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Aziz Ali Dad

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Boundaries and Identities: The Case of Gilgit-Baltistan

Aziz Ali Dad[1]

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1 Introduction

Gilgit-Baltistan, formerly known as the Northern Areas, is situated in the north of Pakistan bordering with China, Afghanistan and Indian Kashmir. It is spread over an area of 72,496 square km with an estimated population of 1.301 million.[2] The resident population follows four denominations of Islam – Shiites constitute 41%, Sunnis 32%, Ismaili 17%, and Noorbakshi 10 %[3] – and at least 25 linguistic[4] and various ethnic groups, which makes Gilgit-Baltistan a highly diverse region in terms of its internal composition.

The region came under the control of the Maharajas of Kashmir and British colonial power through a series of conquests in the mid-second half of the 19th century. However, part of what is today the Gilgit area in the north, known at the time as the Gilgit Agency, was administered by the British under a lease between 1935 that was prematurely terminated in August 1947. The reason for the lease was that the British wanted to control the frontier[5] and continue the surveillance of passes in Karakoram and Hindukush[6] in view of a possible Soviet invasion. Given the Soviet threat, the British did not want to take the risk of leaving Gilgit in the weak hands of the Maharaja of Kashmir.[7] After 1 August 1947, the area again came under the control of the government of Jammu and Kashmir and a Governor, Ghansara Singh was sent to Gilgit along with some administrative officers.. In the eve of Partition between India and Pakistan, a local paramilitary force created by the British decades ago – the Gilgit Scouts– showed its opposition to the new ruler and eventually created a "Revolutionary Council".[8] The Gilgit Scouts were still led by a British man, Major Brown,[9] who was posted there by the Kashmir government and who played an important role in the events. The Scouts lacked a coherent programme but local and external factors allowed the officers to wrest power from the

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[2] Government of Gilgit-Baltistan. *Gilgit-Baltistan at a Glance*. Statistical Cell, Planning and Development Department. 2013, p. 2.

[3] Fayyaz, Mahammad. *Sectarian Conflict in Gilgit-Baltistan. Background Paper.* Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development and Transparency (PILDAT). Islamabad. 2011, p 12.

[4] Kreutzmann, *Hermann. Linguistic diversity in space and time: A survey in the Eastern Hindukush and Karakoram.* Himalayan Linguistics 4. 2005. 1-24, p 5.

[5] Rasul, Ghulam. *Azad-e-Gilgit-Baltistan or Haqaiq* [Independence of Gilgit-Baltistan and Realities]. One International Publishers, Pakistan. 2004, p 19.

[6] Khan. F.M. *The Story of Gilgit-Baltistan and Chtiral: A Short history of Two Millenniums AD 7-1999.* Eejaz Literary Agents & Publishers. Gilgit. 2002, p 46.

[7] Ali, Usam. *Gilgit Ka Inqalab* [The Revolution of Gilgit]. Sang-e-Meel Publications. Pakistan. 2012, p 51.

[8] Hassnain, F.M. *Gilgit: The Northern Gate of India.* Sterling Publishers. New Delhi. 1978, pp. 156-8; Sökefeld, Martin. Jang azadi: Perspectives on a Major Theme in Northern Areas' History, in Stellrecht, I. (ed.): *The Past in the Present: Horizons of Remembering in the Pakistan Himalaya.* Köln, Köppe. 1997, p. 66-7; Dani, Ahmed Hasan. *History of Northern Areas of Pakistan (Upto 2000 AD).* Sang-e-Meel Publications, Lahore. 2007, pp. 341-6.

[9] Brown, William. *A. The Gilgit Rebellion 1947.* Ibex 1998. Privately printed edition.

dominating forces and eventually declared the Independent Republic of Gilgit on 1 November 1947. These Scouts became the leaders of the Independence Movement of Gilgit (*Jang-e-Azadi Gilgit*), and in the power vacuum created by the context of the partition they initially asserted their own agency. Finally, after 17 days, the leaders relinquished their powers and a Pakistan Political Agent was sent to Gilgit, formalizing the accession to Pakistan.

In the post-independence period the Pakistani government followed the British policy of allowing local kings to rule their respective principalities. It allowed enough space for local *rajas* (kings) to wield their power within their areas without affecting the overall administrative arrangements of the federal government. Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto abolished local princely states between 1972 and 1974 and introduced a new administrative set up.[10] Since then, Gilgit-Baltistan has been administered by Pakistan, which led to a gradual regional political participation, although it has not formally been integrated in the state as a province. The reason for this is the region's connection to the Kashmir dispute, following the UN resolution and Pakistan's position of attaching it to the Kashmir conflict.[11] At present, the region is administered through the Gilgit-Baltistan Empowerment and Self-Governance Order 2009, an act of the executive power and therefore not approved by the National Assembly.

The main argument of the paper is that the absence of Gilgit-Baltistan in the power dispensation and state structure of Pakistan has created a power vacuum in the society, which is gradually filled by sectarian forces, nationalist movements, ethnic movements and regional associations. These actors attempt to rearticulate identities in Gilgit-Baltistan with direct repercussions for the region's association to the Kashmir dispute. The ways in which these identities are rearticulated reject the official narratives of the state and Kashmiri nationalism. Thus, Gilgit-Baltistan's path is diverging after having shared a history with Kashmir during the colonial period. Under the new political dispensation in the post-colonial period, it has become subservient to the Kashmir dispute.

This paper examines processes of identity articulation by religious, nationalist and ethnic groups that show the drifting of the region away from Kashmir. Although the region has been kept in a constitutional limbo by Pakistan due to the Kashmir dispute,[12] the changes brought about by broader regional developments and increased communication have triggered political, economic and cultural processes that exceed the received narratives posited by the state and Kashmiri nationalism. The emergence of new local identity narratives has social and political ramifications because it compels certain sectarian quarters and nationalists to rethink their views about the identity of Gilgit-Baltistan vis-à-vis Kashmir on the one hand, and expunge the Kashmir question from the identity formation among ethnic and regional groups on the other hand. Similarly, the paper considers mutations in the

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[10] Kreutzmann, H. The Karakoram Landscape and the Recent History of the Northern Areas, in Bianca, S. (ed.): *Karakoram. Hidden Treasures in the Northern Areas of Pakistan.* Turin. 2005, p. 71; Stellrecht, Irmtraud. Dynamics of Highland-Lowland Interaction in Northern Pakistan Since the 19th Century. in Stellrecht, Irmtraud/ Winiger, Matthias (eds.) *Perspective on History and Change in the Karakorum, Hindukush, and Himalaya.* Rudiger Koppe Verlag. Germany. 1997, p. 82.

[11] Mato Bouzas, Antia. *Mixed Legacies in Contested Borderlands: Skardu and the Kashmir Dispute,* Geopolitics, 17:4, 867-86. 2012, p 872.

[12] Mato Bouzas, Antia. *Mixed Legacies in Contested Borderlands: Skardu and the Kashmir Dispute,* Geopolitics, 17:4, 867-86. 2012, p. 872.

notion of identity in tandem with vicissitudes of history and thereby treats identity in the modern period as fragmented and fractured under the influences of forces that are indigenous and exogenous to the region. While exploring the processes of reformulation of identities in Gilgit-Baltistan, the paper identifies emerging contours of new identities among different segments of society in a fluid transformation.

Following Benedict Anderson's analysis of how administrative units in the Americas come to be conceived as fatherlands over time,[13] the paper argues that the existence of different administrative setups and power arrangements without the participation of people influences the outlook of people, political agendas, notions of identity and perceptions about the state, and the creation of "Otherness". In the particular socio-cultural and political setting of Gilgit-Baltistan, the encounter with modernity during the colonial and post-colonial period gradually deprived people of ideographs that made sense of self, society, state and the world. Under new power arrangements, people lost their traditional worldview and institutions. At the same time local people could not become part of the state's mainstream institutions owing to the existing disconnection between people and representative institutions.

The fragmentation of traditional geo-bodies has transformed an array of social institutions and political arrangements. These structural changes also influence the notion of belonging and place. Therefore, any discussion on identity of Gilgit-Baltistan during the colonial period should not be taken as fixed, essentialist or permanent. Instead, it is necessary to explore identities as fragmented, unresolved and contradictory, as suggested by Stuart Hall. He attributes these characteristics as a trait of the late modern period.[14] These traits of identity will be explored in the context of "liquid modernity" where the phenomenon of "the hollowing out of institutions" occurs.[15] In order to understand the formation of identities in a very fluid situation, Zygmunt Bauman deems it essential to gather the truth of every feeling, lifestyle and collective behaviour. According to Bauman, this is only possible if we analyse social, cultural and political contexts in which a particular phenomenon exists, as well as the phenomenon itself.[16] This article explores the nature of disintegration and new configurations that are taking place in a very fluid situation in Gilgit-Baltistan.

While exploring the political status of Gilgit-Baltistan, it is imperative to place Kashmir at the centre of analysis because Kashmir has attained an indispensable role in the ideology of Pakistan, whereas the region of Gilgit-Baltistan is politically marginal because it has been wedded to the Kashmir issue and subsumed under the broader identity of Kashmir. Kashmiri nationalism in itself is not a monolithic, but a heterogeneous phenomenon, under which several local identities exist. However,

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[13] Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities.* Verso: London- New York. 1993, p. 53.

[14] Hall, Stuart. *Who needs 'identity'?* in du Gay, P., Evans, J. and Redman (eds.), Identity: a reader, Sage Publications Inc, pp 1-17. 2000, p. 18.

[15] Zygmunt Bauman deems it a process where identity in the crisis of multiculturalism. Zygmunt Bauman. *Identity Conversations with Benedetto Vecchi*. Polity. 2004, p 5. I am employing the term to refer a local process where modernity is liquidating old identities but it has not taken a consistent form in Gilgit-Baltistan by remaining fluid. Hollowing out of institutions refers to traditional and modern institutions in Gilgit-Baltistan both of which are divested of power as the former's power were wrested by modern state without investing power in modern institutions.

[16] Bauman, Zygmunt. *Identity Conversations with Benedetto Vecchi*. Polity. 2004, p. 3.

the categorization of Kashmir as having a single identity, as well as the administrative arrangements and state narratives of both India and Pakistan have given it a unified identity over the years. It is this unitary identity of Kashmir that is invoked by Kashmiri leaders to attain a separate status from India and Pakistan, but a single identity of Kashmir. The nationalists and different regional and linguistic groups in Gilgit-Baltistan do not take into consideration the diversity within an imagined Kashmiri community. Although local regional and ethnic groups in Gilgit-Baltistan strive for their own separate identity within, they tend to favour a unified identity of the region when Gilgit-Baltistan's identity is made subservient to Kashmir identity. This bifurcation between sub-regional and linguistic identity and the collective identity of the region gives birth to a highly localised discourse of identity as well as a narrative of unified identity of Gilgit-Baltistan against the "Other" – Kashmir.[17]

One of the challenges for conducting research on this topic is the absence of research by local scholars about the post-colonial period in Gilgit-Baltistan as well as the lack of access to official documents. Much of the discussion about politics, society, culture and identity is limited to a small number of articles in local Urdu newspapers.[18] Much of the discussion about identity and the marginal status of the region at the popular level occurs at the level of local languages, which are non-written languages. This is evident from the fact that there is not a single newspaper or magazine in any local language of Gilgit-Baltistan. In order to get an insight into identity and status discourses among people, it is imperative to explore the oral sources by capturing ideas circulating in public spaces, political platforms, poetry, lifestyle and actions.

This paper begins by providing a brief historical background of boundary making, namely the establishment of the Gilgit Agency and the Independence Movement of Gilgit-Baltistan (*Zang Azadi-e-Gilgit*), in order to provide a contextual background which is indispensable for understanding current identity dilemmas and debates. Then, it moves on to discuss the narratives of nationalist movements and their framing of the Kashmir issue. Afterwards, it addresses the sectarian divide in Gilgit-Baltistan's society and the creation of new spaces and identities with a special focus on the increasing influence of exogenous religious ideas and their connections to local society as well as the Kashmir issue. Finally, the paper analyses the articulation of identities by ethnic and regional groups and their contributions towards the formation of an overall identity of Gilgit-Baltistan.

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[17] Hermann Kreutzmann has examined the boundary-making from the perspective of Gilgit-Baltistan during colonial and post-colonial period and debate of identity of naming in his paper Boundaries and space in Gilgit-Baltistan. See Kreutzmann, Hermann. *Boundaries and Spaces in Gilgit-Baltistan* in Contemporary South Asia. Routledge. London. 2015.

[18] Muhammed Qasim Nasim and Attaullah Sahab have compiled their articles related to Gilgit-Baltistan and Kashmir and published in local newspapers. See Nasim, Muhammed Qasim. *Gilgit-Baltistan Aur Mas'alah-e-Kashmir* [Gilgit-Baltistan and Kashmir Problem. Sang-e-Meel Publications. Pakistan. 2007, and Shahab, Attaullah. *Manzil Ki Talash: Riyasat-e-Kashmir or Shumali Ilaqoon Kay Ayeeni, Siyasi Or Geographyayi Mustabil Ka Tajiya* [In Search for Destiny: An Analysis of Constitutional, Political and Geographical Future of the State of Kashmir and Northern Areas]. Dar-ul-Kitab, Pakistan. 2005.

2 The Independence Movement of Gilgit-Baltistan

Within British India, the region of Gilgit-Baltistan was not only a periphery in geographical terms, but was at the margins of political developments and movements taking place in India as well. Gilgit-Baltistan did not figure in the political agenda of the All India Muslim League. Indeed, the region was a small item in the vast game of transfer of power in South Asia.[19] Therefore, it is important to analyse the events that led to the independence of Gilgit-Baltistan in 1947 within the changing configuration of power in the region in which the British returned the Gilgit Agency to the Maharaja of Kashmir and hence, the Kashmiri ruler stepped in to fill the power vacuum. At the same time, the British Commanding Officer Major Brown, Kashmiri State troops and Gilgit Scouts were also vying to take reign of power into their hand. This is the moment where for the first time Gilgit Scouts exercised agency and thus formed a separate state from that of Kashmir.

Since the arrival of the Kashmiri forces and the British in the middle of the nineteenth century in Gilgit-Baltistan, the Partition period represented the first opportunity for the local people to exercise their political agency to emancipate themselves from alien rule. When the British handed over the region to the Maharaja of Kashmir on 1 August 1947, cancelling prematurely the lease agreement that had begun in 1935 for a period of 60 years, the "Revolutionary Council"[20] of Gilgit Scouts showed their opposition to Governor Ghansara Singh. Despite the lack of a clear and coherent programme of the Gilgit Scouts, there were many local and external factors that provided an opportunity for officers of the paramilitary force to wrest power from the foreign rulers and create a unified state of Gilgit with the reins of power in their hands. All the local officers in the Gilgit Scouts rose from the lower rank of subalterns[21] to the positions of officers. So their rank within the overall structure of the British system and their political status was that of subordinates. However, they became leaders[22] of the Independence Movement of Gilgit famously known as *Jang Azadi-e-Gilgit*. It was in the tumultuous events and a rapidly shifting political situation that they asserted their agency and tried to fill a power vacuum in order to create a space for themselves in the new political order. On the other hand, the political developments, the administrative arrangements, the drawing of boundaries in India and Pakistan and the emergence of the Kashmir issue on the international level pushed the region into a liminal[23] position.

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[19] Dani, Ahmed Hasan. *History of Northern Areas of Pakistan (Upto 2000 AD).* Sang-e-Meel Publications, Lahore. 2007, p. 308.

[20] Khan. F.M. *The Story of Gilgit-Baltistan and Chtiral: A Short history of Two Millenniums AD 7-1999.* Eejaz Literary Agents & Publishers. Gilgit. 2002, p 60.

[21] Subaltern is someone holding a subordinate position; specifically a commissioned officer in the British Army ranking below a captain.

[22] Ullah, Hasmat. *'Gilgit scouts ki khidmaat [Service of the Gilgit Scouts]'* in Ali, Usman (ed) "*Gilgit: Nazarya or Azadi* [Gilgit: Ideology and Liberation]". Maqbool Academy. Lahore 1995, pp 74-82.

[23] Caylee Hong in her paper "Law and Liminality in Gilgit-Baltistan: Managing Natural Resources in Consititutional Limbo" employs the anthropological concept of liminality—a transitional phase between different states to identify Gilgit-Baltistan as legally and politically "liminal". I am using term to define the ambiguous status of Gilgit-Baltistan within the constitutions and political structure of Pakistan. See Hong, Caylee. Law and Liminality in Gilgit-Baltistan: Managing Natural Resources in Constitutional Limbo. (2013) 2:1 C.J. Poverty Law 71.

Even during the time of the Independence Movement of Gilgit-Baltistan there was internal struggle between Muslim officers of the Kashmir State Army and the leaders of the Independence Movement in Gilgit-Baltistan to define the objectives of the movement and the role of local soldiers vis-à-vis Muslim soldiers who did not belong to Gilgit-Baltistan. There was an attempt by a group of Muslim officers of the Kashmir State Army to credit themselves for instigating the Independence Movement of Gilgit to become part of Pakistan.[24] Such a claim is contrary to the facts because the All India Muslim League did not exist in Gilgit. This provides evidence that, from the very beginning, the region was marginal or even negligible in the formative period of Pakistan. Contrary to this, Dr. Ahmed Hassan Dani tends to prove that the Independence Movement of local officers of the Gilgit Scouts was inspired by the vision of inclusion in Pakistan.[25] The accounts of those participating in the events suggest otherwise: Muhammed Shah Khan, Baber Khan and Mirza Hassan Khan show the absence of a clear strategy from Pakistan regarding the region's future status in the emerging configuration of states in South Asia. Significantly, there is confusion regarding the leadership of the Independence Movement as Mirzada Muhammed Shah Khan[26], and Baber Khan[27] count themselves as the architects of the movement, whereas Mirza Hassan Khan[28] presents himself as the sole leader.[29]

Soon after independence on 1 November 1947, Shah Rais Khan was declared president of the independent state of Gilgit-Baltistan, which lasted only for 16 days. Although the subaltern and officer cadres did not fulfil the definition of a political party, they were a force to be reckoned with since it was the Gilgit Scouts that succeeded in bringing a change which had long lasting repercussions on politics in the following decades. On 16 November 1947, the 'Revolutionary Council' of the Gilgit Scouts decided to link Gilgit-Baltistan with the state of Pakistan. However, with

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[24] Sökefeld, Martin. '*Jang azadi: Perspectives on a Major Theme in Northern* Areas' in Stellrecht, Irmtraud (ed.): The Past in the Present: Horizons of Remembering in the Pakistan Himalaya. Köln, Köppe, p. 66.

[25] Dani, Ahmed Hasan. *History of Northern Areas of Pakistan (Upto 2000 AD).* Sang-e-Meel Publications, Lahore. 2007, pp. 321-22.

[26] Shah Khan in his book clearly states that that Captain Mirza Hassan Khan distorts historical facts of Independence Movement of Gilgit-Baltistan by discrediting war veterans by highlighting his personality as central figure of the moment. He asserts that Captain Mirza Hassan Khan did not have any role since the inception of Gilgit rebellion on October 31, 1947 till the arrest of Ghansara Singh in Gilgit. See Khan, Mirzada Muhammed Shah. *Gilgit Scouts.* Privately published. pp II-V.

[27] Interview of Raja Baber Khan in Ali, Usman. *Gilgit Ka Inqalab* [The Revolution of Gilgit]. Sang-e-Meel Publications. Pakistan, 2012. pp 104-111.

[28] Khan, Mirza Hassan. *Shamsheer Say Zanjeer Tak* [From Sword to Slavery]. 3rd edition. 2010.

[29] Sökefeld, Martin. *Jang azadi: Perspectives on a Major Theme in Northern Areas*' in Stellrecht, Irmtraud (ed.): The Past in the Present: Horizons of Remembering in the Pakistan Himalaya. Köln, Köppe, pp. 66-7. Ghulam Rasul identifies three groups who take credit for freeing Gilgit-Baltistan from Dogra rule. The first is comprised of Colonel Hassan Khan and second is comprised of people rallied behind Baber Khan. The third is the one which gives credit to Major Brown. Although he does not name Shah Khan being a part of this group, he does mention in several passages in his book "*Azadi-e-Gilgit-Baltistan or Haqaiq* [Independence of Gilgit-Baltistan and Realities]" close friendship of Shah Khan with Major Brown. Thus, it can be inferred that Shah Khan form the third group that claims to the architect of the Gilgit rebellion against Dogra rule. Rasul, Ghulam. *Azad-e-Gilgit-Baltistan or Haqaiq* [Independence of Gilgit-Baltistan and Realities]. One International Publishers, Pakistan. 2004. p 1.

the transfer of the reign of power to an officer of the federal government, the Gilgit Scouts' influence started to diminish. Power altercations with the bureaucracy and local officers of the Gilgit Scouts fuelled political activities. Along with this, the absolute authority of political agents and the decreasing power of revolutionaries increased political frustration.

There is not much evidence about what transpired during the negotiation of accession between leaders of the Independence Movement of Gilgit-Baltistan and the government of Pakistan. However, surrendering to the newly acquired power and independence without the terms of condition laid the foundation for firm control of the centre in the periphery of Pakistan. The only document that formalised the accession of the region to Pakistan is the Karachi Agreement of 1949, which was signed by representatives of the governments of Azad Kashmir[30] and Pakistan.

The Karachi Agreement constitutes another proof of the absence of local people in the power arrangements and ideology of Pakistan. However, Kashmir has become an important pillar of Pakistan's foreign policy. This has provided an opportunity for Kashmiri leaders and nationalists to subsume the identity of Gilgit-Baltistan under the question of the whole Kashmir dispute. In addition, the internationalization of the Kashmir issue enabled the Kashmiri leadership to incorporate Gilgit-Baltistan as a part of Kashmir. This only became possible due to the wresting power of the Gilgit Scouts' officers who assumed charge of the region. Since the Kashmir issue became an international one, the United Nations brokered a ceasefire between the two countries through the Karachi Agreement on 27 July 1949. According to the UN Resolution 47, the issue of Kashmir would be resolved through a plebiscite. Hence, Pakistan linked Gilgit-Baltistan to the Kashmir issue so that in the case of a plebiscite, the opinion of the region would also be sought.[31]

3 Nationalist Movements and their framing of the Kashmir issue

Pakistan has tried to co-opt the local populace by introducing different institutions. Moreover, the relations between India and Pakistan are increasingly playing an important role in processes of identity formation in Gilgit-Baltistan and Kashmir. Over decades, the state in Gilgit-Baltistan has succeeded in reaching the peripheral region through the improvement of communications and the introduction of an array of institutions. Yet, the state has not accepted the region as a separate entity, but has rather kept its status in abeyance for broader ideological reasons. Local people and leaders of the freedom movement see the existing structure as a continuation of colonial structures that subjugate people. The end of the nascent state of Gilgit-Baltistan and its surrendering to a rule of political agents from Pakistan in November 16, 1947 is seen as a point where the woeful tale[32] of

[30] Azad Kashmir was the name given by Pakistani government to the area of Kashmir which came under its control.

[31] Rasul, Ghulam. *Azad-e-Gilgit-Baltistan or Haqaiq [*Independence of Gilgit-Baltistan and Realities]. One International Publishers, Pakistan. 2004. p. 79

[32] Ghulam Rasul declares this moment as a start of woeful tale of Gilgit-Balistan. Whereas Professor Usma Ali in his eponymous book "*Gilgit ki rog kahani* [A woeful tale of Gilgit]" consider colonial period of Dogra raj as a dark period from which the woeful tale of Gilgit emerges. However, Usman Ali appreciates the freedoms conferred by the Islamic state of Pakistan to local people. For details see Rasul, Ghulam. *Azad-e-Gilgit-Baltistan*

Gilgit-Baltistan in the post-colonial period starts. In response to dwindling power and different political, economic and social issues, various local political parties have emerged in the political landscape of Gilgit-Baltistan.

The political dynamics of Gilgit-Baltistan are permeated by its ambivalent status as part of Pakistan and as a disputed territory connected to the Kashmir dispute. Due to this situation, people in the region do not take part in the national elections in Pakistan and they are only entitled to participate in electing regional representatives to the Gilgit-Baltistan Legislative Assembly (GBLA) situated in Gilgit. However, the main political parties represented in the Assembly are the national parties operating in the rest of Pakistan and they maintain, with some variations, a political discourse based on the region's need for development and better governance. They remain sympathetic to the people's wish to join Pakistan as a province, despite the fact that its political status has yet to be decided. Nationalist local parties have started to emerge in the late 1960s and are in favour of a separate constitutional arrangement for the region. Their irruption in the public-boosted social mobilization has animated the discussion on the region's position as a marginal area.

The exclusion of people from power sharing has led regional politics to revolve around identity/cultural-based mobilization with a fierce criticism of the Pakistani state. It is this disjuncture between culture and power that has prompted nationalist forces to assert their distinctiveness demanding the distribution of power over culture. The first nationalist group created in the late 1960s was the Gilgit-Baltistan Ladakh *Jamhori Mahaz*. This party was formed by individuals from Ladakh, Baltistan and Gilgit, therefore transcending the existing boundaries of state and trying to connect their brethren across the border with India. Wazir Mehdi, Wazir Ashraf and Mohammad Ali (a converted Ladakhi Muslim) were important activists of this movement.[33] Though the party was banned, it paved the way for creating awareness and a cadre of political activists who mobilised people in 1971, when a Punjabi headmaster insulted a local teacher. As a result, a mass protest evolved in Gilgit and mobs broke the jail and torched the police station. The Gilgit Scouts were ordered to shoot but they refused. Shortly after, this force was dissolved. After this mass movement the leaders formed *Tanzeem-e-Millat*[34], demanded the end of the Frontier Crimes Regulations (FCR) and sought equal political status for the region in the political system of Pakistan. Its emergence on the scene of Gilgit-Baltistan represented a turning point as the local society mobilised against what was perceived as a form of discrimination. Many of the prominent leaders of this movement were incarcerated in Haripur prison, where they for the first time interacted with the national parties in Pakistan. Later, most of the leaders of *Jamhori Mahaz* and *Tanzeem-e-Millat* were either offered lucrative jobs in the government or joined Pakistan People's Party, established in 1971.

The Pakistan People's Party (PPP) inducted a large number of workers of *Tanzeem-e-Millat* within its fold. Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto dissolved different princely states in the region and abolished the FCR during

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*or Haqaiq [*Independence of Gilgit-Baltistan and Realities]. One International Publishers, Pakistan. 2004. p. 239, and Ali, Usman. "*Gilgit ki rog kahani* [A woeful tale of Gilgit]" Ali, Usman. Maqbool Academy. Pakistan, 2004.

[33] Dad, Aziz Ali. *History of Political Parties in Gilgit-Baltistan.* Unpublished paper written for Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS). 2012, p. 11.

[34] Rasul, Ghulam. *Azad-e-Gilgit-Baltistan or Haqaiq [*Independence of Gilgit-Baltistan and Realities*].* One International Publishers, Pakistan. 2004. p 291.

his rule.[35] This helped the PPP win the sympathies of the local people. Concomitant with the introduction of a new political and administrative system, the opening of the Karakorum Highway (KKH) and consequent developments in communication and the interaction with mainstream Pakistan, major political parties entered the region. After 1974, political activists in the region aligned their agendas and activities with new political forces from the center. However, no local party emerged during this period.

The reason for local nationalist parties' diminishing power and influence is that they joined mainstream political parties without attaining constitutional and political rights at par with other provinces. Although this has connected individual members with the power in the federal government, at the local political level it created a vacuum as people were left without the traditional rule by local kings on the one hand, and lacked alternatives on the other hand. Soon after the dissolution of the princely state of Hunza and when the Northern Areas Council was introduced by Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, Pakistan witnessed the imposition of Martial Law by General Zia-ul-Haq. Though Gilgit-Baltistan (erstwhile Northern Areas) was not a constitutional part of Pakistan, he declared the region Zone E to extend the rules of Martial Law. This move disrupted the burgeoning political activities that were taking place in the region and rendered it powerless with no representation either in assemblies or in the overall political setup. This continued exclusion of the people from power sharing has led regional politics towards identity/cultural-based mobilization with a fierce opposition to the state. Nationalist movements are one of the actors who attempt to attain a distinct identity for Gilgit-Baltistan on the basis of cultural similarities.

The Karakorum National Movement (KNM) was established in 1984 by student activists in Karachi. The KNM was different from previous nationalist parties because it started with a well organised structure and a stated manifesto. It claims Gilgit-Baltistan to be a culturally and historically separate entity from Kashmir, which was subjugated into a liminal position because of the collusion between the Pakistani establishment and Kashmiri leaders who signed the Karachi agreement.[36] The KNM rejects all the treaties and agreements, including Amritsar and Karachi respectively, as instruments of slavery imposed by colonial rule. Hence, the KNM's initial thrust of a political debate over identity was geared against Kashmiri leaders who evinced colonial documents to make the identity of Gilgit-Baltistan subservient to a meta-identity of Kashmir. During the 1990s, the organisation ran virulent campaigns against the then leaders of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) and Kashmir valley, who were seen as a major hurdle for Gilgit-Baltistan to attain a separate identity and status. The movement sees the leadership of Azad Jammu and Kashmir as part of the establishment that tries to keep its status in limbo. It favours opening up historical routes to Kargil, Dras and Ladakh in India, and the Wakhan corridor for economic prosperity and interaction between communities divided along the border because of the ahistorical and apathetic demarcation of boundaries.[37]

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[35] Khan. F.M. *The Story of Gilgit-Baltistan and Chitral: A Short history of Two Millenniums AD 7-1999.* Eejaz Literary Agents & Publishers. Gilgit. 2002. p. 194.

[36] *Dastur-e-Amal Karakoram National Movement [Manifesto of Karakorum National Movement]*. Central Secretariat Gilgit. 2010, p. 15.

[37] *Dastur-e-Amal Karakoram National Movement [Manifesto of Karakorum National Movement].* Central Secretariat Gilgit. 2010, p. 10.

The KNM considers the demarcation of boundaries of Gilgit-Baltistan – the administrative boundary between Gilgit-Chitral, and Diamer-Shinaki Kohistan- and the Line of Control (LoC) that separates Kargil, Ladakh and Dras from Gilgit-Baltistan detrimental to its "essential" identity. Therefore, the KNM includes Ladakh and Kargil in India and Shinaki Kohistan and Chitral as integral parts of Gilgit-Baltistan that were divided by the governments of India and Pakistan to establish their hegemony. However, the organisation has not succeeded to forge cross-border linkages. Therefore, its focus remains on asserting an identity of Gilgit-Baltistan as different from Kashmir within the context of Pakistan. Although the KNM's manifesto clearly demands a separate constitutional assembly for the region, its leaders have participated in the last three elections. Hence, the politics of identity followed by the KNM is taking shape within the limited space available in the liminal status of Gilgit-Baltistan in the state of Pakistan. The KNM cadres are mostly former activists of its students' wing Karakoram Students Organisation (KSO). With the experience of student activism, KNM succeeded in elections at the Union Council, the District Council and even at the Gilgit-Baltistan Legislative Assembly (GBLA) level. However, some of the leaders later defected to Pakistani mainstream parties like its Chairman Muzaffar Rallay who joined PMLQ after getting elected in 2004. Iqbal Advocate, former Chairman of the KNM, joined the Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz). This has dented the credibility of the party among its members and the populace. Its leader attributes the failure of the KNM to garner votes to state oppression and intimidation. Despite all this, they feel confident that their "movement for self-rule is still gaining strength".[38] The leaders of the KNM feel that their struggle for an identity is visible in forms beyond the political sphere, as the government was forced to name the first ever regional bank and university Karakoram Cooperative Bank Ltd and Karakoram International University (KIU) respectively.

The KNM's political agenda is impeded by regional identities because the regions of Ghizer, Diamer and some parts of Baltistan argue that the name of Karakoram covers only a limited geographical area of Gilgit-Baltistan, failing to encompass these regions.[39] One of the shortcomings of the nationalist movements in Gilgit-Baltistan is their failure to propound an inclusive name for the diverse regional, ethnic and linguistic groups. The common theme among nationalist discourses is the predominance of mountains as the identity of Gilgit-Baltistan. The overemphasis on mountainous features in the nationalist narrative has superseded the articulation of commonalities of culture and historical heritage. Even the logos on the flags of the KNM and the Balawaristan National Front (BNF) display mountains as prominent parts while a symbolic dimension of culture is absent. That is why the human geographer Hermann Kreutzmann calls the various nationalist groups "Mountain Nationalists".[40] Within the nationalist discourse of the KNM, Kashmir has become the "Other" of the nationalist self of Gilgit-Baltistan.

Given the difficulty in creating an all-encompassing definition of the nation in the context of Gilgit-Baltistan as separate from Kashmir, Nawaz Khan Naji has coined the word Balawaristan. Bala means high in Persian and thus Balawaristan means high land. In order to elaborate his idea of a Balawar

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[38] *Discord in Pakistan's Northern Areas*. Asia Report N°131 – 2 April 2007, p. 20.

[39] Naji, Nawaz Khan. *Ham Kon Hain? Naam Ki Ahmiyat* [Who Are We? The Importance of Name]. Essa Enterprises. 2001, p. 33.

[40] Kreutzmann, Hermann. *Boundaries and Spaces in Gilgit-Baltistan* in Contemporary South Asia. London. 2015, p. 8.

nation Nawaz Khan Naji wrote an Urdu booklet "*Ham Kon Hain? Naam Ki Ahmiyat"* [Who Are We? The Importance of Name) in which he attempts to give a unifying name for diverse ethnic, regional and linguistic groups who share a common history, geography and culture. In 1994 Nawaj Khan Naji and Abdul Hamid Khan founded the Balawaristan National Front (BNF), a political party aiming to attain a separate identity from Kashmir and Pakistan. The BNF demands complete autonomy of the region of Balawaristan from India and Pakistan. Moreover, the BNF deems Kargil and Ladakh in India, Chitral and Kohistan as essential components of the region they name Balawaristan.[41]

The leaders of the BNF reject the Pakistani state's position on Kashmir and Kashmiri claims over Gilgit-Baltistan as part of disputed Kashmir. The BNF does not consider Gilgit-Baltistan as a legitimate part of Jammu and Kashmir. It considers instead that Kashmir, during the Dogra rule, was in control of Gilgit-Baltistan by means of military power in collaboration with the British colonial power.[42] Thus, to reclaim a distinct identity from a shared history during the colonial period, the BNF considers it vital to get rid of institutions and a state ideology that has marginalised the region politically. The party was later divided into two groups: BNF (Naji) and BNF (Hamid). The latter has been living in exile since 1998, whereas the former is actively engaged in the political arena of Gilgit-Baltistan.

Balawaristan is a typical example of the construction of what Benedict Anderson calls 'Imagined Communities'.[43] Though the name of Balawaristan is a modern construct with no historical links, it has gotten into the imagination of people to some extent because its founder, Nawaj Naji, has succeeded to mobilise a section of youth especially in the Ghizer District and was elected twice to the Gilgit-Baltistan Legislative Assembly (GBLA). Unlike the KNM, the leader of the BNF remained the only oppositional voice in the GBLA. For this reason, it is imperative to look at the functioning of imaginative entities in the articulation of identity in the case of Gilgit-Baltistan. Although the BNF (Naji) aspires for maximum autonomy, it now strives to find an identity for Gilgit-Baltistan separate from Kashmir through democratic means. On the other hand, the BNF (Hamid) boycotted elections because it thinks that the GBLA is neither an assembly nor a legislative body in its true meaning.[44]

On the contrary, the BNF (Hamid) has succeeded in connecting with Kashmiri groups on the Indian side, in places outside the region and Pakistan. Since the Kashmiri diaspora counts a sizable number in Europe and North America, the BNF has found a base in diasporic spaces to challenge the existing status of Kashmir on both sides of the border of India and Pakistan. Through spaces in Europe and North America, Hamid mobilised different international fora to highlight the liminality of the region and its case to constitute a new identity. He terms Gilgit-Baltistan as occupied territory of Pakistan[45]

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[41] Bala mean high and tan mean land. Balawar means the one who lives in highland and Balawaristan is the name of the region inhabited by Balawar nation. Naji, Nawaz Khan. *Ham Kon Hain? Naam Ki Ahmiyat* [Who Are We? The Importance of Name]. Essa Enterprises. 2001,p. 37.

[42] Bodla, Sohaib. *Making a Nation in High Mountains: Balawars and Balawaristan Nationalism in Ghizer District of Gilgit Baltistan.* Ethnoscripts 2014 16(1): 125-139. p. 125.

[43] Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities.* Verso. London- New York. 1993, p. 6.

[44] Letter for boycott of elections by Abdul Hameed Khan. July 2015.

[45] Pakistan's heart of darkness, Asia Times. http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/DH22Df03.html [accessed on 16 May 2016].

and deems it a colony that needed to be freed through the nationalist movement.[46] Furthermore, his interaction with India has provided an opportunity to contest Pakistan's stance on Gilgit-Baltistan and Kashmir. While the convergence of Kashmiri nationalists and exiled nationalists outside of Pakistan has increased the communication between different political actors abroad, the situation in Gilgit-Baltistan remains different as there is negligible interaction between nationalists of Gilgit-Baltistan and Kashmir. Though Abdul Hameed Khan has not compromised on the identity of Gilgit-Baltistan in the Pakistani state, he has tilted towards the Kashmiri narrative about the region. There is an increasing realization of the political and economic marginalisation of the region among some nationalist groups that are repositioning themselves concerning the identity of Gilgit-Baltistan vis-à-vis Kashmir, as they consider themselves still a part of the Kashmir dispute in the historical sense.[47] This is evident from Hamid's willingness to work with Kashmiris towards the independence of Gilgit-Baltistan. Despite his presence in India he has still not formed branches of his party in the region of Ladakh, Dras and Kargil that his party claims are parts of Balawaristan. He held a press conference with Emma Nicholson in London and endorses findings of her report which clearly declares Gilgit and Baltistan as constituent parts of an undivided Kashmir.[48]

So far nationalist parties could not fulfil their political goals for the reason that their political agendas fails to garner popular support in local elections. Their difficulties are compounded by a dominance of mainstream Pakistani parties which receive majority votes in elections and form the government in Gilgit-Baltistan. In an interview, the writer Mr. Malik Shah, founding member of the Pakistan People's Party in Gilgit-Baltistan, referred to the leader of *Tanzeem-e-Millat* party, Jauhar Ali, who feared that a growing influence of mainstream parties at the national level would weaken local nationalist movements and parties, and would ultimately make the region subservient to the federal government indefinitely.[49] His observation gains credence when we analyse the overt reliance of mainstream parties' local leaders on the party position regarding the ideology of Pakistan and the status of Gilgit-Baltistan and Kashmir in it. All the mainstream parties in Pakistan, like Jamaat-e-Islami, Jamiat-Ulema-e-Islam (JUI), the Pakistan People's Party, the Pakistan Muslim League (N) and the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) subscribe to the idea that, without Kashmir as part of Pakistan, Partition remains unachieved.[50] Therefore, they do not drift from the state's narrative of Kashmir vis-à-vis Gilgit-Baltistan because it would harm the very basic premises of the nation building of Pakistan. This is why the Chief Ministers of Gilgit-Baltistan tacitly follow the policy lines of their respective

[46] Khan, Abdul Hameed. *The Last Colony of 21st Century,* Pakistan, 2001,

[47] Ali, Nosheen. States of Struggle: Politics, Religion, and Ecology in the Making of the Northern Areas, Pakistan. Unpublished Dissertation Cornell University, p. 184.

[48] Committee on Foreign Affairs. European Parliament. *Report on Kashmir: present situation and future prospects* (2005/2242(INI)) 2007, p. 20

[49] Interview with Malik Shah on January 3, 2013 in Gilgit.

[50] Christophe, Jefferlot. *The Pakistan Paradox: Instability and Resilience*. Trans: Cynthia Schoch. Oxford University Press. 2015, p. 6.

parties. The incumbent Chief Minister of Gilgit-Baltistan, Hafiz Hafeez-ur-Rehman, favours the status quo of the region for any change in its status would harm the Kashmir cause.[51]

Unlike nationalist movements in Gilgit-Baltistan that reject the official position of Pakistan regarding Gilgit-Baltistan, Kashmiri leaders always invoke the ideology of Pakistan to claim the region as an integral part of Kashmir. In July 2015, the government of Pakistan planned to convert Gilgit-Baltistan into a province of Pakistan. As a reaction to this development, Prime Minster Chaudhry Abdul Majid and President Mohammad Yaqoob Khan of Azad Jammu and Kashmir declared the region as part of the state of Jammu and Kashmir. Abdul Majid said that the Prime Minister of Pakistan could not make such a decision unless the people of Jammu and Kashmir would agree to it. The president of the AJK termed such a step more damaging than the dismemberment of the country in 1971.[52] Similar views were expressed when the government of Pakistan introduced the Gilgit-Baltistan Empowerment Package Order in 2009.[53] Their claims are contrary to popular sentiments voiced in Gilgit-Baltistan. A recently conducted study reveals views of local people that considerably differ from the plans of leaders in the diaspora as almost 82 percent of the youth surveyed prefer to call themselves Pakistanis and disassociate themselves from the larger Kashmiri identity.[54] One of the reasons for a lack of understanding of popular sentiments regarding the identity of Gilgit-Baltistan vis-à-vis Kashmir by Kashmir leaders is that none of the Kashmir parties is present in the region. The absence of communication and interaction with local people and an emerging rearticulation of Gilgit-Baltistan's identity by nationalist forces are weaning the region apart from Kashmir.

Nationalist movements and parties in the post-independence period are products of a situation in which Gilgit-Baltistan's status has remained in limbo and all the powers are vested in the federal government. In the first three decades of independence after 1947, all nationalist movements were reactions to decisions and issues stemming from the relationship between the administration and local people. Therefore, the narrative of *Tanzeem-e-Millat* and the agitation of people against local rulers did not focus on the colonial history, the Kashmir dispute and an ideology of the state. However, with the arrival of nationalist parties on the political scene in the 1980s and 1990s, the articulation of distinctiveness regarding the identity of Gilgit-Baltistan vis-à-vis Kashmir and the rest of Pakistan challenged the policies and decisions of the colonial period and the policy followed by Pakistan in relation to Gilgit-Baltistan and Kashmir in the post-colonial period. This has resulted in the exclusion of Kashmir from narratives of identity as articulated by nationalist forces in the region. Although the Kashmiri leadership has succeeded in attaining an indispensable position within the ideology of Pakistan and has subsumed Gilgit-Baltistan under the identity of Kashmir, their social and political absence in the region has turned Kashmir into the "Other" which is apart from a presumed

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[51] Hafeez Ur Rehman's Interview with Geo: whom did he represent? Dardistan Times. http://www.dardistantimes.com/gilgit-baltistan/news/1116497804/hafiz-ur-rehman-s-interview-geo-jirga-saleem-safi [accessed on 08 December 2015]

[52] AJK opposes giving provincial status to GB. (2015). Dawn, http://www.dawn.com/news/1193315 [accessed on 17 November 2015]

[53] Mato Bouzas, Antia. *Mixed Legacies in Contested Borderlands: Skardu and the Kashmir Dispute,* Geopolitics, 17:4, 867-886. 2012, p. 874.

[54] Waqas Ali, Syed and Akhunzada, Taqi. *Unheard voices: engaging youth of Gilgit-Baltistan.* Centre for Peace, Development and Reforms. 2015, p. 9.

essential self of Gilgit-Baltistan. However, the predominance of mainstream parties' electoral politics and their ambivalence about the status of the region has kept the region in limbo. The complex interplay of state ideology, the Kashmir dispute, the ambivalence of mainstream Pakistani parties about Gilgit-Baltistan's status and the continuous disenfranchisement of the region have given birth to a new politics of identity. The stance of a separate identity of Gilgit-Baltistan from Kashmir is dominating the discourse propounded by the nationalist parties.

4 Exogenous Religious Connections and the Formation of Local Sectarian Identities

Prior to the dissolution of princely states, the various valleys of Gilgit-Baltistan were ruled by local kings through social structures based on kinship. Centuries of interaction enabled different ethnic and tribal identities to develop social ties and cement the relationships and kinship among them. With regard to this, Izhar Hunzai points out: "Local rulers generally followed secular policies in dealing with their subjects and built alliances with other royals and powerful families in the area through marriages and cultivating foster-family relationships, regardless of their religious affiliations."[55] Before the dominance of puritan Islam in Gilgit-Baltistan in modern times, people practiced shamanistic and pagan rituals including but not limited to the worship of fairies, which coexisted with Islam.[56] Religious leaders such as local *pirs, khalifas, sayyids* and *maulvis* had the prerogative to define religion without any consultation from the authorities in major religious centres outside the region.

The colonial rule of the British brought large swathes of South Asia and High Asia under its fold. This enabled people from diverse backgrounds to increase connectivity with communities that were not historically and culturally related within a single administrative system. Increased contact between the highlands and lowlands of British India was possible because of the rapid growth of roads, mule tracks and bridges. Written and oral histories testify that the neo-Islamization in Gilgit-Baltistan started during the colonial period. Frederic Drew reported about Nathu Shah, the commander of the Sikh Army which attacked Gilgit in 1842, that he was eager to replace local syncretism with 'real Islam'.[57] Until 1891 there was no road connecting Gilgit with rest of the subcontinent. It posed an unsurmountable challenge for the British in terms of logistics[58] and the movement of troops. Later the British undertook the initiative of constructing the Gilgit Road from Srinagar to Gilgit via the

[55] Hunzai, Izhar. *Conflict Dynamics in Gilgit*. Special Report 321. United States Institute of Peace. Washington. 2013, p. 5.

[56] Rieck, Andreas, "From Mountain Refuge to 'Model Area': Transformation of Shi'i Communities in Northern Pakistan", in: Stellrecht, Irmtraud and Andreas Winiger (eds), *Perspectives on History and Change in the Karakorum, Hindukush, and Himalaya*, Köln: Köppe, 1997 (Culture Area Karakorum Scientific Studies; 3), p. 224.

[57] Grieser, Anna and Sökefeld Martin. "Intersections of Sectarian Dynamics and Spatial Mobility in Gilgit-Baltistan" in Stefan Conermann and Elena Smolarz, eds: *Mobilizing Religion: Networks and Mobility*. Bonner Asienstudies Vol 12. EB-Verlag, Berlin 2015, p. 86.

[58] Ali, Usman. "*Gilgit ki rog kahani* [A woeful tale of Gilgit]" Ali, Usman. Maqbool Academy. Pakistan, 2004. p 32.

Burzil Pass.[59] It facilitated fast and easy travel for the mountainous communities of Gilgit-Baltistan and exposed them to exogenous ideas, lifestyles, cultures and forms of religion in South Asia. In terms of education, initially, "some sons of the elite families left the region and got admission in formal education institutions in Kashmir and the British-Indian plains."[60] At the same time more people went to religious institutions and madrassas in South Asia, Iran and Iraq. Until the last decades of the 19th century not a single local Shia *alim* (scholar) in the entire Baltistan region and Gilgit Agency was evidently trained abroad.[61] But from 1890 to 1978, 350 Shia *ulema* were trained in religious centres in Iraq and Iran.[62]

After accession of Gilgit-Baltistan into Pakistan, the state developed the Babusar and Karakoram Highway (KKH) in 1949 and 1978 respectively.[63] The roads improved communication with outside religious centres and facilitated the reach of a proselytizing sect, *Tablighi Jamaat*, to reach local communities.[64] The post-independence period witnessed continuous flow of people from the southern part of Pakistan proselytizing local people in Gilgit-Baltistan. The building of the KKH has provided an opportunity for *Tablighi Jamaat* to access the far flung areas of the region. Coupled with increased communication and interaction with regional religious centres in Southern Pakistan, the diminishing influence of kinship-based associations, the abolition of the traditional state structure, political marginalization, the economic situation and a power vacuum, this helped the new cadre of *ulema,* a religious scholar, to replace vernacular religion with new forms of standardised Islam, supposedly devoid of accretions of local cultural elements. A combination of new Islamisation and the emergence of religio-political forces in Gilgit-Baltistan has shifted the basis of identity from culture to religion. This has caused societies to jettison indigenous ways of engaging with syncretic religion and opt for a monolithic notion of Islam. At the same time, local and syncretic forms of Islam gave way to new versions of Islam that have developed in the Indian sub-continent and Middle Eastern[65] cultural and political settings. New forms of managing religious affairs superseded vernacular Islam.

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[59] Haines, Chad. *Nation, Territory, and Globalisation in Pakistan*. Routledge. 2012, p. 41.

[60] Benz, Andreas. *Education and Development in the Karakorum: Educational Expansion and Its Impacts in Gilgit-Baltistan, Pakistan.* Vol. 67 · No. 2 · 123–36. Erdkunde. 2013, p. 126.

[61] Rieck, Andreas, "From Mountain Refuge to 'Model Area': Transformation of Shi'i Communities in Northern Pakistan", in: Stellrecht, Irmtraud and Andreas Winiger (eds), *Perspectives on History and Change in the Karakorum, Hindukush, and Himalaya*, Köln: Köppe, 1997 (=Culture Area Karakorum Scientific Studies; 3), p. 223.

[62] Rieck, Andreas, "From Mountain Refuge to 'Model Area': Transformation of Shi'i Communities in Northern Pakistan", in: Stellrecht, Irmtraud and Andreas Winiger (eds), *Perspectives on History and Change in the Karakorum, Hindukush, and Himalaya*, Köln: Köppe, 1997 (Culture Area Karakorum Scientific Studies; 3), p. 221.

[63] Kreutzmann, Hermann. *The Karakoram Highway: The Impact of Road Construction on Mountain Societies.* Modern Asian Studies 25, 4 pp. 711-736. 1991, p. 722-23.

[64] Kesier, Lincoln. Friend by Day, Enemy by Night. Organised Vengeance in a Kohistani Community. For Worth: Holt Rinehart and Winston, Inc. 1991.

[65] In naming the Middle East I specifically refer to Saudi Arabia and Iran who export their ideology to other regions.

Under the influence of new versions of Islam and the cadres of *ulema*, people began abandoning local forms of lifestyle and adopting overt religious symbols such as the size of the beard, changing the local cap with the southern prayer cap, turban and attire. Tor H. Aase is of the view that "this recent obsession with religious symbols is not a purely regional innovation. It is related to the religious discourse in Pakistan at large with which the religious communities in the North intensified their communication by opening of the Karakoram Highway."[66] The interconnections with national, regional and international spaces help create new notions of identity among the adherents of the respective sects and shape their attitudes towards politics, economics, self and society. The disruption of vernacular religious institutions and the ideological drifting of local religious leaders and scholars towards supra-regional religious networks have also affected the people's perceptions about their relationship with other communities.

The tendency of perceiving things through sectarian lenses has also intruded into the political domain and has started influencing the debate about the identity of Gilgit-Baltistan in relation to Kashmir. This is not to say that the Kashmir issue has direct bearing on the sectarian politics in Gilgit-Baltistan, rather it is borne out of autochthonous sectarian dynamics and affiliations of sectarian groups with new spaces and regions outside. The leaders of the Shia community in Gilgit-Baltistan fear that the demand to merge the region with Kashmir actually aims at turning the current Sunnite minority status into a majority. Roots of these demands can be traced back to the Kashmir conflict of 1948 when the Pakistani state appended Gilgit-Baltistan with the Kashmir imbroglio. That is why its constitutional status has remained in limbo for the last 68 years. On the other hand, the Shi'ite community considers itself the biggest stakeholder in the region and tries to derive its legitimacy for rule from the fact that there were more Shi'ite martyrs than Sunnites in the Freedom Movement of Gilgit.[67]

The power vacuum enabled the religious leaders to influence not only the religious discourse, but also politics in Gilgit-Baltistan. In the 1980s, the region witnessed the emergence of religious organizations and parties in the political landscape of Gilgit-Baltistan. These parties include *Jamiat Ulama-e-Islam* (JUI-F), *Jamat-e-Islami*, *Sipah Sahaba Pakistan* and *Tehreek-Nafaz-e-Fiqah-Jafria* (TNFJ). Thus, local religious elements benefited from forging linkages with parties and in some cases jihadi groups based outside the region. The overt sectarian politics in Gilgit-Baltistan emerged from May 1988 onwards when a posse [*lashkar]* from the south of Gilgit attacked Shia villages and killed hundreds of people.[68] This event is considered a watershed because in the subsequent decades it tilted society in favour of sectarian identities instead of culture and kinship. In addition, the Shia-Sunni dichotomy has influenced all spheres of society including social spaces, politics, economy, power relations and stance of the region towards Kashmir. According to Grieser and Sökefeld, "today sectarian affiliation (in Gilgit-Baltistan) significantly structures people's imaginations and actions. This for instance means that sectarian identities become more important than identities related to

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[66] Aase, Tor H. (1999) 'The Theological Construction of Conflict: Gilgit, Northern Areas', in Leif Manger

(ed.), *Muslim Diversity: Local Islam in Global Contexts*, London: Curzon Press, pp. 58-79, 75.

[67] Dad, Aziz Ali. Sectarian Violence in Gilgit-Baltistan. (Unpublished) Research carried out for Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, p. 5.

[68] Khan. F.M. *The Story of Gilgit-Baltistan and Chtiral: A Short history of Two Millenniums AD 7-1999.* Eejaz Literary Agents & Publishers. Gilgit. 2002, pp. 197-9.

kinship, language or regional belonging, or that affiliation with a particular sect becomes a premise that to a large extent structures social perception and interaction."[69]

In addition to local and national factors, international dimensions also contributed to sectarianism in Gilgit-Baltistan. In the 1980s, Pakistan turned into turf for the ideological battle between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Although, the Iran-Iraq war was confined within the geographical boundaries of Persia and Arabia, the ideological war spilled over into different parts of the Muslim world, including the far-flung areas of Gilgit-Baltistan. The Iran-Iraq war was to a great extent an Arab-Persian conflict incognito, yet it trickled down into the perception of Gilgit-Baltistan's society as a religious one.[70] At the global level, the decade of the 1980s was also dominated by the struggle between the radical regime of Iran and the conservative monarchy of Saudi Arabia who supported different groups sympathetic to their ideologies. "While Tehran attempted to export its revolution abroad, conservative governments in Egypt, Pakistan, the Gulf and Malaysia often encouraged Muslim radicals in their struggle against communism.'[71] Proponents of both Iran and Saudi Arabia widened the sectarian division of the Pakistani society by extending monetary assistance to different sectarian groups, and in some cases military training. In the Afghan war, Zia-ul-Haq assisted the Mujahedeen. Jihadi ideas turned Pakistan into a recruiting ground for the Afghan jihad that was endorsed and fought by various schools of thought. As a result, religious groups were able to establish ideological connections, but also gained financial support for their agendas. These developments exposed sectarian groups to an exogenous interpretation of local issues that in turn caused a shift of loyalties in favour of the centres outside their homeland. The sectarian outlook has pervaded to every sphere of life including politics in the region. The question of Gilgit-Baltistan's relation to Kashmir is underpinned by sectarian politics. In the case of Kashmir, a section of Sunni religious parties favour the annexation of Gilgit-Baltistan with Kashmir and consider its identity as an integral part of Kashmir. Reacting to a plan in August 2015 by the Pakistani government to give Gilgit-Baltistan provincial status, Atta Ullah Sahab of JUI Gilgit-Baltistan vehemently opposed it by declaring the region as part of Kashmir and warned that no one can dare to separate Gilgit Baltistan from Kashmir.[72] On the other hand, Ithna Ashri Shias, Noorbakhis and Ismailis oppose the inclusion of the area with Kashmir and favour provincial status.[73] Even in the proposed province, Qazi Nisar of

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[69] Grieser, Anna and Sökefeld Martin "Intersections of Sectarian Dynamics and Spatial Mobility in Gilgit-Baltistan" in Stefan Conermann and Elena Smolarz, eds: Mobilizing Religion: Networks and Mobility. Bonner Asienstudies Vol 12. EB-Verlag, Berlin 2015, p. 84.

[70] Dad, Aziz Ali. *Northern Areas Cry for Help*. Dawn. Lifestyle edition. December 11, 2004.

[71] Turner S, Bryan. '*Religion in a Post-Secular Society'* published in '*The New Blackwell Companion to the Sociology of Religion.'* 2010. Wiley-Blackwell. UK. Page no 556-7.

[72] *Gilgit-Baltistan ka Kashmir say taluq koyi mayi kal laal khatam nahi kar sakta* [No one can dare to delink Gilgit-Baltistan from Kashmir] Atta Ullah Sahab. Daily Ausaf. (July 13, 2015).

[73] Rieck, Andreas, "From Mountain Refuge to 'Model Area': Transformation of Shi'i Communities in Northern Pakistan", in: Stellrecht, Irmtraud and Andreas Winiger (eds), *Perspectives on History and Change in the Karakorum, Hindukush, and Himalaya*, Köln: Köppe, 1997 (=Culture Area Karakorum Scientific Studies; 3), p. 228; Sokefeld, Martin*. At the Margins of Pakistan: Political relationship between Gilgit-Baltistan and Azad Jammu and Kashmir* in Ravia Kalia (ed.): Pakistan's Political Labyrinths: Military, Society and Terror. London, Routledge, 2015, p. 179. *Historical Perspective of Gilgit-Baltistan*. A report by Committee Constituted Vide Chief Secretary Gilgit Baltistan's Office Memorandum 21 November 2015, p. 27.

Tanzeem Ahle Sunnah-wal- Jamaat (ASWJ) demanded the redrawing of boundaries by annexing Chitral and Kohistan of Khyber Pukhtunkhwa (KPK) province in Gilgit-Baltistan. The latter two areas have a Sunni majority and no Shia population with the exception of 35% Ismailis in Chitral. This would turn Gilgit-Baltistan into a Sunni majority province. Though Kohistan and Chitral belong to same cultural and linguistic community of Gilgit-Baltistan, inclusion of these areas is not approved by Shi'ites for the fear of their being turned into minority. However, in Baltistan people consider Ladakh and Kargil as parts of greater Baltistan and exclude Kashmir from the broader identity. Hence, the politics of demography by sectarian groups plays an important role in the articulation of identities in relation to Kashmir, which is either excluded or included to create a distinct identity of Gilgit-Baltistan.

The closing of Gilgit-Baltistan borders with the neighbouring regions of Gorno-Badakshan and Xinjiang in China has forced the Ismaili community in Gilgit-Baltistan to reorient their religious linkages from Central Asia to South Asia. These linkages were established earlier but this time came under the control of new institutions. However, the opening of borders with China in the 1970s and the independence of Tajikistan in 1991 helped them reconnect with their coreligionists scattered in border areas. For instance, until 1957, the Ismailis of Gilgit-Baltistan under the religious arrangements of the time belonged to the Badakhshan area because, historically, they were part of the tradition that followed the teachings of Pir Nasir Khusraw in Badakhshan. This enabled Ismailis to forge connections with wider networks in Afghanistan, Gorno-Badakhshan in Pamir and the Tajiks of Xinjiang in China. Owing to the link with the communities of greater Central Asia, the Ismailis from Gilgit-Baltistan are still termed as Badakhshani by the Ismaili community in Karachi. With the introduction of the Ismaili Association in early 1971, they came under the jurisdiction of communities of South Asia mainly concentrated in Karachi in the south of Pakistan. Indeed, Mir Jamal of Hunza was president of the Central Asian Ismaili setup, which was closed in 1972 and new institutions were established with Karachi as the centre.[74] This change was necessitated by the closure of the border with Gorno-Badakhshan, where the Union of Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR) consolidated its control.

Since Badakhshan remained the centre of Ismailism[75] for Ismaili communities in Central Asia, the closure of borders disrupted religious linkages of the Ismailis of Gilgit with Badakhshan. Living under a new institutional arrangement in the south of Pakistan for more than four decades, the connections of Ismaili communities in Gilgit-Baltistan have oriented toward the Ismailis living in Southern Pakistan. Being a part of the tradition of same *pir,* or spiritual guide, they follow the Central Asian Ismaili tradition rather than the Khoja tradition of South Asia, though, administratively, they function through institutions based in South Asia. Unlike Sunni and Shia communities that internalise South Asian and Western Asian Islam, the Ismailis of Gilgit-Baltistan deem the religious tradition of Khoja Ismailis as impure because of the cultural influence of the Hindu religion. The cohabitation of both the vernacular Ismailism of Gilgit-Baltistan and Khoja Ismailism in the south is a source of

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[74] Aesar, Fida Ali. *Shumali Ilaqa Jaat May Ismaili Dawat: Aik Tarikhi Jaiza* [Ismaili Preaching in Northern Areas: A Historical Perspective]. ITREB, Pakistan. 1996, p 73; Hunzai, Abdullah Jan. *Tarikh Dawat-e-Ismailia Shumaili Ilqaq Jaat* [History of Ismailism in Northern Areas]. Minerva Advertising and Publications. 2008. p 241; Malik, Nadeem Shafeeq. *Saada-e-Bam-e-Dunya* [Voice of the Roof of the World]. Institute for the Promotion of National Language (Ministry of Information, Broadcast and National Heritage. 2014, p. 142.

[75] Kreutzmann, Hermann. *Pamirian Crossroads Kirghiz and Wakhi of High Asia.* Verlag: Harrassowitz. 2015, p. 415.

altercation as the Ismaili community in Gilgit does not approve of the predominance of Southern Ismailis in religious institutions.

The policy of the Pakistani state to keep the status of Gilgit-Baltistan in a limbo and its people disenfranchised due to the Kashmir dispute has resulted in the weakening of the political process on the one hand, and has created a class of religious leaders to increase their influence in society and play a prominent role in politics on the other hand. Their power could be increased by delegitimizing those traditional spaces, institutions, ideas and practices that had historically restricted their role in society and in the state. With the gradual weakening of kinship-based institutions and a shift towards sectarian affiliations, the *ulema* have become important actors in articulating identities, religious discourse and politics, and in determining the position of their respective sectarian groups towards Kashmir. This is evident from the differing stances of religious parties about the possible status and administrative arrangements of Gilgit-Baltistan within the Pakistani state.

Contrary to other religious groups, Ismailis and Noorbakshis have not organised themselves around a faith-based political party, and therefore it is difficult to say how they position themselves in relation to the Kashmir issue. Nevertheless, the political position of Ismailis can be evinced from the fact that none of the elected members from the Ismaili areas of Ghizer and Hunza have ever declared themselves as part of Kashmir. Owing to the absence of cultural and historical connections of Ismailis with the region of Kashmir, the Ismailis in Gilgit-Baltistan find no affinity with Kashmir. So far, all the elected representatives from Ismaili dominated areas have vehemently rejected the claim of Kashmiris that Gilgit-Baltistan is a part of Kashmir. This has resulted in Kashmir being deemed as a non-issue for Ismailis when defining the collective identity of Gilgit-Baltistan. Ismailis of Gilgit-Baltistan prefer to have a common identity with people of the same cultural, linguistic and ethnic groups rather than identifying themselves with what is perceived as an exogenous identity of Kashmir. Although there is no official Ismaili position regarding the political status of Gilgit-Baltistan vis-à-vis Kashmir, their elected representatives never spoke in favour of Kashmir and always espouse making the region the fifth province of Pakistan. That is why their views regarding the status of Gilgit-Baltistan vis-à-vis Kashmir are close to the Shi'ite position, but this view is based more on cultural reasons than theological ones. So the demographic politics of sects, at the moment, are setting the identity of the people in Gilgit-Baltistan apart from Kashmir. One of the untoward consequences of subsuming the identity of Gilgit-Baltistan within Kashmir would be further dismemberment of the Sunni majority areas from Gilgit-Baltistan.

5 Regional and Ethnic Identities

As a post-colonial state, Pakistan resorted to the modern narrative that espouses a monolithic identity of the nation-state, based on a definition of Muslim identity overriding other identities. The incompatibility of the state's narrative of identity with its cultural components fuels tensions between the state and cultural/regional groups. In the context of Gilgit-Baltistan, the increasing modernization and exposure to exogenous lifestyles and ideas is bringing about drastic changes in the old social structure. As a result, different regions and linguistic groups in the region strive to rearticulate their status in the changing pattern of society and administrative arrangements.

The demarcation of administrative boundaries of the same linguistic groups within Gilgit-Baltistan in Pakistan has caused disputes over the territories. This has helped the formation of new identities based upon administrative boundaries and leads to exclusionary narratives of the people from same linguistic group but who inhabit different regions. This is evident from the existing disputes and clashes over boundaries between Khowar speakers in the Ghizer District in Gilgit-Baltistan and the Chitral District in Khyber Pukhtunkhwa, and Diamer in Gilgit-Baltistan and the Kohistan District in Khyber Pukhtunkhwa. In the mid-1990s, the government of Khyber Pukhtunkhwa moved paramilitary forces of the Chitral Scouts to Shandur claiming it to be part of Chitral. This claim is refuted by the people in the Ghizer District of Gilgit-Baltistan, who declared it a fudge demarcation.[76] Chitral was separated from the Gilgit Agency in 1896 and was annexed into the newly created North-West Frontier Province in 1901[77], whereas Kohistan was made part of Khyber Pukhtunkhwa, erstwhile the North Western Frontier Province (NWFP) in 1952. Over the years, these boundaries have been internalised and have become markers of identity. New megaprojects and market forces of the tourism industry have turned border areas into important economic resources.

Historically, Chitral enacted an important role in events affecting the region of Gilgit, even during Dogra and British period. Since the inclusion of Chitral in the Malakand Agency in 1901, the Khowar speaking people in the Ghizer District feel alienated from their Kho speaking brethren in the same district.[78] Currently, there is an increasing tendency among educated youth to connect with the same linguistic fraternity. The efforts on the cultural front are spearheaded by people trying to overcome administrative barriers by reviving old cultural connections and establishing new spaces for interaction. But this cultural activism has not translated into a political movement demanding a separate status of Chitral from Khyber Pukhtunkhwa or a merger with Gilgit.

People in the Kohistan district ethnically and linguistically belong to the people in the Diamer District. The conquest of Kohistan by the Wali of Swat has brought Kohistan under the control of Pashtun governance and culture. Gradually, Kohistanis adopted the Pashtun institutions and outlook. It has transformed the traditional system of governance of society.[79] Kohistanis see more benefits in remaining an administrative unit in Khyber Pukhtunkhwa province than in being a part of the same linguistic and ethnic group in Gilgit-Baltistan. For the past 30 years, the government of Pakistan has been planning to build the biggest hydro-electric generation project that lies at the border between the Kohistan and Diamer districts. Since the project can yield an income of billions of rupees annually in the form of royalties, communities around district borders are trying to occupy the land in areas which are not clearly delineated by the government. This has resulted in clashes between

[76] Chitral's claim over Shandur refuted. http://www.dawn.com/news/261102/gilgit-chitral-s-claim-over-shandur-refuted. [Accessed on 29 January, 2016].

[77] Kreutzmann, Hermann. *Pamirian Crossroads Kirghiz and Wakhi of High Asia.* Verlag: Harrassowitz. 2015, p. 397.

[78] In 1892 Munshi Aziz-ud-Din visited Chitral wrote a book *Tarikh-e-Chitral* [History of Chitral]. He includes the region of Yasin and area from Dahimal to Thamsak in Chitral state. See Din, Aziz Munshi. *Tarikh-e-Chitral* [History of Chitral]. Sang-e-Meel Publications. Pakistan, 2010. P 17.

[79] Jetmar, Karl. Indus Kohistan: An Ethnographic and Linguistic Overview. Kohistan Development Board. 1982. p 9.

communities on both sides.[80] Thus, it can be said that, in the process of identity formation, the administrative borders and constitutional politics are determining the contours of emerging and distinct identities.

For the past 67 years, the administrative setup in Gilgit-Baltistan has been changing continuously as the state introduced different arrangements. This has given birth to a politics of administrative units in the shape of tehsil and districts. The announcement of new districts for political purposes has become a trend among politicians in Gilgit-Baltistan. It has helped to rejuvenate old regional or valley based identities. In 2008 the former President Pervez Musharraf announced a separate district for Hunza-Nagar. Both regions are inhabited by the same ethnic and linguistic community, except sect. However, the people of Hunza demanded a separate district for themselves because they have historically been rivals of Nagar. On the eve of elections for GBLA in June 2015, the Prime Minister of Pakistan Nawaz Sharif announced separate districts for both Hunza and Nagar.[81] The scion of the former prince of Hunza, Mir Ghazanfar Ali Khan, claimed that he restored the lost identity of Hunza. This tilted people in his favour and he won the elections this time though his son lost in the previous election in 2009.

In addition to internal administrative borders, the demarcation of international boundaries in the second half of the century turned Gilgit-Baltistan into a cul-de-sac[82] as the historical Baltistan-Ladakh, Astore-Srinagar and Gilgit-Kasghar routes were disrupted after the closing of borders. In order to permeate into the remote region, the Pakistani government has constructed roads and introduced administrative measures to bring it under its control. It has resulted in a change in the orientation of communities in the borderlands of Gilgit-Baltistan. Wakhi[83] community inhabits the border areas of Afghanistan, China, Pakistan and Tajikistan. The gradual closing of borders in the neighbouring regions of *Tanzeem-e-Millat* in the 20th century dispersed the closely-knit Wakhi community across four different nation states and turned its status into that of a liminal group in those states. The members of the Wakhi community were highly mobile in their search for high pastures and cultivated land as they traversed different valleys of High Asia. With the closing of the Pamirian border by the Soviet Union in 1935, and subsequently of the Chinese border in 1953[84], the

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[80] Deadly shoot-outs: Seven killed as Gilgit-Kohistan boundary dispute turns bloody. Express Tribune. http://tribune.com.pk/story/677499/deadly-shoot-outs-seven-killed-as-gilgit-kohistan-boundary-dispute-turns-bloody/ [accessed on 17 November 2015].

[81] Dividing Governance: Three new district notified in GB. http://tribune.com.pk/story/926380/dividing-governance-three-new-districts-notified-in-g-b/ [accessed on 12 November 2015].

[82] Stellrecht, Irmtraud. Dynamics of Highland-Lowland Interaction in Northern Pakistan since the 19th Century. In: Stellrecht, Irmtraud and Matthias Winiger (eds.) Perspectives on History and Change in the Karakorum, Hindukush, and Himalaya. Köln: Rüdiger Köppe, 1997, pp. 3-22.

[83] Wakhi language belongs to a southern group of Pamiri languages. These languages are spoken in the mountainous regions, which is called Pamir. Pamiri languages, including Wakhi, belong to South eastern group of Iranian languages. Malik, Nadeem Shafeeq. *Saada-e-Bam-e-Dunya* [Voice of the Roof of the World]. Institute for the Promotion of National Language (Ministry of Information, Broadcast and National Heritage. 2014, pp. 71-4.

[84] Kreutzmann, Hermann. *Pamirian Crossroads Kirghiz and Wakhi of High Asia.* Verlag: Harrassowitz. 2015, p. 415, pp. 115-6.

movement of the Wakhi people was restricted to Pakistan only. On the eve of collapse of the Soviet Union, the Wakhi Tajik Culture Association Pakistan (WTCA) was formed in 1984. The opening of KKH in 1978 and the introduction of border crossings between Pakistan and China, as well as the connectivity of Tajikistan after the building of the Kulma Pass road made it possible to reconnect the Wakhi populations across borders. There are frequent exchanges of cultural tropes and family visits across borders to increase connections with Wakhi speakers.

In order to define their distinctiveness from other linguistic groups, Wakhis in Gilgit-Baltistan are using Pamiri[85] and Tajik[86] with their name. Their efforts to assert Wakhiness are not confined within the administrative space of Gilgit-Baltistan, but rather they transcend the boundaries of the state and the region. This enabled them to establish a trans-regional identity. Wakhi communities in the peripheries of four countries have been able to forge connections that created new spaces wherein people are able to transcend the limitation of the geo-body embossed over the cultural geography of a particular region. The new identity marker of Tajik or Pamiri creates ripples in existing cultural arrangements and power relations in Gilgit-Baltistan. Two members of the Baltistan Legislative Assembly (GBLA) from the Nagar District accused the 'Wakhi/Tajik Cultural Association' and organisers of the 'Silk Route Festival' of introducing Tajik culture in the region.[87]

Wakhis in Pakistan inhabit the Brughal and upper Yarkhun valleys in Chitral of KPK, Ishkoman in the Ghizer District and Gojal in the Hunza District. Gojal is comprises the upper part of Hunza and constitutes 80% of its geographical area. Historically, it has remained a part of Hunza. In the old social and state structure of Hunza, the Wakhi identity was subsumed under the broader identity of Hunzukuch. Under the influence of modern networking, education and cross-border interaction, there is now a visible shift among people in Gojal to disassociate their identity from the rest of Hunza. The efforts for a separate seat for Gojal tehsil and for its introduction as a separate region provide clues of the changes in the way people associate their identity to a particular region. This gradual tilt may pave the way for the formation of distinct identity for the Wakhi people, whose identity has historically and socially remained under the broader identity of Hunza, Chitral or Ishkoman. The shift towards a separate and cross-border identity is visible in social media with blogs and websites like Pamir Times, Gojal.net, Gojal Educational and Cultural Association (GECA) and wakhi.wordpress.com. The identity debate among the Wakhi people is spearheaded by the Wakhi community of Gojal for the reason that they are educationally and economically better off than

[85] Pamir is a mountainous system spreading over the area of Northern Afghanistan, Pakistan, Southern Tajikistan and Western China. Locally Pamiri refers to people who inhabit this area. Pamir in Wakhi language means pasture and Pamiri means one who lives in pastures but Wakhis of Pakistan use it as identity marker of Wakhi speakers who inhabit high pastures in border areas of Aghanistan, Pakistan, Xinjiang in China and Wakhan Corridor in Afghanistan.

[86] Tajik refers to citizen of Tajikistan, but its use vary in the neighboring regions. In Xinjiang province of China the term Tajik applies to Wakhi people in Tashkurgan county, whereas some Wakhi speaker use this apathetic as their identity marker.

[87] Gulmit Gojal: Preparations for Silk Route Festival underway. http://mountaintv.net/gulmit-gojal-preparations-for-silk-route-festival-underway/. [Accessed on February 19, 2016]

Wakhi communities in Brughal and Ishkoman.[88] With the proliferation of social media in even the far flung areas of Gojal, new forms of virtual connections have been established. To build on connectivity through virtual networks, different organisations are evolving into solid spaces such as festivals in Chupursan, Brughal and Khunjerab. Hence, the emerging identity in Wakhi communities is bounded by administrative spaces and boundaries. Wakhi communities in the peripheries of four countries have been able to forge connections that created new spaces wherein people are able to transcend the limitation of the geo-body embossed over the cultural geography of a particular region.

The articulation of identities by regional and linguistic groups does not gear towards a monolithic narrative, but rather has taken diverse shapes wherein some regions try to disengage with the overall identity of Gilgit-Baltistan and attempt to create a new identity within the space available in administrative boundaries, or to find a niche in the power arrangements in the particular political and economic setting of Gilgit-Baltistan. Unlike nationalist narratives, the regional and linguistic groups tend more towards local strategies than a meta-strategy for the identity of Gilgit-Baltistan. This has led to a trend of localization of identities. In case of the Wakhi community in Gilgit-Baltistan, their efforts aim at establishing cross-border contacts with other Wakhi communities, so that a common Wakhi identity in High Asia can be established. This process is facilitated by the development of communication and road networks, and the easing of travel in the border areas. The emergence of regional identities forestalls the overall national question of Gilgit-Baltistan that nationalist parties try to address. Hence, regionalism and linguistic identity articulation thwart the efforts of nationalist parties in their struggle to define the overall identity of Gilgit-Baltistan.

6 Conclusion

The historical path of Gilgit-Baltistan and Kashmir converged during the period of British rule in India. Owing to geo-political reasons, Kashmir got an active role within the British imperial strategy in the region. On the one hand, this provided an opportunity for the rulers of Kashmir to intrude further into the region of Gilgit-Baltistan in the second half of the nineteenth century, and diminished the power of local potentates on the other hand. The situation turned in favour of the local people, enabling them to exercise their agency after the Independence Movement of Gilgit in 1947, but it remained short-lived as, after the accession of Gilgit-Baltistan to Pakistan, the state continued the colonial policy by pushing the region into a liminal position in its ideology and political structure.

Ernest Laclau defines a dislocated structure as one whose centre is displaced and not replaced by another. According to him, the positive feature of dislocation is that it unhinges the stable identities of the past, but also opens up the possibility of new articulation – the forging of new identities.[89] With the dislocation of the local structure, the society of Gilgit-Baltistan is left with no local power centre and is experiencing drastic changes in every sphere of life including the weakening of kinship-based relationships and identities, and the dominance of sectarian identity over all other affiliations

[88] Kreutzmann, Hermann. *Pamirian Crossroads Kirghiz and Wakhi of High Asia.* Verlag: Harrassowitz. 2015, p. 411.

[89] Hall, Stuart. "The Question of Cultural Identity" in Stuart Hall, David Held, Don Hubert, and Kenneth Thompson (eds). *Modernity: An Introduction to Modern Societies*, Wiley-Blackwell. 1995, p. 600.

and identities. The association of Gilgit-Baltistan with the Kashmir dispute has pushed it into a marginal position in the state structure, and has resulted in limited possibilities for the people to make their claims based on political, legal and economic issues.[90] This has forced the inhabitants to seek alternate possibilities to articulate their identities on the basis of sect, region, culture, ethnicity and language. Since the decision of subsuming the identity of Gilgit-Baltistan under Kashmir was made from above, it has pushed the people into a liminal position, which in its turn has become a reason to form a narrative that contradicts narratives espoused by the state and by Kashmiri nationalism. Hence, linguistic and regional groups in Gilgit-Baltistan tend to expunge Kashmir from their narrative, for they do not find any ethnic relation and cultural affinity with Kashmir. Instead, these groups try to connect with their linguistic communities who inhabit border areas, such as the Baltis' attempt to connect with people from Kargil and Ladakh, and the Wakhi community with Wakhis speakers in Central Asia.

The absence of identity and the power vacuum provided a space for nationalist and religious parties to rearticulate identity, albeit on different markers, as the former's narrative espouses the identity of the region on the basis of the commonality of culture and history, whereas the latter make the sect a basic marker of identity. Nationalist parties in Gilgit-Baltistan are critical towards state ideology and the political setup because they think that the wedding of religion and state has resulted in a division of society along sectarian lines, and that the political system is exploitative. Within this situation, religious parties find the state narrative close to their political agenda of Islamisation of state and society. This is why they support the inclusion of Gilgit-Baltistan in Kashmir. In order to attain their political goal, it is necessary for political parties and sectarian groups to expunge elements of culture, kinship and vernacular forms of religion. The process of divesting people from vernacular forms of religion and association is facilitated by the increasing influence of religious groups and schools of thought in South Asia and the Middle East. The cumulative result has appeared in the shape of the sect assuming a collective identity by overriding all other identities. Sectarian politics exert great influence over the debate on the identity of Gilgit-Baltistan and its connection to Kashmir. This sectarian outlook also influences political positions regarding the future status of Gilgit-Baltistan within the Pakistani state.

The efforts of nationalists to define Gilgit-Baltistan as unified but having a different identity from Kashmir, and regional and ethnic groups' assertion of their unique identity within the region stem from the attempts by the Kashmiri leadership and the Pakistani state to create a unified identity of Kashmir to counter the Indian position. The resurgence of ethnic and regional identities has led to more localization, and thereby excludes some valleys and ethnicities from the identity discourse. Together with sectarian affiliations, ethnic and regional identity discourses have precluded efforts by nationalists and the intelligentsia to form or propound the all-encompassing identity for the heterogeneous linguistic, ethnic and cultural groups in Gilgit-Baltistan. On the other hand, sectarian affiliations have enabled locals to connect with networks at the national and regional level. Hence, it can be said that sectarian identity has created supra-regional identities on the one hand, and ethnic and regional identities caused the localization of identity in Gilgit-Baltistan, on the other. Within the discourse on the identity of Gilgit-Baltistan, the issue of Kashmir is either marginal or non-existent. Hence, living under the conditions created by a certain historical period, Kashmir and Gilgit-

[90]Mato Bouzas, Antia. *Mixed Legacies in Contested Borderlands: Skardu and the Kashmir Dispute,* Geopolitics, 17:4, 867-86. p 882.

Baltistan's paths are diverging, as the latter has repositioned itself in opposition to the former, and has geared its efforts to finding a space within the power structure of the Pakistani state, or to drawing the maximum concession to form a separate identity within the Pakistani state.

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Information on the competence network Crossroads Asia

The competence network Crossroads Asia derives its name from the geographical area extending from eastern Iran to western China and from the Aral Sea to northern India. The scholars collaborating in the competence network pursue a novel, 'post-area studies' approach, making thematic figurations and mobility the overarching perspectives of their research in Crossroads Asia. The concept of figuration implies that changes, minor or major, within one element of a constellation always affect the constellation as a whole; the network will test the value of this concept for understanding the complex structures framed by the cultural, political and socio-economic contexts in Crossroads Asia. Mobility is the other key concept for studying Crossroads Asia, which has always been a space of entangled interaction and communication, with human beings, ideas and commodities on the move across and beyond cultural, social and political borders. Figurations and mobility thus form the analytical frame of all three main thematic foci of our research: conflict, migration, and development.

- Five sub-projects in the working group "Conflict" will focus upon specific localized conflict-figurations and their relation to structural changes, from the interplay of global politics, the erosion of statehood, and globalization effects from above and below, to local struggles for autonomy, urban-rural dynamics and phenomena of diaspora. To gain a deeper understanding of the rationales and dynamics of conflict in Crossroads Asia, the sub-projects aim to analyze the logics of the genesis and transformation of conflictual figurations, and to investigate autochthonous conceptions of, and modes of dealing with conflicts. Particular attention will be given to the interdependence of conflict(s) and mobility.
- Six sub-projects in the working group "Migration" aim to map out trans-local figurations (networks and flows) within Crossroads Asia as well as figurations extending into both neighboring and distant areas (Arabian Peninsula, Russia, Europe, Australia, America). The main research question addresses how basic organizational and functional networks are structured, and how these structures affect what is on the move (people, commodities, ideas etc.). Conceptualizing empirical methods for mapping mobility and complex connectivities in trans-local spaces is a genuine desideratum. The aim of the working group is to refine the method of qualitative network analysis, which includes flows as well as their structures of operation, and to map mobility and explain mobility patterns.
- In the "Development"-working group four sub-projects are focusing on the effects of spatial movements (flows) and interwoven networks at the micro level with regard to processes of long-term social change, and with a special focus on locally perceived livelihood opportunities and their potential for implementation. The four sub-projects focus on two fundamental aspects: first, on structural changes in processes of transformation of patterns of allocation and distribution of resources, which are contested both at the household level and between individual and government agents; secondly, on forms of social mobility, which may create new opportunities, but may also cause the persistence of social inequality.

The competence network understands itself as a mediator between the academic study of Crossroads Asia and efforts to meet the high demand for information on this area in politics and the public. Findings of the project will feed back into academic teaching, research outside the limits of the competence network, and public relations efforts. Further information on Crossroads Asia is available at www.crossroads-asia.de.

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