Walled in, Out of Sight: The Contested Urban Environment of Baghdad

BRET WINDHAUSER (iD)

ABSTRACT

Between 2003–2017, multiple state and non-state factions fought for control of Baghdad, Iraq. Government-sanctioned armed groups and illegal militias each constructed and appropriated defensive architecture for their own purposes. This article argues that licit and illicit armed groups co-produced Baghdad's security infrastructures, creating increasingly homogeneous neighborhoods. Within the walls and behind checkpoints, residents' restriction of movement and vision resulted in an 'antiopticon' in which they faced and negotiated a changing environment of new places and non-places. Through an extensive literature review from the fields of anthropology, urban studies, and conflict studies, this paper explores the tangible role that illicit armed groups played in shaping Baghdad's urban geography and its residents' sense of place.

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR:

Bret Windhauser

Saint Andrew's Sewanee, US

windhauserbret@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

From 2003–2017, during a period of heightened sectarian violence, the conflict between licit and illicit forces in Baghdad resulted in multiple civilian and military deaths, but the city itself also suffered, and indeed continues to suffer lasting consequences from the conflict as reflected in its altered urban environment. The urban reshaping of Baghdad resulted from public space interventions carried out by semi-overlapping and conflicting licit and illicit actors at the subnational level. As these actors co-produced and manipulated emerging security infrastructures, they also created new places and non-places associated with sectarian homogeneity, fear, and conflicting legitimacies.

In this paper, I examine two forms of urban architecture that both governmental agents and non-state organized sectarian armed groups used to transform the built environment of Baghdad: walls and checkpoints. My analysis of these urban security infrastructures contextualizes Baghdad's wartime development, contending that post-2003 Baghdad represents a unique case study for il/licit city-making, as shifting militia allegiances, semi-fluid zones of control held by armed groups, and alterations in the legal status of certain militias shaped Baghdad's aesthetic. I begin with the construction of walls throughout Baghdad, which led to the establishment of sectarian enclaves in which non-state militias and militant groups exploited the fractured city's infrastructure. The network of walls snaking through Baghdad created an 'antiopticon' in which the deprivation of sight and movement manufactured new places and non-places around the city, as well as new homogeneous sectarian intramural communities. Secondly, I explore how licit and illicit groups manipulated the city through networks of checkpoints that extended the security infrastructure of the city's walls into semi-temporary sites of conflict and legitimacy production. The ability of licit and illicit groups to operate checkpoints as both places and non-places highlights the influence of illegal groups to affect Baghdad's sense of place.

This article falls within the scholarly debate of cities as sites of conflict, globalization, and peacebuilding. In the 1990s, researchers began analyzing cities as microcosms of national and transnational conflict in greater detail (Bollens 2007; Brenner 2004; Hepburn 2004). Previous scholarship often contextualizes cities as subnational spatial localities acted upon by national and supranational actors (Bollens 1998). This paper seeks to analyze Baghdad as a unique spatial locality acted upon by national, supranational, and subnational agents. The purpose of this analysis is to propose that legal and illegal groups dramatically shape the built environment of urban areas during periods of conflict, which influences the aesthetic, economy, politics, and culture of these cities.

For this study, the term legal or licit refers to Iraqi government-sanctioned armed forces, politicians, and armed groups incorporated into the realm of the 'official' in the perspective of the state, such as the Iraqi police, the Iraqi army, and the American led multinational force administration (MNF-I) serving from 2004–2011. Notably, the MNF-I forces in Iraq served concurrently with the Iraqi police and Iraqi army who functioned in official capacities under the government. Therefore, the concept of 'legal' follows the classifications produced by the MNF-I and Iraqi government until 2011 and the Iraqi government alone post 2011.

As opposed to such licit groups, illicit and illegal armed groups operated without MNF-I or Iraqi government approval, governmental financial or material support, and occasionally fought against the Iraqi state and MNF-I soldiers. The primary illicit organizations discussed in this article are the Sunni al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) and the Shiite Jaish al-Mahdi (JAM). Small unnamed sectarian neighborhood defense militias and smuggling networks comprised other illicit groups operating in Baghdad. Complicating the notion of licit verses illicit further, the Iraqi government formed the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), an official state sponsored paramilitary force, by combining approximately 50 previously illegal militias in 2014 with newly created units. The Iraqi government believed that incorporating the militias into the national armed services would lead them to abandon their illegal operations and fight in a united front with the government against the Islamic State in northern Iraq. Although American officials previously declared certain militias within the PMF as terrorist groups, these militias post 2014 are legal military entities within the Iraqi armed forces. This paper therefore explores the conflict between licit and illicit forces not as a binary, but rather as a deep and shifting entanglement of influence and conflict (Kasfir et al. 2017: 259).

Conflicting factions in Baghdad between the MNF-I invasion in 2003 and the cautious partial lifting of intracity security procedures in the mid 2010s witnessed the shifting tension between licit and illicit armed groups who negotiated power over the urban environment. Saddam Hussein's Baathist administration, the United States led coalition, Iraq's post-invasion government, and the militia groups discussed above fought over the metropolis to impose their authority over the territory they controlled and spread their religious or political policies. The height of the sectarian violence between Sunni and Shia armed groups manifested during the 'civil war' period from 2006–2008. Many of the illicit groups mentioned in this paper originated to defend their communities against other militias during this period, such as the JAM's formation to protect the Shiite Sadr City neighborhood from Sunni death squads (Biddle 2021: 149). Despite this intended purpose, the JAM later launched attacks from their base in Sadr City into other neighborhoods of Baghdad and fought against the occupying American troops. Exemplifying that the binary between legal and illegal in Baghdad was complicated, the JAM fought against both the illicit AQI and the licit MNF-I forces while simultaneously infiltrating the ranks of the government sanctioned Iraqi police. Later, the Sunni Islamic State conducted a full-scale war against the Iraqi government between 2013 and 2017. While the Islamic State did not take territory in Baghdad, the threat of the Islamic State again recentered Iraqi governmental policy on urban security.

Successive and conflicting factions constructed walls and checkpoints to defend their territories, restrict movement, and exert their legitimacy. In doing so, they co-produced the built environment of the city which stalled development, limited intercommunal interactions, and increased sectarian divisions. While licit and illicit actors constructed or appropriated such infrastructure across Baghdad, they contributed to a more segregated city that exacerbated sectarian violence and weakened a city-wide sense of place.

METHODOLOGY AND APPROACH

To study the development of Baghdad's built environment between 2003 and 2017, I employ media sources, personal accounts of the conflict recorded in military reports, and scholarship from the fields of urban studies, security studies, geography, and anthropology. The choice to use such firsthand accounts of Baghdadi civilians' negotiation of places and non-places in their cities during periods of sectarian violence substitutes for on-site empirical research. While the lack of empirical data proves a limitation to this study, the extensive literature analysis woven through the three main sections—connecting walls and checkpoints—highlights the overlap and conflict between licit and illicit forces on the subnational level as it relates to the built environment of the city and its defensive architecture. Current literature explains the theoretical, political, and sentimental causes and repercussions of such security infrastructures, but generally fails to explore how illicit groups influence urban construction.[1] Here, I work with an approach that takes into account these non-state actors and explore the relationship between places and the people who construct or engage with them politically and socially in the context of war and conflict.

A communal sense of place allows individuals to resonate with one another through shared experiences. A 'place' is a space constructed through active and passive experiences (Tuan 1975: 152–153). Therefore, a sense of place refers to the collective identity felt between people who negotiate the same place. The bond of place can form from either positive or negative experiences and at various scales. Place itself can be constructed through the physical manipulation of space which affects how people interact practically and emotionally with the place and with others who share it (Bollens 2013; Newman 2002; Tuan 1982; Vidyarthi 2018). Following Vidyarthi's (2018: 84) assertion in urban historiography that modern cities are man-made entities created through the continuous interaction between technology and society, this paper utilizes terminology such as pan/antiopticon, sense of place, and non-place to guide the argument that defensive architecture built by licit and illicit armed groups altered the urban environment of Baghdad by fracturing the city's sense of place into sectarian enclaves during the civil war period, isolating religious communities from one another.

---

1   For exceptions and examples see the literature review at the introduction of this special issue (Müller & Weegels, this issue) and the other articles in this issue.

WALLS AND A NEW SENSE OF PLACE

Defensive walls conceptually create a separation between the interior and the exterior. Those falling within the interior of the walls are 'safe' from those positioned outside of the walls. Simultaneously, those outside the walls lack the 'safety' of the walls themselves. As such, walls can engender feelings of both safety and insecurity. Historically, cities built defensive walls to deter invasion. Baghdad itself was a walled settlement beginning in the 8th century. After the coalition invasion of Iraq in 2003, officials in the country revived the concept of defensive walls to provide security. This section explores the methods used to reintroduce defensive walls into the urban environment in Baghdad chronologically from 2003 to 2017. Originally, the invading MNF-I forces constructed walls around their administrative district only. In response to an escalation in violence throughout the city, the MNF-I and Iraqi government introduced the defensive architectures of high walls into other neighborhoods resulting in the modulation of Baghdad and the asphyxiation of denizens' movement. The intracity walls produced sectarian enclaves that promoted understandings of difference, which caused intercommunal unmixing and violence through the deprivation of visibility and restricting of place-based intercommunal social experiences such as Sunni-Shia mixed markets, schools, and cemeteries. Despite progress to remove the walls, neighborhoods remained homogeneous after the civil war period.

Conceived of to reduce sectarian violence, the Iraqi state and coalition forces constructed a series of tall concrete walls that resulted in an abrupt and complete lack of long-field visibility, thus imposing control through the deprivation of sight. Scholars Amanda Wasielewski and Agri Ismail (2016) refer to this phenomenon in Baghdad as an *antiopticon* consisting of 12-foot-high gray concrete blast walls snaking through the city, severing mobility and sightlines. Social theorist Jeremy Bentham (1791) originally conceived of the panopticon as a system of control that encompassed the potential of constant observation. When applied to a prison setting, the theory argues that prisoners will self-regulate if the prison architecture ostensibly led them to believe they are under constant surveillance. The antiopticon, on the other hand, deprives subjects of vision, and inhibits others from viewing them in return. The result is a sense of isolation, blindness, and confusion.

Both surveillance and blindness alter the relationship between state and non-state actors through negotiation and resistance against the imposed security network (Volinz 2018: 447). The imposed antiopticon in Baghdad impeded militias' ability to view potential targets and organize attacks. Civilians sheltered behind the pathway of walls became defended and ensnared by the security network surrounding them. However, such implementation of defensive architecture opposed traditional urban design, which encourages mobility, access, and a united identity. The antiopticon of Baghdad instead solidified isolated sectarian neighborhoods in which those behind walls sought safety internally, while viewing the exterior of their walls as unfamiliar, unsafe, and unstable, creating a patchwork of unique senses of place.

In March 2003, the MNF-I began its invasion of Iraq. Prior to ground forces securing the Iraqi capital, MNF-I aircraft destroyed critical infrastructure in Baghdad with constant barrages of airstrikes (Coward 2009: 404). One month later, MNF-I forces entered Baghdad. When MNF-I soldiers occupied the city, civilians destroyed Baathist public propaganda, most notably the statue of Saddam Hussein on Firdos Square. At the same time, across the river from Firdos Square, the MNF-I forces built the occupation's headquarters to establish a foothold and authoritative presence in the Iraqi capital.

MNF-I soldiers secured the area around Saddam Hussein's Republican Palace to serve as the main base for the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA). The United States government tasked the CPA to lead the Iraqi state until a democratically elected government took power (Chandrasekaran 2006: 12–19). This MNF-I secured area, referred to most commonly as the Green Zone, is located in the Karkh neighborhood of Baghdad. Concrete walls, T-walls, and barbed wire protected the CPA officials from exterior threats, both real and perceived. The built environment of high walls and armed checkpoints physically separated the Green Zone from the rest of the city. Therefore, in Baghdad, the MNF-I implemented a common colonial management tactic of distancing the invading power's base of operations from the majority population by physically separating itself from the invaded populace (Bollens 2013).

The turbulent security situation after the fall of the Baathist government felt distant to those within the deterritorialized American suburb of the Green Zone (Ali 2020: 85, Poll 2012: 163).

Americans residing in the area drove along wide and relatively empty streets, enjoyed constant electricity, visited the various restaurants and bars in the zone, attended Bible studies, and could even find pork served in meals at the Republican Palace headquarters (Chandrasekaran 2006: 9–18). Outside of the American-esque village, Baghdadis languished in traffic no longer maintained by police patrols, dealt with rolling power outages, and feared for their security. While at this time the series of walls and checkpoints only affected Baghdadis who traveled in or near the Green Zone, the idea that the Green Zone and the experiences within it were separate and foreign to the lived experiences of the rest of the city's inhabitants was already settled in the minds of citizens (Masmoudi 2015). The security matrix around the Green Zone crafted a sense of place inside the walls not felt by civilians beyond their protection. As a result, the culture within the zone developed without the same fear of violence experienced in the rest of Baghdad, nor did those living within the walls need to hide their overt difference from the rest of the city as the high barriers protected them from pedestrian gazes.

CPA and, later, American military advisors extended the system of defensive architecture in Baghdad after they perceived the walled Green Zone to be a security success. As violence between Shia and Sunni residents grew more pervasive in Baghdad in 2006, coreligionists formed armed groups to defend their own sect and attack those perceived as enemies (Biddle 2021; Williams 2009: 49–50). Such sectarian violence became so widespread that, in July 2006, Sunni and Shia militias and armed groups killed approximately 2,000 civilians in Baghdad alone (Rayburn et al. 2019a: 579). Given the rise in aggression in neighborhoods split between Sunni and Shia civilians, the MNF-I occupational forces and Iraqi officials decided to encase neighborhoods consisting primarily of one sect within concrete in an effort to protect their security from the other (Ali 2020: 80). Walls encompassed sectarian neighborhoods throughout Baghdad which the government claimed would protect both groups from one another.

The MNF-I and, later, the Iraqi government thus instituted a network of walls throughout the city. One design in defensive infrastructure was the Jersey barrier, an approximately three-foot-high inverted capital 'T' of steel reinforced concrete. The Jersey barrier provided a small amount of cover for crouching troops in a gunfight, yet its primary function was to halt speeding vehicles. More commonly, the CPA installed Bremer walls, named after the leader of the American transitional government of Iraq, which utilized the same design as the Jersey barrier but quadrupled the size to approximately twelve feet high in response to a growing threat of improvised explosive device attacks (Wasielewski & Agri 2016). The mere size of the Bremer walls imposed a difference between those on opposite sides of the wall as they became 'invisible' behind concrete (Tawil-Souri 2011: 20). At 12 feet high, pedestrians on either side of the walls could not recognize city features beyond the structures, let alone develop a sense of community with those belonging to different walled-in areas of Baghdad. The severity and dimensionality of the ubiquitous Bremer walls created a patchwork of seemingly isolated sectarian communities throughout Baghdad.

People living within cities can feel a single sense of place, or multiple senses of place divided between interior and peripheral frontier zones (Bou Akar 2018; Tuan 1975). In Baghdad, the fractured urban environment fashioned by this defensive infrastructure produced a series of senses of place throughout the city. The approximately 11 sectarian enclaves created in the city during the height of the intercommunal violence between 2006–2008 transformed the conception of space as sectarian militias and national as well as multinational coalition forces struggled for influence in various urban zones, where walls established clear and definable territories (Ali 2020: 80). Those living within these territories participated with and socially constructed the senses of space within the enclaves. Supra-urban actors occupying territory such as the MNF-I often imposed walls between feuding groups to reduce violence, but the act of bounding (and blinding) Baghdadi neighborhoods led to long term instability (Bollens 2013). The creation of such senses of place made tangible and visible through walls and other aesthetic productions led to social construction of 'us/them' and 'inside/outside' mentalities, which psychologically distanced denizens belonging to divergent senses of place (Bollens 2013; Brubaker 2004; Newman 2002). Groups and individuals alike formed identities through their associations with places that, in part, developed from boundary-drawing experiences (Bollens 2013: 190; Tuan 1982). As legal and illegal groups manipulated the urban environment of Baghdad, they transformed porous and flexible spaces into defined places affiliated with sectarian allegiances. While the underlying uniting concept of identity became the residents'

sect, their socio-economic statuses, political allegiances, and geographic positions additionally affected the sense of place in each unique enclave.

Outside of such intramural communities, the remainder of Baghdad's urban environment lingered without a clearly defined identity suffering from what Edward Relph (1976) describes as 'placelessness.' Anthropologist Marc Augé (1992) refers to such areas as non-places. Whereas spaces in which someone can feel a sense of place empower identity, encourage socialization, and construct communities, non-places are liminal, transient, and anonymous. Examples of non-places are motorways, hotels, and airports where one does not form a sense of community or defined culture with others, but rather remains unknown using the non-place to transition between two places. As the walls and checkpoints rose throughout Baghdad, an increasing number of spaces became non-places as the ability to socialize safely within them disappeared behind walls and under the threat of sectarian violence. Additionally, intramural places fostered identities belonging to a certain religious sect, meaning those of a different sect within the territory themselves fell 'out of place.' These walled neighborhoods often reinforced the sectarian sense of place by cleansing the area of out of place individuals.

Political theorist Wendy Brown (2010) argues that states resort to militarized hard borders such as concrete walls when faced with their own authoritative limitations. She contends that border wall construction is a testament to the deterioration of state legitimacy as opposed to a reinforcement of authority as governments rely on physical boundaries to assert sovereignty in areas where their governance fails. By expanding Brown's theory from border wall construction to the city level, the MNF-I and later Iraqi government's preference of encasing sectarian enclaves to prevent violence revealed the waning sovereignty of state power in Iraq. While the illicit groups mentioned in this paper did not construct their own walls within Baghdad, they appropriated the structures built by licit actors to serve their own legitimacy. Andrew Gawthorpe (2017) discusses how insurgent groups and their counterinsurgent opponents negotiate legitimacy when both control territory. He asserts that micro-level conflicts such as the civil war period in Baghdad often led to a 'segmentation of physical space' and thus a parallel segmentation of legitimacy. When using these theories in tandem, Brown asserts that the official governmental choice to construct walls signals a delegitimization of their ability to govern, while simultaneously, Gawthorpe explains that the segmentation of space during periods of violence leads to a rise in perceptions of legitimacy among illicit groups. In Baghdad, the spatial segmentation thus manufactured an antiopticon in which illicit Sunni and Shia militias mimicked state-building practices and exerted power through fear.

This way, these walls fashioned a modular urban landscape of impenetrable infrastructure, effectively binding civilians within their respective sectarian enclaves. Baghdadi residents who traveled outside of their neighborhoods needed to negotiate the confusing network of roads resembling tunnels with concrete barriers standing high on either side. Neighborhoods like the Shia Sadr City, consisting primarily of one sect, became hubs for fellow sect members fleeing violence in their own neighborhoods. Meanwhile, areas occupied by members of another sect, such as the predominately Sunni Rusafa neighborhood, formed bases for groups like AQI, who attacked Shia areas with car bombs (Rayburn et al. 2019b: 101). Neighborhoods of Baghdad composed almost equally of Shia and Sunni residents such as Dora, Huriya, and Washash became flashpoints for a blossoming insurgency (Biddle 2021: 149; Rayburn et al. 2019a: 580). Within this context, sectarian unmixing and cleansing in the formerly heterogeneous communities created homogeneous districts in which residents produced and reproduced new micro communal senses of place (Bollens 2013: 190; Bou Akar 2018: 3).

As the walled sectarian enclaves grew more restrictive and homogeneous, the residents within their walls adapted the existing intramural public space to construct self-reliant micro communities. One method Baghdadi citizens used to fabricate such intramural communities was appropriating public spaces within their defined neighborhoods to honor their deceased. Some neighborhoods repurposed public spaces into cemeteries and graveyards in instances where residents feared traveling to the closest extramural cemetery. In the Sunni Adhamiya neighborhood, locals removed a children's playground to construct a cemetery for the community's deceased civilians and militia members (Abdul-Ahad 2009). The act of appropriating a playground to a cemetery altered the place from one of childhood joy to one of somber remembrance and belonging (Połuszny 2020). It also deepened the sense of place and neighborhood/religious identity as opposed to the city as a whole.

Militia groups also devised places to bury the dead and killed. On the outskirts of Sadr City, called al-Sada, the JAM members under the authority of Abu Deraa formed an informal gravesite for their Sunni victims, who they executed in an adjacent field (Abdul-Ahad 2009). Instead of formalized gravestones resting astute in an orderly grid pattern, this cemetery appeared as a scrap yard in which every piece of rusted metal haphazardly placed on the ground represented the resting place of another victim (Abdul-Ahad 2009). In both instances of formal cemetery construction and informal mass graves, sectarian based communities modified the urban environment of Baghdad to accommodate the bodies of those lost in the violence.

WALLED IN, OUT OF SIGHT?

While the MNF-I and Iraqi government walled in areas of Baghdad under the control of illicit groups, such as the JAM's sphere of influence in Sadr City, the same defensive structures also walled out state control and surveillance. Places located within the walls hosted micro communities as the walls produced boundary markers that influence processes of identity-formation (Bollens 2013: 190). The JAM in Sadr City solidified their zone of control by providing defense to the citizens and controlling staple commodities such as 'rice, fuel, and cooking oil' within the walled neighborhood (Biddle 2021: 163). Therefore, the construction of walls in Baghdad altered the city by modulating places and non-places, which illicit groups used to assert their local legitimacy. This way, the practice of state actors physically segregating feuding groups failed to produce long-term peace and led to legitimizing practices among non-state armed groups in Baghdad instead. These appropriated the state sanctioned security walls as an antiopticon to solidify control within their zones of influence.

For the Iraqi Security Forces who sought to protect civilian lives, the network of walls throughout neighborhoods of Baghdad improved security primarily by limiting sightlines of potential assailants within the antiopticon. With a network of walls hampering visibility over a few dozen meters, militias and militants could not adequately plan their attacks. For instance, if an attacker wanted to create the highest number of casualties possible, they would not know if a target location was crowded until they committed to the attack. However, when an attack took place—and in spite of the walls many did at this time—the network of walls ironically also provided cover for a quick escape. For the illicit armed groups operating in Baghdad, the labyrinthian walls allowed them to avoid detection. To the detriment of the Iraqi security forces, the walls' inhibition of vision then functioned as a double-edged sword.

After the most intense period of sectarian violence in Baghdad, the city's government began to remove some of the walls between neighborhoods. This political move reflected the improved security of the city and the elimination of some militia groups, such as the 2008 defeat of the JAM in Sadr City (Biddle 2021: 153). One such initiative removed 25 government checkpoints and 85 surveillance points in Rusafa to increase traffic flow (Sattar 2017). Unfortunately, after targeted killings, death squads, reprisals, and the continued prevalence of Sunni and Shia militia groups, members of one sect remained hesitant to cohabitate with members of the other. Nevertheless, the Iraqi government continued its efforts to remove many of the walls subdividing Baghdad. After a halted attempt to open the Green Zone to the general public in 2015, the Iraqi government permitted traffic in the area for a two-week trial period in 2018. Most Baghdadis born after 2003 had never seen this part of Baghdad until this official opening (Ibrahim 2018). Aside from easing traffic congestion through the elimination of the zone's defensive architecture, allowing all Baghdadis access to more parts of the city allowed residents to foster a more unified sense of place beyond the city's sectarian enclaves.

The efforts to remove walls within the city came at a time when most sectarian violence in the city had ended, yet we can see their re-utilization in dealing with novel security threats. In response to the rapid spread of Islamic State militants in 2016, Baghdadi officials began constructing a security perimeter *around* the city (similar to Baghdad's medieval era city wall) composed of defensive architecture and checkpoints. Interestingly, the security plan sought to source half of the concrete barriers for the city-wide wall from existing Bremer walls removed from the interior of the city. This way, the wall externalized the security apparatus of Baghdad to encase the entirety of the city rather than individual neighborhoods. Iraqi officials planned a large trench, checkpoints, and digital surveillance technology to bolster the security of the walls, but these did not materialize (Sattar 2016). This development, however, underlines the

continued reliance on walls and checkpoints in response to security concerns in the city. I now turn to these checkpoints.

CHECKPOINTS: MAKING, MOVING, AND MANNING THEM

The use of checkpoints by the Iraqi Security Forces, American occupation forces, and illegal armed groups created a shifting web of danger and limitations for Baghdadi residents. Unlike the large concrete walls, checkpoints needed little to no building materials. Often, a checkpoint in Baghdad consisted only of a few armed men, a line of Jersey barriers, and perhaps a car semi-blocking traffic. The mobility of checkpoints allowed for licit and illicit groups such as the Iraqi police and sectarian militia groups to effectively use their manpower and project their authority over a larger area than they could feasibly control. In this context, checkpoints functioned as non-places *and* places depending on how civilians negotiated their presence in Baghdad. In any case, the use of checkpoints during the civil war period and after contributed to a sense of place rooted in fear.

As the Iraqi state apparatus and militia groups such as AQI and the JAM utilized checkpoints, the pervasiveness of their presence during the civil war period in Baghdad affected the city's sense of place. Martínez and Sirri (2020: 851) describe the emotional responses felt by Baghdadis when negotiating the patchwork of checkpoints in the city as a range from fear 'operated through coercion and uncertainty' to desire for more effective security in the city. The continued and routine negotiation of infrastructure such as checkpoints between civilians and either state actors or militias triggers 'flickers,' which punctuate these interactions with emotions such as despair, hope, legitimacy, and anger that created a 'culture of fear' in Baghdad (Caldeira 2000; Larkin 2018: 185; Martínez and Sirri 2020: 853; Merriman and Jones 2017: 601–603). Aside from the emotional response to such security stops, checkpoints in Baghdad served as a wartime infrastructure operating on multiple levels concurrently. The checkpoints served the technical functions of regulating traffic and identifying commuters, while also serving the symbolic function of legitimizing the group operating the checkpoint, or at least granting them temporary spatial authority (Larkin 2013: 335).

The notion that checkpoints can be both places and non-places must be contextualized properly. Professor Helga Tawil-Souri analyzes the role of Israeli checkpoints in Palestinian society. She argues that checkpoints are both 'anthropological spaces' and non-places according to Auge's definition mentioned earlier. This contradictory function creates a fragmented Palestinian space-time of 'constant transience, impermanence, volatility, and sometimes simply a standstill' (Tawil-Souri 2011: 16). Checkpoints exist within the context of space and time as constructed sites that physically alter the geography of a location and shape psychological experiences (Tawil-Souri 2017: 386). Similar to the context of Israeli checkpoints in Palestine, checkpoints in Baghdad served as explicit manifestations of authority during the sectarian conflict (Tawil-Souri 2011: 17). However, in Baghdad, the actors behind the development of such checkpoints were not always clear. Rather than the single hegemonic authority manifesting its power, a series of rival and occasionally complementary forces sought legitimacy by mimicking state-building practices and maintaining power through fear (Tuan 1979). Taking up Tawil-Souri's (2011) call to transpose the analysis of checkpoints' contradictory nature, I bring it into dialogue here with the context of Baghdad after the 2003 invasion, expanding it to explore the place of checkpoints as places and non-places operated by state and non-state actors as opposed to a single state within another's territory.

Checkpoints in Baghdad represented places in which the armed forces manning them abruptly interrupted mobility and required identification from those wishing to pass it. As the civilian approached a checkpoint on the street, the non-place of the road gave way to a sense of place in which they must socialize with the checkpoint guards who eliminated the anonymity of the non-place through acts such as requiring proof of identity or searching the vehicle (Rayburn et al. 2019a). However, due to the nature of the sectarian conflict in mid-2000s Baghdad, civilians traveling through checkpoints remained anonymous and nonsocial by using fake identification and adapting their actions to display belonging to the Shia or Sunni communities depending on in which areas of the city they found themselves:

Commuters began carrying two sets of identification cards, one with Shia information and the other with Sunni information, that would allow them to pass through the ISF [Iraqi Security Forces] or militant checkpoints they were sure to encounter on their way. Parents also began instructing their children to carry two different identity cards, complete with backstories for each identity, to give to police or militants who might stop them on their way to school. Baghdadis who traveled throughout the city by car even learned to play Sunni or Shia music, or to hang Sunni or Shia symbols from their car mirrors, as they moved through different neighborhoods. (Rayburn et al. 2019a: 571–572)

Civilians who could manifest a fluid identity as Sunni or Shia depending on the circumstance thus passed through the checkpoints as non-places of temporary transit sites, similar to airports (Tawil-Souri 2011). While a number of these borders between communities were fixed with hard infrastructure like walls, checkpoints manned by sometimes rival and sometimes aligned armed groups operated flexible and only semi-tangible borders through an ever-changing network of roadblocks.

Yet checkpoints also broke the transient nature of non-places and fostered a sense of place rooted in fear for civilians who could not operate with such a fluid identity. For them, the acute transition from the non-place of public infrastructure to the sense of place imposed through a manned checkpoint appeared to be stark and aggressive, creating a sense of dread. As the same report claims, 'the most dangerous locations in the city were the many checkpoints the police and army had emplaced as part of the Baghdad security plan' (Rayburn et al. 2019a: 571). This report also found that government administered police checkpoints purposely diverted Sunni citizens to illegal checkpoints operated by armed groups such as the JAM. The JAM was known to frequently infiltrate the Iraqi National Police force (Moore, 2006). American Colonel Bannister noted in 2007 that residents of east Baghdad viewed the National Police as an extension of the JAM. Other coalition reports indicate that Shia policemen in mixed sectarian neighborhoods such as Rashid and Saidiyah killed Sunni residents at checkpoints (Rayburn et al. 2019b: 114).

The JAM effectively used checkpoints as a weapon of war by using their control of movement along various roadways to identify and kill Sunni residents. In February 2006, the JAM responded to an AQI suicide bomber killing Shia worshippers in the Golden Dome Mosque in Samarra by invading the Sunni neighborhood of al-Jihad and establishing their own checkpoints there (Biddle 2021: 149). These illegal and unregulated checkpoints stopped drivers and examined their identification. When the JAM militiamen discovered that a stopped car belonged to a Sunni man, they told him to wait in a nearby bus guarded by other armed men. After the JAM filled the bus with Sunni civilians, they drove away and executed the hostages (Rayburn et al. 2019a: 579). Sunni death squads operated other non-state sanctioned checkpoints in their own sectarian enclaves in an attempt to rid the areas of Shia residents (Tavernise 2006; Rayburn et al. 2019a: 571). Therefore, checkpoints extended the fear of sectarian violence from the perceivable borders of the walled enclaves to practices of separation and even elimination carried out at or through the checkpoints. While walls and roads visually defined the borders between sectarian enclaves, checkpoints conflated them, and blurred the lines between licit and illicit armed groups within Baghdad.

Importantly, checkpoints were built to be mobile and could transform any road in the city into a dreaded frontline. The Iraqi and MNF-I forces, as well as the illegal armed groups, constantly deconstructed and reconstructed new checkpoints throughout the city, setting them up as traffic stops. The flexible positioning of legal and illegal checkpoints expressed the fluidity of urban insurgency. Illicit armed groups benefited from the use of checkpoints as they could manifest their authority almost anywhere in the city despite their limited manpower and reach, and effectively used them for the purposes of localized intimidation or sectarian cleansing. Checkpoints in Baghdad, therefore, reinforced hard boundaries between sects by restricting movement and deterritorializing zones of control, all the while allowing not only the state but also illicit armed groups such as the JAM and AQI to operate fluidly throughout the urban environment.

The checkpoints also complemented walls by bringing place to non-places such as roadways. Post 2011, after the end of Baghdad's sectarian violence, Iraqi police operated checkpoints

solely as they conducted security operations in response to the rise of the Islamic State. In this regard, the checkpoints continued to be contradictory places and non-places among residents who engaged with the Iraqi state through the 'culture of fear' at checkpoints (Martínez and Sirri 2020: 859).

CONCLUSION

This article explored the ways in which licit and illicit groups co-produced the security infrastructures in Baghdad during its period of increased sectarian violence after the 2003 MNF-I invasion. It did so by closely examining two of the city's security infrastructures: walls and checkpoints. Licit groups such as the Iraqi army and police, and illicit groups such as AQI and the JAM manipulated new defensive architecture and appropriated existing infrastructure that imposed intercommunal segregation. Walls and checkpoints confined these populations into sectarian enclaves, producing an antiopticon of limited vision. Within the antiopticon, sectarian divisions increasingly cemented between Baghdadis as the urban environment changed around them (Bollens 2013). The creation of intra-communal public spaces, such as cemeteries, also solidified senses of belonging to certain neighborhoods, reinforcing the concept of sectarian micro communities. After years of neighborhood-level targeted killings and reprisals between Sunni and Shia armed groups, religious maps of Baghdad continue to reflect the highly divided nature of the city's population after the civil war period.

By employing geographic and anthropological theory related to sense of place and non-place, I argue that the manipulation of infrastructure by legal and illegal armed groups in Baghdad solidified multiple, separate senses of place, and facilitated sectarian violence, curbing exchanges between neighborhoods and creating more homogeneous micro communities in the process. Licit and illicit groups exercised their agency to alter the city's built environment for their own purposes by appropriating the deprivation of sight produced with an antiopticon of labyrinthian Bremer walls. Their intentions often related to crafting an aesthetic of legitimacy within their zones of influence.

While this paper analyzed a time of extreme sectarian violence in Baghdad, more recent developments in the city signal an intention by the Iraqi government to bolster a broader sense of place. Despite this, the lure of short-term violence mitigation through defensive infrastructure remains tempting for Baghdadi politicians, as seen in the face of the threat from the Islamic State in the mid 2010s. By framing the actions of either illicit or licit organizations as purely reactionary to the other, scholars eliminate the continuous entangled relationship between the two. Studies such as this highlight the importance of exploring the ability for illicit groups to shape urban politics and infrastructures. While this study focuses on Baghdad, the trends and approach discussed in this paper may well be transferable to other global cities experiencing periods of intra-urban conflict.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The author has no competing interests to declare.

AUTHOR AFFILIATIONS

Bret Windhauser orcid.org/0000-0002-3906-0153
Saint Andrew's Sewanee, US

REFERENCES

Abdul-Ahad, G. 2009. Baghdad: City of walls. *The Guardian.* 15 April. Available at https://www.theguardian.com/world/series/baghdad [Last accessed on 15 June 2021].

Ali, A. 2020. Baghdad: War and insecurity in the city. In: Kaldor, M and Sassen, S (eds.), *Cities at war: global insecurity and urban resistance.* New York: Columbia University Press. pp. 78–102. DOI: https://doi.org/10.7312/kald18538-005

Augé, M. 1992. *Non-places: Introduction to an anthropology of supermodernity.* New York: Verso.

Bentham, J. 1791. *Panopticon or the inspection house, volume 2.* London.

Biddle, S. 2021. *Nonstate warfare: The military method of guerillas, warlords, and militias.* Princeton: Princeton University Press. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1515/9780691216652

Bollens, S. 1998. Uncovering the urban dimension in nationalist conflict: Jerusalem and Belfast compared. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 10(1): 1–38. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/09546559808427442

Bollens, S. 2007. Urban governance at the nationalist divide: Coping with group-based claims. *Journal of Urban Affairs,* 29(3): 229–253. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9906.2007.00341.x

Bollens, S. 2013. Bounding cities as a means of managing conflict: Sarajevo, Beirut, and Jerusalem. *Peacebuilding*, 1(2): 186–206. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/21647259.2013.783263

Bou Akar, H. 2018. *For the war yet to come: Planning Beirut's frontiers.* Stanford: Stanford University Press. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1515/9781503605619

Brenner, N. 2004. *New state spaces: Urban governance and the rescaling of statehood.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Brown, W. 2010. *Walled states, waning sovereignty.* Princeton: Princeton University Press. DOI: https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv14gpj55

Brubaker, R. 2004. *Ethnicity without groups.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press. DOI: https://doi.org/10.4159/9780674258143

Caldeira, T. 2000. *City of walls: Crime, segregation, and citizenship in Sao Paulo.* Berkeley: University of California Press. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520341593

Chandrasekaran, R. 2006. *Imperial life in the Emerald City: Inside Iraq's Green Zone*. New York: Alfred A. Knope.

Coward, M. 2009. Network-centric violence, critical infrastructure and the urbanization of society. *Security Dialogue*, 40(4,5): 399–418. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1177/0967010609342879

Gawthorpe, A. 2017. All counterinsurgency is local: Counterinsurgency and rebel legitimacy. *Small Wars & Insurgencies,* 28(4,5): 839–852. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/09592318.2017.1322330

Hepburn, AC. 2004. *Contested cities in the modern west.* New York: Palgrave MacMillan. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230536746

Ibrahim, A. 2018. Baghdad's Green Zone opens its gates to public after 15 years. *Al Jazeera,* 22 December. Available at https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2018/12/22/baghdads-green-zone-opens-its-gates-to-public-after-15-years/ [Last accessed 27 August, 2021].

Kasfir, N, Frerks, G and **Terpstra, N.** 2017. Introduction: Armed groups and multi-layered governance. *Civil Wars*, 19(3): 257–278. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/13698249.2017.1419611

Larkin, B. 2013. The politics and poetics of infrastructure. *The Annual Review of Anthropology.* DOI: https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-anthro-092412-155522

Larkin, B. 2018. Promising forms: The political aesthetics of infrastructure. In: Nikhil, A, Gupta, A and Appel, H (eds.), *The Promise of Infrastructure.* Durham: Duke University Press. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1215/9781478002031-008

Martínez, J and **Sirri, O.** 2020. Of bakeries and checkpoints: Stately affects in Amman and Baghdad. *Society and Space,* 38(5): 849–866. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1177/0263775820919773

Masmoudi, I. 2015. *War and occupation in Iraqi fiction.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1515/9780748696567

Merriman, P and **Jones, R.** 2017. Nations, materialities and affects. *Progress in Human Geography,* 41(5): 600–617. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132516649453

Moore, S. 2006. Killing by Shiite militias detailed. *Los Angeles Times,* 28 September. Available at www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2006-sep-28-fg-intel28-story.html [Last accessed 5 February 2022]. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1097/01.COT.0000303173.26574.ad

Newman, D. 2002. The geopolitics of peacemaking in Israel-Palestine. *Political Geography*, 21: 629–646. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1016/S0962-6298(02)00010-0

Poll, R. 2012. *Main Street and Empire: The fictional small town in the age of globalization.* New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.

Połuszny, Ł. 2020. Non-places of memory: Space, materiality and false cemeteries. *Studia Ubb. Europaea*, 62(2): 23–44. DOI: https://doi.org/10.24193/subbeuropaea.2020.2.02

Rayburn, J, et al. (eds.) 2019a. *The U.S. Army in the Iraq War: Volume 1.* Carlisle: Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College.

Rayburn, J, et al. (eds.) 2019b. *The U.S. Army in the Iraq War: Volume 2 surge and withdrawal 2007–2011.* Carlisle: Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College.

Relph, E. 1976. *Place and placelessness.* London: Pion. DOI: https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1pk85wb

Sattar, O. 2016. Iraq begins construction on Baghdad wall. *Al-Monitor,* 22 February. Available at https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2016/02/iraq-baghdad-wall-deepens-sectarian-division.html [Last accessed 16 July 2021].

Sattar, O. 2017. Why is Baghdad removing checkpoints during security crisis? *Al-Monitor,* 4 January. Available at https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2017/01/baghdad-security-concrete-barriers-checkpoints.html [Last accessed 16 July 2021].

Tavernise, S. 2006. Gunmen kill 20 passengers at fake checkpoint in Iraq. *New York Times,* 5 June. Available at https://www.nytimes.com/2006/06/05/world/middleeast/05iraq.html [Last accessed 03 February 2022]

Tawil-Souri, H. 2011. Qalandia checkpoint as space and nonplace. *Space and Culture,* 14(4). DOI: https://doi.org/10.1177/1206331210389260

Tawil-Souri, H. 2017. Checkpoint time. *Qui Parle,* 26(2). DOI: https://doi.org/10.1215/10418385-4208442

Tuan, Y. 1975. Place: An experimental perspective. *Geographical Review*, 65(2): 151–165. DOI: https://doi.org/10.2307/213970

Tuan, Y. 1979. *Landscapes of fear*. New York: Pantheon Books.

Tuan, Y. 1982. *Segmented worlds and self: Group life and individual consciousness*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Vidyarthi, S. 2018. The built environment: How infrastructure shapes city design today and tomorrow. In: Pagano, M (ed.), *The public infrastructure of work and play*. Urbana; Chicago; Springfield: University of Illinois Press.

Volinz, L. 2018. From above and below: Surveillance, religion, and claim-making at Jerusalem's Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif. *Surveillance & Society,* 16(4): 446–458. DOI: https://doi.org/10.24908/ss.v16i4.6850

Wasielewski, A and **Ismail, A.** 2016. Baghdad as antiopticon. *The Towner,* 11 July. Available at http://www.thetowner.com/baghdad-as-antiopticon/ [Last accessed 20 May 2021].

Williams, P. 2009. *Criminals, militias, and insurgents: Organized crime in Iraq*. Carlisle: Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College. DOI: https://doi.org/10.21236/ADA504847

LSE Press