often be done in a group setting. Hassan was, hence, not excluded from the experience of watching the game, but was reminded that he did not, in fact, feel a part of the Afghan nation when outside celebrating on a darkened street due to the lack of electrical development in Bamyan. Hassan imagined other Afghans in other regions celebrating with electricity.
12. Some Hazaras, especially those from the city of Quetta in Pakistan, take pride in a belief in Mongol ancestry. Many in Bamyan, particularly in rural areas, do not have a problem with the idea that they are descended from Mongols. In Markaz Bamyan, however, it is becoming more coming for people to reject this facet of their identity and to link themselves to civilizations that were in the region before than Mongols.
13. While in other parts of the world development may be focused on rural areas, as they have been determined to be the most vulnerable areas, this is not the case in Bamyan, nor in much of Afghanistan. Projects are often implemented in more secure areas, and rural areas are often more prone to insurgent activities. Additionally, Markaz Bamyan actually seems quite rural from the point of view of planners in Kabul. It is not a town, but simply a bazaar surrounded by several villages. As there are few good roads, travel to more remote areas that might also be deemed needy is difficult. Working in Bamyan, it is very clear most development activities are centred around Markaz and nearby villages.
14. The veracity of these claims is not verified and surely not consistent. I know from experience in Nangarhar, and in Jalalabad, the provincial capital, that there is some access to state-powered electricity provided by a Russian-built dam. The dam is in need of repairs, however, and electricity for most citizens is just a few hours a day. Those with more money can pay for what is termed '24 hour electricity', but this is also likely to go out for long periods of time, despite its name.
15. This phenomenon has also been discussed via private correspondence with Thomas Barfield.
16. These figures do not take into account the aid activities of PRTs, or provincial reconstruction teams, which further complicate the situation. Most provinces or grouping of several provinces were home to a PRT which was run by whichever country from among the coalition forces that had been put in charge militarily of that geographical location. Each PRT could choose to spend on resources on development projects as it saw fit, with no unifying guidelines. For an understanding of PRT spending on development, see Waldman (2008, 14).
17. This, of course, does not take into account possible intra-provincial discrepancies, which might lead to fewer funds for Hazara districts within provinces. Such questions were out of the scope of this paper to answer.
18. While many provincial centres do have better access to electricity than Bamyan, many also suffer similar problems, although perhaps at different scales.
19. This section does not intend to document every project planned, attempted or failed in Bamyan. Rather, it highlights those projects that my informants were the most aware of.
20. A New Zealand-based NGO was planning a large solar energy project when I left the field. Reports from my informants after my departure stated that the project was working, but that the electricity provided was extremely weak.
21. Personal correspondence with a USAID representative, July 2011.
22. See Kraudzun (2014, in this issue) for problems of solar-panel use in Tajikistan.
23. A Wikileaks document indicates that the Tupchi dam project was discussed by PRT officials with locals in 2007; however, there is no evidence that these discussions ever lead to action: http://wikileaks.org/afg/event/2007/07/AFG20070709n859.html (accessed on September 10, 2013).
24. Interestingly, according to a plaque on the lantern, the improvements to the square were funded in part by the Agha Khan Foundation. Informants all related the establishment of the lantern to civil society activists though, and not to the foundation.

25. Hazara activists often maintain that many of the advisers to the US Embassy and other US development workers in Afghanistan are Pashtuns, and that these Pashtuns mislead the Americans into carrying out projects that discriminate against Hazaras.

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