

Synopsis:

AFGHAN DREAM **The urban middle class in Kabul**

A photographic documentary by
Sandra CALLIGARO

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Even though the war – coalition military operations, terrorist attacks, the return of the Taliban – has focussed attention for the past ten years, what strikes me on returning to Kabul over past twenty years, is the emergence of a new westernised urban class, who live from the influx of money that has come with the coalition since 2001. Far from the clichés of a turbaned Afghanistan, these new urbanites meet in supermarkets in Kabul, mobiles stuck to their ears. Clothes, particularly men's, are tighter, showing off the hours at the gym and transforming bodily functions (how do you pee, squatting in tight jeans?). In private spaces, smaller housing speeds up reduced family units where children have their own room and family hierarchy changes to the detriment of the older generations whose authority is undermined by social and technological changes.

The emergence of this urban middle class is not without internal tension; contradictory moral codes coexist, cobbled together in improvised fashion. Guests realise that the first western-style living rooms are mainly used as a sign of upward mobility; daily family life takes place in another room, where people sit on the floor in traditional manner. Public spaces have also been broken up, places where the middle class socializes (cafés, restaurants, gyms) are off-limits to the lower classes whose values and references contradict their own. If the coalition leaves, it could lead to the disappearance of this urban group who are bringing a modernisation in opposition to the Taliban's – as well as part of the current political elite's. Documenting its existence is important before events wipe out this fragile hint of what Afghanistan could have become.

Gilles Dorransoro