

STATES OF STRUGGLE: POLITICS, RELIGION, AND ECOLOGY IN THE
MAKING OF THE NORTHERN AREAS, PAKISTAN

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My dissertation investigates the nature of state power and social struggle in the disputed border territory of the Northern Areas (Gilgit-Baltistan), Pakistan. This strategic region comprises 86% of Pakistan-administered Kashmir, is the only Shia-dominated political unit in Sunni-dominated Pakistan, and is valued nationally and globally as a rare biodiversity hotspot. How is rule accomplished and negotiated in such an extraordinary space, where people are simultaneously border, religious, and environmental subjects? I address this question using ethnographic and textual analysis, examining first the state practices of political, religious, and environmental regulation through which the Northern Areas is constructed and contained. These practices include the denial of basic constitutional rights such as voting, the silencing of Shia religious identity in school textbooks, and the appropriation of pastoral land for national parks. Second, I illuminate how people in the Northern Areas have engaged in critical struggles for political justice, religious recognition, and ecological sovereignty, in an effort to rework state power and realize a more substantive vision of citizenship. By examining state rule and citizenship struggles in a unified analytic field, my research elaborates how the nation-state and its regional subjects are mutually constituted through a continuous process of negotiation. It captures the states of struggle that exist both within and between the state and region, highlighting the unevenness and contingency of power.

Four processes of state-making form the crux of my inquiry: representation, militarization, sectarianization, and conservation. I examine how these processes are enacted and experienced, and how they have reoriented local attachments to the nation, to religion, and to land. Such a multi-process analysis of state-making yields several broader insights. I argue, first, that seemingly unlinked state-formative processes must be examined relationally in order to grasp the intersecting ways in which nation-states govern spaces and subjects. Second, my analysis draws attention to state-making as a regional exercise, highlighting how sub-national, place-based expressions of rule jointly make the state and the region. Finally, a multilayered, ethnographic understanding of state-making reveals the state not as a coherent structure of legibility and integration, but as an unwieldy assemblage that operates through illegibility, disintegration, and the constitution of affect. Specifically, state power in Pakistan's Northern Areas exemplifies what I call *politically disorganized subjection*, whereby rule is accomplished through the cultivation of erasure and ambiguity, divisiveness and manipulation, and emotional regulation via the production of loyalty and suspicion. This subjection simultaneously produces concealment, consent, coercion, and conflict.

While state subjection in the Northern Areas has structured local subjectivities and imaginaries in intensely disempowering ways, its expressions are nevertheless constantly contested and reworked. My dissertation illuminates a range of individual and collective action as forms of critical struggles through which agents – including state officials themselves – strive to promote a progressive vision of ethics and politics in the region. Covering political activism, religio-political movements, literary performances, and community-based conservation efforts, I examine how people in the Northern Areas struggle to imagine new social futures for their region and for the Pakistan state.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Nosheen Ali was born in Karachi, Pakistan in 1980. She received her undergraduate education at the Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS), from where she graduated in May 2002 with a B.Sc. (Honors) in Computer Science. At LUMS, she also pursued a minor in Social Sciences that nurtured her interest in state politics, development, and social justice issues, and eventually led her to choose the field of sociology for graduate study. She joined Cornell University's Department of Development Sociology in August 2002, where she received an M.S. degree and then continued to work towards a Ph.D. Alongside her dissertation work, Nosheen has researched and published in the field of ICT4D (Information and Communication Technologies for Development). She is a founding member of GRASP (Group for Research in the Anthropology, Sociology, and Politics of Pakistan), and serves on the editorial board of the South Asian journal SAMAJ.

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INTRODUCTION

Overview

My dissertation investigates the nature of state power and social struggle in the disputed border territory of Pakistan's Northern Areas (Gilgit-Baltistan). I firstly explore a fundamental question about state power that James Scott raised in *Seeing Like the State*: "How did the state gradually get a handle on its subjects and their environment?" (1998:2). I address this question by examining key processes of political, religious, and environmental regulation through which Pakistani state rule is accomplished in the Northern Areas. Simultaneously, I ask: How do the subjects of state rule struggle to realize a more substantive meaning of citizenship, and assert control over their environment? To address this concern, I examine the individual and collective engagements through which people in the Northern Areas have labored for political justice, religious recognition, and ecological sovereignty. By examining state rule and social struggles in a unified analytic field, my research seeks to elaborate how the nation-state and its regional subjects are mutually constituted through a continuous process of negotiation. It captures the "states of struggle" that exist both within and between the state and region, highlighting the unevenness and contingency of power.

The dissertation is thus centrally concerned with the state-citizen relation, as it plays out in the relationship between the Pakistan state and the strategic region of the Northern Areas. Four processes of state-making form the crux of my inquiry: representation, militarization, sectarianization, and conservation. I describe the logics and practices of government that define each process, constituting what we think of as the "state" and enabling its centralized control over regional spaces and subjects in the Northern Areas. While I discuss how this control is realized through forms of overt coercion such as the denial of fundamental constitutional rights, my emphasis is on unraveling the more subtle yet equally coercive processes of representational

illegibility – such as in maps and textbooks, emotional regulation – in the normalization of inter-sect suspicion, for example – and spatial re-ordering – in the form of national parks – that have served to consolidate state power by radically reshaping territory, subjectivity, and social life in the region. These processes work in incongruous, unintended ways, reflecting what I call the *politically disorganized subjection* (c.f. Abrams 1988) that is characteristic of state power.

No matter how pervasive and normalized, state hegemony is nevertheless a dynamic and multilayered process of formation that is fractured and constantly contested (Gramsci 1971). Social struggle lies at the heart of this process; both strategies of asserting and maintaining power as well as efforts to challenge and rework power are embedded in contingent struggles that make and unmake – to use a classic Marxian term – the “balance of social forces.” I thus investigate the multiple and often conflicting practices through which state institutions and actors struggle to shape state policy – not always towards repressive ends – while elaborating how people in the Northern Areas question and resist state power – not always towards progressive ends. I focus on everyday moments as well as organized movements that reveal how people think about, feel, embody, and act on state power. I thus talk about how power is lived and inhabited. Some inhabitations of state-formative processes in the Northern Areas – for example militarization – have profoundly restructured people’s sense of reality and possibility such that it becomes tremendously difficult to puncture the status quo. An analysis of other state processes such as conservation reveals how communities can successfully contest the terms of recognition and reconfigure the boundaries of the possible. But nothing is fixed, and certain in the theatres of social transformation. Ultimately, my dissertation is not just an analysis of the “observable relationships of power and powerlessness...but equally of what is

made of those relationships by those involved in them; an analysis of the complex of meaning within which the relationships are enacted” (Abrams 1982: 73).

Context

The Northern Areas – officially called the “Federally Administered Northern Areas” (FANA) – comprise a rural, mountainous region located in the north of Pakistan, bordering India, China and Afghanistan. Historically known as Gilgit-Baltistan, the region covers an area of 72,500 sq km and is divided in six administrative districts - Gilgit, Ghizer, Ghanche, Diamer, Skardu, and Astore. It has a predominantly agro-pastoral population of around one million, which is spread across some 1200 villages and belongs to diverse ethnic and linguistic groups such as the Shina, Balti, Burushaski, and Wakhi. As a result of the region’s historical linkages with the former princely state of Jammu and Kashmir, the political destiny of these groups has become entangled with the “Kashmir issue.” Today, the region of the Northern Areas has an undecided, rather paradoxical status: it is claimed by both India and Pakistan, is constitutionally part of India¹ but not of Pakistan,² yet is effectively controlled by Pakistan, constituting 86% of Pakistan-administered Kashmir. The remaining 14% is comprised by Azad Kashmir. Figure 1 below shows the location of the Northern Areas in relation to Kashmir as a whole.

¹ India claims all of disputed Kashmir including the Northern Areas as an “integral part” of its territory.

² Pakistan’s official policy on Kashmir proclaims that the entire region is disputed and its political future needs to be decided through a U.N.-supported plebiscite. Hence, the Pakistani constitution does not include any part of disputed Kashmir in the territorial definition of the country.



Figure 1: The Disputed Territory of Kashmir (Source: The U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, 2002)

Since its creation in 1947, Pakistan has been fraught with anxieties of nation, state and territory that confluence in complex and interesting ways within the region of the Northern Areas. To begin with, the Northern Areas is the only Shia-majority

political unit in Sunni-dominated Pakistan.³ For a nation/state that officially proclaims Islam as its ideological essence (Alavi 1988) – a Islam that is implicitly coded as Sunni – the Shia-majority Northern Areas thus constitutes a problematic space of religious difference as it contests the Muslim disposition that the Pakistan state has sought to normalize for its citizens. In this, the region is not as exceptional as it is exemplary – it represents an exaggerated form of the general context of lived Islam in Pakistan which in any case is remarkably heterogeneous. Amplifying this predicament of religious difference is the strategic and contested nature of Northern Areas’ territory. As indicated earlier, the region constitutes a frontier zone at the borders of Pakistan, India, China and Afghanistan, and historically formed part of the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir which has been the source of a 62-year old territorial dispute between India and Pakistan. Along with Islam, the claim to Kashmir has become the bedrock of nationalist ideology in Pakistan. Ironically, at the heart of the strategic territory of Kashmir – which Pakistan claims on the basis of its “Muslim” identity – lies the region of the Northern Areas which contradicts this identity by being home to a different kind of Muslim than that endorsed by Pakistani nationalism (Ali 2005). The people of the Northern Areas are nevertheless crucial for Pakistan’s political interests in relation to Kashmir: in the event of a plebiscite in disputed Kashmir, they are expected to opt for Pakistan based on the shared affiliation with Islam, and hence sway the overall vote in Pakistan’s favor.

Due to the territorial and religious anxieties posed by the Northern Areas, the political status of this region has been over-determined by concerns of “national security.” Consequently, it has been placed under direct federal control and denied even the most basic citizenship rights such as the right to vote in national elections,

³ The term “Shia” in this dissertation refers specifically to the Isna-Ashari (Twelver) Shias. 75% of the region’s population practices the Isna-Ashari or other form of Shia Islam (Rieck 1997). The Shia population in the rest of Pakistan is estimated to be between 15-25%.

and appeal judicial decisions in a higher court.⁴ This has enabled the military and intelligence agencies in Pakistan to have a particularly interventionist role in the region's political economy. Here again, the Northern Areas is symptomatic instead of anomalous: state-formation in Pakistan more broadly has been dominated by a "political economy of defence" (Jalal 1990) and a tendency towards a "garrison" or "security" state (Kamal 1982). But it is in a strategic, disputed frontier such as the Northern Areas where the superseding of democratic political process by military rule is especially manifest.

The Northern Areas thus constitutes a peculiar space of exception (Agamben 1998), being outside the recognized territory of the "state" as well as the normative Muslim "nation" in Pakistan. Yet it reflects an extraordinary continuation of statist tendencies elsewhere in Pakistan, where military-dominated and fundamentalist state policies continue to abuse the rule of law and impose a narrow, authoritarian interpretation of Islam. As such, the region of the Northern Areas provides a compelling site for illuminating the construction and experience of both the "garrison" and "Islamic" state in Pakistan.

The significance of the Northern Areas to the Pakistani nation/state also lies in its abundant natural resources. The mountainous and glacial terrain of the region constitutes a key catchment area for the Indus river,⁵ while its agro-pastoral territory is a global biodiversity hotspot. Indeed, the natural landscape of the Northern Areas is simultaneously the key trope through which the region is culturally represented in the Pakistani national imaginary, and through which the Pakistani nation is itself constructed. Official textbooks, for example, portray the Northern Areas as a scenic

⁴ Azad Kashmir, on the other hand, has an autonomous status, with its own Parliament and Supreme Court.

⁵ Often described as the lifeline of agriculture in Pakistan, the Indus derives almost 72% of its mean annual flow from rivers in the Northern Areas (http://www.wwfpak.org/nap/dnap_freshwater_hydrology.php).

landscape which epitomizes Pakistan's "natural beauty" with its soaring peaks and lush valleys. Over the last thirty years, almost 40% of this scenic landscape has been converted into government-owned protected areas for biodiversity conservation, in the form of national parks, wildlife sanctuaries, game reserves, and hunting areas. Spearheaded by international organizations and implemented through national governments, such conservation projects have resulted in the territorialization of nature (Vandergeest and Peluso 1995) in the region that has in turn served to naturalize state control over territory and population, and strengthened the Pakistan state's proprietary claim over the landscape of the Northern Areas.

In effect, the multiple positionality of Northern Areas' people – as border, religious, and environmental subjects – has rendered them subject to multiple state projects of rule, including practices that deny political justice to the region, textbooks that silence Shia identity in discussions of Islam, and national parks that appropriate pastoral land in the name of development. In this dissertation, I analyze such practices in terms of four state-formative processes: representation, militarization, sectarianization, and conservation. I argue that such seemingly unlinked processes must be examined relationally, in order to grasp the intersecting ways in which nation-states govern spaces and subjects. Simultaneously, I explore how citizen-subjects in the Northern Areas are demanding inclusion not just in terms of political rights – an aspect that over-determines the discourse on Kashmir – but also through struggles for religious recognition and ecological sovereignty which they see as integral to the achievement of meaningful citizenship. By examining state-making processes and citizenship struggles in a unified analytical frame, my dissertation thus illuminates how national as well as regional identity is mutually reworked at the spatial and social margins of the nation-state (Donnan and Wilson 1999, Das and Poole 2004, Rajaram and Grundy-Warr 2007).

Site

While I have traveled and stayed in many parts of the Northern Areas, the ethnographic base of my dissertation is primarily constituted by two research sites: the town of Gilgit, which is the key political and administrative centre of the Northern Areas, and the village of Shimshal, which is located in a remote valley alongside the Pakistan-China border. The material for the dissertation was collected over several research trips: for a month each in 2004 and 2005 for pre-dissertation research, and seven months during July 2006-Aug 2007 for dissertation research.

Gilgit town has a population of approximately 50,000, while Shimshal is inhabited by around 1700 people. Both are located at the opposite ends of the district of Gilgit in the Northern Areas. When I refer to “Gilgitis” in the dissertation, the reference is to those who reside in Gilgit, but I want to clarify that residents of Gilgit belong to all parts of the Northern Areas. Indeed, even families living in Gilgit for two generations might still trace their origin to Astore, Ghizer, Hunza, Baltistan, or other regions of the Northern Areas, where they continue to have land, an alternate residence, and families.

Agriculture remains the major source of livelihood in the Northern Areas, although both the perceived value and actual practice of pastoral and farm-based activity has declined over the last three decades. Apart from tourism and small-scale ventures such as gemstone-cutting, there is no substantial industry in the region. Either seasonally or permanently, people regularly migrate to other areas of Pakistan in pursuit of better economic opportunities. Till the 1980s, paid jobs in the Northern Areas were mostly available only through the government sector, within the civilian administration or in the army. A job as a government teacher was the most realistic and respectable option for the newly educated youth, if they wished to remain in their region instead of migrating down-country. Since the 1980s, the non-governmental

development sector, the tourism industry and increasingly, the banking sector in the Northern Areas have become lucrative and appealing options for youth seeking paid work in the region. However, opportunities for such work are severely limited, compared to their demand.

The Nation/State and its Regions

A key theoretical concern underpinning my dissertation is the relationship between a region and the nation and state of which it forms part. I seek to analyze not how an already-made entity called the nation-state acts on a region, but rather on constitutive processes that jointly make the state and region, and serve to accomplish rule. Hence, the emphasis is on the relational production of national and regional space as well as national and regional social identities within Pakistan, not on the “impact” of the state and regional “responses” to its policies.

Historically, the organization of social relations at a regional level – such as that of the district or province – has been a neglected category of social analysis (Ahmad 1983, Baviskar 2007b). The focus of anthropological study has predominantly been a particular village, community or culture, while sociologists and historians have tended to focus on the level of states. Particularly in the field of history, the obscurity of the region is also related to the ideological foundations of the discipline due to which the writing of history came to play a constitutive role in the making and legitimating of nation-states (Applegate 1999). The devaluation of regions and their pasts emerged alongside triumphalist nationalist historiographies, in which local or regional history for its own sake was “to reveal one’s lack of serious learning, or, particularly in France and Germany, one’s dubious political allegiances” (Ibid: 1160).

Whenever the region did receive attention, it was understood primarily through the lens of “national integration.” The nation was simultaneously assumed to be, and

had to become, a homogenous unified community in which pre-existing or emergent regional identities – like linguistic or ethnic ones – were considered anachronous, and hence deeply problematic for accomplishing the project of “nation-building.” Under the hegemonic discourse of modernization, this “problem” of region was seen as particularly afflicting postcolonial states, which were already engulfed in primordial sentiments that made them inherently unstable.⁶ In European states, however, the region-as-hindrance was assumed to be an annoying exception to the norm in which regions had presumably been rendered insignificant through the successful development of a modern, integrated national polity, economy, and culture. The emergence of regionalist movements within Europe in the 70s and 80s challenged such understandings, signifying a structural crisis within the very ideologies of modernization and nationalism.

Within academic and journalistic understandings of Pakistan, state-region relations continue to remain limited to a question of balance of powers within a federal set-up, or to that of insurgent “regionalism.”⁷ Indeed, the continuing presence of ethnic-regional groups and their claims to rights is constructed as a “lack” and “threat” that is peculiar to Pakistani nationalism, making Pakistan a country still “in search of a nation” (Sayeed 1998), an “unachieved nation” (Jaffrelot 2002: 7) and indeed, one where there is “nationalism without a nation” altogether (Jaffrelot 2002). These narratives are deeply problematic, as they analyze nation-making by adopting the very categories of nationalism, reinscribing the ideological claim that each nationalism

⁶ That is why they needed an “integrative revolution” to become proper and “successful” modern states (Geertz 1973).

⁷ Here, I use “regionalism” to refer mainly to sub-national political movements that have opposed the authoritarian tendencies of the nation-state. In other contexts, the concept has come to represent a variety of movements that have opposed different forms of centralization and homogenization. For example, “in France, regionalism meant a protest against over-centralization of culture in Paris, and the movement was aimed at the free development of culture and local talent. In Germany the movement was aimed at reorganizing the old state boundaries. In Britain regionalism has meant administrative devolution and a new framework for local government. In Denmark it was directed to a folk revival combined with scientific agriculture” (Cohn 1967).

corresponds to a single, organic unit of the nation (Munasinghe 2002). Citing the work of Walker Connor (1972), Duara argues that “there is scarcely a nation in the world – developed or underdeveloped – where ethnic mobilization has not challenged the nation-state” (Duara 1996: 9). Even when differences might be encompassed with a larger hegemonic vision, there continue to exist “a polyphony of voices, contradictory and ambiguous, opposing, affirming, and negotiating their views of the nation” (Ibid: 10). These perspectives include regional identities and experiences that both construct and are in turn constructed by state and nationalist ideologies.

Just as the illusory homogeneity of the “nation” has been questioned by positing it as an ideological construct and imagined community (Kedourie 1960, Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983, Anderson 1991), the objectification of regions as fixed and self-evident has also been challenged (Whittlesey 1954, Cohn 1967). Regionality has been studied in terms of the production of regions through capitalist practices of internal colonialism (Hechter 1975), as well as in terms of the ethnographic experience of regional identities (Schomer et al 1994) and modernities (Sivaramakrishnan and Agrawal 2003). Further, recent studies in geography and anthropology have been particularly stimulating in their attention to the region as a historical formation, and the multiple ways in which regions are constituted and regulated (Paasi 1986, Sundar 1997, Sahlins 1998, Sivaramakrishnan 1999, McLeod and Jones 2001, Radcliffe 2001).

Despite this attention to regional formations, I contend that the relationship between national and sub-national regional configurations of state rule in the postcolonial context remains understudied in the literature on state-making. The analytics of power and space that have been used to profoundly re-theorize metropole-colony relations have seldom been applied to examine center-province relations. What

insights do we gain if we attend to state-making as a regional exercise, and why is it important to do so?

Similar to colonial states, nation-states are spatially and politically constituted through the extension of control over territory that forms part of multiple, overlapping regional landscapes. It is interesting to note that the term “region” is from *regere* which means to command, and “province” is derived from *vincere* which means to conquer (Abraham 2003). The imperative of commanding and conquering regions requires a high degree of centralized decision-making, particularly in areas such as revenue management and defense. Paradoxically, centralized government largely operates through, and depends upon the parcelization of state sovereignty and the devolution of administrative authority. This is achieved primarily through the establishment of regional political structures that can enact state functions at a local level. Put simply, national states work through the formation and regulation of regional states within them. The “region” here is not merely a spatial or political unit of authority. It is a historically structured identity through which individuals are dealt with as citizens of the local and national state, and through which people outside the region but within the same nation-state know them. The region is also critical to people’s self-identification and sense of possibility, fundamentally mediating the ways in which they belong to a nation and engage with the state.

It is this historical structuring of the Northern Areas within the Pakistan state, and the region’s negotiation of belonging that is the focus of my dissertation. Such a focus allows us to rethink the hegemonic totalities of “state” and “nation”, and calls attention to the contentious processes through which state power works. I argue that to grasp state power, we not only need to see like the state, but also inhabit, think, feel, and struggle like the region through which the state is made and unmade. In this respect, the methodological insights offered by Cooper and Stoler (1997) for studying

metropole-colony relations are particularly insightful, and may be adapted to study center-region relations within a nation-state. The scholars argue for theorizing the colonizer-colonized relation in a single analytic frame, displacing the unidimensional narratives of colonial oppressors and victimized/resistant colonizers by more historically situated analyses which attend to the complex dynamics of inclusion and exclusion that played out in the colonial, bourgeois world. The emphasis in such analyses is on unraveling the contradictory workings of power, and exploring its production through the multiple engagements between and within the “center” and the “periphery” (Cooper and Stoler 1997). Along these lines, I examine nation/state-making as a contradictory set of relations, which generates both limits and possibilities of negotiation on the part of regional subjects.

State-making in the Northern Areas

The “state” is an abstraction that makes the working of a particular constellation of power and social relations possible (Abrams 1988). State power is rooted in the “state-idea” (Ibid), which is the normalized vision of the state as a coherent entity that represents and fulfils the common will of society – one that is often conceived of as a homogenous nation. While the state-idea enables the state-system to claim legitimacy and authority, the accomplishment of state rule is a highly fragile and contentious process in practice. Far from being a monolithic actor representing a unified nation, the “state” represents an unwieldy assemblage of competing interests, contested discourses, and micro-practices of power (Mitchell 1991, Joseph and Nugent 1994, Steinmetz 1999, Trouillot 2001, Hansen and Stepputat 2001, Sharma and Gupta 2006) that works in incongruous and contingent ways. Despite this contingency, however, the various arenas and institutions of state power do enable “politically organized subjection” (Abrams 1988) by particular hegemonic ideologies and collectivities of class, race, and ethnic group amongst others. State-

making, thus, is a multilayered process of inclusion and exclusion through which practices of subjection are institutionalized and normalized. State-making processes give material reality to the “state” in people’s lives, fundamentally structuring the very modes through which citizens think, feel, and act in the world. In turn, state processes are themselves constituted by socially produced action and struggle. The “state” – while it may appear to be an abstraction residing above and apart from society – is in effect embedded within society and lives through its subjects (Corrigan and Sayer 1985). Indeed, it is eminently social itself.

State-making processes serve to actualize rule through several means of subjection: the monopoly of violence (Weber 1964), the invention of a pure homogenous nation (Williams 1989), the legibility of spaces and subjects (Scott 1998), and the ability to suspend law (Agamben 2005) amongst others. In this dissertation, I track the nature and effects of four key state-making processes through which particular regimes of subjection have been established in the Northern Areas. The first arena is that of representation. By representation, I mean the tropes, images, and narratives through which the region of the Northern Areas is envisioned within state and nationalist discourses in Pakistan. Understanding “more fully how regions are imagined will complicate both our understanding of how nations are imagined and, just as important, under what circumstances they are unimagined, deconstructed, resisted, and collapsed” (Applegate 1999: 1176). I begin with an interrogation of the very name “Northern Areas” and the ways in which it structures national imaginings and regional realities. Then, I examine how the region is represented within official sites, such as the constitution, census, map, and public school textbook. A key argument that I make in this regard is that state rule in the Northern Areas is not accomplished merely through forms of panoptic legibility and objectification (Mitchell 1988, Scott 1998). Instead, I demonstrate how representational practices regarding the

Northern Areas – such as those in the map and census – are productive of and for power because they institute forms of *illegibility* and mystification that conceal coercive forms of state control.

The second process that I analyze is that of militarization. Militarization as a state-formative process is neither limited to the organization of armed forces nor to war situations. Rather, it represents a political and cultural process through which military structures and ethos become deeply embedded in state, economy, and society (Lutz 1999, de Mel 2007). I thus attend to the ways in which the military-intelligence regime – the most potent face of the state in the Northern Areas – has come to occupy space, politics, and subjectivities in the region. My aim is to go beyond a conceptualization of the military that views it merely as a state apparatus of repression whose power lies in its monopoly of violence (Weber 1964, Poulantzas 1973). While the concentrated capacity to discipline and violate is a key source of military power, I argue that militarization must also be seen as a form of hegemony that entails what I call *emotional regulation*. I therefore adopt a more grounded and processual approach which investigates how military power is rooted in the physical control of space, bodies, and resources, but also in its domination of discourse, emotions, and ways of being. Militarization is critically linked to livelihoods and cultural orientations (Lutz 1999), shaping local understandings of family, region, and nation as well as people's identities and aspirations. I argue that employment in the military creates *loyal subjects* who revere the military and hence, the military-state, producing the conditions of possibility for continued military authoritarianism in the Northern Areas. Simultaneously, the activities of the intelligence agencies produce both a *surveillance state* and *suspicious subjects*, further reinforcing military power in the region. Loyalty and suspicion constitute forms of emotional regulation that are paradoxical but not

contradictory: the former accomplishes rule by creating consent, the latter services state power by disrupting regional unity and creating active conflict.

Central to the accomplishment of state rule in the Northern Areas, I argue, is the process of restructuring religious identities and imaginaries – a process of moral regulation (Corrigan and Sayer 1985) that I call sectarianization. This third process of state-making, in Pakistan, stems from the desire and claim of the state to represent a homogenous nation, defined in terms of a shared Islamic identity. But realizing this vision of state as nation – a hyphenated nation-state – necessitates the management and disciplining of “others” as difference is seen as antithetical to the nation-state’s aspiration for an organic community (Handler 1988, Pandey 2001). In the Northern Areas, this imperative of disciplining difference is heightened due to the demographic constitution of this disputed region – the majority of the region’s population adheres to Shia interpretations of Islam, which challenge the Sunni-centered definition of Islam that the state has sought to normalize for its citizens. To deal with this difference, and the related problem of Northern Areas’ political status, state institutions in Pakistan have legitimated disciplinary practices of sectarianization. These are linked to the process of militarization, and entail divisive state policies such as the instigation of Sunni and Shia religious organizations in the 1970s for thwarting local secular-nationalist aspirations, state-backed violence against Shia communities in 1988, and most recently, the introduction in 2000 of Islamic textbooks which had a visibly stronger Sunni orientation. Such sectarianizing practices have been effected, and even normalized in other Pakistani regions, yet it is in a political and religious “zone of anomaly” (Sivaramakrishnan 1999) like the Northern Areas where they become most stark, and consequential. I demonstrate how these practices have radically transformed the historically pluralist religious dispositions of people in the Northern Areas by routinizing sectarian suspicion and resentment, and creating a *sectarian imaginary*

whereby people come to view even non-religious matters through a sectarian lens. This reflects a transformation in local categories of thought, as well as in categories of feeling. Such sectarianized subjectivities and hostilities disrupt inter-sect interaction as well as political solidarity, leading to inflamed episodes of sectarian violence while justifying further state control so that law and order may be maintained. As Corrigan and Sayer have argued, state power “works through the way it forcibly organizes, and divides, subjectivities and thereby produces and reproduces quite material forms of sociality” (1994: 374).

Sectarianization, thus, entails both discourses and practices through which the Northern Areas is produced as a sectarian space. The process has become a useful means for deflecting political contestation and inscribing state rule, as it helps to recast legitimate political grievances as primordial, anti-modern demands by irrational subjects. In effect, both the discourse and practices of “sectarian conflict” in the Northern Areas become a means for emotionalizing politics in the region, and rendering its people non-political: they are considered incapable of being proper political subjects and agents. By sectarianizing citizenship and politics in the region, the question of substantive citizenship rights in the Northern Areas is trumped, reinforcing the securocratic interests of the state in relation to Kashmir, and its hegemonic efforts to impose a particular sectarian vision of Islam as defining of the nation. The defense of Kashmir and of Islam has been constructed as integral to nationalist ideology and state stability in Pakistan – both are revealed (as hollow), and realized through the denial of citizenship and perpetuation of sectarianism in the Northern Areas. Hence, sectarianization is a key process through which both the sovereign state and regional subject is produced in Pakistan.

Finally, I analyze the process of conservation through which the “natural beauty” of the region is purportedly maintained, and the touristic trope through which

the region is constructed in nationalist discourse actualized. The lens of biodiversity conservation also enables me to explore how transnational discourses and institutions of power contribute to the making of state power (Sharma and Gupta 2006). Modern conservation projects such as national parks constitute a discourse of rule from outside, yet they serve to retrench and reinvent the state (Neumann 2001, Agrawal 2001a, Li 2002, Baviskar 2007a). To unravel the dynamics of conservation in the Northern Areas, I focus on the continuing efforts of the Pakistan state and international conservation NGOs to implement the Khunjerab National Park – which was first designated in 1975. I argue that both international organizations and governmental park authorities have sought to territorialize Northern Areas’ nature not through commercial forestry and high-modernist agriculture (Scott 1998), but through more insidious “community-based conservation” schemes – such as of international trophy hunting – that are ironically contingent on relinquishing the very land and livelihood on which pastoral communities are founded. Such neoliberal ideologies of global conservation have attained a commonsense legitimacy over pastoral concerns and futures, and enabled a commodification of nature that abstracts nature from its social contexts, and delegitimizes the rights and use values of local communities to make way for the interests of national and global elites. Ultimately, conservation projects in the Northern Areas of Pakistan have facilitated a process that I call *ecological state-formation* – an assemblage of nature-management practices that serve to intensify state power over regional environments and subjects.

In illuminating these varying state-making processes, a key effort of mine is to understand how state power works by structuring common sense (Gramsci 1971) as well as the possible field of action (Foucault 1982). I attend to the ways in which state hegemony is *lived* and *inhabited*. As Williams has argued:

“It (hegemony) is a whole body of practices and expectations, over the whole of living: our senses and assignments of energy, our shaping perceptions of ourselves and our world. It is a lived system of meanings and values – constitutive and constituting – which as they are experienced as practices appear as reciprocally confirming. It thus constitutes a sense of reality for most people in the society...” (Williams 1977: 109-110).

In the way the Northern Areas are represented, militarized, sectarianized, and conserved, particular meanings and sensibilities have become normalized as “reality” – such as the absence of the region in the cognitive and territorial map of the nation, the expression of pride in local soldiers’ deaths for the military, the suspicion amongst members of different sects, and the taken-for-granted value of Western conservation ideals in developing nature and communities. Emotion is a key site and ground for such normalization processes of state-making, as I will show in particular for political and religious regulation in the Northern Areas. Sentiment – such as sectarian suspicion and military loyalty in the case of the Northern Areas – is the very substance of governing projects instead of its embellishment (Stoler 2004). I argue for seeing state-making as a form of emotional regulation in which structures of rule produce, and work through “structures of feeling” (Williams 1977).

Ultimately, my multilayered, ethnographic understanding of state-making reveals how state power operates through illegibility, disintegration, and the constitution of affect. Specifically, the state in Pakistan’s Northern Areas embodies what I call *politically disorganized subjection* – adapting Abrams’ notion of politically organized subjection (1988) – whereby rule is accomplished through the cultivation of erasure and ambiguity, divisiveness and manipulation, and emotions like loyalty and suspicion that simultaneously produce concealment, coercion, consent, and conflict.

Critical Struggles

I conceive of social struggle as multifaceted engagements with power. Social struggles constitute practices that make, unmake, and remake power, and offer a methodological lens for understanding the formation of social relations as well as the dynamics of social change (McMichael and Morarji forthcoming).

My dissertation illuminates a range of individual and collective action as forms of social struggle. I firstly explore action in terms of local perspectives on state power. Such perspectives reveal the layers of meaning that people bring to situations of power, and help us understand how regional subjects in the Northern Areas negotiate their multiply marginal status in everyday life. I pay particular attention to critical perspectives which challenge the abuse of state power in the region. These perspectives, however, may co-exist with appreciative ones, and do not preclude the reality that subjects constantly reproduce state power by living within the frameworks defined by state institutions (Corrigan and Sayer 1985). Yet I contend that it is important to recognize critique as a form of agency and struggle, because discourses of power – such as nationalist and neoliberal ones – work precisely by claiming an epistemic privilege on what can be said, what is the truth, and what is the correct way of thinking about and organizing social relations (Lipman 2004). As I show in the dissertation, forming and articulating positions on issues such as military presence and sectarianized textbooks is not a straightforward process for my interviewees, but a shifting and complex one in which they strive to make sense of, and come to terms with power. This applies to state officials themselves, many of whom do not uphold the dominant ways of conducting government in the Northern Areas as it perpetuates authoritarianism and conflict. Hence, my approach goes beyond that of capturing “subaltern” voices and consciousness, to argue that we must complicate the narratives we tell about the “sovereign” as well. Ultimately, voices from above and below that

question the legitimacy of coercive power – through censure, mockery, and humor – constitute moments of contestation that serve to denormalize the status quo, and reveal the partiality of state hegemony. They also reveal a critical consciousness that suggests hopeful possibilities for progressive change. While such critical positions might exist on the margins, they hold analytical and concrete significance in reshaping power relations. Hence, they are critical in both senses of the term.

My analysis of social struggles in the Northern Areas further includes the individual efforts and collective mobilization through which people in the region strive to defend their rights, and work towards a more egalitarian vision of the world. For example, I investigate how members of the Shia community in Gilgit organized a sustained movement against sectarianized state textbooks, challenging the exclusionary meanings of “Muslim” identity in the Islamic republic of Pakistan, as well as the devastating role of religion in state-making in the Northern Areas. I contextualize the movement by situating it within long-standing historical grievances about political and religious suppression. I also illuminate how the framing of demands by Shia protestors transcends the simplistic binaries of religion and secularism, while highlighting how their position was contested within the Shia community itself. Ultimately, however, I argue that in unintended and ironic ways, this particular social struggle in the region ended up reproducing state power and social difference.

The Shia movement against textbooks entailed direct political action through street protests and boycotts of schools. These form part of the “repertoire of collective action” through which agents act together for shared interests (Tilly 1978: 390). But the notion of collective action has often been limited to political resistance of the classic kind, such as that which involves rallies and boycott campaigns. At the other end, are “everyday forms of resistance” – such as foot dragging, flight, sabotage (Scott

1986) – and the “hidden transcripts” (Scott 1990) embodied within linguistic genres such as folk songs and poetry (Abu-Lughod 1986, Raheja and Gold 1994). I argue that the notion of the “everyday” all too often becomes collapsed into individual, and often subtle negotiations of identity and power, overshadowing how everyday means of contestation can also reflect shared sentiments and collective organization.

I thus explore the regular “entertaining” activities of a literary organization in Gilgit – Halka-e-Arbab-e-Zauq (HAZ: Circle of Literary Fellows) as a form of everyday social struggle and collective action that is as concrete and meaningful as a “movement.” These activities are neither ordinary nor hidden, but embedded in the daily social life-worlds of Gilgitis nonetheless. I discuss how the widely-attended poetry festivals organized by HAZ embody a key site of contestation and subversion, creating a critical public arena (Fraser 1992) for progressive politics. In these festivals, critical and humanistic poetry is used for protesting state authoritarianism in the region, and for recovering the ethos of a non-sectarian religious harmony that has historically characterized “religion” in the region. It is also significant to note that a majority of HAZ members work for the local administration in Gilgit, and hence, are part of the state itself. Their efforts challenge the assumption that bureaucrats are unthinking “state agents” who simply represent and reproduce state discourses and practices of rule. Capturing such engagements “within” the state is central to my understanding of the state as a contingent and emergent social formation, and also to my effort in recovering the state as part of the solution instead of just essentializing it as the problem. HAZ also organizes poetry events for the specific purpose of bringing recalcitrant *ulema* from different sects together in appreciation of a shared Islam. Such initiatives to “break the tension” by creating a space for “sitting together” and recognizing commonality are of profound value in the highly sectarianized context of Gilgit. They can be seen as forms of “banal transgression” (Amin 2002:14) where the

fixed patterns of interaction between people from different backgrounds may be destabilized and new ways of connecting established. The effects of these efforts are far from trivial. I argue that HAZ performances constitute a micro-political site of interrogation, mockery and pedagogy that has the power to transform subjectivities as well as social structures. Alongside the efforts of HAZ, I also describe progressive political party activism in Gilgit, arguing that political education seminars organized by left-leaning parties also constitute a discursive public arena for critical reflection and action in the Northern Areas.

Finally, I investigate how the agro-pastoral community of Shimshal in the Northern Areas has successfully resisted a global and national project of biodiversity conservation – the Khunjerab National Park (KNP) – that would dispossess them of land, livelihood, and life as they know it. I argue that the Shimshali struggle against the KNP is not just about the protection of local land and livelihood against national and global interests. At its heart, their struggle is an epistemic one: it challenges the dominant meanings of nature and conservation in global environmental practice, questions whose knowledge counts as expertise, and contests the very process through which “global” development ideals and projects are framed and terms of “community participation” defined. Shimshalis represent themselves as the original conservationists, instead of merely highlighting their traditional land rights. They have also creatively appropriated the NGO-ized conservation discourse by creating a Shimshal Nature Trust in the image of a global NGO, but one that proposes indigenous ownership of local land and ecology instead of a national park or revenue-sharing conservation schemes as proposed by international conservation NGOs. Shimshalis thus engage in what Jean Franco has called a “struggle for interpretive power” (1989). This involves active appropriation of discourses of domination and new repertoires of representation through which marginalized communities carve a

space of maneuver within dominant paradigms (Pratt 1999, Cornwall et. al 2007). Shimshalis have to strategically represent and position themselves in relation to conservation, in order to claim voice and value, and simply, to survive. In the process, they re-imagine the very categories – such as “conservation” and “community participation” – through which they are represented and regulated (Tsing 1993, Starr and Adams 2003). Simultaneously, they subvert global and national visions of development by puncturing the epistemic privilege through which state and international institutions construct particular visions of the world as natural, and particular interests as the right, universal, and inevitable path of progress. The Shimshal Nature Trust may thus be seen as a form of transformative resistance that serves to constitute historical alternatives (Gill 2003).

What unites these various engagements with power is the quest for a substantive citizenship that embodies dignity, equality, and harmony. People neither wish to reject modernity nor the modern state; rather “they are struggling for self-determination, that is, significant control over the terms and conditions under which they develop their relations with the nation-state, the global economy...and other historical processes (Pratt 1999: 39).

Respecting this quest for self-determination requires, on my part, to avoid giving definite answers about “what people want” in the Northern Areas, particularly when it comes to the region’s political status. My research subjects as well as colleagues have often asked me about this thorny issue, and sometimes argued that clarifying the “majority sentiment” should be a key “finding” of my research. Do people want their region to be a fifth province of Pakistan, or have a semi-autonomous status like Azad Kashmir? Or do they want an independent homeland altogether? Within the Northern Areas, the answers to such questions are often assumed to be linked to sectarian identity. Simplistic and ungrounded formulations circulate widely,

such as: Sunnis want Northern Areas to be a fifth province, or a part of Azad Kashmir; Shias want a semi-autonomous status; Ismailis covet their own state. Such sectarianized modes of thinking about the political present and future of the Northern Areas are reflective of the “sectarian imaginary” that has recently come to permeate Gilgiti social life, as I argue in chapter 4.

I want to resist giving an answer to the question of “what people want,” both in terms of numerical percentages, and in terms of sectarian identity. Gilgitis evaluate the state and their status in far more complex ways than a survey form with presumed categories would capture. Such categories also do not highlight what is *common* across different political leanings: that people desire a greater say in the way their region is governed, more control over their resources, and more transparency to curtail the systematized abuse of power. My effort, thus, is on attending to these commonalities, while capturing the multiple perspectives that exist within a “community” that is usually assumed to be homogenous, as well as the simultaneous subjectivities within people that disrupts a stable, quantifiable stance. For example, Gilgitis feel all sorts of different emotions towards the military, and the military-state in the Northern Areas. *Irrespective of sectarian affiliation*, expressions of loyalty and pride exist alongside resentment at abuse and suffering and might even be expressed in the same breath; there is tension between the desire of military privilege for respect and a comfortable life for family members, and the recognition of political authoritarianism that the military regime at large represents for the region. These are not examples of being “unsure” or having “two” attitudes; instead, these are forms of multivocal identity that better capture people’s consciousness instead of modern notions of unitary subjectivity and the juxtaposition of such subjectivity in a binary logic (e.g. 70% say “no” to military rule; 30% say “yes”). By attending to the multivocal, simultaneous subjectivities of my subjects, my own methodological and epistemic struggle in this

dissertation is to ensure that what I write resonates with people's lives and experiences in the Northern Areas.

Chapter Outline

In Chapter 1, I interrogate how knowledge about the territory of the Northern Areas is regulated through discursive strategies of illegibility, framing the way the region is named, the way it is mapped, and the way in which it is represented in the Pakistani constitution, census, and textbook. I also examine the historical and political context that produced this illegibility, and the ways in which this illegibility is locally experienced and negotiated. Chapter 2 is an ethnographic exploration of the contested meanings of militarization in the Northern Areas, and particularly the emotional subjectivities through which the power of military and intelligence agencies is engendered, and accomplished. Chapter 3 examines the gradual sectarianization of state and citizenry in the Northern Areas, highlighting the state practices that have served to radically restructure inter-sect relations in the region. I focus particularly on Sunni-biased state textbooks of Islam which became the subject of a "textbook controversy," and led to the most potent Shia movement against the state in contemporary Northern Areas, and indeed, in contemporary Pakistan. Chapter 4 continues the attention on sectarianism, and investigates how a sectarian imaginary has become dominant in Gilgit, reflecting a routinization of emotional ill-will and paranoia between members of different sects. I explore the working of this imaginary by illuminating sectarian encounters in contexts of secular education. Simultaneously, I discuss local poetic performances and political seminars that offer a critical public arena for contesting sectarianism, and seek to promote a progressive vision of faith and politics in the region. Finally, chapter 5 illuminates the contradictory meanings and contestations that the process of biodiversity conservation has entailed in the Northern Areas.

CHAPTER 1

SEEING THROUGH THE STATE

“Effective silencing does not require a conspiracy, not even a political consensus. Its roots are structural” (Trouillot 1995: 99).

This chapter explores how the border territory of the Northern Areas is constructed within the representational practices of the Pakistani nation-state. I examine the multiple modes through which knowledge about the Northern Areas is regulated in sites where the nation-state is articulated and reproduced, such as the textbook, map, and census. My analysis demonstrates how the presence of the region in these sites is constituted by the very absence of its political and social identity – an absence that is produced through ambiguous, contradictory, and exclusionary methods of representation. I argue that such representations reflect the structural political indeterminacy and indeed – unrepresentability – of the region. Moreover, they serve to erase the Northern Areas, its people, and their political exploitation from the imagination of “Pakistan” and “Kashmir,” hence constituting crucial exercises in rule and legitimation.

What’s in a Name?

Naming is a basic yet critical way of attaching meaning to a place. It is a crucial tool of state power precisely because it can be used to privilege certain meanings over others – meanings that are frequently used to promote nationalistic agendas. States also claim the power to name because it reflects ownership of space. In fact, it is the very act of naming that symbolically transforms space into a place and embeds it within the territory of a state (Carter 1987). It is an effect of power that people come to internalize names as the permanent, natural attributes of the places they denote. This naturalization of place-names obscures the fact that place-names are

chosen by authorities of power, and may reflect strategic political aims linked to nation-building and state-formation (Cohn and Kliot 1992). The creation and naming of Pakistan's capital city of "Islamabad" is a case in point. Islamabad literally means the abode of Islam, or the place where Islam thrives. The name is an expression of the attempts by the incipient Pakistani government to entrench Islam as the dominant motif and legitimating basis for the new nation/state.

What is the significance of the name "Northern Areas" and where does it come from? Historically, the region that today forms the "Northern Areas" was never united politically; it comprised several independent princely kingdoms such as those of Hunza, Nagar, Ishkoman and Yasin (Dani 2001). These kingdoms paid tribute to, and recognized the sovereignty of the Maharaja of the Princely State of Jammu and Kashmir. To distinguish these principalities from the Kashmir Valley, Jammu, and Ladakh regions, they were referred to as the "Northern Areas of Jammu and Kashmir." Under the British/Kashmiri administration, these areas were further classified into the political units of Gilgit Agency, Gilgit Wazarat, and Baltistan – administrative classifications that remained operative even after the partition of 1947 when the entire region came under Pakistani control. Between 1972 and 1974, the Pakistan state abolished the administrative units of Gilgit Agency, Gilgit Wazarat and Baltistan, as well as the feudal estates of local kings that were contained within these units. The region was then integrated into a single political unit that was brought under the direct rule of the federal administration. This unit was renamed as the "Federally Administered Northern Areas" (FANA), though it became commonly known as the "Northern Areas" or the "Northern Areas of Pakistan."

While the enforcement of direct rule over the region paved the way for institutional domination, the renaming of the region signified a form of symbolic control. The choice of name is blatantly and strategically possessive. The official and

popular use of the name “Northern Areas of Pakistan” makes it clear that the “Northern Areas” are not the “Northern Areas of Jammu and Kashmir” as they were historically considered, and which is where the term Northern Areas most likely comes from. The name thus represents a direct claim of the Pakistan state over the territory of the Northern Areas, discursively changing it into a non-negotiable place. More importantly, by reducing the region to a mere component of Pakistan, the renaming also denies a sense of regional identity that would be embodied by historically and locally significant names such as “Gilgit-Baltistan” and “Boloristan.” By erasing this local identity while firmly embedding the region within Pakistan, the strategic renaming of the region thus symbolizes the state project of “permanent possession through dispossession” (Carter 1987: xxiv).

The name of “Northern Areas” constitutes a further form of erasure because of the effect of non-specificity that it creates: it seems like a reference to a general geographical space, rather than the name of a particular demarcated place. Not surprisingly, it is often interpreted as an allusion to “areas in the north of Pakistan”, or “Northern Pakistan,” instead of being recognized as an identifier for a specific administrative unit of Pakistan called the “Northern Areas.” Moreover, due to a similar geographical connotation, the name of the “Northern Areas” is also commonly misunderstood as a reference for the province of “North-West Frontier Province” (NWFP) which is adjacent to the Northern Areas. Further, people living outside of the Northern Areas also tend to confuse the region with the geographically un-contiguous tribal region called Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and specifically its territory of “Wana,” presumably because the names of these regions are similar to the official name “Federally Administered Northern Areas” and acronym “FANA” of the Northern Areas. Together with the already vague and mystifying nature of the name

“Northern Areas,” such conflation further help to obscure the existence and identity of the actual region called the Northern Areas.

The power of naming and its relationship to the identity and marginality of a place was interestingly revealed to me during my research in the Northern Areas in August 2004. I had gone to the Gilgit Public Library, where I joined a discussion that included prominent local politicians, bureaucrats, and lawyers. Over a duration of three hours, I listened and took notes while the rest of the group discussed various forms of political injustice prevalent in the Northern Areas. At one point, a consensus emerged that part of the reason for the disempowerment of the region and its people is the lack of awareness of this very fact within the “rest of Pakistan,” and that the people of Pakistan needed to be made aware of the region’s marginality in order to exert pressure on the Pakistani government for changing the status quo. A local politician pointed out that this was a monumental task, as people in the cities of Pakistan did not even know what the Northern Areas were. He said:

“When you tell anyone in Karachi or Lahore that you are from the Northern Areas, either they don’t understand what it means or they think we are from NWFP.⁸ They are so ignorant.”

Responding to this comment, another politician added:

“Part of the problem is that Pakistanis are ignorant. But part of it is also that our name is *ajeab*.⁹ It does not sound like the name of a place. *Is naam nay humain benaam kar dia hai* (This name has rendered us unknown).”

Over the course of my extended research in the region, I realized that many more inhabitants of the region similarly perceive the name of the Northern Areas as

⁸ I have also come across this inability to recognize the name and hence the place of Northern Areas in my personal interactions with friends and family members. For example, when I tell them that my research is based on the Northern Areas, they often assume that I am referring to places in the North-West of the country, such as the province of NWFP, or the tribal territories of FATA or Wana. Else, they ask, “What do you mean by the Northern Areas?” At the same time, people can readily recognize other administrative territories of Pakistan, such as Punjab and Sindh.

⁹ This Urdu word can be translated to mean “strange,” “mysterious,” or “incomprehensible.”

personally and politically marginalizing. Not surprisingly, the renaming of the region has become a strong demand of several local political parties, which see it as a way of reclaiming their identity from the Pakistan state and also as a strategy for foregrounding and resolving their political predicament.

Landscaping the Nation

Ironically, while people within Pakistan may not be able to recognize the name of the Northern Areas or the specific place it denotes, they can nevertheless identify particular kinds of physical spaces that fall largely within the bounds of the Northern Areas, such as the valleys of Gilgit and Hunza and mountains like Nanga Parbat and K-2. This is because the region epitomizes the “natural beauty” of Pakistan. As such, it occupies a central place in the geographical imagination of the nation. While I question the ways of seeing which normalize particular landscapes as beautiful and others not, I do not wish to deny the picturesque qualities of the landscape of the Northern Areas per se. Rather, my concern is with exploring how a mode of inclusion based on spatial appeal embodies and produces a number of exclusionary effects. I will now explore how this dynamic of inclusion and exclusion plays out in the representation of the Northern Areas in specific texts on Pakistan.

The first book that I will examine is titled “Pakistan Studies: Class X” (Rizvi et. al 2003).¹⁰ It is a tenth-grade textbook used in government schools in the province of Punjab, which is the most populous province of Pakistan. I have chosen a textbook of a specific province as textbook production and indeed, public education itself is managed on a provincial basis within Pakistan, though it is supervised by the Federal Ministry of Education. I have not conducted a detailed investigation of official textbooks on Pakistan Studies used in provinces other than Punjab, but a brief

¹⁰ “Pakistan Studies” is a compulsory subject in government schools and colleges in Pakistan.

overview of them has given me a sense that they treat the region of the Northern Areas in ways similar to the Punjabi one which I will now proceed to analyze.

The Northern Areas are conspicuous in the text by their very absence. In the entire book, there is not even a single mention of the word “Northern Areas.” At one point, the text does state that the Karakoram Highway “links northern areas of Pakistan with China” (p.139). However, due to the lack of capitalization, one gets a sense that it is “areas in the north of Pakistan” that are being referred to, not the specific region called Northern Areas which in fact contains the bulk of the Karakoram Highway. While the regional identity of the Northern Areas is unacknowledged, locations within the region are frequently referenced and included as part of Pakistan. For example, a chapter titled “The Natural Resources of Pakistan” mentions that marble is available in “Gilgat,” and that the Pakistan International Airlines (P.I.A.) passenger and cargo services are available in “Gilgat” and “Skardu.” Gilgit – which is consistently misspelt as “Gilgat” – and Skardu are the main towns of the Northern Areas, located in the districts of Gilgit and Skardu respectively. A chapter called the “The Land of Pakistan” more explicitly appropriates the land of the Northern Areas. It has a section on the “Physical Features” of Pakistan, which in fact, begins with a description of the “Northern Mountain Ranges.” The part of these ranges that falls within Pakistan primarily lies in the Northern Areas, but this fact is not acknowledged, though specific valleys of the region like “Gilgit” and “Hunza” are mentioned. The Himalayan, Karakoram and Hindukush mountains that comprise these ranges are each described at length in separate sub-sections, and mention details such as:

“...between Karakoram mountains and Himalayas the valleys of Gilgat and Hunza are situated. The mountain peaks surrounding these areas are covered with snow throughout the year. When the summer season sets in these valleys are full of life. The people are busy in different activities. The hill torrents flow with great force and the green grass grows everywhere” (p. 87-88).

The region of the Northern Areas is thus romanticized as a scenic landscape, significant to the nation merely for its beautiful mountains and lush valleys. The abstract “people” of the region appear not as living, cultural beings but almost as physical features of the land to lend an aspect of reality to the picture. We do not get any sense of the social identities of these people, as they remain absent from the whole book – even from the chapter called “The People of Pakistan and their Culture.” Of course, one can justifiably argue that government textbooks in Pakistan are generally of a very poor quality, and embody an overly simplified and nationalistic representation of Pakistan. Hence, there is nothing special about their treatment of the Northern Areas, as all the regions of Pakistan are likely to be portrayed in selective and distorting ways. I would argue that these ways deserve attention precisely because they embody misrepresentations which help to shape how the country is geographically and culturally imagined by its school-going population. Such misrepresentations have particularly critical implications in the context of a disputed and exceptionally dominated region like the Northern Areas. It is also important to note that the official textbook construction of the Northern Areas discussed above is not limited to one particular book. The region is similarly represented in a variety of other nation-making sites, such as in newspaper and television media, and even in unofficial sites like private school textbooks and popular/academic publications. In a sense then, there is a persistent structure of representation and discourse that characterizes the production of the Northern Areas within depictions of the Pakistani nation-state. However, this discourse is not produced in the same manner in every text and context. There are certain regularly occurring threads, but each recurrence may also produce its own forms of inclusions and exclusions.

“Introduction to Pakistan Studies” is a book written by Muhammad Ikram Rabbani (2003), and is primarily used by 9th-11th grade private school students in

Pakistan who follow the British O-level examination system.¹¹ This 420-page book is one of the most comprehensive texts on “Pakistan Studies” that I have come across, and also one which gives the most detailed attention to the Northern Areas. However, this emphasis is ridden with ambiguities and contradictions. To begin with, the Northern Areas are not included in the “Area and Location” of Pakistan, which is the first section of a chapter titled “Geography of Pakistan” (p.165). This is understandable, as the Northern Areas are not constitutionally part of Pakistan. On the very same page, however, there is a section called “Neighbouring Countries and Borders” which mentions Pakistan’s common border with China along “its Gilgit Agency and Baltistan.” As indicated earlier, Gilgit Agency was a colonial political unit which ceased to exist in 1972 when it was merged with surrounding territories (including Baltistan) to form the Northern Areas. Hence, while the region of the Northern Areas itself is not and cannot be included in the definition of the territory of Pakistan, older names of the Northern Areas or locations within it are nevertheless incorporated into the state’s territory in descriptions of the border areas of Pakistan. Likewise, while the Northern Areas remain absent from the extensive, written discussion of “Political Divisions” that is provided in the text, they are vividly present on a map titled “Pakistan: Political Divisions” (p. 183).

Similar to the official textbook discussed earlier, the major presence of the Northern Areas in this independently written textbook appears in the section on “Physiography.” This section begins with a discussion of Pakistan’s “Northern Mountains,” and talks at length about the peaks, valleys, glaciers and passes that mark the region. Unlike the previous text, however, this text recognizes that besides the physical landmarks, the north of Pakistan also comprises a *place* called the “Northern Areas.” This place is considered so crucial for describing the “physiography” of

¹¹ This system is managed by the Universities of London and Cambridge, U.K.

Pakistan that it is allocated a separate sub-section, which is titled “Importance of the Northern Areas of Pakistan (F.A.N.A.).” It begins with a basic administrative definition of the Northern Areas:

“The Federally Administered Northern Areas (FANA), include the territories of Gilgit and Baltistan (Ghizer, Gilgit, Diamer, Skardu and Ghanche) situated in the extreme North of Pakistan” (p. 192).

This is the only textbook that I came across which specifies the administrative regions that comprise the Northern Areas. It is paradoxical, though, that this definition appears in a section on “Physiography,” while the very existence of the Northern Areas remains unacknowledged in the section on the political and administrative divisions of Pakistan. Hence, it is only in the context of the physical description and beautification of Pakistan that the region is considered significant enough to be mentioned and expanded upon. As the text goes on to state:

“The FANA is one of the most beautiful locations in the sub-continent. More than 100 peaks soar over 7000 meters (22, 960 ft.). World’s three famous mountain ranges meet in the Northern Areas. They are Himalayas, the Karakorams and the Hindukush. The whole of Northern area of Pakistan is known as paradise for mountaineers, climbers, trekkers and hikers.”

In the paragraphs that follow this text, the “importance” of the Northern Areas is categorically attributed to the landscape of the region: its peaks and valleys are invaluable for tourism, while its rivers and glaciers serve as vital sources of water. There is not even a scant mention of the region’s relationship and “importance” to Kashmir – not even in separate, detailed sections on “Kashmir” that appear elsewhere in the same textbook. And this is also true for the government textbook discussed earlier. In the private school textbook, at least the nature-related glorification is specifically linked to the “Northern Areas” which is not the case for the government textbook. However, even this recognition is short-lived: while the section titled

“Importance of Northern Areas (FANA)” recognizes the Northern Areas as a specific, bounded, administrative region of Pakistan, the very next section called “Valleys of the Northern Areas” displaces this unique regional identity. In this section, the valleys of the Northern Areas include those that lie in the place “Northern Areas” – like Gilgit, Hunza, Yasin, Ishkoman and Skardu – as well as other valleys such as Swat and Kaghan which lie in the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP). This textual manifestation of the confusion between the Northern Areas and the NWFP can be linked to the geographically-related, mystifying names of these regions which I discussed earlier, as well as the common context of “natural beauty” in which both these places are often invoked. It reveals and simultaneously perpetuates the inability to recognize the Northern Areas as a distinct administrative territory of Pakistan.

The tendency of claiming and acclaiming the landscape of the Northern Areas while at the same time reducing its regional identity to an ambiguous or non-existent place, is also prevalent in popular and academic discourse. An example of this is provided in a prominent volume called “Pakistan” (Husain 1997) which was published in 1997 to mark the 50th anniversary of the creation of Pakistan. This book is written for popular consumption, but features contributions from leading national and international scholars who work on Pakistani politics, culture, and history. Images of the Northern Areas are abundantly present throughout the book. In fact, even the cover page of the book displays an image from the Northern Areas – that of the magnificent Deosai peaks, as viewed from the Skardu district of the Northern Areas. Also, the book has a section on “The Land and the People” which predictably begins with a fairly detailed discussion of the beautiful mountains and valleys of the Northern Areas. But yet again, these landmarks appear to be located directly in “Pakistan” rather than in a specific region called the Northern Areas. Moreover, while other regions of Pakistan – mainly the four provinces of Punjab, Sindh, North-West Frontier, and

Balochistan – are expanded in separate sub-sections, no such section is assigned to the Northern Areas. Instead, the region is defined in the section on “The North-West Frontier.” This is also the section in which pictures from the Northern Areas are prominently included. Hence, this text becomes yet another site where the conflation of the Northern Areas and the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) is reproduced. It needs to be noted that the book does have a separate section for “Jammu and Kashmir,” but the “Northern Areas” do not appear in this section. There is a reference to the fact that “Dardistan and Baltistan”¹² historically formed the north of Jammu and Kashmir State (p. 143), but in the rest of the section’s text as well as in the images that accompany it, one gets the sense that “Pakistani” Kashmir exclusively refers to Azad Kashmir. Here, as in the two texts that I discussed earlier, the delinking of the Northern Areas from Kashmir exists alongside, and in fact, is produced through the romanticized landscaping of the region within Pakistan. Such depictions silence the fact that the political status of the Northern Areas is inextricably linked to the disputed territory of Kashmir, and thus, marginalize the region within representations of the “Kashmir issue.”

Despite having a privileged place in the geographical and pictorial imagination of the nation, the Northern Areas nevertheless remain indecipherable within the regional taxonomy of the nation. Partly as a result of this unclear regional identity, the Northern Areas also remain predominantly absent from depictions of the “people” and “culture” of Pakistan. For example, in the edited volume just discussed, the socioeconomic and cultural profile of Pakistan is provided on the basis of specific regions. The cultural imagining of a Pakistani national and citizen is thus associated with the regional entities to which they belong i.e. the regions of Punjab, Sindh, NWFP, Balochistan and Kashmir which are seen as the constitutive units of Pakistan.

¹² Dardistan and Baltistan are historical names of regions that today form the “Northern Areas.”

Hence, the Punjabi lives in Punjab, the Sindhi lives in Sindh, the Balochi in Balochistan, the Pukhtoon in NWFP, and the Kashmiri in Kashmir. Even if acknowledged, other linguistic and ethnic groups that reside in these territorial units seem to get overshadowed in this homogenizing one people-one place configuration. In the case of the Northern Areas, such a configuration is made difficult because no group can be constructed as the dominant one. The cultural landscape of the Northern Areas – with its mosaic of people like the Shina, the Brushaski, the Wakhi, and the Balti – cannot fit into the ethnic matrix of a nationalist discourse in which places are assumed to map onto a particular social identity. Even if such a mapping could be constructed, the inhabitants of the Northern Areas would be prevented from being accommodated in the regionalized representation of the nation as the very existence of the region of the Northern Areas is rendered ambiguous. To be sure, there is mention of the “longevity and tranquility” of Hunzakuts (p. 93) and the “ancient Greek ancestry” (p. 142) of Baltis, but even these scarce, often essentializing references are not related to the place called the “Northern Areas” and thus, do not convey that Baltis and Hunzakuts live in the Northern Areas. The region is effectively reduced to an unpeopled landscape, inhabited only with soaring peaks and lush valleys. This produces a double exclusion: the communities of the Northern Areas remain largely unimagined within the nationalist imaginings of Pakistan, and simultaneously, their subjection and rightlessness is also obscured from the nation’s view.

This landscape-only, no-people no-region depiction of the Northern Areas is linked to the ambiguity surrounding the political status of the region, as well as its contested and dominated status which necessitates the erasure of its identity in nationalist discourse. At the same time, it is important to note that the practice of effacing people from depictions of a scenic Kashmiri “wilderness” was prevalent even in Mughal times, and continued in the colonial period particularly through the writings

of European travelers (Rai 2004). This practice is not even limited to Kashmir, and extends to the depiction of mountain territories in general which have always remained barred from the realm of “culture” and “civilization.” Even a historian par excellence like Braudel claims: “The mountains are as a rule a world apart from civilizations, which are an urban and lowland achievement. Their history is to have none” (Braudel 1972: 34). This outside-history depiction of mountains often accompanies a picture of timeless isolation and inertia, as evident in the following representation of the Northern Areas in an academic text on the role of roads in border-making in Asia:

“Over many thousands of years the economy and the society of Northern Areas had changed but little. The lives and work of its people had remained isolated from the modernization of the Indus Valley. Rulers from the plains – including the British and the Chinese from across the mountains – had come and gone, but material conditions were relatively unaltered” (Ispahani 1989: 185).

Such representations of mountain societies as history-less, timeless, isolated and backward are typical and symbolic of the lowland perspective from which historical and social analysis is often written (Stellrecht 1997). Particularly in the context of the Northern Areas, this perspective runs counter to local histories of caravan trade, travel, religious conversions, and political and military struggles that have shaped the trajectory of the region as well as that of the British Empire in India. For example, rulers of Hunza and other states that today constitute the Northern Areas were key players in the Great Game. They frequently maneuvered the British, Russian, and Chinese authorities against each other, and imagined their territory and rule as one “where three empires met” and one that was central to the security and stability of the British Empire (Hussain 2003).

A new form of the lowland perspective – the global NGO discourse on environmental conservation – has also become dominant in the thinking about the

Northern Areas, and characterizes several development programs that have been implemented in the region in recent years (chapter 5). The perception and implication of this discourse is captured well by the following comment from Raja Hussain Khan Maqpoon, the editor of the Northern Areas' weekly newspaper K2:

“It is ironic that the world is more worried about the falling trees; they are sad that our white leopards are vanishing day by day; the dead bodies of our Markhor frightens them; they are going all out to preserve our ecosystem. But nobody ever thinks of the people of this land” (Mehkri 2000).

Hence, what is common to the lowland nationalist discourse on the Northern Areas as well as NGO discourse on the region is the valorization of nature and the simultaneous devaluing of the people. This discourse is not limited to official state discourse, but also extends to academic and popular texts on the region. Whether authorized by the state or not, my point is that these representations serve the project of authoritarian state rule in the region as they silence the political marginalization of the region and its people.

Constituting the State and its Territory

“They rule us and fleece us and manipulate our love of Pakistan for supra-national geo-political ends but won't give us the constitutional status we deserve” (Nawaz Khan Naji, Founding Member of Balawaristan National Front (BNF), Northern Areas).¹³

Whether they strive for a provincial, supra-provincial or independent status for the Northern Areas, local political parties across the spectrum agree on one issue: the crux of the problem is the region's ambiguous constitutional status. This position is also shared by many journalists and academics who are concerned about the political exploitation of the region. Hence, it is important to understand what the constitution of Pakistan says or does not say about the political status of the Northern Areas.

¹³ M. Ilyas Khan. “The Pariahs of Pakistan”. *The Herald*. October 2002. The Balawaristan National Front is a prominent nationalist political party in the Northern Areas.

The constitution is often seen as a document that is created *by* a concrete entity called the “state” to specify how it will function and rule the “society” or “nation.” However, it is the constitutional text itself that concretizes the abstractions of the “state” and the “citizen,” and defines the nature and extent of state power over citizens. In this sense, the constitution effectively constitutes the “state” rather than vice versa.

The textual definition of state territory is inscribed in the constitution of a country, as the formal, legal definition of the dominion of a state. Indeed, the 1973 Constitution of Pakistan¹⁴ begins with identifying “the Republic and its territories” (Qazi 2003: 3). The four provinces of Pakistan are included (Balochistan, North-West Frontier, Punjab and Sindh), along with the capital city of Islamabad, and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). Additionally, Pakistan also comprises “such States and territories as *are* or may be included in Pakistan, whether by accession or otherwise” (Qazi 2003: 3, my emphasis). I would claim that the implicit reference in this vague clause is to the disputed region of Jammu and Kashmir, and hence to the Northern Areas. Since Pakistan’s official position is that the region is disputed and its territorial future must be decided by a U.N.-led plebiscite, the territory defined by the constitution cannot openly include even the one-third part of Kashmir that is under the control of the Pakistan state i.e. Azad Kashmir and Northern Areas. The sentence from the constitution quoted above ensures that the Pakistan government can constitutionally defend its control of regions belonging to Jammu and Kashmir, but it is ambiguous enough for the state to declare that the Northern Areas are not “constitutionally” part of Pakistan yet, hence enabling it to remain in compliance of

¹⁴ Pakistan has had three constitutions. The 1973 constitution is the one that is currently in force, with various amendments over the years by successive military and civilian regimes.

U.N. resolutions as well as to continue denying constitutional rights to the people of the region.

The Northern Areas (and Kashmir in general) is clearly absent from the territorial definition of Pakistan that is provided in the 1973 Constitution, and even in the earlier constitutions of 1956 and 1962. The only explicit reference to the territorial control of Jammu and Kashmir is provided in Article 257 of the 1973 Constitution, which states:

“When the people of the State of Jammu and Kashmir decide to accede to Pakistan, the relationship between Pakistan and the State shall be determined in accordance with the wishes of the people of that State” (Qazi 2003: 150).

The hypocrisy of Pakistan’s official line on Kashmir is clearly revealed in this article. Through a clever use of words, it effectively deprives the people of Jammu and Kashmir from exercising their right to self-determination. Their wishes are to be respected only if they decide to join Pakistan presumably through a plebiscite that would be conducted by the U.N. Hence, one way of reading this article is that Pakistan would abide by the U.N. resolution in so far as the eventual vote is in its favor. The only choice granted to the inhabitants of Kashmir is in deciding what administrative form their territory will take when it becomes part of Pakistan. And, until they make this choice, they are not “part” of the Pakistan state even if they are directly controlled by it.

The content of the Pakistani constitution has tremendous implications for the status of the Northern Areas. If the Northern Areas are not constitutionally part of Pakistan, then the state is not bound to give any citizenship rights to the people inhabiting the region. In fact, in several court cases pertaining to the status of the Northern Areas, the Federal Government has openly justified the denial of fundamental rights to the region and its people, on the basis that the Northern Areas

are not part of Pakistan. Hence, while the 1973 constitution of Pakistan might construct an ostensibly democratic state, it leaves enough room for the state to continue its coercive rule in the Northern Areas.

As suggested earlier, a constitution is fundamental to the discourse and practice of the state as it structures and legitimizes the institutional apparatus of the state. Hence, it embodies a discursive practice that is productive of material power. But this power does not always work in favor of the state. By specifying what the contours and limits of official rule would be, the constitution imposes legal restrictions on what can be done by agents in the name of the “state.” While the “legal” is itself a creation of power and those who exercise power can manipulate self-authorized legal checks in their favor, the constitution – and law in general – can nevertheless provide a space for subjects to enforce their rights and hence, exercise power. To some extent, then, the state can be bound by what it states, within the arena of the state itself.

The state institution of the judiciary is one key site where such checks on the “state” can be negotiated. In the context of the Northern Areas, the Supreme Court of Pakistan has adjudicated various cases in relation to the political status of the region and passed decisions that have played a fundamental role in pressuring the Pakistan government to establish a democratic process in the region. The landmark verdict came on 28th May 1999, when the Supreme Court decided against the Federal Government in the constitutional petition of “Al-Jehad Trust vs. the Federal Government of Pakistan.” It directed the Pakistani government to “make necessary amendments in the Constitution” and “initiate appropriate administrative/legislative measures within a period of six months” for the enforcement of “Fundamental Rights” in the Northern Areas (Mian 1999).¹⁵ The representatives of the Federal Government

¹⁵ According to the Constitution of Pakistan, these Fundamental Rights include the right to freedom of speech and expression, right to equality before law, right to vote, right to be governed by chosen representatives, and the right to have access to an appellate court of justice (Qazi 2003).

had argued that since the region is not constitutionally part of Pakistan but of the disputed territory of Jammu and Kashmir, its political destiny needs to be settled according to the awaited UN-led plebiscite, not by the Pakistan government and certainly not by the Supreme Court. However, deciding in favor of the plaintiffs, the then Chief Justice of Pakistan Ajmal Mian held that while the Northern Areas may not be constitutionally part of Pakistan, they are nevertheless under the “de jure” and “de facto” control of the Pakistan government (Mian 1999). As such, the latter is bound to extend constitutionally-guaranteed citizenship rights to the people of the Northern Areas. Since this decision, a number of “packages” for increasing the region’s legislative, financial, administrative and judicial powers have been announced by successive Pakistani governments. While this change in political attitude has generally been welcomed within the Northern Areas, several of the people I spoke to in the course of my research perceived the actual reforms as insubstantial and “artificial,” and hence remain skeptical of the designs of Pakistani government officials.

My purpose in invoking the Supreme Court decision is not only to highlight the role of judicial constitutional interpretation in structuring the legal relationship between the Northern Areas and the Pakistan state, but also to underscore the complexity and heterogeneity of “state” discourse and practice pertaining to the Northern Areas. As is evident from the court case, institutions of the Pakistani state have often taken a contradictory stance on the political status of the Northern Areas. However, such differences cannot be simplistically interpreted to mean that one institution of the state is championing the rights of the region while the other is trampling on them, and that therefore, there is no project of rule that unites the two. The positive move by the Supreme Court needs to be seen in light of the March 1993 ruling of the Azad Kashmir High Court, in which the Court declared that the Northern Areas are a part of Azad Kashmir and not of Pakistan, and accordingly directed its

government to assume charge of the region.¹⁶ The apprehensive Pakistan government appealed this decision in the Supreme Court of Pakistan. In its September 1994 verdict, the Supreme Court implicitly reaffirmed the rule of the Pakistan state over the Northern Areas, by declaring that the Northern Areas are part of disputed “Jammu and Kashmir” but not of Azad Kashmir.

Given this context, the recent willingness of the Pakistani Supreme Court – and subsequently of the Pakistan government – to acknowledge the citizenship rights of the Northern Areas can be seen as a continuing strategic effort of the Pakistan state to delegitimize the claims on the Northern Areas by the expansionist Azad Kashmir, instead of symbolizing an institutional rift within the Pakistan state. Simultaneously, it can be perceived as a means to contain popular resentment and resistance against the Pakistan state, and particularly to counter secessionist political aspirations as exemplified by movements like the Balawaristan National Front. Despite this, however, the Supreme Court rulings on the constitutional status of the Northern Areas do embody an empowering step towards regional political justice.

Unmapping Cartographic Anxiety

“Deconstruction urges us to read between the lines of the map – ‘in the margins of the text’ – and through its tropes to discover the silences and contradictions that challenge the apparent honesty of the image” (Harley 1989: 3).

In July 2004, the Pakistan government organized golden jubilee celebrations to mark the first ascent of K-2, which is Pakistan’s highest and the world’s second highest mountain. Grand festivities were arranged across three weeks, for which numerous state bureaucrats and international dignitaries flew into the scenic district of Skardu – one of the six districts of the Northern Areas. A journalist friend of mine,

¹⁶ I am grateful to Cabeiri Robinson for this insight.

Israr Mohammad, who belongs to the region and was covering these celebrations, related to me the confusion of foreign visitors, who had obtained copies of Pakistan's map only to discover that the region of "Northern Areas" was nowhere to be found. In an attempt to point out the cartographic location of K-2 to one of these visitors, my friend discovered much to his own astonishment, that while other parts of the Northern Areas were shown as part of Pakistan, the regions of K-2 and Skardu were excluded from it, and instead depicted as part of the "Disputed Territory of Jammu and Kashmir." Recounting this experience, Israr sarcastically and indignantly commented:

"This is the height of injustice and exploitation. The Pakistani government claims that our beautiful mountains and valleys are the glory of Pakistan. Yet, not only has it denied us our fundamental rights, it has even denied us on the map. *As if we don't exist* (my emphasis)."

It is this cartographic denial of the identity of the Northern Areas that I wish to explore in this section.

A map is similar to the constitution in the sense of being a discursive practice that constructs and concretizes the nation/state. However, a constitution is clearly a more important text of and for power, because it formally and extensively regulates the functioning of states as well as that of subjects. No wonder that it is often considered the most "sacred" text which "enshrines" the fundamental values and principles of the nation-state. The map does not have the legal sanction that a constitution has, and as such, state officials may be less pressured to stick to "reality" in drawing up a map, than when writing up the constitution. But despite their less sacred nature, maps – like flags – can be seen as totemic symbols of the nation, which bind the national community together even as they allow the nation to be articulated in the first place (Durkheim 1976, Derrida 1986, Ibrahim 2004). Hence, they are powerful texts that orient how the nation imagines the territory of the state.

In the South Asian context, maps have further played a particularly significant role in shaping state-formation and inter-state relations. As Razvi has pointed out, “the Radcliffe Line, which covers most of Pakistan’s borders with India, was drawn on a map in the first instance. The line was then re-laid on the ground by the survey teams of India and Pakistan. No cadastral or aerial survey preceded the Radcliffe decisions, which were taken only with reference to the guiding principles contained in the Partition Plan of June 3, 1947, and on the basis of existing reports” (Razvi 1971: 7).

Moreover, the Sino-Indian war of 1962 stemmed partly from the hostilities which emerged in response to the publication of Chinese maps that depicted the Aksai Chin frontier of disputed Kashmir as part of Chinese territory. Hence, the significance of maps is not limited to a symbolic-material structuring of national thought, but also extends to the formation and defense of state territory.

On the face of it, it seems easier to interpret a map than a constitution, because words can be used to convey or hide many meanings and hence, allow more complexity and manipulation than a static, visual depiction. However, in the case of the Northern Areas, the cartographic definition appears to be more complicated than the constitutional one.

To demonstrate how this is the case, I will now examine the cartographic representations of the Northern Areas, and attempt to make sense of the claims embedded in them. Before doing that, I would like to clarify that I have not researched the circuits through which cartographic knowledge is produced in Pakistan, and I cannot and do not wish to establish definite relationships between political intentionality and the production of Pakistani maps. My concern is with exploring the “‘truth effects’ of the knowledge that is conveyed in maps, both of its more emphatic utterances, and also of its equally emphatic silences” (Harley 2001: 107), and with investigating how these truth effects might reveal and realize state power in the region.

One would expect the politically and strategically significant region of Kashmir to have a particularly clear representation on the maps of both India and Pakistan. The Indian map fulfils this expectation: it incorporates the entire former Princely State of Jammu and Kashmir – including the regions today called the “Northern Areas” – as part of its territory. This depiction, of course, represents India’s official claim that Kashmir is its integral component, not the reality of a disputed Kashmir that has regions under total control of the Pakistan state. The Pakistani map, on the other hand, embodies a curious image of Kashmir. The Pakistan state officially considers Kashmir as “Disputed Territory,” the future of which will be decided on the basis of a UN-backed plebiscite. But on the map, all of Kashmir does not appear as “disputed.” And ironically, there are a number of maps of Pakistan that circulate within the country, all portraying different versions of Kashmir and indeed, the Northern Areas.

Figure 2 provides a section from the official map of Pakistan that was published by the Survey of Pakistan in 1995, and is included in the most recent Census Report of 1999.

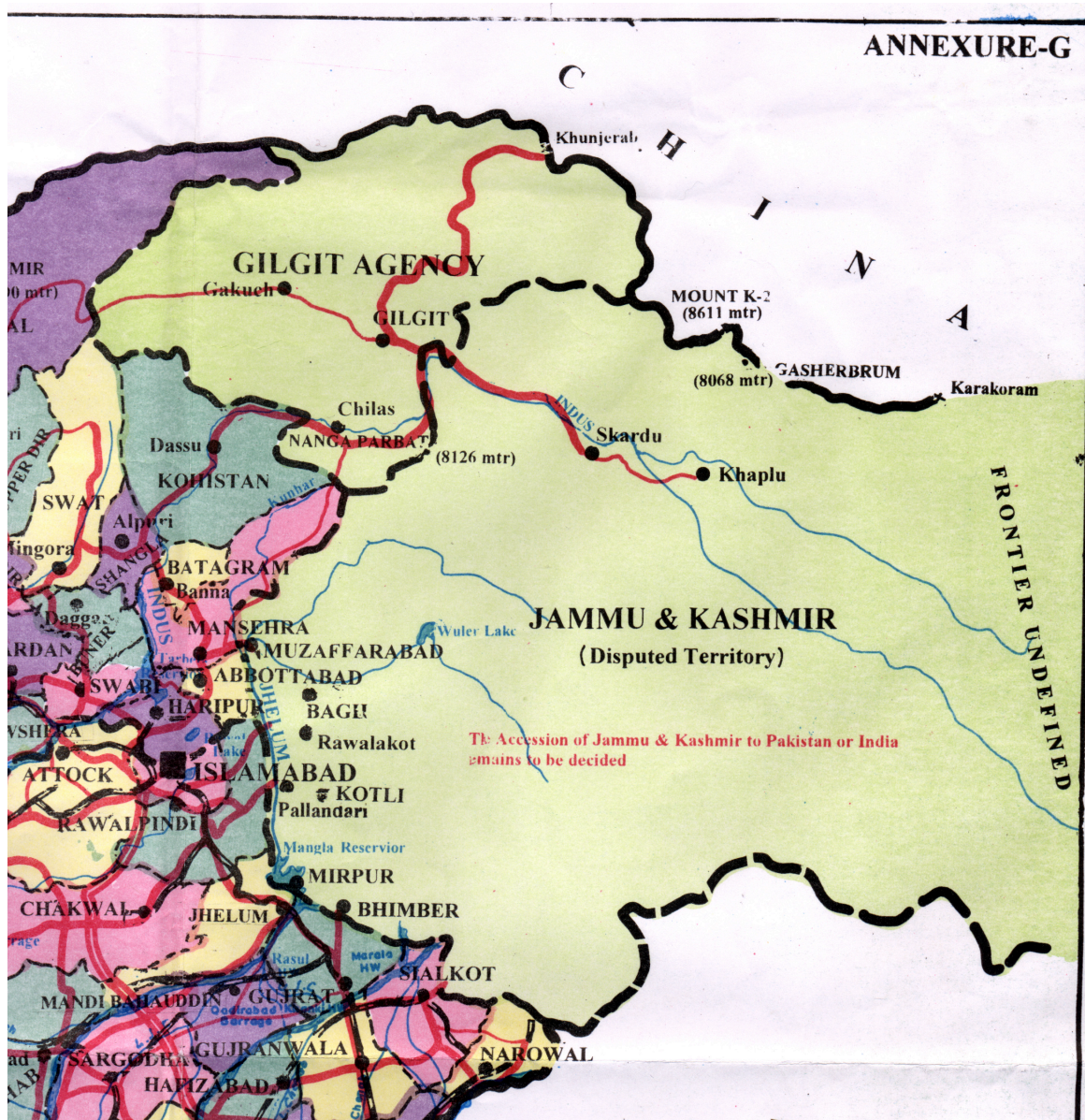


Figure 2: Section from “Pakistan: Showing Administrative Districts” (Source: *Survey of Pakistan*, 1995).¹⁷

¹⁷ Pakistan has four Provinces, and each province is divided into Divisions which are further subdivided into Districts.

Conforming to the definition of Pakistani territory in the constitution, the map neither has a space marked as the “Northern Areas” nor one categorized as “Azad Kashmir,” though both these components of Pakistan-administered Kashmir are practically treated and controlled as administrative districts of Pakistan. There is just a blanket category called “Jammu and Kashmir (Disputed Territory),” which has an undelineated eastern boundary labeled as “Frontier Undefined.” The Line of Control (LoC)¹⁸ which divides Indian-controlled Kashmir from the Pakistan-controlled one is not marked, as it would symbolically map the reality of Indian-held Kashmir, and undermine Pakistan’s official claim to the entire territory of Kashmir.

Interestingly though, the region identified as disputed Kashmir does not include all of Pakistan-controlled Kashmir. It leaves out the colonial administrative unit of “Gilgit Agency” that forms a sub-region of present-day Northern Areas. The Gilgit Agency covers districts such as Gilgit and Ghizer which constitute key administrative centers of the Northern Areas. Technically, the Agency itself does not exist as an “administrative district” anymore as it was combined with the adjoining territories of Gilgit Wazarat and Baltistan to constitute the “Northern Areas” in 1972. While the space of these latter territories is unmarked and is included within that of Jammu and Kashmir, that of the defunct Gilgit Agency retains its label and is firmly mapped within Pakistan. It is clearly *separated* from “Jammu and Kashmir.” At the same time, though, the color of both the “Gilgit Agency” and “Jammu and Kashmir (Disputed Territory)” is the same (light green), which cannot be considered a coincidence as no other territory of Pakistan is shaded in this color. Even in the abridged version of the map (Figure 3) that appears right below the original map, both these regions are vertically lined in the same color, though the boundary between them marks them as distinct units. Hence, the colors connect, but the lines divide.

¹⁸ This line was legitimated by the U.N. in July 1949.



Figure 3: “Pakistan – Showing Administrative Division” (*Source: Survey of Pakistan, 1995*).

Such cartographic maneuvers cannot be dismissed as matters of incompetence and oversight. They fundamentally redesign the landscapes of the Northern Areas, Kashmir and Pakistan. The contemporary administrative territory of the “Northern Areas” does not appear as such on the map, as it is not named and its space is divided up so that most of it is included in Pakistan while the rest (including K-2) appears as part of disputed Kashmir. This vague and distorted presence makes it difficult to locate the Northern Areas on the map. They are neither “included” within Pakistan nor

“excluded” from it. Rather, a creative and political use of lines, labels and colors *invisibilizes* their very existence and identity. At the same time, their relationship with Kashmir is rendered ambiguous as they are simultaneously linked and delinked from Kashmir. The link needs to be maintained because Pakistan is U.N. - bound to treat the Northern Areas as disputed. More importantly, due to its entirely Muslim population, the region is expected to provide a favorable vote to Pakistan in the case of an eventual plebiscite in Kashmir.¹⁹

The delinking from Kashmir i.e. the depiction of Gilgit Agency as part of Pakistan, occurred only in the mid-80s as before that, the entire space of the Northern Areas (“Gilgit Agency,” “Gilgit Wazarat,” and “Baltistan”) was depicted as part the “Jammu and Kashmir (Disputed Territory)” in official maps (Rahman and Mahmood 2000). This de-linking can be related to the post-1972 attempts of the Pakistan state to obtain more direct control over the region for territorial expansion and frontier stability as well as for strategic military interests. It also comes across more strongly than the linkage between the Northern Areas and Kashmir, as lines are more fundamental to maps than colors. Despite this “coloring” of the Northern Areas-Kashmir connection, the message is clear: the Gilgit Agency, and by implication the Northern Areas, are part of Pakistan, not of disputed Kashmir. The official map of Pakistan hence becomes a “model for, rather than a model of” what it purports to represent (Winichakul 1994:130). Instead of mapping the spatial and political reality of Kashmir, it constructs an imagined Pakistani state which manages to appropriate the space of the Northern Areas, while simultaneously obscuring its identity and political status.

¹⁹ Sadly, the link of the Northern Areas with Kashmir has been used by the Pakistan state to justify the denial of citizenship rights to the inhabitants of the region. State representatives have claimed that that any change in the region’s status would amount to a violation of international agreements on Kashmir (Mian 1999).

Since the official map of Pakistan does not acknowledge the existence of the Northern Areas, it is not surprising that an official, publicly available map of the region itself is also lacking. The closest map of the “Northern Areas” is a map produced by the Survey of Pakistan in 1995, which is titled “Gilgit Agency and Jammu & Kashmir.”²⁰ The very title of the map suggests that there is a connection between these political units, but the “and” separates the two and does not really explain what the connection really is. This map is compatible with the more abstract map shown in Figure 2, as the same green color is used for both the Gilgit Agency and Jammu and Kashmir, while still dividing them into distinct political entities. The only difference is that in this detailed map, “Gilgit Wazarat” and “Baltistan” are labeled and visibly included as part of the territory of Jammu and Kashmir. Hence, in this map, it is even clearer that some territories that belong to the Northern Areas are being counted as part of disputed Kashmir, but the major portion of the region is being mapped within Pakistan.

Oddly enough, the official maps of Pakistan differ from those that are included in sites such as private school textbooks and travel guides, though they still remain broadly confined to the official, nationalist frame. As a case in point, Figure 4 provides a map taken from a textbook titled “A Geography of Pakistan: Environment People and Economy,” which is commonly used by 9th-11th grade students in the non-governmental, British O-level schooling system in Pakistan.

²⁰ The map is too large to be accommodated in this text.



Figure 4: Section of “Pakistan – Political Divisions” (Source: *A Geography of Pakistan: Environment People and Economy*, 1991).

In this map, the label of “Gilgit Agency” is replaced with that of “Northern Areas” which is more accurate as the political unit of Gilgit Agency ceased to exist in 1972. However, while the name makes more sense, the lines remain inaccurate as some parts of the Northern Areas like Baltistan (though not labeled) are still mapped in “Jammu and Kashmir (Disputed Area).” Since textbooks for “Geography” or “Pakistan Studies” are often not in color print, the limited connection that is officially suggested between “Gilgit Agency” and “Jammu and Kashmir” (through a shared color) does not come across in this map. Hence, while the reality of a place administratively classified as “Northern Areas” is now acknowledged, the area bound by it remains inaccurate, and the connection to Kashmir is completely erased.

The last map (Figure 5) that I want to discuss is taken from the prominent academic/popular book called *Pakistan* (Husain 1997) which I discussed earlier in relation to the textual construction of the Northern Areas.

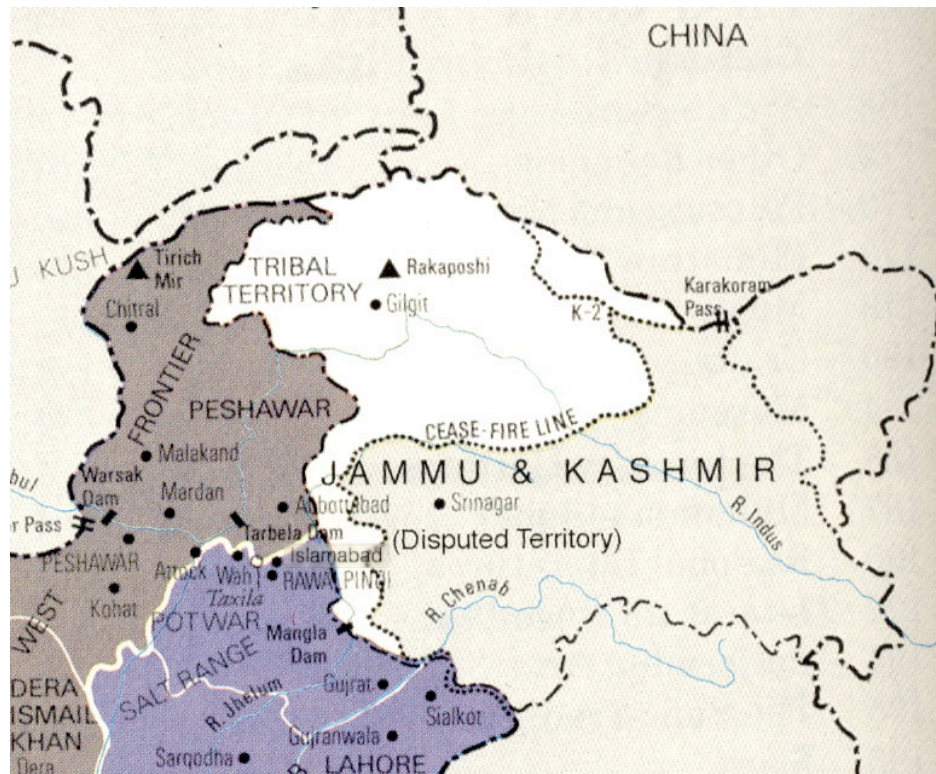


Figure 5: Map of Pakistan (*Source: Husain 1997*)

The above map is one of the very few maps that I found which depicted the whole space of Northern Areas as part of disputed Kashmir. But this map contains different misrepresentations that are even more opaque and exclusionary than the ones in the official map. It incorporates the “cease-fire line” that divides Pakistan-administered Kashmir (colored white) from Indian-administered Kashmir (colored gray), and appropriately labels both these parts as “Jammu & Kashmir (Disputed Territory).” Moreover, Pakistan-controlled Kashmir is accurately depicted as including the space covered by “Azad Kashmir” as well as the “Northern Areas,”

though neither of them is labeled as such and the division between the two is not depicted. But interestingly, while no landmark of Azad Kashmir (such as the key city of “Muzzafarabad”) is identified, the territory of the Northern Areas is marked with three labels – the main town of Gilgit, the mountain peaks of “Rakaposhi” and “K-2,” and a supposed region labeled as “Tribal Territory” (in capital letters). This label does not make any sense in relation to the Northern Areas, as in the context of Pakistan, “tribal territory” commonly denotes the region of FATA (Federally Administered Tribal Areas) that is located between the North-West Frontier Province and Pakistan’s border with Afghanistan.²¹ Hence, while this map draws the lines such that the territory of the Northern Areas is included as part of disputed Kashmir, we still *do not see* the connection between the Northern Areas and Kashmir because the region is neither represented with the colonial name (“Gilgit Agency”) nor the postcolonial one (“Northern Areas”). Moreover, the silence perpetuated by the absence of appropriate labels is made worse by the presence of the misleading label of “Tribal Territory” that is marked around Gilgit. Through the further identification of the Rakaposhi and K-2 peaks, this map represents and reinforces the nationalist tendency of signifying the region of the Northern Areas in terms of its picturesque value for the nation-state.

It is evident, then, that instead of occupying a standardized place on Pakistani maps, the Northern Areas have an opaque and distorted presence which is produced through various techniques of what Harley calls “cartographic censorship” and “cartographic silence” (Harley 2001). The presences and absences on these maps are significant, because they produce a particular imagining of the geographies of Pakistan and Kashmir. Maps are important ideological tools because they are used in a variety of organizational contexts such as in schools, government departments, and business offices. Hence, in everyday life, they often come to be internalized as social facts that

²¹ This area is marked in the abridged version of the official map of Pakistan, shown in Figure 3.

depict what Pakistan “is” instead of being considered as social constructions that represent a particular way of seeing the territorial boundaries and divisions of Pakistan – a way that produces an *unseeing* of the Northern Areas, as I hope to have shown above.

The Classified Nature of Census Classifications

“The fiction of the census is that everyone is in it, and that everyone has one – and only one – extremely clear place. No fractions” (Anderson 1991: 166).

While representations through maps are powerful because they abstract, simplify and summarize the territory of the nation-state, those in census documents are significant because they provide elaborate information about this territory. The Pakistani census is no exception. Along with presenting a “general description of the country,” the 1998 Census Report of Pakistan provides a plethora of figures and statistics that give details about a wide range of topics such as population size and distribution, house construction and facilities, employment and migration, and education and health. It is no wonder that the Population Census Organization of Pakistan describes census-taking as a “gigantic task” which involves the “whole nation.”

According to the preface of the census report, this involvement of the “whole nation” also includes that of the people of Northern Areas, as “the census was undertaken...throughout the country including...Northern Areas and Azad Kashmir.” The specific mention and separate inclusion of these territories implies their special status in the context of Pakistan, as these are areas on which the state does not have or cannot claim to have complete control. Precisely because of this reason, it makes sense for the census to survey these regions extensively so that key data can be collected for monitoring and control. Moreover, for the same reason, one can expect that some of this data would be considered confidential and so, not included in the publicly

available census report.²² Hence, there is a conflict between the need to classify the Northern Areas and the need to keep information about the region classified. Not surprisingly, the Northern Areas end up being selectively included in the overall Census Report of Pakistan, with representations that are replete with silences, ambiguities and contradictions.

Like the Constitution, the Census also describes the territory of Pakistan as comprising the four provinces (Punjab, Sindh, North-West Frontier Province and Balochistan), the federal capital of Islamabad, and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). However, these “administrative units” identified by the text of the report (p.14) are not consistent with those depicted in the map of Pakistan which is provided in the report (Figure 1). As discussed earlier, the map additionally includes the colonial administrative entity of “Gilgit Agency” as part of Pakistan. Hence, the census makes a contradictory statement: it visually depicts the territory of the Northern Areas within Pakistan but does not claim it as part of the country in the written description.

Even within the written text the Northern Areas are represented in contradictory ways. On the first page of the census report, an explicit description of the territory of Pakistan is provided in a section titled “General Description of the Country.” As mentioned earlier, only the four provinces, Islamabad, and FATA are described as being part of Pakistan. Right after that, however, and just like the private school textbook discussed earlier, the existence of the Northern Areas within the state of Pakistan is implicitly acknowledged when the boundaries of the state are described:

“It is bounded on the north and north-west by Afghanistan, on the east and south-east by India, on the south by the Arabian Sea and on the west by Iran. The Peoples Republic of China lies in the north and north-east *alongside Gilgit*

²² Predictably, the District and Division-level census reports of the Northern Areas are extremely confidential.

and Baltistan, while close across the northern borders is the Central Asian State of Tajikistan” (Census Report 1998: 1, my emphasis).

Hence, we see the unity of the official construction of the Northern Areas – as embodied by the census – and the supposedly unofficial representation of the Northern Areas as depicted in the Muhammad Rabbani’s textbook for Pakistan Studies that I discussed earlier. In both these texts, spaces within the Northern Areas are implied as part of Pakistan when the borders of the state are described, but the spatial unit of the “Northern Areas” is not included when the territory of the state is described. Ironically, an administrative region commonly referred to as the Northern Areas of *Pakistan* remains absent from any official or unofficial description of the territorial composition of Pakistan.

As discussed earlier, the space of the Northern Areas is given prime focus when the geographical beauty of the country needs to be described. Accordingly, the census makes prominent reference to the physical features of the territory defined by the Northern Areas. For example, a section on the topography of Pakistan that begins on the first page of the census has a dedicated sub-section called the “Northern Mountains.” This section includes the following description:

“Trans-Himalayas or the Karakoram ranges in the extreme north rise to an average height of 6100 meters. Godwin Austen (K-2) is the second highest peak in the world (8610 meters) is located in the Karakoram. A number of glaciers cover these ranges. Siachen, Hispar, Biafo, Baltoro and Batura are some of the important glaciers.”

These glaciers are located in the Northern Areas, but this fact is never mentioned. Hence, even the physical landscape of the Northern Areas is included in an exclusionary way.

Later, a section on “Important and Historical Places” states:

“Pakistan offers to its visitors...un-spoilt natural beauty, boasting the densest concentration of high mountains in the world like mountain ranges of

Karakoram, Hindu Kush and Himalayas with world renowned highest peak K-2...and picturesque valleys like Kaghan, Swat, Gilgit and Chitral” (p. 73).

Kaghan, Swat and Chitral valleys do not lie in the Northern Areas, and are allocated separate sub-sections which provide details about their location, as well as general tourism-related information. No such description is provided about Gilgit valley, which lies in the Northern Areas, and has as popular a tourist site as the other valleys, if not more. Perhaps this is just a coincidence, but it is nevertheless striking that “beautiful” sites of Pakistan located outside of the Northern Areas are expanded upon, and situated within a specific regional context, whereas the scenery of the Northern Areas is appropriated as that “of Pakistan.”

The only landmark of the Northern Areas that is elaborated upon in a separate section is the Karakoram Highway, which is a 1300 km road that runs through the Northern Areas, connecting Pakistan’s capital city of Islamabad to Kashgar in China’s Xinjiang province. The section states that the Karakoram Highway is:

“the greatest wonder of modern Pakistan and one of the most spectacular roads in the world. It is an engineering marvel which connects Pakistan to China, twisting through three great mountain ranges (of) the Himalayas, Karakoram and Pamirs following one of the ancient silk routes along the valleys of Indus, Gilgit and Hunza rivers” (p. 81).

The location of the highway is defined by references to rivers, valleys and mountains, but the fact that these natural sites as well as the highway itself is largely located in the Northern Areas is not mentioned. This is yet another example which shows how the space of the Northern Areas is appropriated for the production of the nation-state, while the identity of the region is erased. The fact that the Karakoram Highway is the only feature of the Northern Areas that is detailed also suggests how the highway has become a prominent marker for the region, so much so that it has come to *stand for* the Northern Areas. As Haines has argued,

“the Northern Areas *is* the Karakoram Highway, in tourist discourse. The people and the places are things to encounter along the way, not really worthy of visiting in and of themselves. The landscape is de-peopled. The attraction, and selling point, are the highway, the deep river gorges, the glaciers, and of course, the mountain peaks” (Haines 2000: 196, my emphasis).

I would argue that what Haines suggests about the representation of the Northern Areas in tourist discourse also holds true for the overall discursive construction of the region. Hence, the official discourse about the Northern Areas can itself be seen as tourist discourse, as the region is produced as the picturesque essence of the nation. In the texts that I have analyzed, this prominent presence is also accompanied by a conspicuous absence of the region in almost all other discussions of the various regions of Pakistan. This reaches a bizarre level in the Census Report of Pakistan, where even the most fundamental “census” statistics about the region such as the size of its area and population are not provided. This is odd, given that in the preface of the census, the “Northern Areas” are specifically mentioned as being included in the census-taking process. If that is indeed the case, then it is not clear *what* data was collected from the region, as there is no evidence of it in the entire census report.²³ Hence, an acknowledgement of the presence of the “Northern Areas” creeps into the beginning of the report only to be subsequently negated. The section on migration does acknowledge the existence of the Northern Areas, when people specify “NA” (Northern Areas) or “AK” (Azad Kashmir) as their “place of previous residence.”²⁴ But the “present residence” only includes the four provinces and the capital city of Islamabad, suggesting that migration data was not collected *within* the Northern Areas. Hence, the only way in which the people of the Northern Areas are

²³ One possible explanation would be that since census data is categorized by “administrative units”, providing information about the Northern Areas would necessitate classifying it as an administrative region of Pakistan, hence negating the official definition of Pakistani territory provided both in the text of the census as well as in the constitution. Also, of course, more-than-basic data is collected from the region but cannot be included in the overall census report for strategic and political interests.

²⁴ There is a single column for “AK/NA” which suggests a relationship between these two areas – the only place in the text of the report where such a connection is suggested.

represented in the overall census is when they have migrated to a region which is officially part of Pakistan. They are given a place only when they are out-of-place.

Amongst all the texts that I have discussed, the census report holds a special significance as it can be seen as the closest expression of the state discourse on the Northern Areas. Like the official map, census classifications and enumerations circulate widely in institutions such as schools, businesses, government departments and the media. The Census Report of Pakistan is an all-encompassing text that represents and legitimizes the official depiction of Pakistan, making obvious to the population what the geographical, administrative, economic and socio-cultural composition of Pakistan is. This corresponds to Bernard Cohn's argument that the introduction of the census in India led to a political process of classification that objectified the culture and society of India, making obvious to the British as well as to the Indians what "India" was (Cohn 1987). However, the census not only has discursive power in shaping the national imagination, but also embodies material power as it can solidify totalizing identities (such as those based on "race" and "caste"), provide comprehensive quantitative data that can be instrumental for administrative control by the state (especially taxes), and play a crucial role in allowing people to make claims on the state. The latter aspect is often overlooked when the power of "texts" such as the census is investigated, as they are merely seen as tools for representation and control, not of entitlement and rights.²⁵

In the contemporary context of Pakistan, for example, the census results are constitutionally linked with the political, economic and social rights of the provinces of Pakistan, and hence, are a source of immense conflict and anxiety. In fact, the Housing and Population census of Pakistan which was due in 1991 could not be

²⁵ Cohn makes a brief comment about this aspect of the impact of the census, when he discusses how the census became "an object to be used in the political, cultural and religious battles at the heart of Punjabi politics" (Cohn 1987: 250).

conducted until 1998 as provincial governments felt that their powers and resources would be negatively affected by the incorrect (or correct) execution of the census. The situation is much worse for an area such as the Northern Areas, which is neither counted in the constitution nor census, and hence, cannot legally claim any kind of socioeconomic privileges from the state. Hence, the region's absence in the census has tremendous implications for the promotion of rights and development in the region.

Representation and the State

The official Pakistani constitution, census and the map embody discursive practices that in different ways, articulate the form and content of the nation-state. They offer key sites for understanding how the apparently simple and obvious “fact” of defining the territorial structure of the state is actually a deeply political exercise that naturalizes a particular way of perceiving the nation-state, and legitimizes its claims for sovereignty over a physical and social space. Thus, they are not objective representations of a fixed, concrete structure called the “state”; rather they constitute forms of knowledge that help to produce the state itself in its formal, official garb.

By emphasizing the constructed nature of the state, I do not mean to deny the existence of what Abrams calls the state-system – “a palpable nexus of practice and institutional structure centered in government” (Abrams 1988: 58). I intend to emphasize, as Abrams does, the state-idea – “an ideological artifact attributing unity, morality and independence to the disunited, amoral and dependent workings of the practice of government” (Abrams 1988: 81). However, while Abrams suggests the notions of the “state-system” and the “state-idea” as useful analytical devices in place of studying a reified entity called the “state,” he does not theorize the relationship between the state-system and the state-idea. By exploring sites such as the census and the map where agents who are part of the state-system articulate what the

ideal/material “state” is, I am proposing one particular way in which we might understand the connection between the “state-system” and the “state-idea.”

State-system institutions such as the Census Organization of Pakistan and the Survey of Pakistan in part derive their legitimacy from the state-idea, as they claim to enable a coherent entity called the state to effectively govern and defend the illusory common interest of the nation/society. At the same time, the working of these very institutions reproduces the state-idea by establishing spheres of state activity that articulate and objectify the state in particular political ways, but make these political articulations appear as neutral representations of a physical reality called the state. Hence, the “state-system” and the “state-idea” mutually constitute each other, and are “two aspects of the same process” (Mitchell 1999:77). As Mitchell argues, this process involves “mundane” material techniques of disciplinary power (including map-making and census-taking) that produce “spatial organization, temporal arrangement, functional specification, supervision and surveillance, and representation” (Ibid: 95). Such techniques create the effect of an abstract totality called the “state” which seemingly stands apart from society.

However, the “state” is not merely an effect of power. It is a crucible for the confluence, concentration and contestation of power relations. As Foucault has argued, “power relations have been progressively governmentalized, that is to say, elaborated, rationalized, and centralized in the form of, or under auspices of, state institutions” and that “in a certain way all other forms of power relation must refer to it (the state)” (Foucault 1983: 224). This suggests that the state-system itself is the key arena for the deployment of disciplinary techniques that, according to Mitchell, create the state effect. Practices of map-making and census-taking, for example, operate within the realm of the state-system as they are implemented by officials who are employed in state institutions. As such, they create the effect *of* the state, but are simultaneously

produced *by* the “state” as well. Though specific to the “state,” this argument echoes Foucault’s broader thesis that “knowledge is produced within the matrix of power and that power operates through the deployment of knowledge” (Ray 2000: 62).

The productiveness of census and cartographic knowledge for state power is not just limited to their contribution to the state effect, and to the perpetuation of the state-system and the state-idea. They also serve specific, technical purposes, some of which I brought up earlier while analyzing the cartographic and census-based representations of the Northern Areas. To reiterate and elaborate, maps and census are political discursive practices that embody and legitimize an official, objectified version of the nation-state. Maps are particularly instrumental in structuring the way the territorial divisions and boundaries of the nation-state are imagined, while the census is critical for classifying the places and people that constitute this territory. The statistical output of the census also provides a key source for guiding administrative policies, facilitating the state in resource distribution as well as population management. In effect, both mapping and census-taking are forms of producing the territoriality of the nation-state, where territoriality denotes the practices of classifying space, producing a sense of place, and enforcing control over space (Radcliffe 2001). Hence, they need to be seen as technologies of power that are constitutive of state spaces, instead of being reduced to mere representations of these spaces.

According to James Scott, the key characteristic which makes practices such as mapping and census-taking tools of power is their ability to make legible the spaces as well as the subjects governed by a state. This legibility, he argues, is one of the preconditions for the modern state’s exercise of power, as an illegible society is “a hindrance to any effective intervention by the state, whether the purpose of that intervention is plunder or public welfare” (Scott 1998: 78). More specifically, Timothy Mitchell has compellingly demonstrated how the map and the census were part of

novel disciplinary methods of order, that, through transparency and objectification, enabled Egypt to become “readable” for the colonial state and thus facilitated surveillance and control (Mitchell 1988). And similarly, Benedict Anderson has argued that the map and census aided first the colonial and later the postcolonial states in Asia and Africa, by classifying, standardizing and solidifying spatial as well as social identities that created a “human landscape of perfect visibility” for state control (Anderson 1991: 185).

Hence, it has become almost axiomatic to think that power over a space is achieved by implementing discursive techniques of legibility, uniformity, and transparency. The case of the Northern Areas, however, complicates this argument by demonstrating how the maps and census of Pakistan embody an opaque, inconsistent and distorting representation of the region. The Northern Areas may be included on the map, in the census, and even in textbooks, but with such silences and contradictions that it becomes hard to really *see* them. And yet, this illegibility cannot be interpreted as a sign of lack of state control in the Northern Areas. The region, in fact, is suffering from extreme forms of state domination. If indeed, the areas are under the rule of the Pakistan state, why do they not have a clear, standardized place in the representational discourses of the state? In the following sections, I will attempt to make sense of this paradoxical crisis of representation, and explore its connections with and implications for state rule in the Northern Areas.

Historical Overview

To understand why the Northern Areas defy a disciplined representation, the nature of their relationship with the Pakistan state needs to be investigated. For this purpose, I will first give a brief overview of the political history of the Northern Areas, particularly in relation to the dispute over Kashmir which has profoundly shaped the position of the Northern Areas within Pakistan. I will then outline how the Northern

Areas have been governed by the Pakistan state since partition, and explore the reasons behind their contemporary status within the country. And finally, I will examine how this status relates to the ambivalent representations of the Northern Areas, and how they both help to achieve the Pakistani project of rule in the region.

Before the partition of the subcontinent in 1947, the majority of areas that today constitute the Northern Areas formed part of the “Gilgit Agency” – a political unit (based around the mountain outpost of Gilgit) that was created by the British in 1877 to define and defend the Empire’s northern frontier, but became a permanent base only in 1889. The Agency comprised several independent local kingdoms, such as those of Hunza, Nagar, and Ishkoman. The British were able to conquer these territories through the active support of the Dogra rulers of Jammu, who in 1860 had annexed Gilgit to the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir. The exact composition of the Gilgit Agency as well as its relationship to Kashmir was never spelt out clearly by the British. This northern region of the British Empire thus remained a fluid frontier zone with multiple, intersecting systems of authority and alliance, rather than a borderland with firmly established boundary lines (Razvi 1971, Haines 2001, Rai 2004). In fact, after the establishment of the Gilgit Agency, the region became doubly classified as a dominion of the state of Kashmir as well as that of the British Empire. It therefore came to be supervised partly by the British Political Agent and partly by the Kashmiri Wazir-i-Wazarat (governor), though the administrative control of both was quite weak as the local princely kings had autonomous jurisdiction over their areas (Stellrecht 1997).

To gain more control over frontier affairs, the British in 1935 leased the Gilgit Agency from the Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir for a period of 60 years. However, on 1st August 1947, the last Viceroy Lord Mountbatten prematurely terminated the lease and returned the Agency to Maharaja Hari Singh who was the ruler of Jammu

and Kashmir at the time of partition. When the rulers of the princely states of India were given a choice to accede to either Pakistan or India, Maharaja Hari Singh of Kashmir decided in favor of India and stationed a new Governor named Brigadier Ghansara Singh at Gilgit. The entirely Muslim local population resented the accession of their land to a “Hindu” India by a Hindu Maharaja whose sovereignty over the region was already contested by local independent rulers. Thus, on 1st November 1947, the British-created local paramilitary force called the Gilgit Scouts initiated a revolt against Brigadier Ghansara Singh and arrested him with the help of the Muslim soldiers of the Jammu and Kashmir armed force stationed at Gilgit. The entire territory of Gilgit and Baltistan was liberated by the locals, who then established a new state called “Jamhooriya Gilgit-Baltistan” (Republic of Gilgit-Baltistan) with Raja Shah Rais Khan as its President (Ali 2001). However, this independence was short-lived: the leaders of the rebellion and the members of local ruling families realized that the region’s security as well as their personal interest would be better safeguarded with the Muslim-majority Pakistan (Ibid). Hence, they acceded to Pakistan on 15th November 1947.

The political leadership of Pakistan accepted the willful accession of Gilgit and Baltistan (the former Gilgit Agency) but did not formally incorporate the region into the state due to ongoing territorial tensions with India over the control of Jammu and Kashmir. Uprisings had emerged in different parts of this princely state since 27th October 1947 when its Hindu Maharaja acceded to India. The Pakistan state refused to recognize this accession, and claimed control over entire Kashmir on the basis of its predominantly Muslim population. India and Pakistan soon became embroiled in a full-fledged war over Kashmir in which, aided by local resistance, the Pakistani armed forces obtained control over 13,297 square kilometers of Kashmir that came to be known as “Azad Kashmir” (Free Kashmir) within Pakistan. On August 13th 1948, the

UN Commission for India and Pakistan (UNCIP) passed a resolution that called for a ceasefire between the two countries, the withdrawal of troops from Kashmir and the holding of a UN-sponsored plebiscite in both Indian and Pakistan controlled Kashmir to determine the political will of its people. In accordance with this resolution, a ceasefire line was established in July 1949 that separated Indian-controlled Kashmir from its Pakistani counterpart but the agreement to demilitarize and to conduct a plebiscite is yet to be realized. It is important to note that the 1949 U.N. resolution as well as subsequent U.N. negotiations regard the region of Gilgit-Baltistan as part of disputed Kashmir, even though it had voluntarily acceded to Pakistan in opposition to a political future with Kashmir. The status of this region that is today called the Northern Areas has thus become inevitably intertwined with that of Kashmir.

Territorializing a Disputed Territory

Gilgit-Baltistan's accession to Pakistan was not realized on the basis of any legally enforceable democratic rights that the new nation-state provided, or was obliged to provide to its new subjects. The Pakistan state took control over the space and people of the region, but the people were not granted even basic citizenship rights such as the right to vote and the right to have representation in parliament. Hinting at this asymmetrical relationship, a political activist from the region commented to me that "Pakistan got Gilgit-Baltistan for free," while another one remarked that "the leaders of Gilgit-Baltistan sold the place to Pakistan for free." This suggests a collusive arrangement that worked well for both the Pakistani government and the local ruling elites: like colonial times, the latter were given full freedom to continue their oppressive feudal relations while the former was not compelled to grant any rights or resources to a firmly controlled and pacified populace. The fact that the region was internationally considered disputed territory further absolved the Pakistan state from any responsibility towards its people. Moreover, precisely because of the

region's relationship to the Kashmir dispute, the Pakistan state began to implement coercive policies of territorialization that helped to strengthen its control over the space as well as the subjects of the region.

Between 1947 and 1972, the relationship between the Pakistan state and the region of Gilgit-Baltistan was remarkably similar to the one existing in colonial times: indirect rule continued through a Pakistani Political Agent in place of a British one, while the local monarchs continued to squeeze labor, produce, and taxes from their subjects. In some ways, the rule of the Pakistan state was even worse as the Political Agent implemented much despised policies. These included the State-Subject Rule, which allowed non-locals to own property, and the Frontier Crimes Regulation (FCR) that gave discretionary law-enforcing powers to state officials. In the 70s, the Pakistan state sought to obtain more direct control of the region for securing its northern boundaries. Popular resentment was tamed by abolishing the FCR as well as the authoritarian rule of local feudal kings. The territories that were previously divided into autonomous states and political districts were now integrated under the strategic name of the "Northern Areas" in place of the colonial "Gilgit Agency," and were brought under the direct control of the federal administration.

These integrative moves were accompanied by road-building projects – most prominently the Karakoram Highway – to “advance the conquest of physical distance, the extension of central control, and economic and political integration” (Ispahani 1989: 193). Along with facilitating this nation-state-building imperative of incorporating space, the construction of roads also served Pakistan's defence needs by providing a direct route to its ally China that would be crucial against aggression from India. The state has not only appropriated the space of the region, but also its subjects for the purpose of “national security.” Service in the Pakistan army is a major source of employment in the Northern Areas. The region's soldiers are exceptionally

proficient in high-mountain warfare, and hence, indispensable for Pakistan's military security in disputed Kashmir. It is ironic that they help to defend a state that denies them the most basic citizenship rights. It even discriminates against them in terms of military rights, by denying them higher positions and by blatantly disowning them when they lose their lives in state-sanctioned military activities, as I will discuss in the next chapter. Here, I will just suggest that the recruitment of Northern Areas people in the Pakistan military helps to achieve their "consent" as it cultivates a sense of patriotic fervor along with providing them with a means for economic security. This support constitutes a chief mechanism through which the hegemony of the Pakistan state is maintained in the region.

Contemporary Political Status

While territorializing practices such as those discussed above have continued on the ground, the broader regional status of the Northern Areas has remained undefined. As part of the disputed territory of Kashmir, the region continues to be claimed by both India and Pakistan, though it is centrally administered by Pakistan and indeed, constitutes 86% of Pakistan-controlled Kashmir. While the region is governed by Pakistan and even constructed as integral to its "geography" and "beauty," it nevertheless remains excluded from the territorial definition of Pakistan in official texts such as the constitution and the census. Hence, the region has an ambivalent place within official constructions of the nation-state of Pakistan. Its status has been further mystified by the state's attempt to distance it from disputed Kashmir. As discussed earlier, the Northern Areas were mapped as part of the disputed territory of Kashmir till the mid-80s, and were administered by a federal organ called the "Ministry of Kashmir Affairs." However, the majority of the territory of the Northern Areas is now depicted cartographically as part of Pakistan, and the federal authority is called the "Ministry of Kashmir Affairs and Northern Areas (KANA) and States and

Frontier Regions (SAFRON).” Despite this attempt to distinguish the Northern Areas from “Kashmir,” the people of the region were classified as Kashmiri Mohajirs (migrants) on the national I.D. cards issued to them by the Pakistan state. Thus, “official” policies on the Northern Areas have been ambiguous and contradictory about whether the region is part of Kashmir, or separate from it.

There is also a clear difference between the administrative mechanisms that are used to govern the two regions of Kashmir under Pakistan’s control: Azad Kashmir and the Northern Areas. While Azad Kashmir has an autonomous status with its own President, Prime Minister, Parliament and Supreme Court, the Northern Areas have not even been granted a provincial status. Instead, as mentioned earlier, they are administered directly by the Federal Ministry of Kashmir Affairs and Northern Areas (KANA), which is based in the capital city of Islamabad. Since October 1994, party-based elections have been held for a local assembly called the Northern Areas Executive Council, but it has not been granted any significant powers of legislation and administration. Moreover, it is headed by an un-elected Chief Executive (usually a non-local retired officer of the Pakistan army) who is answerable to the un-elected Minister of Kashmir Affairs and Northern Areas. The irony of the situation is captured well by a local poet, Ahmed Din, who said to me:

“In democracy, we have two bureaucrats under a political representative; here, we have two bureaucrats above a political representative.”

These representatives at least exist at the local level, even though they have been reduced to mere figureheads. At the national level, there is not even a single representative from the Northern Areas as the people of the region have been denied the fundamental constitutional right of voting in the national elections – a right that has been extended to all other parts of Pakistan, including Azad Kashmir and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). Similarly, the Northern Areas neither

have a High Court nor the right of appeal to the Supreme Court of Pakistan – essential judicial rights that also apply to other parts of Pakistan. The people in the region are thus exceptional subjects without citizenship.

The Logic of Post-Colonial Colonialism

The Pakistan state justifies the subjection of the Northern Areas by claiming that the Northern Areas are part of disputed Kashmir, and that their status cannot be altered until a UN-backed plebiscite is conducted in the region (Mian 1999). This logic is clearly contradicted by the representational practices of the state pertaining to the Northern Areas, as they demonstrate that the Northern Areas are consistently delinked from Kashmir. It is also dubious because Azad Kashmir also forms part of disputed Kashmir but the Pakistan state has not kept the inhabitants of Azad Kashmir under such extreme authoritarian rule for the sake of upholding international law. Here, I will not dwell upon the differential status of Azad Kashmir and Northern Areas within the “Kashmir dispute,” as that requires extensive historical investigation and is a separate thesis altogether. My concern is more specific to the predicament of the Northern Areas: why does the region remain deprived of fundamental constitutional rights and in fact, does not even have a well-defined political status?

Part of this ambiguity stems from the historical practices of British rule in the region. As indicated earlier, the northern frontier of the British Empire lacked firmly established boundary lines. The State of Jammu and Kashmir was not a homogenous, clearly demarcated space of authority (Maass 1994), and as such, the status of present-day Northern Areas within this princely state remained in constant flux throughout the colonial period. However, the ambivalent political place of the Northern Areas within contemporary Pakistan cannot simply be reduced to a colonial legacy, as it has been transformed and sustained during the postcolonial period by the policies of the Pakistani state.

Two reasons are usually pointed out for this continuing anxiety over the political status of the Northern Areas. First, it is argued that in the event of a plebiscite in disputed Kashmir, the people of the Northern Areas would most likely opt to join Pakistan, hence swaying the Kashmiri vote in Pakistan's favor. Thus, their relationship to Kashmir needs to be maintained, and as such, they cannot be officially classified as "Pakistani." Second, a formal incorporation of the Northern Areas would imply an acceptance of the Line of Control and a renunciation of Pakistan's claims over Indian-held Kashmir, both of which go against Pakistan's long-standing policy and strategic interests in Kashmir. Thus, the main reason for the marginality of the Northern Areas is precisely its centrality to the strategic aims of the Pakistan state in its northern frontier.

However, I would argue that the subjection of the Northern Areas cannot be understood just in relation to its instrumental value vis-à-vis Kashmir. There are troubling aspects of the region itself that make its integration into the nation-state problematic. To begin with, the contested status of the Northern Areas poses a contradiction for Pakistani nationalism which by its nature was anti-colonial – much like other Third World nationalisms that emerged in response to the experience of colonization. As Duara has pointed out, "the moral authority of new nation-states has often been built upon the distinction between 'imperialism' and 'nationalism' as discrete and oppositional forces representing 'alien rule by conquerors' versus 'self-rule'" (Duara 2003: 199). In the context of Pakistani nationalism, this distinction is unsettled by the exclusionary practices that characterize the rule of the Northern Areas. Even without such practices, the Pakistan state would find it hard to incorporate the Northern Areas into the universalizing narrative of nationalism. The region's diverse cultural and ethnic composition does not lend itself to essentialisms like "Sindhi," "Punjabi," "Balochi," "Pathan," and "Kashmiri" – "types" of people that are

made to map conveniently onto the Pakistani territories of Sindh, Punjab, Balochistan, NWFP, and Kashmir respectively.

Most importantly, as mentioned in the introduction, 75% of the population of the Northern Areas practices some form of Shia Islam, whereas in the rest of Pakistan, barely 10-15% of the population belongs to the Shia faith (Rieck 1997). The predominant sect in Pakistan is the Sunni sect of Islam, the beliefs of which form the crux of Islamist policies that have been undertaken by several governments in Pakistan. The Shia region of the Northern Areas thus poses a dilemma for the Sunni-oriented Pakistani state, given the context of the traditional rivalry between the Sunni and Shia sects of Islam as well as the political ramifications of this rivalry in the inter-state arena. It appears that due to their religious otherness and immense ethnic heterogeneity, the people of the Northern Areas cannot be culturally integrated into a universalizing narrative of the Pakistani nation, and because of the region's fraught relationship with Kashmir, it cannot be politically integrated into the Pakistani state.

Illegibility in Representation and Rule

The ambivalent and liminal political status of the Northern Areas is both produced, and maintained through the ambiguous and exclusionary representations of the Northern Areas, as discussed in this chapter. Representational illegibility sustains state power over the region through techniques such as pictorial but people-less valorization, naming, and ambiguous mapping, which silence the identity of the region and its people, and obscure their subjection and its connection to Kashmir. Simultaneously, these marginalizing representations create a reality in which the contested space of the Northern Areas is naturalized as an obvious part of Pakistani territory. Hence, far from being neutral, discursive depictions of material actuality, the representations of the Northern Areas materially constitute both rule and reality.

The question then emerges: what is the relationship between rule as discursive practices of representation (such as national maps), and rule as physical and social engineering through practices such as surveillance (chapter 2) which help to control the region “on the ground?” I would argue that while the former primarily serve to make the Northern Areas, its inhabitants and their exploitation illegible to the Pakistani nation, the latter make the region and its people legible and subject to the Pakistani state. In making this rather formulaic claim, my aim is to underscore one specific form of the analytical significance of legibility and illegibility, not to create a binary that reduces illegibility to an ideal realm of representation and legibility to a supposedly more material arena of rule. As discussed earlier in the thesis, the Northern Areas are also made legible within the representational discourses of the state through the inclusion and exaltation of their spatial features, especially their mountains and the Karakoram Highway. At the same time, the region can also be thought of as illegible within and to the Pakistani state as it has a constitutionally ambiguous status and remains deprived of participation within the institutional apparatus of the state. Moreover, representational technologies such as confidential district-level census reports have been used in the Northern Areas for producing legibility and enabling state control, while the political identity and predicament of the Northern Areas is often illegible to state officials, who after all, are also part of the nation. Hence, a complex dialectic is at work in which forms of legibility and those of illegibility differently but mutually help to accomplish the project of state rule in the Northern Areas – to keep the region under repressive domination for Pakistan’s political interests and military security in relation to the Kashmir conflict.

The role of representation in this project of rule must not be seen as subservient to “actual,” “real,” and “material” practices of repression and territorialization. Rather, representational devices themselves need to be seen as

repressive, territorializing practices because they help to naturalize realities that serve to legitimize and actualize rule over the space and subjects of the Northern Areas. As such, state territoriality and rule is not just about controlling space and converting it into a legible place, but – as this chapter hopes to have demonstrated – also about using representation to appropriate space, while reducing a specific controlled place to an illegible, almost non-existent space.

Thus, the discourse of rule that underlies the subjection of the Northern Areas is neither based on veneration – as for example, demonstrated by the construction of Manchukuo’s “peopled places” as sites of “primitive authenticity” (Duara 2003) – nor on denigration – as evidenced by the depiction of the Meratus as “disorderly primitives” and “immoral pagans” (Tsing 1993). Rather, power/knowledge practices appropriate and eulogize the physical landscape of the Northern Areas, but simultaneously invisibilize the identity of the region and its people. Hence, the Northern Areas are given a *space*, but not a *place*, through silencing representations which are “active performances in terms of their social and political impact and their effects on consciousness” (Harley 2001:87). They help to produce the absence of the Northern Areas, its people, and their exploitation within the national imagination of “Pakistan” and “Kashmir.” The power of these silencing representations suggests that we need to investigate not only how states “state” (Corrigan and Sayer 1985, Roseberry 1994) but also how they do not state, or cannot state, and regulate and dominate precisely by not stating.

Experiencing Illegibility

While the representational illegibility of the Northern Areas corresponds to a calculated political ambiguity that was put in place for historical reasons, it currently makes no sense to people in the Northern Areas. Some are simply outraged by the representational and political oblivion in which they find themselves, for it is a

betrayal of their historical choice and struggle to be part of Pakistan, and also a reflection of the callous arrogance and impunity with which they are ruled by the Pakistan state. Others characterize the Pakistan state as downright ridiculous for not claiming the land that it controls, like India, but rendering it “disputed” and “undefined” as if it makes strategic sense.

The invisibility of the Northern Areas in the cognitive map of Pakistan also affects people in the region at a most personal level. When people from Northern Areas study or work elsewhere – and there is a strong historical trend of out-migrations particularly in the winter months – they feel an acute crisis of identity as they are unable to identify themselves in terms that are recognized by other Pakistanis. Saying “Northern Areas” unsurprisingly draws blank stares, as it sounds like a general geographical region, not the actual name for an administrative territory in Pakistan. A village name or other meaningful regional names that denote place of origin – such as Shigar, Haramosh, Darel, Astore, Gojal – are equally unknown. Most people end up saying they are from Gilgit or Hunza, as these might sound more familiar and make more sense than the cryptic label of “Northern Areas.” But when asked where is Gilgit or Hunza, people have to say *shumali ilaqajaat* (Northern Areas) and get trapped again. Very often, the follow-up question is: “Oh is that ____” where the ____ could be NWFP, FATA, Waziristan, or any other place in Northern Pakistan that might have recently been in the news, but has nothing to do with the Northern Areas.

To circumvent the issue of clarifying what exactly the Northern Areas is, one NGO worker who belongs to Gilgit and whom I met in Islamabad simply says he is from Peshawar, the key city in the province of NWFP. As he put it:

“People are likely to think I am somewhere from around there either way, even if I say Gilgit, Hunza, Skardu, or the Northern Areas, which are far from Peshawar and have nothing to do with it. But Peshawar is readily understood.”

A student in Karachi, Gohar, had a more innovative solution, and expressed how he avoids any association with the northern parts of Pakistan given the current context where a particular, demeaning attitude towards the “north” prevails. I met him by chance at a library in Karachi, and suspecting that he is from the Northern Areas, asked where he is from. He said, “Central Asia.” I was even more curious now, and probed further about where in Central Asia he came from. He hesitatingly replied, “Hunza.” When I responded with, “Oh nice, I have been there quite a few times,” he was both surprised and relieved. Later on, I asked him why he introduced himself to me as someone from Central Asia. He explained,

“You know, I have just adopted that as my identity because when I say Hunza, people ask what is it, where is it, is it a village, and so on. When I say Northern Areas, they think I am from FATA. I don’t want to explain all the time, and these days, people make bad impressions of you when they find out you are from the north of Pakistan. People think we are all *jahil* (illiterate) and dangerous up there, but I am sorry to say, it is the Pakistani mentality here that is *jahil*. So it’s better to say Central Asian. By saying Central Asian, people know you are foreign and might give you more respect. It is also true, we do have much in common with Central Asian mountain culture.”

Hence, as one way to deal with the invisibility of the Northern Areas, people themselves invisibilize their link to the region in their self-representations with those from outside. But within the region, Northern Areas’ lack of spatial and political identity is the subject of intense popular discussion.

In particular, the absurdity of their placelessness is the subject of many stories as well as jokes that people like to tell about their ambiguous political status. For example, an ex-Major related to me in a group discussion:

“I think that God had complete plans to send the (October 2005) earthquake to the Northern Areas. But when His Lt. General came down to earth, he simply couldn’t find the region!”²⁶

²⁶ The October 2005 devastated Azad Kashmir and parts of the NWFP, but very marginally affected the Northern Areas.

The implication that even God was confused by state practices of illegibility drew an irony-tinged laughter from the group. The confusion, indeed, goes deep. Many humorous narratives in Gilgit, for example, highlight how government officials are themselves confused by the illegibility that state discourse has helped to produce. One popular narrative that was repeated to me several times goes something like this:

“A delegation from the Northern Areas went to Prime Minister Junejo in 1986 to demand constitutional rights, and especially the right to representation in Parliament. He said, ‘What rights? Of course you have rights. How can you not have rights?’ The delegation responded: ‘That’s exactly our point. How can we not have rights?’ Apparently, he too had confused the Northern Areas with FATA. What hope do we have, if even our Prime Minister does not know about our status!”

Another incident that circulates in Gilgit is as follows:

“Once a DC from down country was appointed to Gilgit. Can you believe that he landed in Peshawar, thinking that Gilgit was right next to it? Those who are sent to rule us don’t even know where we are located.”

Yet another experience was related to me by a Skardu-based member of the Northern Areas Legislative Assembly (NALA), Riaz Habib:

“In 2000, I was part of an NALC delegation that went to meet the Law Minister for demanding an expansion of the powers granted to the NALC. He was a very nice man, who promised us that he would look into the matter. Then, he asked me, ‘What is Chitral’s height?’ I gave him the answer. And then he asked me what hotel would I recommend in Chitral. At that point, I politely told him that Chitral is not part of the Northern Areas.”

Such narratives were related to me with a sense of amusement, but also with undertones of cynical bitterness. It often seemed to me that the humor or sarcasm with which people commented on their political illegibility offered a way to hide their anger, or deal with it. While the narratives might be performed as jokes, they reflected harsh truths and not made-up tales. The harsh truth, of course, is not just the rightlessness of the Northern Areas but the sheer ignorance of this condition, which

extends beyond the Pakistani populace to many state officials themselves who neither know the geographical territory nor the political status of the Northern Areas.

The “ignorant government official” is thus a dominant trope through which the Pakistani state is understood in the Northern Areas. Capturing the ignorance of the state is a key way in which Gilgitis express the hopelessness of their situation, but also one through which they poke fun at the state, and critique it. Through jokes, my interviewees in fact highlight how the Northern Areas is itself treated as a joke by the Pakistan state.

The ignorance of the Pakistani state might even be contrasted with the knowledge through which the British colonial state ruled the region. As Tariq Zafar, a veteran writer from Gilgit said to me,

“The *angrez afsar* (British officer) always had a pen and paper with him, and was interested in local languages and customs. His key purpose was to safeguard British interests but at least he tried to understand the region. And now we have Pakistani officials, most of whom are ignorant and incompetent.”

Thus, while practices of legibility that produced local knowledge were fundamental to the realization of colonial power, they also embodied a political recognition and cultural interest which – at least in retrospect – is deemed positive by formerly colonized subjects. One of the main grievances against the Pakistan state is precisely that it does not *know* and *value* the place under its control, making its rule less legitimate. This compels us to rethink the relationship between knowledge and power. Knowledge has perhaps been viewed too narrowly as merely the field through which governmentality is produced (Foucault 1980), but especially if it is non-orientalizing, knowledge also plays a more affirming role by producing value and validation for subjects of power. In some ways, at least, it is better to be seen by the nation and state, than remain unseen altogether.

CHAPTER 2

THE MILITARIZATION OF SELF AND SOVEREIGNTY

Rethinking Repression

“Every state is founded, in the final analysis, on force” Sayer (1994: 377).

The poststructuralist turn in social analysis has radically transformed academic understandings of power, by centering attention on the role of representation and knowledge in shaping the formation of states and subjects (Said 1978, Foucault 1980, Mitchell 1988, Scott 1998). As evidenced in the previous chapter, I draw upon much of this work in my own analysis of state-making in Pakistan. However, I argue that within analyses of state-making, the role of force and repression has largely been overlooked, or assumed to be self-evident. Force has been seen as just negative and juridical, not a relation which is integral to the production of power. Recent attention to sovereign violence explores how power entails the reduction of spaces and bodies to “bare life” (Agamben 1998), but this focus tends to essentialize the state of being in exceptional exclusion, ignoring the ideal-material relations of power through which particular abuses are made possible, legitimated, and cultivated (Butler and Spivak 2007). Additionally, it also discounts the social meanings and forms of negotiation that people supposedly reduced to a bare biological existence bring to situations of repressive power (Turner 2005).

This chapter interrogates the working of relations of force in Northern Areas, as they are institutionalized in state structures and experienced in everyday life. I attempt to capture the multiple ways in which the Pakistani military and intelligence agencies occupy space, politics, and subjectivities in this strategic border zone. My aim is to go beyond a conceptualization of the military that views it merely as a state apparatus of repression whose power lies in its monopoly of violence (Weber 1964, Poulantzas 1973). To make sense of the military-intelligence regime’s hegemonic rule

in the Northern Areas, I adopt a more grounded and processual approach which investigates how military power is rooted in the physical control of space, bodies, and resources, but also in its domination of discourse, emotions, and ways of being.

Militarization fundamentally structures state, economy, and society in Gilgit. It is critically linked to livelihoods and cultural orientations (Lutz 1999), shaping local understandings of family, region, and nation as well as people's identities and aspirations. I argue that while employment in the military creates *loyal subjects* and provides a way for the Northern Areas to belong to the nation, the activities of the intelligence agencies produce both a *surveillance state* and *suspicious subjects*, further reinforcing military power in the region. The production of such emotional dispositions as loyalty and suspicion is a process of *emotional regulation* that forms part of politically organized subjection and moral regulation (Abrams 1988, Corrigan and Sayer 1985), and is fundamental to the sustenance of militarized state power in the Northern Areas. At the same time, however, militarization is also a site of negotiation (de Mel 2007). Thus, I highlight historical and everyday moments that reveal how the military-intelligence hegemony in the Northern Areas is continually fraught with tension and contestation.

The Cultural Politics of Militarization

Studies of the military in Pakistan have focused on the issues of martial rule and civil-military balance (Jalal 1991), arms procurement (Siddiq 2001), the extensive military capital which is hidden from public view (Siddiq 2007), and the army's historical relationship with the U.S. (Nawaz 2007). While these studies contribute immensely to our understanding of military dominance in Pakistan, what is missing is a focus on the ethnographic experience and negotiation of military power. Instead of emphasizing the organization and activities of the military in Pakistan, or its relationship with civilian governments, this chapter explores the cultural politics of

militarization in Pakistan – it brings together the cultural-political discourses of rule, practices of domination, and emotional subjectivities through which military power works.

Militarization as a state-formative process is neither limited to the armed forces nor to war situations. Rather, it represents a cultural and political-economic process through which military structures and ethos become deeply embedded in state and society. de Mel argues that “a militarized society is one in which the military has taken ascendancy over civilian institutions, and is predominantly and visibly relied upon to police and regulate civilian movement, solve political problems, and defend and expand boundaries in the name of national security” (2007:12). While this definition applies well to countries like Sri Lanka and Pakistan, one might erringly conclude that national society in the U.S. is not militarized. I would argue, however, that militarization need not involve direct and visible dominance of the government by the armed forces. Rather, the political and economic dominance of the military can be represented by the powerful role of military-industrial corporations in creating a “permanent war economy” (Mills 1957) and in covertly shaping public policy (Lutz 2004). What defines the hegemony of the military over state and society is an investment in perpetuating a cultural ethos of militarism, in which military ideals are valorized and hypermasculinist and violent solutions to conflict favored (de Mel 2007). The result is an “addiction to war” (Andreas 2004).

In effect, a “military definition of reality” becomes the common sense for the nation (Mills 1956: 191 quoted in Lutz 2006). In this naturalized vision of reality, the meaning of “national security” is monopolized to promote a political economy that is centrally dependent on military institutions, armaments, and warfare. This political economy is underpinned discursively by “a shift in general societal beliefs and values in ways necessary to legitimate the use of force, the organization of large standing

armies and their leaders, and the higher taxes or tributes used to pay for them.” (Lutz 2004: 320). It is further sustained through a logic of perpetual hate, threat, fear, jingoistic patriotism and defense against internal and external Others. This discourse helps to justify and provoke more conflict, which only serves to prove the existence of the threat and bolster the need for more militarization.²⁷

In Pakistan, such an enabling discourse is provided primarily by a military-shaped nationalism in which India is constructed as an aggressive other that constantly threatens the existence of the country. This is not to suggest that the Indian state has not been hostile, but rather, that the military-dominated state in Pakistan has cultivated an extreme fear of India to the exclusion of other national needs, and also pursued aggression towards India as a means to legitimize itself and its hawkish policies. Additionally, the military also claims to provide internal stability by protecting the nation from corrupt politicians.²⁸ It constructs itself as an agent of cleansing discipline and security, erasing its own role in perpetuating profound violence, inequality, instability, and religious extremism to sustain its own interests (Nawaz 2007). “National security” in Pakistan has thus been reduced to the creation and maintenance of a strong and dominating military, supposedly providing internal and external protection through high defence spending, an arms buildup, and a direct role in government. For its survival, the nation is asked to prioritize the needs of military

²⁷ While otherizing discourses are integral to nationalism itself, their power in servicing a security state also stems from the gradual erosion of social solidarities. This erosion is the result of the break-up of traditional forms of community, along with neoliberal policies that have “privatized the public sphere...shifted responsibility for social problems onto individuals...(and)...undermined whatever ethic of social responsibility and alliances were forged through labor and social movements in previous decades” (Lipman 2004). When more and more people “have problems defining their own identity, or determining their own social or cultural affiliation...they feel lost, and are increasingly susceptible to the suggestions of nationalists and racists, who tell them to regard the Other as a threat, the enemy, as a cause of all their tiresome frustrations and fears” (Kapuscinski 2008: 42-43).

²⁸ Incompetent as well as co-opted politicians have lent credibility to this discourse, leading to a widespread tendency where people in Pakistan see the military as the lesser of the two evils.

personnel, giving it privileged access to state land and resources.²⁹ However, what lies under the guise of “national security” is a project of rule that has produced a military-dominated state, instead of one that facilitates democratic participation and equality, political negotiation of resources, and rule of law.³⁰ This has been achieved through the collusion and tacit approval of elites and civil political groups who have been patronized as beneficiaries in a military-dominated system (Siddiq 2007, Nawaz 2007).

Simultaneously, the perpetuation of a military-state in Pakistan has been fundamentally tied to U.S. patronage of the Pakistan army (Nawaz 2007). Since the second world war, the U.S. security agenda has entailed the backing of authoritarian regimes in developing countries, particularly military ones that tend to support, and gain from empire. Democratic governments tend to be less conducive to domination, and might even question the imperialist policies of the U.S. Pakistan has been especially pursued as a client regime in maintaining American hegemony, for its central role in defending capitalist ideology and Western oil interests in the Middle East (Alavi 1990). In return for compliance, and use of Pakistan as an army base for American military needs, the U.S. has extended significant military aid, armaments, and training to the Pakistan army. Alongside, it has sometimes knowingly ignored and at many times actively supported the army’s repeated use of internal and external violence, and continuing derailment of the democratic process. This support has been critical in strengthening the Pakistan Army’s sense of superiority and invincibility,³¹

²⁹ This has been a contentious process, of course, facing fierce resistance especially in the province of Balochistan. Nationalist parties in the province have consistently opposed the use of Balochi land as “state land” for nuclear testing and for expanding military cantonments.

³⁰ Because the military is Punjabi-dominated, increasing military authoritarianism is also perceived as a rise in Punjabi dominance which has already been a source of tense center-province relations.

³¹ As both Ayesha Siddiq and Shuja Nawaz point out, this disposition of untouchable power has meant that both the office cadres as well as rank-and-file soldiers have begun to feel that they are beyond question, and their perks and privileges – including subsidized electricity, water, gas, housing schemes, and agricultural land – are indisputable rights even in a context of massive inequality. Moreover, many in the top echelons have adopted grandiose ideas about how it is their duty to take direct control of the

with the result that the army has increasingly resorted to autonomous execution of military adventures as well as of Pakistan's foreign policy (Nawaz 2007). In pursuing unilateral, war-mongering military interventionism, the state of Pakistan has become a mirror image of its imperial master.

It is essential, therefore, to understand militarization at the nation/state level as part of the global U.S.-dominated process of empire-making and militarization, in which the international production and trade in arms feeds of, and builds upon national security regimes. The U.S. military-industrial complex in particular maneuvers political decisions in the U.S. towards hawkish goals (Lutz 2004), and ensures support to military client regimes abroad to sustain military consumerism as well as U.S. imperialism. Such short-sighted and destructive American foreign policies have enhanced the power of client militaries in states like Pakistan, where the army has come to dominate both politically and economically, and created extensive business interests of its own which further perpetuate the military's political predatory attitude (Siddiqi 2007). The so-called "strategic" interests of the U.S. have also entailed the cultivation of militant Islamic fundamentalism to contain Russian dominance in the context of the Cold War (Cooley 1999, Mamdani 2004, Abbas 2005) – a process that has continued to produce devastating consequences for state and society in Pakistan and Afghanistan. In the context of the war on terror, it is insufficient to now claim that the approach was mistaken, put the entire blame on the Pakistani military establishment, and try to replace it with conducive democratic regimes. What is required is deep accountability, admission, restitution, and rethinking of the entire political and cultural economy of militarization and foreign policy, both within Pakistan and the U.S.

state to make it "secure," according to their own self-fulfilling definition of national ideology and security.

The Garrison Region

While Pakistan in general is dominated by the army and may be seen as a garrison state (Kamal 1982), it is in a strategic and politically suppressed region like the Northern Areas where its garrison tendencies are especially manifest and entrenched.

Until ten years ago, a visitor to the Northern Areas may not have found any visible signs of military dominance in Gilgit, the key administrative center of this region and the town where I conducted the bulk of my fieldwork. It was the magnificent landscape that met the eye, inspiring an overwhelming sense of awe – a feeling that I still remember from my first trip to the Gilgit-Hunza region in 1996. By 2006, the feeling one got was one of fear and nostalgia. Although I had traveled to the Northern Areas several times during these ten years and even stayed there for extended periods, it was in 2006 that the change seemed drastic. Numerous checkpoints guarded by military and paramilitary units had been set up after the sectarian clashes of 2005 (chapter 3), and Gilgit now appeared to be a high-security zone instead of a tourist gateway. No matter how long I stayed in Gilgit, crossing a checkpoint always remained an unsettling experience of force.

Even before the coming of such palpable markers of military power as checkpoints, Gilgit seemed to be defined by a militarized landscape. Driving from the airport towards Jutial, in a short span of time, one passes the premises of the FCNA (Force Commander Northern Areas), Controller of Military Accounts, Army Public School, Askari³² Bakery, and Helicopter Chowk. Since I myself partly grew up in the Cantt area of Lahore, the existence of military memorials and buildings had become a normalized feature of my spatial experience of the city. So initially, I considered the military presence to represent nothing out of the ordinary in Gilgit – although the

³² An Urdu word for “soldier.”

pervasiveness of military symbols is extraordinarily pervasive everywhere in Pakistan. However, in 2006, the establishment of multiple checkpoints in Gilgit heightened the visibility of other military symbols and spaces as well. If Gilgit resembled a big cantt before, now it looked like a fortified army base.

The military dominates both state and capital in the Northern Areas, reigning over economic, strategic and administrative matters. Road-building and maintenance is a monumental service industry in the mountainous terrain of the region, and is controlled by the military-run Frontier Works Organization (FWO). The telecommunications infrastructure is under another army-controlled body called the Special Communication Organization (SCO), which is the sole provider of home phone lines in the Northern Areas.³³ Most significantly, the military exerts tremendous political control through its direct intervention in the administration of the Northern Areas. While there are multiple authorities that govern the administration of the Northern Areas, it is the Force Command Northern Areas (FCNA) – the Gilgit-based headquarters of the Pakistan army – that is considered the key institution spearheading the local administration. The Commander of the FCNA holds the position of Major-General in the Pakistan Army, and works directly under the 10 Corps – the crucible of army power based in Rawalpindi.

Amongst other tasks, the FCNA is responsible for supervising the Frontier Corps, the Rangers, the Field Monitoring Coordination Cell (FMCC), and the District Monitoring Teams (DMTs) – often known as Army Monitoring Teams. These teams were introduced in all of Pakistan by General Mushrraf after he took over through a military coup in 1999. Their role entailed the monitoring of the civil administration, and in practice, meant that military personnel were appointed to supervise even

³³ Mobile services were introduced for the first time in the region in August 2006, also by SCO. Private mobile companies were allowed to operate a few months later.

individual government departments within each district of Pakistan (HRW 2000). Such practices effectively paved the way for a more pervasive role of the army in the day-to-day governance of the country. These teams still continue in the Northern Areas, even though they were discontinued in the rest of Pakistan within one or two years of their formation.

The army “monitoring” undertaken in the Northern Areas is channeled through the FMCC and the DMTs, and is the source of intense local resentment. I was frequently told that it is these very institutional structures that directly enable *fauj ki hakomat* or army rule in the Northern Areas. The FMCC effectively controls the use of the Annual Development Programme (ADP) in the Northern Areas, selecting which development schemes will be approved, and who will be hired to execute these schemes. For example, the Northern Areas Public Works Department (NAPWD) is the biggest recipient of the ADP funds, and the appointment of Project Directors for various development projects under NAPWD needs to be approved by a Major/Colonel who is part of the FMCC. More generally, as a down-country bureaucrat posted in Gilgit, Naik Muhammad acknowledged:

“The civil administration is largely ineffective in all bigger matters. Posting and transfer above Grade 17 simply cannot happen without the approval of the army.”

For local government servants – those who are ethnically from the region of the Northern Areas itself – such army interference can be even more gnawing. They resent how army “approvals” for government projects often translate into the selection of down-country employees, instead of qualified people from the local populace. This reinforces the already strong perception in the Northern Areas that employment opportunities in the region are not only controlled unfairly by the army, but also predominately reserved for non-locals, particularly from Punjab and NWFP. For

example, I was often told how the Frontier Works Organization, the Frontier Constabulary, and the Special Communications Organization are military organizations that control key economic services in the Northern Areas and draw heavily from the region's budget, yet most of their employees are "outsiders."

An argument that is frequently given by the military establishment for the preferential treatment to non-locals in the civilian or military bodies is that there is "lack of local expertise." However, as a Gilgiti engineer, Barkat Yar indignantly responded:

"First of all, there are many locals who are well-qualified. But how will we ever get experience if we are never given jobs even in our own region? People here, in the mountains, have faced a lot of hardship to get good education and training. Many of us have worked for the local government in a junior capacity as well. Plus, we have the advantage that we know the region better, and have a higher sense of accountability as we have to continue living here. Those who come from outside will just come, make money, and leave. At the least, there should be some partnership. The government just wants to perpetuate non-local rule in the Northern Areas, they want to keep us subservient, they don't want us to ever get ahead."

Hence, local grievances about the "non-local" aspects of Northern Areas' political administration are often linked to the dominant presence and control of the army.

Politics of Desire and Honor

While the monopolizing role of the army in the political economy of the Northern Areas is a source of widespread resentment, the Pakistan Army is simultaneously an object of intense desire as well. This is because the army has historically provided one of the key avenues of employment, with the result that there is a strong tradition of military service in the region.

The employment of Northern Areas men in the military dates back to colonial times. At the end of the 19th century, the British established a unit of civil levies in the

Gilgit Agency, which was transformed into the Fighting Levies in 1903, and then into the Gilgit Scouts in 1913. Indeed, military employment was the first formalized source of wage labor in the Northern Areas, providing a dominant source of income in the form of active service as well as that of pensions (Stöber 2000).

Employment in the Gilgit Scouts was socially desirable not just because of its financial rewards, but also due to the prestige and privilege associated with working for a mighty foreign power – particularly its security forces. The British commandants of the Gilgit Agency tended to induct men from influential local families into the Gilgit Scouts, a practice that added to the Scouts' authority and appeal. Moreover, as an interviewee described:

“The Gilgit Scouts had both *rowb* (power) and *izzat* (honor) because they represented a salaried class, and had regiments, garrisons, medals – all of which attracted the imagination of people. In fact, soldiers of the Gilgit Scouts were regarded as the most eligible bachelors.”

This revered and glamorous status of the military continues today, even as other forms of paid work have emerged. The opportunities for military employment have also expanded, with the increase in the paramilitary forces from the Northern Areas and the possibilities of employment in army regiments outside the NLI.

Most importantly, there are concrete perks and benefits associated with military service that heighten its appeal for many families. As a number of women informed me, the children of army personnel pay Rs. 300-450 in the local Army Public School – considered one of the best in Gilgit – whereas a civilian child has to pay between Rs. 1100-Rs 1350. The former does not have to pay security fee, and their pick and drop is free. Two teachers of the Army Public School also mentioned that teachers cannot fail an army child. In the realm of healthcare as well, subsidized treatment is available to soldiers and their families. Put simply, families who have a member employed by the military are more privileged citizens, particularly in a

context where education and healthcare are often the two most critical concerns and sources of expenditure.

Given the glory associated with military participation since British times, and the economic opportunities and benefits provided by military service, it is not surprising that almost every person I met in the Northern Areas during my fieldwork had a relative who once served or continues to serve in the army.³⁴ Tales of army service, honors and courage frequently came up in my conversations and interviews, particularly when people introduced their family to me. For many families who have a strong tradition of military service, both military conquest and military sacrifice (*shahadat*) are described as the highest form of service to the nation. As the retired Colonel Ghulamdin told me in an interview:

“In 1948, my father conquered Targabal fort in Dras. Now in Kargil, my younger brother commanded a battalion in the same sector of Kargil. This is a huge honor for us. We can say with pride that we are true Pakistanis.”

Hence, the military is not just a form of employment; for many in the region, it is part of family history, identity, and honor. It reinforces their loyalty to the Pakistan Army, as well as their emotional bond with the nation. It is the production of such *loyal subjects*, as well as the status, opportunities, and privileges generated by army service, that play a critical role in producing the hegemony of the military in the region. In a context where the military is a key source of employment and by the nature of its service, an object of pride and respect, the possibilities of political assertion – that necessarily challenge military dominance – become severely limited.

It is not just out of economic need, and feelings of desire and allegiance that young men might join the army. Though I was not able to investigate this aspect in detail, I did come across two cases where the men had joined the army because they

³⁴ This is also due to the fact that a person has numerous “rishtaydaars” (relatives), given the complex and extensive kinship relations in the Northern Areas.

were doing badly in school, or had quit it altogether.³⁵ Their parents or relatives reasoned that joining the army was a better option than sitting idle at home. There are also cases of soldiers who want to leave the army within months of joining, but all soldiers sign a bond which prevents them from leaving till they reach a higher rank which might take ten years or more, and is hardly a realistic option. To leave before this point, soldiers need to pay around 2.5 lakhs or more, an amount that parents in the Northern Areas can scarcely afford. This contractual bond is yet another factor that adds to the power of the military.

Increasingly, however, many young men do not look at the army with the same source of prestige and honor as their parents' generation. Some question, and fear the kind of social values that a culture of military service propagates. As Aftab, a university student said to me:

“If you kill 100 people and come back, you become a *ghazi*.³⁶ If you kill 100 people and you die, then you are a *shaheed*.³⁷ Is this something to glorify?”

Whether looked upon as pride or resentment, the reality remains that a dominant tradition of military service in the Northern Areas has also entailed a high number of deaths of local soldiers during army operations. The possibility as well as the certainty of becoming a *shaheed* (martyr) can be a source of pride and honor, but also one of anxiety and loss for many in the region. The Kargil episode of 1999 is a recent and tragic case in point, where the martyrdom of Northern Areas soldiers engulfed the region in simultaneous pride and suffering, and also – importantly – an exceptional bitterness towards the high command of the Pakistan Army. An in-depth analysis of the episode is much needed, and could be the topic of a separate dissertation. Here, I shall just attempt to sketch an outline of the conflict, as well as its

³⁵ Minimum entrance qualification to the army is 10th grade.

³⁶ A war hero with a special religious status.

³⁷ A martyr with a special religious status.

profound implications for the Northern Areas – an aspect that has mostly been eclipsed in the state-centered discourse on the conflict.

Kargil

Between May and July 1999, Pakistan and India were embroiled in the worst armed conflict since the 1965 war, once again over the disputed territory of Kashmir. The encounter came to be known as the Kargil conflict or the Kargil war, as it was fought in the high-mountain district of Kargil in Indian-administered Kashmir. The conflict was all the more frightening since the long-term rivals had become nuclear powers barely a year before.

The strategic goal of Kargil for Pakistan – specifically the Army that had conceived the plan – was to cross over the Line of Control (LoC) into Indian-administered Kashmir, and then block India's land route to Siachin so that supplies to the Indian army stationed there could be interrupted.³⁸ To achieve this goal, the Pakistan Army launched a ground attack using its paramilitary troops – primarily the Northern Lights Infantry (NLI) which at that time was entirely composed of soldiers from the Northern Areas. Moreover, these NLI fighters were deployed in the garb of *mujahideen* to enable plausible deniability – Pakistan could claim that independent Kashmiri freedom-fighters had launched the struggle – and consequently India would not have an excuse to declare war on Pakistan. To give credence to this *mujahideen* effect, Kashmiri and Pakistani *jihadis* were also engaged under the direction of the army.

The NLI soldiers fought bravely and quickly made progress towards their assigned task, but when they called for support and supplies, no help was forthcoming. Pakistan was officially claiming that it was the *mujahideen* who were fighting, and

³⁸ Siachin is a glacier in disputed Kashmir, which Pakistan and India have fought over since 1984. It is considered to be the highest battleground in the world, where many soldiers from both sides have lost their lives due to the inhuman conditions in which they are forced to live.

hence, refrained from giving any ground or aerial support as that would reveal its own involvement. Indeed, people in Skardu movingly talk about how even the food needs of the soldiers had not been catered for, and hence, local families organized to provide food to their *jawans*. India, on the other hand, was fully equipped to respond to an infiltration of the territory hitherto under its control, and soon resorted to aerial bombing to quell the offensive. Left in the lurch in an already difficult glacial terrain, the NLI began to incur a heavy loss of life. Pakistan was eventually forced to retreat, due to the failure of its operation as well as direct pressure from Washington.

The military strategy of Pakistan was simply ill-conceived, and bound to fail – army-backed soldiers could gain ground, but without *any* support, how could they ever hold the ground in the face of the massive and fully-engaged Indian military? Second, the operation was deemed irresponsible by the international community at large, and shattered the diplomatic gains that Pakistan had made from the Nawaz Sharif-Vajpayee bus diplomacy barely three months prior to Kargil. When prospects of peace looked bright, and were being worked upon, why was there any need for an obviously offensive military operation? On the domestic front as well, much conflict arose between General Musharraf – the architect of Kargil – and the then Prime Minister, Nawaz Sharif, as the latter claimed that he was neither fully informed about the Kargil operation, nor gave his consent. Indeed, the fallout between the two over Kargil became one of the major reasons behind General Musharraf's coup barely three months later, in October 1999.

The real victims of this tragedy, of course, were the people of the Northern Areas whose bodies were used as fodder in a grandiose and reckless military plan. There was widespread discontent in the Northern Areas at the way in which NLI soldiers were left to tackle the might of the Indian army alone. However, the region erupted in total outrage when the Pakistani government even refused to accept the

bodies of the martyrs of Kargil, in order to perpetuate the myth that only *mujahideen* were involved. Angry processions were taken out by political parties and ordinary people, but they were crushed and several protestors were detained. It was only after India decided to honor the Pakistani soldiers by giving them proper Muslim burials that the Pakistan government was shamed into accepting the martyred bodies. The landscape of the Northern Areas continues to bear the memory of this martyrdom, as countless graves of the Kargil *shaheed* dot the region, each made visible by a white flag. The death toll from the conflict on the Pakistan side is estimated to be between 800-1000, while in the Northern Areas alone, the official count provided by the Ex-Soldier's Board is 561 martyrs. Apart from the martyrs and their families, the direct affectees of the conflict also include the hundreds who live in the border areas of Baltistan, and were displaced due to the shelling of their territory.

To diffuse local rage and make up for its callous betrayal, the Pakistan Army undertook a number of appeasement and control measures. For example, the Nishan-e-Haider was given to two martyrs of Kargil, one of whom was from the NLI – Lalak Jan, a resident of Ghizer district of the Northern Areas. Such honors also represented a grudging acknowledgement of the Pakistan state's central role in the Kargil “insurgency.” More significantly, a long-standing demand of the NLI was accepted and the hitherto paramilitary organization was converted into a full-fledged regiment of the Pakistan Army. This heightened the status and privileges accorded to soldiers from the Northern Areas, but simultaneously, also embodied a form of discipline as a regiment entails a mix of soldiers from different areas of Pakistan. Before, almost 100 percent of NLI comprised of men from the Northern Areas, but as a regiment, around 40 percent strength now comes from outside the Northern Areas. The Pakistan Army was thus able to dispel one of its chief fears after the Kargil conflict – the fear that a homogenous frontier force, when enraged, may rebel or organize against the state.

However, no matter how much the loyalty and courage of soldiers is tested and exploited, the possibilities of rebellion are already limited by the material dependency and emotional attachment that participation in the military generates. Becoming a *shaheed* for the sake of defending the nation is the highest goal that soldiers are trained to aspire towards. As such, Kargil presented a unique opportunity, and ironically, at least in some part helped to re-establish the loyalty of Northern Areas' subjects to the nation. While the families of martyrs suffered, they also learned to deal with their suffering because of the collectively recognized honor that is accorded to martyrs. Even several years after the conflict, people often mentioned their association with a Kargil *shaheed* to me with immense pride. Lalak Jan, who became the first recipient of the Nishan-e-Haider from the Northern Areas, has become a symbol of regional pride, and revered in local Urdu poetry as the one whose martyrdom finally enabled the region to get recognition within the nation-state of Pakistan. At the same time, however, expressions of indignation are still present as well e.g. at the Army high command's initial refusal to accept the dead bodies of Northern Areas' soldiers, and continued disregard for the promised compensation to some martyrs' families.

It is also important to note that my interviewees often had a nuanced take on the role of the army in the region, and that the same interviewee would frequently express both pride and criticism towards the military. For example, a passionate retired military captain who extolled the virtues of the Pakistan Army in general, and the bravery of the Northern Areas' soldiers in particular, also acknowledged:

“Our military psyche is that we are the best, and the *dushman* (enemy) is nothing. We have too much *guroor* (arrogance). There is no reflection, and no public accountability. This is why we blindly thought that we would conquer Kargil.”

For nationalist political parties in the Northern Areas – already agitating for constitutional rights – the Kargil episode was yet another case that epitomized the

highhandedness of the Pakistan state. Not surprisingly, their efforts as well as their popular appeal gained strength after Kargil. Unfortunately, their voices and legitimate grievances have never been heard respectfully, nor responded to diplomatically. Instead, they have been brutally crushed with repression, including bans on critical newspapers such as *Kargil*, intimidation, torture, and illegal detention of activists, and their engineered exclusion from local elections.

Ultimately, the Kargil issue brought to the fore the ironies and contradictions within the militarized relations of rule that structure the status of the Northern Areas in Pakistan. Northern Areas soldiers were fighting to defend a nation-state that has denied them even the most basic citizenship rights, and this denial is linked to the very dispute of Kashmir over which the Kargil war was being fought. Moreover, the same state even disowned their bodies once they were sacrificed for national “glory.” Yet, the bond of loyalty and the power of martyrdom is such that soldiers continue their service with dedication and courage. However, moments of martyrdom are not always moments of commemoration and fervor; they may also create a space for questioning whether a martyr’s death could have been avoided.

Shahadat (martyrdom)

One morning, in August 2006, the dead body of Captain Zameer Abbas was brought back to Gilgit from Balochistan. Captain Abbas was amongst the 21 security personnel who had died during a military operation conducted by the Pakistan Army against the Baloch nationalist leader, Nawab Akbar Bugti.³⁹ With everyone I met that day – students at the Karakoram University, staff members at a local NGO, shopkeepers, and taxi drivers – the topic of conversation was the Captain’s death. How Zameer Abbas was just 29 years old when he died. How he had gotten married just

³⁹ Nawab Akbar Khan Bugti was a former Chief Minister of Balochistan, and was also an elected member of the National Assembly.

last month, and how his mother was now in the hospital. It seemed that people in Gilgit, irrespective of sect or other affiliations, were mourning the tragedy that had befallen this high-ranking and respected local soldier and his family. A video of the funeral was also broadcast in the evening by local cable operators, and was keenly, if sadly watched by everyone in the girls' hostel where I was staying at the time.

Since I had arrived in Gilgit – barely a month before Captain Abbas's death – I had noticed that people around me were avid followers of the news, both in print and on television. Whether it was in the homes of people whom I visited for research or social purposes, or at the hostel, people would switch to the hourly news and critically debate it at length. This interest challenged my assumption that female homemakers or college-going students in Gilgit would not care much about the news. My misconceptions were perhaps a product of elite conceit and disconnect, which had led me to believe that in general, people in villages and towns must be quite apathetic, and hence ignorant. They are supposed to be too busy worrying about their survival.

The assumption that when it comes to broader structural and political issues, the “masses are unaware” or “masses do not care” is of course, deeply flawed, but perhaps one that remains powerful in both intellectual and popular elite imagination. It was at the time of the Balochistan operation, however, that I realized that beyond general interest, people in Gilgit might have a stronger reason to follow the news, particularly in recent times with the escalation in “internal security operations.” Such political events were not remote and inconsequential realities; they directly and personally affected people in the Northern Areas as the region provided the very bodies on and through which the “national security” politics in Pakistan was being played out.

The flourishing of relatively independent, private news channels – which many have called a “media revolution” in Pakistan – provided an added draw to the news.

The power of a free media dawned on me at this particular time of my fieldwork. The state-run Pakistan Television (PTV) was remarkable in its demonization of Nawab Akbar Khan Bugti, as well as its open justification and even celebration of the army operation. Moreover, PTV pathetically insisted that things were completely “normal” in Balochistan after the operation. On the other hand, private news channels such as ARY-World and GEO highlighted the prominent political status and legacy of Akbar Bugti, the mass unrest and condemnation that followed the operation, and the diverse views on the operation from parliamentarians in official buildings as well as people on the street. What even such independent channels did not highlight were details about the soldiers who had died in the operation, and where they came from. For this, people around me in Gilgit turned to their local cable channel.

Commentary on Zameer Abbas continued for several days in everyday conversation and local newspapers. Mixed with the grief was a palpable sense of resentment. When I talked to the female cook, Shahnaz, at the hostel about the operation, she said:

“Killing one’s own people? Where is such a principle followed? Use of force can never be a solution.”

An ex-government servant, Mohammad Khan commented:

“They keep sending our men to danger zones such as Balochistan and WANA. Whereas those from other areas are sent to Lahore and Karachi.”

Through similar comments, both the need of internal security operations as well as the dominant presence of Northern Areas’ soldiers in these operations was being contested. In multiple articulations, people seemed to be asking: how can the Pakistani government use fighter jets and gunship helicopters to openly kill a prominent leader of an already marginalized province? And second, why are soldiers

from the Northern Areas repeatedly used in such military operations, instead of soldiers from Punjab or other areas?

Very often, a sense of resentment was followed with a sense of pride or vice versa. For example, right after criticizing the military's repeated use of NA soldiers in danger zones, the same government servant Mohammad Khan said to me:

“You know our soldiers are from the mountains, so they know how to fight in mountainous terrain. They are very brave and competent. Look, the *shaheed* Captain was so young, and yet he was qualified enough to be sent to an important mission.”

A similar sense of pride and veneration was expressed to me by a taxi driver, and by a student at the Karakoram University. Perhaps this sensibility is precisely what enables people to deal with military deaths. The death of a *shaheed* needs to be honored, not questioned – it has become a structural disposition in a context where every family has a man in the army.

And yet, even a genuine sense of glory in *shahadat* for the sake of the nation can sometimes fail to give comfort to those who lose their family members in the process. A female cousin of Captain Abbas, Safia, lamented to me:

“What was the point of his death? He didn't have to die...he shouldn't have died. The women suffer when their men go away in the army, and they suffer when their men die for the army.”

The gendered aspect of the suffering was also brought home to me a year after Captain Abbas's death, at the time of the Lal Masjid operation in July 2007. Once again, people around me seemed to be watching the news with more than a general interest. I was having lunch with Sitara, a 26-year old friend who was an administrative assistant in a local NGO. We were sitting in the cafeteria of the NGO when I noticed that she was visibly distressed, and not eating. When I asked why, she explained:

“You know my brother-in-law, Safdar bhai, did not call last night. He is part of the battalion that is fighting against the Lal Masjid clerics. There was no light in our house yesterday, so we could not even watch the news. And today, a TV channel said that 6 soldiers have died, but they did not reveal the identity of these soldiers. Before I came to the office, I could not breathe and my throat was dry. I felt more sick thinking what my sister must be going through. She is in the village these days. The phone is not working there, so Safdar bhai calls me and I communicate the news to my sister through a neighbor. My sister could not even keep calling me for information, because otherwise my mobile would be busy when Safdar bhai tried to call. A while ago, finally, Safdar bhai called and he said he was fine. It was such a relief for all of us, but I still feel tense. Who knows, when...I just keep looking at the phone.”

The Surveillance State

The anxiety and suffering linked to military employment that I have highlighted above is heightened by the repressive role of the intelligence agencies in the region. *Yahan har doosra banda jasoos hai* – every other person here is a spy – is one phrase that was repeated to me countless times during my research stays in Gilgit. Initially, I thought that my friends and colleagues were either paranoid, or exaggerating the role of the intelligence agencies so that I would be extra-cautious in my research. However, I gradually discovered that while not every other person may be a spy, the presence and control of intelligence agencies in the Northern Areas was indeed quite exceptional, and that their pervasiveness had become a social fact in the Northern Areas, firmly rooted in people’s experience.

Intelligence agencies are generally quite powerful in Pakistan, often described as forming a “state within a state” due to their apparent independence from the Ministry of Interior as well as the Ministry of Defence. It is also widely recognized that agencies – particularly the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) – have played a decisive role in electoral rigging, and in the production of religious militants for Pakistan-sponsored movements in Afghanistan and Kashmir (Abbas 2005). However, the role of agencies in the micropolitics of government remains an under-studied area of analysis. The secrecy and repression that shrouds intelligence activity is an obvious

barrier to such an analysis; nevertheless, my field research revealed aspects of the local perception of agencies that can help to illuminate their complex political role, as well as how it shapes the social fabric of the region.

If military domination in the Northern Areas has translated into a garrison state, the work of the intelligence agencies has created what I call a *suspicious state* that both creates and feeds on surveillance and suspicion. Agencies in the Northern Areas have been able to expand their already unchecked powers in extraordinary ways, as the structure of political representation and accountability that is at least formally present in the provinces is completely absent in this federally-controlled, garrison territory. Further, agencies have used the disputed, border status of the region, along with the specter of its always-suspect Shia populace, as grounds for spreading their reach. As a result, there are known to be at least eight different intelligence units operating in the small vicinity of Gilgit, with spies employed all across the Northern Areas.

I did not have to ask about the “role of the intelligence agencies” in my interviews – it would inevitably come up itself whenever I asked about the political and administrative issues that afflict the region. My interviewees – across sect and other social locations – pointed out that agencies are fundamental to the working of the military establishment in the Northern Areas. They closely monitor and shape the dynamics of the local administration. The decision to induct, promote, and dismiss government servants is often critically dependent on the extensive dossiers that agencies maintain through their network of hired informers. These dossiers detail the views expressed, and activities undertaken by potential or existing government employees in private or public. This is to test whether any action could be interpreted as a sign of critique or dissent, and hence, a source of suspicion. Such dossiers are also maintained for journalists, teachers, and political activists to keep them in check. As

part of this reconnaissance, intelligence agencies regularly tap phone lines, and intercept postal and electronic communication. They have also embedded informers as journalists in the local media to ensure the monitoring of media personnel and censorship of the news. Moreover, house searches, messages of warning, detaining people without charge, and violent interrogation techniques are routine methods of agency harassment and coercion in the Northern Areas.

During my fieldwork, several interviewees matter-of-factly mentioned that they knew a person or even a *rishtaydaar* (relative) in their village and neighborhood who worked for the agencies, or has been approached to work for them. In a casual conversation with a taxi driver once, I learned that he himself previously worked for the agencies, but since the money was not enough, he decided to take a loan to buy a car and becoming a taxi driver instead. The normality with which he brought up his employment for an intelligence agency was disconcerting to say the least, but after an extended stay in the region, I realized that the taxi driver was not an exception. In a context of widespread unemployment, many people spy to get an extra income and this had become a taken-for-granted reality in the region.

Importantly, the way people accept and valorize employment in the Pakistan Army does not apply to the agencies. In fact, it would not be an exaggeration to say that intelligence agencies are the most despised element of the state establishment in Gilgit. A number of linked reasons are responsible for this sentiment.

To begin with, working for the agencies was often described as a result of a person's *majbori* – his helplessness due to economic need– and a cause for disdain as this need was being used as a weapon to create disaffection in his own community. More importantly, there is widespread bitterness at the manner in which agencies create and sustain the representation of the region as an untrustworthy, treacherous space. People are acutely aware – and painstakingly insist – that this representation

has no correspondence with reality, and it is perpetuated only because it serves to justify the agencies' own survival and control.

As Ataullah, a teacher from a local government college tellingly explained:

“It is not that agencies exist because we are unreliable. We are assumed to be unreliable so that agencies can exist (my emphasis). We are the most loyal and peaceful Pakistanis. Ours is the only region that actually fought a war to become part of Pakistan – the other areas became part of Pakistan by political settlement. Our men have also given sacrifices for Pakistan in the 1965 war, in the 1971 war, and in Kargil. People from Punjab, and from Azad Kashmir have been caught spying for India, but never from our region. Then why aren't we trusted? The border is an excuse, Shias are an excuse. It is because agencies run this place, and this is what they do...they suspect, and make everyone appear suspect. This is the biggest problem facing us – this suspicion, and this lack of trust. This is why we are denied any identity, any political rights.”

Juxtaposing this comment with one from a member of the Northern Areas Legislative Assembly (NALC) yields further insight:

“A country needs intelligence agencies for its security. But more than ensuring external security, the agencies in our region create internal insecurity through suppression. They make sure that no rights are given to us, and if we ask for our legitimate rights, they make sure that our voices are crushed.”

A journalist adds:

*“It is like thought control. So many of us live in fear, and are afraid to freely discuss anything in public – what if there is a spy around? Last week, when I sent a report about the region to a newspaper in down-country – under a pseudonym – I first got a threatening warning on phone, then through an agent who came to my house. They do this to remind us that they know where we live, where our families are. This *ghatiya* (debased) pressure is brutal. We have to ask: who benefits from this system? By denying us our rights, and holding us in fear and suspicion, it is the military establishment that benefits because they want to maintain their unchecked privileges.”*

Surveillance and suspicion are thus integral to the working of the political process in the Northern Areas. People are *assumed* to be suspect *by definition*, simply because they live at the border, and on top of that, many of them happen to be non-Sunnis – an identity that has been rendered antithetical in a gradually Sunni-ized

nation-state. In practice, this presumed suspicion has translated into a regime of monitoring and intimidation by a military-intelligence establishment, for whom the suspicion serves as a convenient rationale for maintaining its own political and economic authority. If there is any expression of critique or dissent at the abuses of this establishment, it is treated as a threat, and as evidence of a disloyalty that is already presumed.

But there is another dimension to this politics of suspicion. It helps to accomplish rule not only because a military-intelligence state suspects its citizens, and uses this suspicion to further its control, but also because it *creates suspicion amongst citizens*. Apart from suspected subjects, it produces what I call, *suspicious subjects*. This is done primarily along sectarian lines: by actively transforming the Shia-Sunni sectarian relation from one of pluralistic difference into a polarized hostility.

Suspicious Subjects

Sectarian tension is the most significant arena in which the role of agencies is widely recognized, and condemned. I was often told that “agencian firqon ko larwati hain” (agencies make the different sects fight), and “agencian fasad ki jar hain” (agencies are the root cause of conflict). Of course, theology itself fosters a sense of incommensurable values (Shaikh 1989) and along with bigoted religious practices – such as inflaming mosque sermons, and stereotypes learned at home – creates a potential for discord between people with different religious beliefs. This potential is all the more volatile amongst the highly contested interpretations of Sunni and Shia Islam. However, it is human action – not primordial beliefs – that has produced conditions for the creation of sectarian conflict in modern times. In the Northern Areas in particular, this action has been principally initiated and coordinated by state authorities, especially its secret service agencies.

According to my interviewees, the invasive role of intelligence agencies in the region emerged in the beginning years of the 1970s. In December 1970, Gilgit saw a massive civil political protest that shook the centers of power in this strategic territory. In response to the insulting attitude of a non-local military commander's wife towards a local student, the office of the DC in Gilgit was stormed by a massive crowd of people from across sect and social class. The DC ordered a local Gilgit Scout soldier to fire at the protestors. The soldier refused, firing in the sky instead. This strengthened the crowd, and shocked the Pakistani establishment which now realized that troops drawn from the local population could not be solely relied upon to enforce rule.⁴⁰ The authorities responded with jailing hundreds of protestors, but the crowd en masse broke into the jail to release their compatriots. The incident reflected a growing popular resentment against bureaucratic authoritarianism in the region, subsequently enabling local political groups to more forcefully assert the region's call for justice and accountability.

An official document, Report of the Committee of the Northern Areas (Government of Pakistan 1971), acknowledged the significance of the 1970 incident and recommended the actions of appeasement that needed to be taken in response. It suggested that people of the region had to be given some rights, so that they can be incorporated more firmly within the Pakistan state. Otherwise, they might rebel.

Accordingly, the Bhutto government in 1973 abolished the princely kingdoms in the region, relieving people from much hardship and strengthening the direct rule of the Pakistan state in the region. Simultaneously, however, state institutions – chiefly the army, intelligence agencies, and the KANA⁴¹ bureaucracy – embarked upon a

⁴⁰ By 1975, the Gilgit Scouts which were hitherto responsible for law and order in the region were disbanded, and the responsibility of local security was passed on to the Frontier Constabulary (FC) troops or other army units that employed non-local, primarily Punjabi or Pukhtun soldiers.

⁴¹ KANA stands for the Ministry of Kashmir Affairs and Northern Areas; it is the Islamabad-based federal institution that directly administers the Northern Areas.

divide-and conquer project that aimed at creating disunity along sectarian lines, in order to thwart future expressions of regional solidarity and secular-nationalist aspiration.

The language of “divide-and-conquer” is not my own reading of the situation; this English term is widely used by my research subjects to describe the Pakistan state’s approach towards the Northern Areas since 1972. The divide-and-conquer policy firstly entailed state sponsorship of Sunni and Shia religious organizations, which were required to spur sectarian animosity as a means to deflect political energy and agreement (Shehzad 2003, Personal interviews). Maulvis from both sects were paid by intelligence agencies to engage in dehumanizing tirades against sectarian others, through wall-chalking, mosque loudspeakers, and publications. While each sect was played against the other – primarily the Sunni against the Shia and vice versa – the Sunni sect was more patronized as the Shia identity has been rendered antithetical in a gradually Sunni-ized Pakistan state (Qureshi 1989).⁴² Hence, the religious suppression of the Shia community in the Northern Areas became central both to the project of creating regional disunity and subordination, as well as to that of imposing an orthodox, Sunni interpretation of Islam on the population. A turning-point in these projects of rule was the 1988 pogroms against Shias in Gilgit (chapter 3) in which the military-intelligence as well as the bureaucratic regime in Gilgit played a defining role.

Apart from subverting regional solidarity, sectarian conflict in the Northern Areas is also useful for the military state, as it serves to produce the very “sectarian” subject which it ascribes to the region, thus reinforcing the need for its own presence

⁴² Making such a statement in the Northern Areas immediately invokes the accusation of bias, and a defensiveness amongst many of my Sunni friends. However, it needs to be clarified that recognizing the partisan nature of sectarian politics of intelligence agencies is not tantamount to an anti-Sunni agenda, but rather one that fundamentally questions the privileging of *any* sectarian identity, and inquiring how the Sunni identity has been exploited to strengthen a military-intelligence establishment in the Northern Areas.

for maintaining “law and order.” According to two political commentators in the region, the Pakistan army has used Sunni-Shia riots as an excuse to expand military presence and influence, by transferring key civilian posts to army brigadiers, and deploying paramilitary forces.

State sectarianization in the Northern Areas has also entailed the induction of a particular kind of political leadership into the grain of government in the Northern Areas. In their everyday practices, state officials such as the political agent, the district commissioner, as well as the general in FCNA gradually began to patronize their own sect – the Sunni sect since barring a couple of exceptions all were Sunni – while simultaneously playing both Shia and Sunni sects against each other. According to Sajid Zafar, a serving government official, this involved telling Sunnis in the region that the government belongs to them and that they can and should control the Shias, while telling Shias that they are in a majority and thus should be able to tame the Sunnis. Such discursive engagements constituted a requirement of the government, to keep stoking the sectarian fire. Not that all Sunni officials did this, but that a particular kind of leadership increasingly became normalized, fuelling sectarian patronage as well as inter-sect suspicion.

Such practices of mobilizing suspicion, hate and violence radically transformed the nature of community in the Northern Areas. In the Gilgit district of the Northern Areas, the time before the 70s is remembered as a time of shared life-worlds, when religious identities were fluid and pluralistic. Though inter-sect skirmishes are acknowledged, people by-and-large respected and even participated in each other’s religious rituals, and inter-marriage across sects was fairly common, with the result that several families in the Northern Areas today have members who belong to different sects (Aase 1999, Sokefeld 2003). However, state-engineered religious hate and violence have served to tear apart the pluralist social textures of life in the

Northern Areas. Each group is more “Shia” or “Sunni” now, shunning cross-communal social interaction as well as inter-marriage.

The continuing state sponsorship of hate ideologies and discriminatory practices has aggravated sectarian conflict in the region, and also seeped into people’s religious and political subjectivities. They have led to a routinization of suspicion in the Northern Areas, producing suspicious subjects who harbor immense sectarian paranoia and emotional ill-will towards each other. How this suspicion is evidenced in everyday contexts is the subject of chapter 4, but here I would like to emphasize the work of suspicion in state and subject formation.

While the role of emotions such as patriotism and loyalty in producing national subjects is widely recognized, that of suspicion in the making of states and subjects remains under-researched. Suspicion is a corrosive emotion that creates particular patterns of everyday behavior and social interaction, while also helping to legitimize major political decisions. It is integral to nationalism, as nationalist ideologies seek to create a singular Self by marginalizing and excluding various Others which they are suspicious of. The others – be they religious, ethnic, regional, or racial – need to be seen with distrust and vigilance, and hence constantly monitored, contained, or thwarted. Increasingly, the discourse of permanent threat and the availability of new technologies has led to a “surveillance society” (Murakami-Wood 2006) in which the citizenry as a whole is suspect, and intricately monitored in ways that are not open to public scrutiny and accountability. Thus, the logics of secrecy, suspicion, and surveillance have come to define the very nature of the late modern state (Feldman 2008), bolstering the militarization of citizenship that a security state already entails.

In this chapter, I have highlighted how these logics have been integral to the working of the military-state in the Northern Areas. Along with the panoptic gaze and control of the military-intelligence regime in the Northern Areas, it is the suspicion

and paranoia that it generates amongst citizens which produces power, by fostering sectarian conflict and thus eroding social cohesion and possibilities of political cooperation. Paranoia can thus be seen as a “psychic panopticon” (Harper 2008: 6) that is integral to governmentality and rule.

As discussed earlier, narratives from my interviewees in the Northern Areas also reveal a dominant sentiment that state power itself is paranoid. And that this lies at the heart of the repression that they face. This sentiment is corroborated by research elsewhere. Several scholars have documented – for countries such as the U.S., U.K., Canada, Russia, and Germany – how undercover law enforcement can be disproportionately paranoid, its scale bordering on the ridiculous and tactics nasty and outrageous (Marx 1988, Buse et al 2000, Blum 2003, Lyon 2003, Los 2004, Murakami-Wood 2006, Shorrock 2008).⁴³ An endemic surveillance of the population driven by paranoia in turn becomes a condition of possibility for producing paranoia and conspiracy theories amongst citizens (Harper 2008). Paranoia, thus, reflects “an intensification of normal processes instead of a departure from them.” (Barringer 2004: 8).

Ironically, while intelligence agencies in the Northern Areas thrive on creating suspicion amongst the populace, their activities in turn create suspicion towards the agencies themselves. Indeed, any discussion of political and religious conflict in the Northern Areas would be incomplete without someone mentioning: *is mein to agencion ka haath hai* – “the hand of (intelligence) agencies is responsible for this.” Since there is an experiential awareness of the pervasiveness of intelligence agencies, and an established understanding that agencies regularly maneuver political activity,

⁴³ The extent of political manipulation and media control that local and foreign intelligence agencies engage in can be gauged by archival documents that demonstrate the working of agencies in the Pakistan of the 1950s. See, for example, <http://www.icdc.com/~paulwolf/pakistan/anticommunist7aug1951.htm>

they end up being the prime suspect whenever there is any incidence of conflict and violence in the Northern Areas.

This reverse suspicion offers some solace, as people in the Northern Areas across sect – aware and wary of the “hand” of intelligence agencies – have come to see sectarian conflict as being a political instead of a primordial matter. The heightened visibility and interference by intelligence organizations has thus resulted in the subversion of their own power. While the role of local maulvis and external players is recognized, it is the state itself and particularly the intelligence agencies that are perceived to be the major culprits, trying to create sectarian conflict to continue a divide-and-conquer project. We might say that this reverse suspicion reflects a crisis in the legitimacy of the state.

Such attitudes serve to denaturalize sectarianism, as people blame incidences of sectarian conflict on sectarianizing state practices instead of fellow citizens. They offer hope, because the state project of producing hate is punctured. Unfortunately, it is not entirely thwarted. As highlighted earlier, repeated occurrence of sectarian violence and discrimination has sadly, also infected social imaginaries and subjectivities such that there is intense paranoia and resentment between members of different sects (chapter 4). Religious sentiments form a deeply personal and sensitive aspect of a community’s roots, making differences along religious lines perhaps the most volatile of all difference. It has been convenient for national and international powers to mobilize this religious potential for strategic ends, creating intolerance and vicious conflict.

That the divisive, strategic politics is undertaken by abusing religion is a source of particular moral outrage in the Northern Areas. As Nawaz Jan, a government official, said to me:

“The saddest reality is that they have made us fight in the name of Allah and the Prophet. It is despicable. They have no *deen* (faith) and no *iman* (integrity).”

His critique, and despondent anger is widely shared. I also mention Nawaz Jan in particular to highlight that the recognition of the divisive role of intelligence officials is also present amongst members of the local state itself.

The next and final section of this chapter discusses how state officials themselves have also undertaken critical action against state-backed sectarian hatred – efforts that need to be recognized even if they are not met with immediate success.

Critical Struggles within the State

Because of its divisive role, government in the Northern Areas is generally seen as a monolithic entity that rules through malice, manipulation, and “dirty politics.” At the same time, however, we need to recognize that the state on the ground is hardly monolithic, represented ultimately by the actions of countless individuals from within as well as outside the Northern Areas. Many of these individuals conduct their work and personal lives with a thoughtful concern for the region, viewing their role in the government as a meaningful duty which they must fulfill with a sense of service and responsibility. While academic understandings of social change value the agency of “people”, somehow individual state functionaries are excluded from this valuation and become collapsed in broad portrayals of the “state.” Particular in terms of progressive struggles, recognizing the agency of individual state functionaries is critical for grasping the friction within the state, so that we understand state action not as pre-given but as an ongoing process of negotiation. Hence, while I argue that the historical working of the Pakistani state has been detrimental in many ways for people’s sense of belonging and security in the Northern Areas, I also wish to

emphasize the critical voices that exist within the government – perhaps at the margins but significant nonetheless for they too constitute the state.

Shiraz Qamar is a case in point. During the period of my fieldwork, Qamar was serving as a high-ranking civil bureaucrat in the Northern Areas. He seemed to be quite popular and well-respected in Gilgit. In everyday conversations or interviews, Gilgitis would criticize the government for its high-handed attitude towards the region, but often end with: “Shiraz Qamar is a good official though; we need people like him in the government.” On asking why Qamar was regarded as different from other officials, I variously heard that he was “considerate,” “competent,” “principled” “accessible,” and someone who “listened to issues and tried to resolve them.” People across the social spectrum seemed to admire his personality, work ethic, and importantly, his politics. Sadly, it was precisely because of his principled nature and politics that he was ultimately “relieved” from his post.

Unlike many previous bureaucrats, Shiraz Qamar could not readily reconcile himself to the domineering role of the military in the Northern Areas. He was proving to be “difficult” for the military establishment in Gilgit because he did follow an unspoken norm of government in the Northern Areas – taking the consent of the FCNA military command in all matters. But it was his reluctance in maintaining the government’s sectarian attitude that proved to be the major source of contention between him and the army-intelligence regime.

Shiraz Qamar had decided to take action against the leading Sunni cleric in the Northern Areas, after attending his Friday *khutba* (sermon) in which anti-Shia sentiment was being preached. Qamar felt that this was a clear violation of regulations related to loudspeaker use in mosques, and needed to be particularly curtailed in a region that had recently experienced such intense Shia-Sunni violence. The cleric’s house was subsequently raided, and sophisticated weapons were discovered which

now constituted a more serious breach of anti-terror laws. However, when the civil government in the Northern Areas decided to press forward with stern action, the move was strongly resisted by the military command. It was made clear to Qamar – as it has been evident to locals for long – that the cleric was being patronized by the intelligence agencies and the army. Qamar refused to bow down, which eventually led to his transfer from the region.

I have highlighted Qamar's case in particular because it was a more recent and publicly visible example of friction within the state. But there are many state officials who struggle within the state, and try to steer it in a more democratic and pluralistic direction. Such struggles *within* the margins of the state, even if unsuccessful, revive some faith in the egalitarian potential of the state, and serve to demonstrate to those marginalized by the state that the state can be a source of justice, instead of conflict and abuse. However, it is not easy to undo the damage caused by a sustained investment in sponsoring and realizing religious hate. A structural transformation is required, which would entail public scrutiny and effective political control of the military and intelligence agencies in Pakistan.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have attempted to explore how the military-intelligence regime has become integrated in state practice and everyday experience in the Northern Areas. The regime's control of political administration in Gilgit is a form of repression that constitutes a key aspect of military power. But to understand the hold of the military and intelligence agencies in the region, we also need to attend to the emotional regulation through which its power is embedded in the Gilgiti social imaginary. I thus highlight the politics of desire and aspiration that the military engenders, as families strive to become part of its economic opportunities and privileges. Indeed, the process of local employment in the military and sustained

participation in security operations such as Kargil has produced a structure of feeling that cultivates honor, pride, and loyalty towards the military, and hence, towards a military-state: these constitute the conditions of possibility for continued military authoritarianism in the Northern Areas. Efforts to challenge this status quo are made all the more impossible by the surveillance and hate-mongering activities of intelligence agencies, which have served to create suspicious, sectarianized subjects with decreased capacity for political solidarity. At the same time, however, the power of the military-intelligence regime is also contested through critical reflections that construct the regime as a source of insecurity, injustice, and violence, particularly in the national context of rising “security operations” which have deeply affected the lives of Northern Areas’ soldiers and their families.

In the next chapter, I discuss how the process of sectarianization – sustained partly by the military-intelligence establishment as I argued in this chapter – is also evidenced through other state institutions and policies, breeding more insecurity and violence in the Northern Areas.

CHAPTER 3

SECTARIANIZATION AND ITS DISCONTENTS

Sectarian conflict between Shia and Sunni Muslims has increasingly undermined political stability and social development in the Northern Areas. Very often, however, Shia-Sunni sectarianism is reduced to primordial theological differences, or understood merely in terms of militant violence. In contrast, I argue that to understand sectarianism in the Northern Areas, we need to attend to the regulatory practices of state-making which have sought to sectarianize space, politics, and subjectivities in the region.

In the analyses of sectarianism in Pakistan, the state is understood largely as an instrumentalist policy-maker, and its role limited to considerations of law, the control and proliferation of madrassas, and party politics (Malik 1996, Zaman 1998, Nasr 2000). My study, on the other hand, focuses on how sectarianism is embodied in state practices of “politically organised subjection” (Abrams 1988) and “moral regulation” (Corrigan and Sayer 1985) through which the social identities of subjects are constructed for the accomplishment of rule. In the previous chapter, I discussed how the creation of suspicion and division has been a means for sectarianizing citizens by the military-intelligence regime in the Northern Areas. In this chapter, I attend to the work of sectarianized textbooks in producing Shia-Sunni conflict. I also examine how state practices of sectarianism are resisted through collective action – a silenced topic within studies of sectarianism in Pakistan. Hence, I illuminate how between 2000-2005, Sunni-biased representations of Islam in school textbooks led to the most potent Shia mobilization against the state in the Northern Areas, as well as the worst episode of sectarian violence that the region has experienced in the last two decades. This “textbook controversy” – as it came to be called – offers a key point of entry to

understand the historical structuring of political and religious life in the Northern Areas.

The Past of Sectarianism

In several conversations that I had with Gilgitis over the course of my research, people commented on how new the present situation of sectarian bitterness really is in the region. Particularly for those who are middle-aged and older, memories of a more harmonious past are very real and recent, and the change in sectarian relations palpable. For example, Noor Afroz, a thirty-eight year old Shia woman from the Ampheri area of Gilgit related to me:

“I remember that when I was young, there were always women who brought fruit and juice in our (Shia) *majalis* (religious gathering) in *muharram*. Only later, when the conditions changed, did I become aware that these were Sunni women.”

Similarly, Parveen Bibi, a fifty-year old Sunni woman from the same neighborhood in Gilgit said:

“It wasn’t like this in previous times. We met women from other communities who were also living close by. We didn’t even know who was of what sect. *We didn’t think about it* (my emphasis).”

Sectarian identity, hence, did not seem to be an active category of subjectivity and thought in the Gilgiti social imaginary – especially so in the social universe of women. People in Gilgit do acknowledge that notions of sectarian difference and even revulsion existed, more in some places than others, and perhaps this has been part of Muslim history in many places. But this did not mean that sect hampered the way in which people connected with each other in practice. Debates about Shia and Sunni theology could continue – even leading to each sect acrimoniously claiming its superiority – without any actions of violence, and denial of the right to be different. A

peak into the colonial record also lends credence to this, even as I recognize the contested and partial nature of the “facts” and “knowledge” embodied in the archive.

In 1890, Colonel John Biddulph, the first British “Officer on Special Duty” for the Gilgit Agency wrote:

“The people of Chilas, who were always a less tractable race than their neighbours, make it their boast that, though travelers and traders are safe in their country, no Shiah ever escapes out of their hands...In Gilgit, at the commencement of the Sikh occupation, the greater proportion were Shiah or Maulais⁴⁴, and it is related that any Sonnee falling into their hands was branded with a hot iron unless he consented to become a proselyte” (Biddulph 1890: 118).

Having said this, Biddulph immediately recognizes that:

“Wherever Soonnees and Shiah are found living together, they seem to practice a mutual tolerance rare in other purely Mahommedan communities. Intermarriage between the sects is so common as not to excite remark...They (the Maulais)...wherever permitted, live on good terms with Soonnees and Shiah, with whom they intermarry without restraint” (Biddulph 1890: 119-123)

According to my interviewees as well, the *rishtaydari* (kinship ties) stemming from inter-marriage between Sunnis, Shias, and Ismailis established “mutual tolerance” and served to cement ties across communal lines. Perhaps it is erroneous to even consider these relations as “inter-” marriage or “cross-” communal because sect was not considered a defining marker of identity and community. What mattered more in terms of social identification and differentiation was affiliation with a *qoum*, an agnatic descent group that might be translated as tribe or people. Alongside the significance of *qoum* identity, there was also *ilaqiat* – a recognition of difference, and contention between people from different geographical regions. Both tribe and region were more crucial signifiers of difference as compared to sect.

⁴⁴ A historical name for the Ismaili Muslims of the region.

Communal peace and understanding was further helped by the common body of work that people across sect drew upon for religious and ethical guidance. For example, the writings of the Persian poet-scholar, Sheikh Saadi, were deemed especially important for Muslim education, and were referenced both at home and by the local *maulvi* who taught Quran to the children in his neighborhood. These writings were known for their moral guidance, and deemed integral to the practice of religion. In the modern school as well – introduced in the region by the British in the late nineteenth century – the possibility of conflict over what counted as legitimate religious practice was minimized as religion was not part of the subjects that were taught. Indeed, an older Gilgiti ruefully commented on how he studied with Hindus and Sikhs without any sense of religious conflict,⁴⁵ while the current state of intolerance is such that “Muslims cannot study with Muslims.”

The maintenance of sectarian peace was further enabled by both princely and colonial rule in the region that today forms the Northern Areas. Royal alliances as well as marriages were often cross-communal and as in other monarchical regimes in princely India, the ruling families in the Northern Areas practiced a form of “managed pluralism” (Copland 2000) in which the accommodation of different communities was considered foundational to the political and moral order. For the British as well, the imperative of geopolitical security at this frontier translated into a special concern for internal peace and calm. Quite apart from practices of “divide and conquer” along religious lines – as colonial policy elsewhere in the subcontinent often instituted – the norm at this frontier was to keep local rulers and conflict situations in check so that the overall political control of the region could be ensured.

⁴⁵ The 1947 partition changed the communal dynamics, forcing the several Hindu and Sikh families settled in Gilgit to migrate to India.

Pluralism and coexistence was thus the norm in the mountainous region of Gilgit-Baltistan, similar to what Mushirul Hasan has argued for Hindu-Muslim relations in qasba society in Awadh (2004). In both contexts, local relationships were considered more important than religious structures, helping to share risk, manage disputes, and co-survive. In Gilgit-Baltistan, even religious occasions were considered more cultural than sectarian; in particular, Shia mourning rituals and gatherings in *muhammad* were not only respected by other groups, but also involved their participation. As Hasan has argued for colonial Awadh, one of the reasons for the transcommunal importance of Muharram might be that “the Karbala paradigm itself communicated profound existential truths not only to Shias but also to Sunnis and Hindus” (Hasan 2004: 37).

Hasan, however, suggests that pluralism was a mark of the gentry in Awadh, and emerged primarily from their education and self-conscious role as carriers of ethical piety. In Gilgit-Baltistan, on the other hand, a pluralistic religious sensibility can be seen as a “pre-secular tradition” (Nandy 1988), integral to a local life-world where sectarian identity did not disrupt social relations. Indeed, modern education in the postcolonial context of Northern Areas contributed to the erosion of inter-sect peace and social solidarity, as I discuss later in this chapter.

1988

Before discussing the textbook controversy, I would like to highlight an earlier critical event that marked a significant turning point for inter-sect relations in the Northern Areas. Indeed, *atthasi ka waqia* (the incident of 1988) or *atthasi ka tension* (the tension of 1988) has become a historical reference point in people’s memories, with social and political life perceived as perceptibly different before and after 1988.

Between 13th May- 24th May 1988, a systematic pogrom was launched against the Shia populace of Gilgit area by well-armed Wahabi-Sunni *lashkaris* (militants),

most of whom were non-local and came from the NWFP (Shehzad 2003, Ahmed 2005). Ostensibly, the immediate cause was a sectarian squabble over the sighting of the Eid moon, which led to the Shias celebrating Eid one day before the Sunnis. But as interviewees across sect pointed out to me, it is highly improbable that such a localized, and even commonplace argument would overnight turn into a large-scale slaughter in which fully-equipped militants from outside would descend upon Gilgit, claiming to wage *jihad* on Shia *kuffar* (infidels). The estimate for the number of militants ranges from 2,500 to 40,000 (Rieck 1995); that the figure is in the thousands alone points to the planned nature of the violence. At least 12 Shia-dominated villages were brutally attacked, through acts of torture that were wholly new to the region – bodies were burnt, *imambargas* (Shia mosques) torched, crops destroyed, and even animals were slaughtered. Villages like Jalababad were completely ruined, and civilians in several other areas fled from their villages to seek protection. The official death toll was put at 200, but unofficial accounts estimate the number of deaths at 800 (Aase 1999). Accompanying this physical annihilation was the cultural project of transforming both local Sunnis and Shias into “proper Muslims.” The militants distributed pamphlets to local Sunnis that preached how any *rishtaydari* (family relations) – let alone marital ties – with Shias are un-Islamic, and how Shias must be converted and shown the “true” path of Islam. Those who survived this period recall how Shia Muslims were forced to perform *namaz* (prayer) amongst Sunni *maulvis*, and how married Shias were forcibly divorced and then made to go through a new Sunni *nikkah* (Muslim marriage contract).

Such open and outrageous violence against the Gilgiti Shias must be understood in the context of a national and international mobilization of political Islam that continues to ravage Pakistan today. On the one hand, General Zia’s Islamization agenda had institutionalized a conservative Sunni interpretation of Islam that

sanctioned the repression of other sects (Weiss 1986), while on the other hand, the U.S., Saudi, and Pakistani governments had actively transformed frontier Sunnis into militants for the Afghan jihad against Russia (Cooley 1999, Mamdani 2004, Abbas 2005). The ideological training of these *mujahideen* promoted a fanatical, militant version of Sunni Islam that was also rabidly anti-Shia. Once the Afghan war ended, the thousands of Wahhabi militants who were well-equipped to hate and kill in the name of Islam returned to Pakistan, and focused their *jihad* on perceived internal enemies of Islam such as the Shias (Abou Zahab 2002). In this, they found common cause with the Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP), the most prominent Deobandi-Sunni political party that had emerged in Pakistan in 1985. Both *mujahideen* and SSP activists were supported by a gradually Sunni-ized Pakistani government, the Wahhabi monarchy in Saudi Arabia, and by the U.S. administration as all three states were interested in countering Shiite radicalism in the wake of the Iranian revolution (Abbas 2005). And both formed the bulk of the perpetrators of the 1988 Shia massacre in Gilgit.

The 1988 violence was thus a consequence of a transnational U.S.-Pakistan-Saudi political alliance, and of its narrow Cold War vision of achieving “strategic” goals through the support of Islamist militancy. The blowback – in the form of sectarian violence – had begun way before the U.S. suffered itself in the form of the 9/11 attacks. Emboldened by the “success” of the Afghan jihad, Zia’s military government, the ISI and the Islamist groups could now expand their reach in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Indian Kashmir, using militancy as a strategic tool for political power as well as for the assertion of an extremist Sunni ideology. Indeed, it is widely believed in Gilgit that the perpetrators of the 1988 violence had been specifically given the task of “teaching a lesson” to Shias in areas where the latter had a prominent presence. Lending credence to this is the fact that earlier in the same year, state-

backed violence had also occurred in Parachinar, another Shia-dominated region in Pakistan (The Daily Times 2005). Thus while the sectarian assault was exceptionally devastating in Gilgit, it was certainly not an isolated event.

More than the *lashkaris* and their international benefactors, Gilgiti Shias resent the Pakistan state for its role in the 1988 massacre. They hold General Zia directly responsible, arguing that the operation was in line with Zia's Islamizing agenda, and could not have taken place without the backing of his military regime. Moreover, the KANA Minister of the time, the Frontier Corps, as well as two higher-up military officials who were then posted to the Northern Areas are directly named and blamed for their involvement in the attack – to the extent that some state officials joined the *lashkaris*, instead of protecting Shia civilians. Twenty years later, Gilgiti Shias still ask: How is it that the non-local *lashkaris* knew well the location and access routes of Shia-dominated villages? Why was there no curfew imposed, or any attempt made to stop the *lashkaris*? No official inquiry about the violence has yet been published, and many Shia leaders still demand accountability and compensation for the losses that the community sustained in 1988.

The most devastating long-term consequence of the 1988 violence was that it introduced among Muslim communities in the Northern Areas, a vehement fear and intolerance of the other. While there were numerous cases of Gilgiti Sunnis extending protection to their Shia relatives and neighbors, several hardliner local Sunnis had also participated in the violent campaign, which severely polarized inter-community relations and generated several episodes of sectarian violence in successive years. Each group was more “Shia” or “Sunni” now, shunning cross-communal social interaction as well as inter-marriage.

Alongside this mistrust and hostility emerged the drift towards weapons. The Shia community in particular realized its vulnerability, and felt that it had to acquire

weapons for it to be perceived as a strong force, and thus for ensuring future security. The concern for self-protection and self-assertion likewise prompted other communities to purchase weapons.

A violent event such as that of 1988 can cause both structural transformation in the way communities are organized, as well as intense personal suffering. Those who lived in mixed villages and fled their homes in 1988 regret how they are not able to return home even to visit their ancestral graves. Even those who may not have directly witnessed the violence can nevertheless remember its chilling sound, because the *naara baazi* (chanting) of the lashkaris was deafeningly loud.

The subjective transformation caused by the traumatic violence of 1988 was particularly brought home to me one day when I attended a cultural show with two female students at the local university, KIU. Because of bad weather, the spacious outdoor venue at the university was changed into an indoor hall, with the result that only 300 people could be accommodated instead of the more than 500 who had bought the ticket for the event. There was quite a ruckus outside as the men who were denied entry fought with the management, and tried to force their way inside. The 20 or so women in the crowd, including myself, had comfortable seats indoors thanks to patriarchal privilege, and were sitting with a number of male acquaintances with whom we had come to the event.

The event predictably ended early, and I returned with my friends to the hostel where I was staying at the time. While we all had felt anxious at points, one of my friends, Gulnaz, seemed overly edgy and paranoid. She felt that the hall would be burnt down and the *izzat* (honor) of women was at stake. In fact, when Gulnaz was recounting the experience to other hostel girls who had not attended the event, I felt that she presented quite an exaggerated version of the entire episode. It seemed almost comical to me. With a slight smile, I said: “Don’t you think you are reacting a bit too

much? The situation was not *so* bad.” She replied: “No *baaji*. You don’t know. Anything can happen in Gilgit.” I tried to calm her down, telling her that she worries too much. Eventually, she relaxed and said:

“*Mein dari dari si rehti hoon* (I tend to feel scared a lot). I was eight years old when I saw the *hamla* (attack) on the Shias, in 1988. My father is in the army and was stationed in Bonji at the time. Women were in the fields without their *dupattas* (scarves), trying to hide from the chanting *lashkaris* who were destroying everything they saw...homes, fields, cattle, people. We are Ismaili and we were in a military cantonment, so we were safer but still so vulnerable...since then, I feel nervous in public events. Anything can happen in Gilgit.”

Gulnaz’s comments completely threw me off. I apologized to her for being dismissive about her feelings earlier, and tried to imagine how it must have been to witness such violence at the age of eight. I had heard about the brutality that 1988 signified for the region, but I had not realized the intimate ways in which the experience of sectarian conflict can transform the emotional selves of victims.

The Present

For investigating the experience of Shia-Sunni sectarianism in the Northern Areas, I had prepared a research outline that entailed semi-structured interviews with members from both sects in a mixed neighborhood located in the heart of Gilgit. Once I arrived in Gilgit, however, I realized the sheer difficulty of implementing this aspect of my research plan. After three visits to the neighborhood with a local research assistant, it became clear that while my respondents would talk to me – some more eagerly than others – they would nevertheless remain suspicious of my intentions and affiliations, especially since I was seen to frequent both communities. I was told by the community members as well as by acquaintances that sectarianism is a “sensitive issue” and that I should not go around discussing it “openly” otherwise I would become “visible.” Heeding the advice, I decided not to go door-to-door in a specific

neighborhood – not that this was ever going to protect me from visibility in the small, socially connected, and heavily monitored site of Gilgit. My focus thus remained on interviews with key informants as well as participatory observation, both of which enabled learning through building relationships, conversations, and informal networks.

Besides, I soon realized that I did not have to limit myself in space and structure to understand the experience of sectarianism. Every other person I met seemed to have a tale of personal suffering to share in relation to sectarian conflict in Gilgit. When I mentioned my research topic to Gilgitis, many of them would invariably talk about a life under curfews with severe food shortages, and the fear that children are out in school when there is violence going on in the city. Some remembered particular days – such as Jan 8th and October 13th in 2005 – when they could hear firing from morning till evening and thought that “Gilgit would simply end.” Others matter-of-factly mentioned how they had lost family members in the many incidents of sectarian violence that have taken place since 1988. I had not realized that the stories of sectarianism were so ubiquitous.

Saima, a Sunni girl, could not undergo a safe delivery as the only government hospital of Gilgit is located in a Shia neighborhood where she was barred from going due to ongoing sectarian tensions. Amin is a Shia student who has been engaged to a Sunni relative of his parents choosing for ten years, but cannot marry her as recent inter-sect discord has made his extended family disapprove of the match. Such cases – like Gulnaz’s case discussed earlier – illuminate how the personal and the political are intimately tied, and capture experiences of sectarianism that are overlooked in accounts centered on death tolls and curfews.

The imprint of the sectarian conflict can even be felt in the landscape of Gilgit. While there are neighborhoods such as Central Gilgit where all three communities continue to reside together, other “mixed” mohallas have increasingly transformed

into segregated dwellings, making it easier to identify a “Shia” *ilaqa* (space) from a “Sunni” or “Ismaili” one. The tensions of 2004-2005 strengthened this trend, as some of the remaining Sunni households living in Shia-dominated Khomer moved to the more Sunni-dominated Basin and vice versa. The towering mountains that surround the town have also been informally classified as Shia and Sunni, based on the sectarian composition of the neighborhoods that lie underneath. This was an outcome of a conflict between Shia and Sunni communities concerning *charagah*, the practice of lighting up the mountains on cultural occasions that are often sect-specific.

The sectarianization of space is also manifested in the schools attended by Gilgiti children. Again, there are government-run schools such as High School Number 1 and private ones such as Aga Khan Higher Secondary that children of all communities attend. However, as several respondents pointed out, there is a growing parental preference for schools that are dominated by their own sect, or located in sect-specific neighborhoods. As Saeeda, a Sunni woman residing in the Ampheri area of Gilgit told me:

“There is a school in Zulfiqarabad which I would like my son to attend. But that is not our territory, and I would always be scared for his safety in case the (sectarian) situation became tense. That is why I have enrolled him in Tameer-e-Millat which is in our area, and mostly our children go there.”

The Textbook Controversy (2000-2005)

In May 2000, the Shia Muslims based in the Gilgit district of the Northern Areas began to agitate against the recently changed curriculum of government schools in the region. The controversial textbooks spanned various disciplines such as Islamiyat,⁴⁶ Urdu, and Social Studies, and were produced by the Punjab Textbook Board. The Islamiyat texts for primary classes were deemed particularly unacceptable.

⁴⁶ Islamiyat is a subject that focuses on the study of Islam. It was declared a compulsory subject for all Muslim students in Pakistan, under General Zia’s Islamization programme.

Many in the Shia community felt that in these new books – written by a panel of four Sunni scholars – not only was the Shia interpretation of Islam blatantly disregarded, but the Sunni interpretation was also more starkly asserted. For example, it was argued that visual representations of performing prayers followed the Sunni style of prayer, implicitly delegitimizing the Shia way of being Muslim. Similarly, it was felt that the lives of Caliphs as well as the Prophet’s Companions were extensively discussed, while those of the revered Shia Imams were barely mentioned. Such representations were deemed to undermine the faith and identity of Shia youth. Four years after the agitation began, the “textbook controversy” – as it came to be called – turned into a fatal conflict involving violent confrontations between state authorities and Shia protestors, a climate of heightened Shia-Sunni discord, and a constant curfew that paralyzed daily life in the region for eleven months. The matter was partly resolved in April 2005, when an agreement was reached to withdraw some of the controversial textbooks, and replace them with those produced by the National Book Foundation and the NWFP Textbook Board.⁴⁷

Why and how did the issue of textbooks become so huge and consequential? It generated the collective mobilization and protest of the Shia community against the state for five years, and at the same time, intensified Shia-Sunni sectarian hostility in Gilgit. As such, it encompassed much more than what the term “controversy” might suggest. In the rest of this chapter, I investigate the dynamics of the Shia movement against government textbooks in the Northern Areas, and explore the larger stakes that were implicated in their struggle.

⁴⁷ “Schools re-open today in northern Pakistan after one-year,” *Pakistan Times*, April 27th, 2005. <http://pakistanimes.net/2005/04/27/national1.htm>. I say “partly” because the controversial texts numbered far more than those that were going to be replaced, and further, the replacement that was agreed in principle has not materialized on the ground in the Northern Areas.

Events

By 2004, it had been four years since the Shia community in the Northern Areas started agitating against the controversial curriculum. Delegations had repeatedly appealed to the Ministry of Education as well as the Ministry of Kashmir and Northern Areas Affairs in Islamabad, only to be dismissed each time (Stöber 2007). Discouraged and angered, Shia students began to boycott classes and stage rallies, and more than 300 of them went on a three-day hunger strike in Gilgit on May 17th, 2004.⁴⁸ Within days, the situation gravely deteriorated as thousands took to the streets, blocking roads and bringing businesses to a halt.⁴⁹ When the prominent Shia leader Agha Ziauddin Rizvi declared June 3rd as a day of protest if the government failed to resolve the syllabus issue by then, the army was called in and a curfew imposed in Gilgit town. However, street processions continued in defiance of the curfew, leading to violent clashes between the protestors and security personnel in several parts of the Northern Areas.

In the following months, the situation kept worsening as the curfew continued and caused severe food shortages and transport problems, schools remained closed, and government services and businesses virtually shut down. An atmosphere of extreme sectarian discord and violence engulfed the region, as the conflict between the Pakistan state and local Shia communities over the controversial syllabus spiraled into a sectarian one that pitted local Shia and Sunni communities against each other. For many belonging to the Shia and Ismaili communities, even quotidian activities like traveling in the bus became fraught with danger as busses started to get attacked and passengers – deemed to be non-Sunni based on information about name and home address on national I.D. cards – were singled out and killed. The conflict intensified

⁴⁸ “Hunger Strike,” *Dawn*, May 20th, 2004.

⁴⁹ “Syllabus protests paralyse business and traffic,” *Daily Times*, June 1st, 2004.

even more when on January 8th, 2005, Agha Ziauddin Rizvi – the imam of the central Shia mosque in Gilgit and the most vocal opponent of the controversial syllabus – was gunned down. Even as it was widely believed that the killing was an act of government intelligence agencies to discipline the Shia community, it nevertheless generated another wave of Shia-Sunni sectarian strife in the Northern Areas. More than a 100 people lost their lives in the long-drawn conflict resulting from the textbook controversy (S. Abbas 2005). Things returned to a relative calm only in April 2005, after leaders from both sects came to a peace agreement through a jirga, and the government agreed to withdraw two key textbooks that had spawned the controversy.

Deep sectarian fissures, however, have taken root in the region as a result of the textbook controversy, heightening divides that previous state policies had already been generating. For example, a foreboding trend towards sect-specific, “secular” schools has emerged, reducing opportunities for socialization and friendship between the youth of different sects. Relations have been tense even among students from different Muslim communities who study in the same educational institution. As in other conflict situations, women in the Northern Areas have become particularly vulnerable because their bodies are constructed as embodiments of community honor, and become sites for enacting and reproducing community identity. Thus, for instance, when schools and colleges re-opened in 2005 after remaining closed for a whole year, Shia girls in some colleges started taking a black *chaadar* (long scarf). This was a marker of Shia identity,⁵⁰ but was also practiced so that in the event of a conflict, Shia women could be singled out for protection by being distinguishable from others wearing the white college uniform. A teacher from the F.G. College for Women, Gilgit, who pointed this out to me, noted the absurdity of a protective

⁵⁰ Black is a traditionally significant color for Shias, particularly symbolic of the practice of mourning the martyrdom of Hussain, the grandson of Prophet Mohammad.

measure that would render women more visible for attack, and the sadness of a logic that construes some women as more worthy of protection in situations of conflict. She also commented on how disconcerting it was for her to see an educational space being visually and physically divided into black and white, and how this stark dichotomy symbolized the general deterioration of inter-sect relations in the region.

Questioning the Texts

The textbook movement was spearheaded by the late Agha Ziauddin Rizvi, who was the imam of the central Shia mosque in Gilgit and the principal leader of the Shia community in the Northern Areas. Agha Ziauddin seemed to be a popular leader for the Shias, many of whom stood by him in his call for a change in the textbooks irrespective of whether they understood or cared about the curriculum issue. Even those who disagreed with his stance on the textbooks nevertheless respected him for the sense of integrity with which he dealt with the government. He was often described to me as one who “could not be bought” and who “did not fawn on the Chief Secretary.”

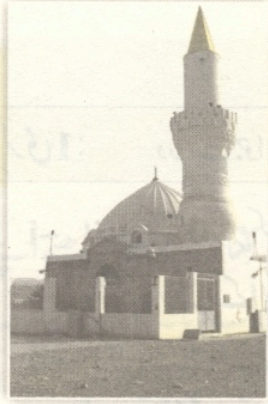
Agha Ziauddin and other proponents of the textbook movements firstly argued that Sunni beliefs and values were deeply embedded across the various disciplines that are taught in government schools. They called for the implementation of a consensus curriculum, which would be representative of and acceptable to all sects, and teach respect for all faiths. Further, they demanded that in the absence of such a curriculum, the Islamiyat curriculum should be optional for Shia students in the Northern Areas.

The specific objections to the curriculum were detailed in a document published by the Islah-e-Nisab (Correction of Curriculum) Committee, Northern Areas, under the aegis of the Markazi Imamia Jam-e-Masjid (Central Shia Mosque), Gilgit. In this document, the textbooks used for teaching Urdu, Islamiyat, and Social Studies in classes 1 all the way through B.A. were meticulously analyzed, and their

silencing or negation of Shia beliefs and practice identified (Islah-e-Nisab Committee Shumali Ilaqajaat 2003). Most of the objections relate to differences in the interpretation of Islamic history, and in the performance of Islamic ritual.

As a case in point, consider an objection to a section from *Meri Kitab* (My Book), a text used by class 1 students in the Northern Areas (Figure 6 on p. 135). According to the Islah-e-Nisab Committee, the section is problematic because its visual depiction of the performance of *namaz* (prayer) privileges the Sunni interpretation of Islam. In Shia practice, hands are typically held loosely on the side during *namaz*, not clasped in front as shown in the image. This example was also considered problematic by several Shia respondents whom I interacted with during my fieldwork, who argued that such images routinely confuse young Shia children who are learning a different practice at home, and thus have the potential to make them *gumrah* (astray).

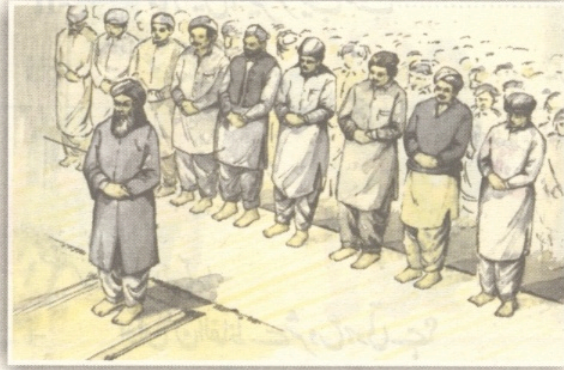
Another representation considered one-sided by the Islah-e-Nisab Committee is present in the official 7th-grade textbook for “Art and Drawing,” which is reproduced in Figure 7 on p. 136. It contains an exercise that directs students to imitate – in sketch and color – a calligraphic text illustrating the names of the four Caliphs: Abu Bakr, Umar, Usman, and Ali. This is in line with Sunni belief which regards Ali as the fourth caliph; Shia doctrine, on the other hand, disputes the authenticity of the caliphate system, and reveres the imamat system in which Ali is the first Imam instead of the fourth Caliph. In the textbook, the exercise in Figure 7 appears right after two other exercises that instruct students to calligraphically reproduce the word “Allah” and “Mohammad” respectively.



نماز

عارف کی صبح سویرے آنکھ کھلی تو مسجد سے اذان کی آواز آرہی تھی۔ مؤذن پکار رہا تھا اللہ اکبر اللہ اکبر۔

اذان سنتے ہی عارف کے ابو اُمّی نماز کی تیاری کرنے لگے۔ نماز کے لیے کپڑوں، بدن اور جگہ کا پاک صاف ہونا ضروری ہے۔ نماز سے پہلے عارف نے اپنے امّی ابو کی طرح وضو کیا۔ ابو اس کو اپنے ساتھ لے کر مسجد کی طرف چل دیے۔ امّی نے گھر میں نماز پڑھنے کی تیاری کی۔



مسجد میں داخل ہو کر وہ ایک صف پر بیٹھ گئے۔ تھوڑی دیر بعد امام صاحب سب نمازیوں کے آگے کھڑے ہو گئے۔ نمازی ان کے پیچھے صفوں پر ترتیب سے کھڑے ہو گئے۔ مؤذن نے تکبیر کہی۔ امام صاحب نے نماز پڑھانی شروع کر دی۔ نماز میں امیر غریب مل کر کھڑے ہوتے ہیں۔ تمام مسلمان ایک دن میں پانچ بار نماز پڑھتے ہیں۔

Figure 6: Page from *Meri Kitab (My Book)*, Class 1 (Source: Punjab Textbook Board, Lahore)

سوال نمبر 9: نصف دائرہ میں ابوبکرؓ، عمرؓ، عثمانؓ و علی رضی اللہ تعالیٰ عنہم کے نام خوش خط لکھیں۔

عمل نمبر ۲: شکل کے مطابق نصف دائرہ میں ابوبکرؓ، عمرؓ، عثمانؓ و علیؓ کے نام لکھیں۔ اور رنگ بھریں۔ ان کے علاوہ اگر آپ اور مقدس ہستیوں کے نام لکھنا چاہیں تو لکھ سکتے ہیں۔



Figure 7: Page from “Art and Drawing,” Class 7 (Source: Punjab Textbook Lahore).

The exercise in Figure 7 is particularly significant in the context of the textbook controversy, as in September 2001, a 7th grade Shia kid was reportedly kicked out from a school in Gilgit for tearing this exercise from his book (Islah-e-Nisab Committee 2003). This was the first of several incidents that prompted Shia students to boycott their classes, and mobilized the Shia community in general against the curriculum.

The exercise is both striking and disturbing, as firstly, it demonstrates how an already pervasive presence of religious content in supposedly secular textbooks in Pakistan extends even to the realm of drawing. Second, the exercise is accompanied by an intriguing instruction that can be translated in English as: “If you wish, you can also sketch the names of other revered personalities apart from the ones depicted here.” This might be read as a subtle form of recognizing and permitting sectarian difference, but it is a limited one: the page neither has an example for calligraphically reproducing the names of other Muslim personalities, nor space for a sketch that students might wish to create on their own. Importantly, the wording of the Urdu instruction is such that the option to illustrate different names can be availed only after the normalized names have been copied in accordance with Sunni tradition.

The above exercise was also specifically pointed out to me during an interview that I conducted with a Shia religious figure in Gilgit, Haider Shah. Shah was deeply involved in the textbook movement, and continues to play a prominent role in the activities of the central Shia mosque in Gilgit. He argued:

“First of all, what is the point of putting religion in an art book? Don’t we have enough of it already in the Urdu, English, Islamiyat, Social Studies... basically all other books? Yes, calligraphy has an important place in Islamic history, so if desired, one could have an exercise about painting “Allah” or “Bismillah ir-Rahman ir-Rahim” (In the name of Allah, the Most Beneficent, the Merciful). But why should our kids have to paint something that contradicts their religious beliefs? I am not saying that we should have a separate exercise for Shia children, which calligraphically shows the Twelve Imams. We should not

have any content that represents the beliefs of a particular sect. The voice that we raised was not against one picture; it was against the one-sided representation of Islam in the entire curriculum, from class 1 till Bachelors. The curriculum has become so poisonous, fussing over rituals and losing sight of ethics. You see the main problem is that *maulvis* are writing the curriculum instead of scholars. The *maulvis* get their say because they have managed to portray and dismiss scholars as Westernized and secular. But why should the government buy into their agenda? This surely has to change.”

Haider Shah’s comments came as an unsettling surprise to me, as I had grown to perceive the textbook movement predominantly in terms of the assertion of a Shia “religious” identity, instead of the “secular” demand – and a broader progressive vision – that it evidently embodied. I realized that my own unconscious prejudice – stemming partly from the violence of a liberal-secular epistemic lens that we tend to internalize under modernity – had led me to believe that a struggle about religious representation which was actively promoted primarily by clerical figures would be devoid of secular ground and legitimacy. I was all the more struck that this Shia secularism – as it seemed to be to me – was communicated to me by a devout Shia closely involved in running the affairs of the mosque, and that the perspective emerged from within his understanding of religion. Ultimately, the entire encounter made me realize the profound unhelpfulness of “religious” and “secular” as categories of analysis and as descriptors of social reality.

It is more useful, then, to pay close attention to the terms used by the participants of the textbook movement themselves. In my interviews as well as in documentary sources, the demand for a consensus curriculum was articulated as an *insaani* (human), *aaini* (constitutional), and Islamic right that is due to Shias as citizens of Pakistan (Islah-e-Nisab Committee 2003, Markazi Shia Tulba Action Committee 2004). The demand was further underpinned by a nationalist impulse, proposing that a consensus curriculum was necessary for achieving intra-Muslim (specifically, Shia-Sunni) unity in order to ensure peace, justice, and development in

Pakistan. Simultaneously, it was emphasized that people who have helped to create Pakistan and have continued to defend it have come from all sects, and hence they all deserve recognition in the official school curricula.

The Sunni community of Gilgit, on the other hand, by and large opposed the textbook movement. A teacher, Sarfaraz Taj, objected to the tactics of the movement:

“Shia kids were often pressurized into boycotting their classes. I think that Shia elders are poisoning the minds of young kids with their propaganda.”

Hajra Jabeen, a college student, was concerned about the consequences of the movement for the region:

“Look where we are now. There were open killings in Gilgit because of the textbook issue. Rangers have set up their *chowki* (checkpoint) at every corner, and even if the situation is more normal now, we feel scared if Rangers were to leave.”

Yet another respondent, Gul Azam, questioned the very rationale of the movement:

“How can we change the curriculum and remove references to Hazrat Umar? Why do Shias hate Umar? The whole Pakistan follows this curriculum. We are Pakistani and we should not try to be different.”

This comment indirectly renders the movement as anti-national, reflecting a perception that was common amongst the Sunni inhabitants of Gilgit. It is presumed that there is neither any reason nor room for religious difference within a Pakistani nation that is implicitly conceived as homogenous. The mention of hating Umar also shows that the movement was perceived as anti-Sunni.

The Shia participants took pains to dismiss the allegation that the movement was anti-Sunni and anti-Pakistan. They argued that their efforts were directed towards the freedom of religious belief which has been promised to every citizen in the constitution. However, they felt that the movement was given an anti-Sunni color by

the local administration and intelligence agencies, to mislead the Sunni community and create a sectarian rift between Sunnis and Shias in the Northern Areas.

State-Formation and the Production of Sectarian Difference

Representations of Islam such as those discussed above are fundamental to the project of Pakistani state-formation, as they provide a chief mechanism through which Islam is constructed as the ideological basis of the nation, and the legitimating source for the state. Through these representations, the Pakistani state is naturalized as a space that is inhabited – barring a few small groups of non-Islamic minorities – by a homogenous national community organically united by the force of Islam. Textbook Islam is thus routinely constituted as a singular belief system, with no sectarian differences. While it is often claimed that this Islam emphasizes the commonalities of the various schools of thought in Islam, in actuality, it is mostly the tenets of Sunni Islam – adhered to by around 75% of the Muslim population in Pakistan⁵¹ – which has come to be legitimized as “correct” Islam in textbook representations as well as in classroom teaching. Shia beliefs thus tend to be marginalized in textbook representations of Islam, in the curricula of public as well as private schools. Such representations become particularly problematic and contested in the Northern Areas because around 75% of the region’s population follows some form of Shia Islam (Rieck 1997), almost an exact reversal of the norm in the rest of Pakistan.⁵²

A particular kind of Sunni Muslim is created and privileged in textbook Islam in Pakistan. While there are many ways of being Sunni and generally of being

⁵¹ Such figures – whether used to represent Sunnis or Shias – always need to be accompanied with words of caution: information about sects is not collected in the Pakistani census, and hence the figure quoted is a commonly used estimate. The figure is an abstraction of course, as the “Sunni sect” or “Shia” sect incorporates diverse and often contradictory religious perspectives. Also, many people would describe themselves as Sunni or Shia in a broad cultural and social manner, without adhering to particular religious beliefs and practices.

⁵² In Gilgit town, specifically, the Twelver Shias are perceived to be in majority, alongside a sizeable presence of Sunnis as well as Ismailis.

Muslim, the textbooks emphasize a narrow and bigoted interpretation that reduces Islam to excessive ritualism, and openly demonizes non-Muslim faiths (Saigol 1994, Jalal 1995).⁵³ As such, these representations can be seen as constituting forms of politically organized subjection (Abrams 1988) and moral regulation” (Corrigan and Sayer 1985) through which the social identities of subjects are cultivated for the making of state and citizen in Pakistan.⁵⁴

Processes through which states strive to create such national homogeneity constrain the possibilities of self-ascription, fluidity and change, and simultaneously end up giving “socio-political significance to the fact of difference” (Verdery 1994: 46). This means that difference is raised from “the realm of doxa, the assumed, into the realm of notice, where disputes can occur between the orthodox and the heterodox, the normal and the strange – that is, between the values associated with what are now *recognized* as significantly different options (c.f. Bourdieu 1977:164-171) but were not previously seen to be so” (Ibid). Verdery makes this argument for understanding how ethnic identity and difference become noticeable, meaningful and consequential because of the disciplinary practices of the modern state, and I would argue that a similar dynamic is at work in the context of religious identity and difference in the Northern Areas in Pakistan. At the same time, though, how and when differences come to matter and produce conflict depends on the particular historical context in and through which state forms develop.

⁵³ The Islamic content of textbooks in Pakistan has recently become somewhat of a national controversy, militantly defended in the discourse of religious parties and deeply opposed in widely publicized scholarly research that has elaborated the ways in which curricula across Pakistan propagate religious intolerance and violence (Nayyar and Salim 2003). Curiously, this scholarly attention has not focused adequately on how internal differences within Islam – particularly between the Shia and Sunni interpretations – are represented in official textbooks, which is ironic since it is precisely this aspect of textbooks that has been most prominently contested in Pakistani history, and recently become the source of violent conflict in the Northern Areas.

⁵⁴ A rich body of research on textbook politics has shown that textbooks not only serve to naturalize particular understandings of the nation, but also reinforce existing social inequalities such as those of class, rural/urban location, gender, ethnicity, and religion (Apple and Christian-Smith 1991, Pigg 1992, Starrett 1998, Saigol 2000).

As discussed earlier, sectarian “difference” in the Northern Areas did not always have the meaning and consequence that it carries today. In the Gilgit district of the Northern Areas, the time before the 70s is remembered as a time of shared life-worlds, when religious identities were fluid and pluralistic. Though inter-sect skirmishes are acknowledged, people by and large respected and even participated in each other’s religious rituals, and inter-marriage across sects was fairly common, with the result that several families in the Northern Areas today have members who belong to different sects. Such practices defy essentialist understandings of “sectarian difference” which presume that sectarian identity is inherently exclusionary and antagonistic, and that differences between sects naturally lead to conflict. Surely, theology itself fosters a sense of incommensurable values (Shaikh 1989) which can and has created conflicts between people with different religious beliefs. However, we need to examine the conditions and processes – local, national and global – through which a sense of difference is produced, and the potential for conflict heightened and realized.⁵⁵ I will briefly outline some of these processes that have enabled the production of sectarian difference in the specific context of the Northern Areas.

Both the national project of Islamization implemented by General Zia as well as the international mobilization of political Islam for the Cold War bears significant responsibility for the rise of sectarian conflict in Pakistan 2002, and hence, also in the Northern Areas. However, state policy specific to the region needs to be examined to understand the local context of sectarianism.

A strong sense of religious difference has emerged and become politically significant precisely since the formal integration of the Northern Areas into the Pakistan state, between 1972-1974. This integration was effected partly in response to

⁵⁵ Simultaneously, we need to be attentive to the lived realities of overlapping identities, co-existence, and co-operation through which the potential of conflict is constantly undermined.

growing secular-nationalist voices in Gilgit, which challenged the authoritarian rule of the military-bureaucratic establishment in the Northern Areas, and demanded equal citizenship. By abolishing the system of princely kingdoms, the Pakistan state was able to pacify the local populace, but meeting their demands for political representation and fundamental rights was deemed unthinkable in the larger context of the Kashmir dispute (Ali 2005). Thereafter, state institutions – chiefly the army, intelligence agencies, and the KANA⁵⁶ bureaucracy – embarked upon a divide-and-conquer project⁵⁷ that aimed at creating disunity along sectarian lines, in order to thwart regional solidarity and secular-nationalist aspirations.

This divide-and-conquer policy firstly entailed state sponsorship of Sunni and Shia religious organizations, which were required to spur sectarian animosity as a means to deflect political energy and agreement (Shehzad 2003, Personal interviews). Maulvis from both sects were paid by intelligence agencies to engage in dehumanizing tirades against sectarian others, through wall-chalking, mosque loudspeakers, and publications. While each sect was played against the other – primarily the Sunni against the Shia and vice versa – the Sunni sect was more patronized as the Shia identity has been rendered antithetical in a gradually Sunni-ized Pakistan state (Qureshi 1989).

This was accompanied by a targeted suppression of the Shia community in the Northern Areas. One of the first acts that represented this suppression was the banning of the traditional Muharram procession in 1974 in Gilgit, which generated a major sectarian clash in this Shia-majority region. In popular memory and discourse, this is the period that is routinely identified with the beginning of “sectarian conflict”

⁵⁶ KANA stands for the Ministry of Kashmir Affairs and Northern Areas; it is the federal institution that directly administers the Northern Areas.

⁵⁷ The language of “divide-and-conquer” is not my own reading of the situation; this English term was widely used by my research subjects to describe the Pakistan state’s approach towards the Northern Areas.

(Sokefeld 2003). As discussed in detail earlier, the year 1988 was a key turning point in inter-sect relations, as a systematic anti-Shia pogrom was launched in the region with the support of the Zia government (Rieck 1995, Aase 1999). No official inquiry about this violence has yet been undertaken, and many Shia leaders still demand accountability and compensation for the losses that the community sustained in 1988.

Such grievances are compounded by other frustrations over economic and political discrimination. The higher posts within the local bureaucracy in Gilgit, for example, have tended to be dominated by non-local down-country officials belonging to the Sunni sect. When a Shia District Commissioner was appointed for the first time in 1994, local Sunnis created a huge furor. This, in the words of an interviewee, rankled even the non-practicing Shia because it demonstrated how bureaucratic positions of power had become an assumed Sunni privilege.

As indicated earlier, practices of religious regulation also constitute key strategies for regional subordination, as they help to keep the strategic border territory of the Northern Areas divided along sectarian lines – a division that serves to disrupt the formation of regional unity and avert challenges to the coercive regime that has been put in place in the region since 1947. Political subjection and religious subjection are thus intimately linked in the Northern Areas, together helping to maintain territorial control over the region.

This link is commonly understood as well as articulated by people in Gilgit. Irrespective of their sectarian affiliation, many locals perceive modes of inscribing Shia marginality – particularly since the 1988 riots – as part of a “divide and conquer” state project, in which religion has become both a rationale for regional subordination as well as a tool for accomplishing it – the rationale being the threat of a Shia-majority province, and the tool being the perpetuation of religious sectarianism through various mechanisms.

Such historically shaped perceptions about the state affect the meanings that people give to any new state policy, as well as the consequences that these policies produce. This was amply demonstrated in the context of the textbook controversy. While it has been suggested and can be reasonably believed that at least part of the stronger Sunni orientation of the textbooks comes from the domination of the Punjab Textbook Board by members of the Jamaat-e-Islami, or others who profess an authoritarian Sunni sensibility (Shehzad 2003), many Shia protestors as well as local journalists felt that “divide and conquer” was the key project behind the change in curriculum. How far that is true, I do not know. But it is important to note that because of historical experiences, people perceive it as such. The fact that the textbook issue did in fact end up intensifying sectarian conflict in the region made people believe all the more in an assumed intention of the state to politically suppress the region by religiously dividing it. Furthermore, the logic of “divide and conquer” as an explanation for sectarian conflict in the Northern Areas is significant because – like the memories of inter-sect harmony and acceptance – it serves to challenge arguments that explain “sectarianism” as a natural outcome of religious differences.

The link between sectarian differences and regional politics was centered in the demands of the Shia protestors as well. When the issues of the controversial textbooks emerged, many local Shias argued that there would not have been any problem with textbooks, if, like other regions of Pakistan, the Northern Areas too had a separate textbook board to author its own curriculum.⁵⁸ If such a body existed, the local populace could have ensured that textbook representations of Islam were not biased, but rather, reflective of the different Muslim practices that are prevalent in the region. This perspective meant that the Shia protests against the controversial textbooks had the potential of being transformed into a cross-community political demand for the

⁵⁸ It is worth noting that even Azad Kashmir has a separate textbook board.

creation of a separate textbook board, hence becoming a vehicle for the assertion of regional identity and sovereignty. Such a platform for local unity and citizenship would pose a major threat to the Pakistan state, and the fear of this possibility was perhaps one of the key reasons that led the government to crack down severely on the movement against textbooks. Even before the government crackdown, however, such a platform could not materialize – partly because the Shia demand for a separate religious curriculum was simply unacceptable to the Sunni community, but also because many locals felt that a separate curriculum for Northern Areas Shias would create more divisions in an already polarized environment. Indeed, the demand for a separate curriculum was opposed within the Shia community itself, as I elaborate in the next section.

Debates and Dilemmas of Cultural Reproduction

Like any other community, the “Shia community” in the Northern Areas is not a homogenous group in which all the Shias were uniformly offended by the new curriculum, and unanimously opposed it. While grievances against Shia representation in textbooks were widely shared, many within the local Shia community – particularly older members and veteran leaders – felt that collective action calling for a replacement of the curriculum was unwise and unnecessary. At least three discernible reasons for this stance emerged during personal interviews with some of these Gilgit-based leaders.

First, it was felt that the negative impact of discriminatory textbook representations on Shias dwarfs in comparison to the widespread violence against the Shia community that has escalated all over Pakistan in recent years. As one leader, Jamal Zaidi put it:

“In Karachi, our doctors, engineers, and military officers are being targeted, while ordinary people continue to die in attacks on our mosques. As a minority that is facing such a systematic campaign, we need to pick our issues wisely.”

According to an interviewee, several Shia leaders elsewhere in Pakistan also shared this perspective, and hence disagreed with Agha Zia on his decision to contest the textbooks.

Second, the extent of danger posed by Sunni-biased representations in textbook Islam is itself considered debatable. As a prominent leader Abbas Hussain commented:

“We have always been learning Sunni thought in secular schools, but we have never lost our faith. Our faith is taught to us at home, and no one can take it away. So why should we be scared of textbooks?”⁵⁹

Third, as Abbas Hussain further pointed out, there was a successful struggle for gaining Shia representation in textbooks elsewhere in Pakistan but far from benefiting Shia youth, it proved to be immensely detrimental:

“In President Ayub Khan’s time (1960s), our people raised their voice. A Shia Mutalibat Committee (SMC) was formed and because of its efforts, a separate curriculum for Shias was eventually introduced in Prime Minister Zulfikar Bhutto’s time in the 70s. But the person who was grading the Shia section of the Islamiyat syllabus remained Sunni, so Shias were easily singled out for discrimination. In the exam that one has to take to join the Civil Service, Shia youth particularly suffered as the rate of failure increased. And so, access to government jobs decreased. It was at this point that Punjabi Shia youth told the Tehrik-e-Jafaria Pakistan⁶⁰: we are suffering because of your policies. So finally, Shias themselves got rid of the separate curriculum that they had worked so hard to introduce.”

⁵⁹ It is important to note that people in the region have not always been learning Islam – Sunni or otherwise – in public schools. The system of modern schooling in the Northern Areas was introduced by the British in 1893. Till 1947, there was no designated subject for religious studies. People were accustomed to sending their kids to neighborhood preachers, or educating children in their homes. It was only when Islam became a compulsory subject in postcolonial Pakistan that the issue of Shia kids learning Sunni Islam emerged. The issue became particularly marked during the Zia years, when Islamic studies became significantly more Sunni-ized, and its emphasis shifted from ethics to rituals e.g. on issues such as the correct way to perform *wuzzu* (ablution).

⁶⁰ Founded in 1979, TJP is the foremost Shia political party in Pakistan.

This historical experience highlights the paradoxical dilemma in which religious minorities often find themselves when they get political and cultural recognition at the state level – affirmation of their identity and difference is accompanied with a heightened visibility that renders them more vulnerable to forms of discrimination. Particularly in the context of an oppressive and puritanical state, religious minorities therefore feel that it is much safer to keep a “low profile” – a policy that often translates into internalized modes of suppressing religious identity and practice in the public sphere.⁶¹ The discourse of “keeping a low profile” is particularly prevalent amongst the Ismaili-Muslim community in the Northern Areas, which time and again has found itself caught between the Shia-Sunni conflict. However, for the Shia community in the Northern Areas, the situation is different. They might be a minority from the perspective of a Sunni-majoritarian Pakistani state but numerically, they comprise a sizeable majority of the population in the Northern Areas. In such a context, the desire, legitimacy, and possibility of the recognition of Shia religious identity takes on a different salience.

Citizenship versus Sectarianism: Competing Representations of Struggle

The demand for equal representation in textbook discussions of Islam can be seen as a religious right, which Shias in Gilgit claim for the simple reason that they too are Muslims, and that their children deserve to learn about their own faith whenever Islam is taught in public schools. However, as mentioned earlier, the movement participants and supporters simultaneously employed the liberal discourse of citizenship to describe their struggle. They claimed that as citizens of the Pakistani

⁶¹ Munasinghe (2002) also discusses how East Indians in Trinidad “downplay” their culture in order to claim native status. It might be the case that minority ethnic and sectarian groups, as well as the “others” of hegemonic nationalism in general need to engage in this *invisibilizing* of their own identity, in order to fit in, and avoid marginalization. This suggests that the “others” of nationalism might also help to produce the homogeneity of the nation from below.

state, it was their *secular*, constitutional right to have “freedom of religion,” and necessary protections as a national minority.⁶²

Recourse to this vocabulary is critical and effective for two reasons. First, it constitutes a creative strategy of making a claim to citizenship rights, in a context where these have been consistently denied even in their most basic forms. In fact, it can be argued that it was precisely the historical marginalization of the region and the repression of secular-nationalist struggles within it, which paved the way for religion to emerge as an idiom of claiming citizenship and sovereignty for the dominant Shias in the region. After all, it is not uncommon for assertions of cultural identity – and difference – to take place in contexts of political and economic marginality.

Second, the discourse of rights offered a way to counter the official representations of the struggle against the controversial textbooks, in which the demand for the withdrawal of the textbooks was portrayed as part of a subversive “sectarian agenda” by the Shia populace. Instead, the protesting Shias constantly asserted that the issue was not primarily a Sunni-Shia one, but one that was fundamentally tied to the state-citizen relation.⁶³ The discourse of constitutionally guaranteed citizenship allowed the Shias to overcome their representation as the “others” of secular politics, and claim that their agenda was fully in line with the criteria of a modern liberal democracy – in fact, it was the Pakistan state itself which was upholding sectarian biases by privileging Sunni ideology, and promoting authoritarianism by denying legitimate regional rights to the people of the Northern Areas. Hence, the state was portrayed as the culprit because it was abusing its duty of

⁶² Interestingly, these protections were first put into the Pakistani constitution precisely because of Shia mobilization for rights and representation (Rieck 2000).

⁶³ Even in the so-called sectarian riots that had engulfed the region in June 2004, the buildings that were burnt were prominent government buildings, not Shia or Sunni mosques as would be the case in many other parts of Pakistan.

looking after the common good of society, which is constructed as its fundamental purpose in the modern-liberal paradigm.

In contrast, the dominant way in which the textbook issue was represented in official and media discourses was through the motif of “sectarianism.”⁶⁴ Indeed, in the last five years or so, the sociopolitical landscape of the Northern Areas in general has come to be characterized and explained through the paradigmatic idiom of Shia-Sunni “sectarian conflict.” This is not to deny that inter-sect discord in multiple forms has indeed become a grave everyday reality in the region. What is problematic, however, is the way in which the depictions of the region as a sectarian mess overshadow the substantive political contestations that underlie most of the cases that are branded as instances of sectarian conflict.

The representation of state-society political conflict as inter-group religious discord is both a reminder and continuation of colonial strategies of rule. The rhetoric of Hindu-Muslim communalism was routinely employed by the British colonial state in India to reduce particular conflicts that challenged its authority to local “religious” differences, so that it could absolve itself of responsibility, construct resistances as pathological, and then quell them under the pretext of restoring harmony (Frietag 1990, Mayaram 1997). The vocabulary of religion provides a particularly useful means for deflecting political contestation and reinscribing state paternalism, as it helps to recast legitimate political grievances as primordial, anti-modern demands by emotional, irrational subjects. Such an “emotionalizing” of political issues is a key strategy of accomplishing state rule.

⁶⁴ Whether portrayed merely as a matter of sectarianism or not, it is important to note that the political situation in the Northern Areas has generally received dismal coverage in the national press. Moreover, local journalists whose voices do manage to make it to the national press have been severely harassed by government officials for their reporting of the region.

In present-day Northern Areas, the discourse of “sectarian conflict” similarly produces a depoliticizing effect: backward society is in a state of anarchy, stemming from supposedly primordial intra-Islam differences, and the innocent and caring state constantly needs to intervene to create order. If it were not for the state, the region would remain steeped in violence, and as a state official put it, “the uncompromising attitude of ulema of both the sects” would “destabilize the area.”⁶⁵ This was precisely the language used in an official press release by the Northern Areas Home Department to explain the violent clashes and continuous curfews that paralyzed the region in October 2005. The clashes had started after security personnel shot at students who were peacefully protesting against the death of their colleague in custody, but the incident was conveniently represented officially and in the media as one in which law enforcement agencies were dealing appropriately with the “sectarian elements” afflicting the region.⁶⁶ Similarly, the discourse of sectarianism can be and has been instrumentalized by intelligence agents for covering up attacks on anti-government leaders, as these can be conveniently attributed to the workings of some Shia or Sunni fundamentalist outfit depending on the ascribed identity of the leader.

Minoritizing the Subject

Apart from creating a depoliticized representation of conflicts in the Northern Areas, the discourse of sectarianism also invokes a majority/minority distinction that further misrepresents the political and social realities of the Northern Areas. When one hears of Shia demands in the Northern Areas and conflict due to these demands, the internalized image that is conjured is one of a religious minority trying to scramble for

⁶⁵ ‘Eight religious leaders held,’ *Dawn*, October 16th, 2005.

⁶⁶ This is not to deny that the Sunni and Shia clergy has indeed inflamed the sectarian situation in the Northern Areas on several occasions. Rather, my point is that several recent cases of “sectarian conflict” in the Northern Areas cannot be simplistically reduced to the rhetoric of the parochial, conflict-prone “sectarian elements.” Moreover, it is important to recognize that state policies themselves have indirectly or directly contributed to the power of the clergy in the Northern Areas, and elsewhere in Pakistan.

rights and “creating issues” – it is not usually known that the Shias constitute a sizeable majority in the region. Even if this is known, there is a certain way in which majoritarian politics creates a complacency that undermines the concerns of national minorities. This complacency is widely spread in society and not limited to the views and practices of members of religious parties. Hence, the majority/minority distinction itself becomes a key mode of subjection for religious groups like the Shias in Pakistan.

Let me problematize this distinction more. To begin with, the distinction assumes that homogeneous cultural groups exist which can be neatly parceled into “majority” and “minority.” However, culture is a messy, interactive process that is necessarily constituted through borrowings across boundaries (Hall 1992, Said 1993), and hence cultural identities – whether minority or majority – cannot be construed as pure, unified, and fixed. The Northern Areas in particular has a long history of pluralist religious identities, with inter-marriages and shared participation in religious rituals being the norm instead of the exception. Secondly, constructions of majority and minority privilege one particular form of identity in defining and numerically dividing a population, as if the reality of people’s multiple social positions and complex subjectivities – stemming from the interacting identities of class, gender, ethnicity, religion, and language amongst others – can be simplistically reduced to a single, determining essence (Gottschalk 2000). Most importantly, the majority/minority distinction constitutes a critical discourse through which the hegemonies of particular collectivities are sustained, and their access to the apparatus of the state naturalized. Hegemonic power asserts itself as the legitimate authority by appealing to the logic of “majority rule” – defined in terms of religious, ethnic, class, and other identities. Simultaneously, by constructing various others as “minority,” it renders them somehow less legitimate, as assumed deviants because they are not “normal,” and hence, justifiably deprived from a recognition of identity, and

participation in structures of authority (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1992). This utility of the majority-minority distinction in maintaining hegemonic power makes it effective for the accomplishment of state rule. Not surprisingly, then, the minority/majority distinction has been deeply embedded in legitimizing discourses of nationalism. In nationalist projects across the world, the “imagined community” (Anderson 1991) of the nation was frequently constructed as one in which an imagined majority personified the nation, and a “minority tolerated only insofar as it proved able to accommodate the demands of the fictitious majority represented by the state” (Benbassa and Rodrigue 2000: 105). The distinctiveness of the minority was “to receive expression only in private, and destined eventually to disappear within the majority” (Ibid).

This disappearance within the majority has not only been achieved through the denial of equal and substantive citizenship to those labeled as “minorities,” but also the denial of their very existence via mechanisms of legal subjugation and physical violence. Such processes of minoritization can be totally disruptive of people’s sense of security and belonging, as has been amply and shamefully demonstrated in the case of Ahmadi repression in Pakistan (Kennedy 1989). However, in some situations, the discourse of a minority status can in fact be appropriated to claim rights and protection. The problem, of course, is that even when so-called minorities achieve their objectives, just treatment is not a guarantee. On the contrary, the granting of their demands can make them even more vulnerable to discrimination, by making them legible to state officials whose ways of thinking remain structured by the majority/minority discourse. My reference here is to my earlier discussion of the ways in which Shias in Pakistan successfully struggled for a separate curriculum, but then themselves organized to abdicate this right as their new visibility became the very source of their educational and economic subjection.

Conclusion

Sectarian conflict in Pakistan has risen remarkably in recent years, particularly in the wake of Zia's Islamization programme, the Iranian revolution, and the Afghan war, all of which have fueled the creation and sustenance of sectarian hostility and violence (Qureshi 1989, Zaman 1998, Nasr 2002, Abou Zahab 2004). These processes surely influenced the emergence of Shia-Sunni conflict in the Northern Areas as well. However, a closer study of sectarian conflict in the Northern Areas reveals that here, the issue is fundamentally linked to the religious and geo-political anxieties that this Shia-majority, contested border territory poses for the Pakistan state, as a result of which the state has established particularly harsh regimes of political and religious subjection in the region. Further, analyses of sectarianism in Pakistan have focused heavily on the politics of militant religious parties, but as the case of the Northern Areas demonstrates, we also need to be attentive to the ways in which sectarianism is both propagated and contested in the realm of cultural representations as well. Finally, it has often been argued that sectarianism constitutes a key "threat" to the Pakistan state, due to which the country remains an "unachieved nation" (Jaffrelot 2002). Such discourses tend to render the state as a hapless victim with no causal responsibility in the matter, and moreover, risk a reproduction of the standard hegemonic narrative in which the military-dominated state claims to be striving to protect Pakistani society from extremism and sectarianism. The regional context of the Northern Areas, however, illuminates a reverse logic, as the state itself is perceived as a threat to people's identities and sectarian relations in the region. We hence need to focus more on the role of the state, on the content of categories such as the "state" and "sectarian identity," and on the ways in which these categories are mutually constituted in a dialectical relation with each other. These categories are historically formed and internally contested, and in fact, always *in the process* of making and negotiation.

Instead of assuming them to be unified, already-made, and oppositional, we need to investigate how the nation-state is itself formed through the cultivation of particular religious identities, and the ways in which the latter are transformed in the process.

The textbook controversy in Gilgit offers a useful lens to interrogate how state practices in Pakistan have served to normalize particular religious sensibilities for its citizens. Instead of homogenizing identity by “managing” difference, these practices have served to aggravate inter-sect differences and conflict in the Northern Areas. Hence, it is not surprising that movements for religious assertion have taken strong root in the region in recent years. For many in the Shia community of the Northern Areas, the movement for a separate Shia curriculum provided a concrete, verifiable manifestation of the state’s sectarian-political agenda, around which the local Shias could mobilize and have more realistic chances of getting their voices heard as compared to mobilization around other demands. The controversy over textbooks was an outlet for, and consequence of a history of political and religious suppression in the Northern Areas that has been vitally responsible for the polarization of sectarian relations in the region. The right to have representation of Shia identity in school textbooks was seen by Shia protestors – particularly by the younger generation – as a mode for securing recognition and cultural reproduction, even as veteran leaders challenged this connection. Moreover, through the idiom of religion, the Shia subjects of the Northern Areas were also articulating a political demand for legitimate, substantive inclusion in a polity that has historically denied them even the most basic citizenship rights – partly on the very grounds of their different religious identity. Hence, asserting religious difference and getting it politically recognized in official arenas such as education becomes a potential, and perhaps the only viable way to achieve equal treatment as citizens of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan.

Towards this end, Shia protestors and sympathizers of the movement against textbooks productively framed their struggle in a religious idiom as well as in liberal-political terms, challenging the sense of contradiction that is usually ascribed to these forms of politics. By drawing attention to the controversial texts and also by securing an agreement with state authorities for withdrawing the texts, the movement participants helped to subvert the universalizing – and dangerous – project of the state to claim and establish a narrow vision of Islam as the basis for a supposedly homogenous national culture. Yet, at the same time, the movement against the textbooks produced a sharp response from the paramilitary and intelligence apparatus of the state as well as local Sunni groups, resulting in a violent conflict that severely disrupted people's lives and livelihoods. This led many across the spectrum to question whether textbooks justified such a confrontation with a repressive regime, and thus alienated them from the cause of the movement. Ironically, then, the movement helped to reproduce state power by intensifying sectarian distrust and conflict in the region, and thus obstructing possibilities of local unity for political empowerment.

CHAPTER 4

SECTARIAN IMAGINARIES AND PUBLIC ARENAS

In this chapter, I firstly explore how sectarianizing state practices that were discussed in the previous chapter have impacted everyday inter-sect interaction in Gilgit. Specifically, I ask: how is sectarian difference encountered and produced in daily life? To address this question, I illuminate three episodes of everyday sectarian tension, and argue that a “sectarian imaginary” – a normalized mode of seeing and interacting with the sectarian other through suspicion and ill-will – has come to structure inter-sect relations in Gilgit. I then discuss how such sectarianized modes of thinking and social interaction are contested through critical public arenas (Fraser 1992, Chuengsatiansup 2001) in Gilgit, embodied in widely-attended poetry festivals organized by a literary collective called Halka-e-Arbab-e-Zauq (HAZ), as well as in political seminars organized by left-leaning political parties. These constitute pedagogical forums of “moral-intellectual struggle” (Chuengsatiansup 2001: 63) where the imagining and realization of a more progressive politics is made possible. I describe how these progressive struggles promote a vision that defines harmony and humanity as the essence of faith as well as politics – instead of the sectarian imaginary.

The concept of the sectarian imaginary builds upon Charles Taylor’s concept of the “social imaginary” (2004), and helps to examine the everyday forms of sectarian conflict in the Northern Areas. It illuminates the kind of subjectivities and emotional dispositions that sectarianizing state practices have served to produce, by connecting structures of rule to structures of feeling.

My analysis is also inspired by recent studies of South Asian Islam in which the lived realities of Muslims have received rich attention (Ahmad and Reifeld 2004, Marsden 2005, Khan 2003, Khan 2006). However, these studies have tended to focus

on practices of popular syncretism, heterogeneity, and plurality, in an attempt to put forward a gentle, alternate vision of Islam (Metcalf 2005). While this is a critical intellectual and political project, it nevertheless overlooks the feelings of sectarian resentment and practices of othering that might also permeate everyday intra-Muslim interaction. Such polarizing attitudes have not erased values of local pluralism that have always existed in the region. But they have threatened them enough such that it takes active mobilization and struggle – embodied for example in poetry performances and progressive party activism – to keep local life-worlds of religious diversity alive.

In my analysis of everyday forms of sectarianism, I focus specifically on spaces of secular education and the Shia-Sunni encounters that take place therein. While madrasa education in Pakistan is routinely criticized for producing the radicalized agents of sectarian violence (Zaman 1998, Nasr 2000, Jaffrelot 2002), the relationship between secular education and sectarianism remains largely unproblematic. Indeed, education is constructed as a key solution for combating sectarianism within popular discourse in Gilgit, and elsewhere in Pakistan. This discourse assumes that school education constitutes an entirely non-sectarian milieu, and that it somehow automatically helps students to rise above parochial sectarian sentiments, thus promoting a more progressive and tolerant understanding of Islam.

Ground realities in Gilgit, however, starkly contradict this assumption. As discussed in the last chapter, the Islamic content of secular school textbooks recently became the source of the most intense Shia-Sunni conflict that the region has witnessed in the last two decades. The conflict publicly demonstrated the extent to which secular education is implicated in the production of sectarian tension. Beyond these eruptive incidents, and also because of them, it is important to investigate the more everyday experiences of sectarianism that have become routinized in secular

educational contexts, so as to grasp the sectarian subjectivities which shape the personal as well as the political in Gilgit.

Taunts: Casual or Structural?

Javed is a 16-year old Shia boy from a village in Baltistan – a district in Pakistan’s Northern Areas – who studies at a local government school in Gilgit. When I asked him about his views on sectarianism in Gilgit, he narrated the following incident:

“Last week, there was a cricket match between class 8 – in which I study – and class 7. I was balling. And it went wide. A Chilasi (Sunni) boy, Kamran, who was in my team angrily said,

“His balling is atrocious, we should beat him up.”

I was hurt, and dejectedly responded,

“Go ahead and beat me, if you like.”

To this, Kamran responded, “You Shia people are like this only, incompetent.”

The other Shia boys in my class then came to my defense. One of them said to Kamran,

“Ok, so you really want to talk about religion? Then talk to us. He is a *pardesi*⁶⁷ and not even *mazhabi type*.⁶⁸ How cowardly it is to scare him.”

Then the situation calmed down, and we continued the game. After all, we were in the same team.”⁶⁹

Having related this incident to me, Javed went on to explain it. In a simultaneously amused and puzzled tone, he said,

⁶⁷ *Pardesi* is an Urdu word for “foreigner” and Javed was termed as one since he is originally from Baltistan, not Gilgit.

⁶⁸ *Mazhabi* is an Urdu word for “religious”; *mazhabi type* is a hybrid Urdu-English word that denotes a person with a strong religious disposition.

⁶⁹ Delving further into this incident, I discovered that Javed did not know Kamran from before, and there was no prior case of bitterness between them. They both knew about each other’s sectarian affiliation from their respective place of origin, as places in the Northern Areas tend to be religiously homogenous; hence, it is normal to conclude that a Balti student is Shia and a Chilasi one is Sunni.

“You see even when there is no link, people have to bring religion in between from somewhere or the other! *Baat baat mein mazhab dal deytay hain* (people bring in religion in every other matter).”

Javed’s narrative provides a revealing glimpse into what we might call the everyday forms of sectarianism in Gilgit. There is no involvement of organized religious groups, and no physical violence. Yet, sectarian tension is created and manifested through the invocation of epithets, and an unexpected ridicule of sectarian identity. I say “unexpected” because the denigration of Shia identity neither emerged in the context of a religious discussion, nor is it based on the usual normalized grounds: that the Shia are corrupted or simply *kaafir* (infidel). The taunt is instead based on a lack of worldly ability that is presumed to emerge from an inferior Shia identity, hence expanding the available rationales for sectarian othering.⁷⁰ Consequently, even an ordinary situation of playing cricket in the playground of a secular school – a form of inter-sect social encounter that should ideally reduce prejudice and promote harmony – can lead to the production of sectarian anxieties.

Javed’s assessment of this incident is equally telling, and also resonated with my own experiences in Gilgit. As much as I would like to resist generalizations, it did seem to me that the invoking of sectarian sentiments in every other matter – or *baat baat mein mazhab* as Javed aptly put it – had become disturbingly common, and perhaps a structural disposition in Gilgit. It is not surprising that someone like Javed would find this disposition particularly striking, as he had come to Gilgit only recently, and that too, from a rural culture which had not experienced the kind of sectarian anxiety present in Gilgit. Even more troubling was the realization that the arena of secular education – often proposed as the panacea for sectarianism in local

⁷⁰ Normalized interaction with sectarian others also requires that a taunt or any attack of a sectarian nature be strongly confronted. In this respect, it is interesting that Kamran is not told to apologize or take back what he said, but that he has cowardly picked on a target who is a foreigner – implying that Javed is not yet socialized into the Gilgiti norm of inter-sect relations where exchanging taunts as well as the ways of dealing with them might be common knowledge.

and supra-local discourse – was in fact deeply implicated in the production of sectarian tension and distrust. One form of this implication is a spontaneous kind of tense exchange over sectarian identity that Javed experienced while playing cricket in his school. At other times, the altercation can stem from more organized sources, and assume larger dimensions.

Forming Difference

In 2006, a new principal at the prestigious and “secular” Army Public School in Gilgit introduced bio-data forms for teachers and students, in which their sectarian affiliation had to be specified. School teachers had to ask students – even nursery-level ones – to find out or confirm their sectarian identity from parents, in order to fill out the forms. Not surprisingly, teachers across sect resisted this move, citing it as a “sensitive issue.” Parents were likewise suspicious, and complained bitterly to teachers. Shia and Ismaili teachers felt particularly resentful, as the new principal was considered a zealous Sunni who would use the bio-data form as a basis for targeting non-Sunni teachers and students.⁷¹ Despite resistance from all quarters, the principal refused to back down and the sect-specific data he wanted had to be collected.

According to two teachers of the school whom I interviewed, the whole process had a severely damaging impact on relations between students. Bushra, a 4thth grade class teacher said:

“In my class, I noticed that children were now more aware of each others’ sect. They started to self-segregate, with Sunni ones sitting and socializing with other Sunnis, Shias with Shias, and so on. Several teachers noticed this tendency in their classrooms.”

Aafreen, a senior head-teacher said:

⁷¹ One of them complained to a higher-up military official in Gilgit through her husband, but there was no response. Parents as well as teachers whom I interviewed felt that the decision to introduce the forms had the sanction of the military establishment in Gilgit.

“Young kids are so vulnerable. Some of them did not even know what sect means, and what their sect was. Because of the forms, kids started talking about religion and sects. In fact, a class 2 boy discovered that one of his classmates was Shia and beat him up. Apparently, he had heard at home that ‘Shia people are bad, and should be beaten up.’”

This particular case of a sectarian-driven physical fight between young students was repeated to me a number of times in Gilgit, as people commented with cynical dismay on the extent to which the *zehir* (poison) of sectarianism has spread in their region. I will provocatively call this incident a case of “sectarian violence,” to underscore and ask why such discursively and physically violent encounters at the micro-political, everyday level are silenced in normative analyses of sectarianism. Attention to such encounters is critical for understanding the deployment of sectarian discourse in practice, and for grasping the intimate production and experience of sectarian difference. These encounters help to illuminate the very content of sectarian othering, its pervasiveness, as well as its consequences for sense of self and collectivity. Moreover, micro-practices of sectarian hostility embody a “violence of the everyday” that serves to constitute the very conditions of possibility for dramatic eruptions of collective violence (Das 2007).

At the same time, we also need to attend to the ways in which the everyday is structured. The above case is instructive in this respect, as – analogous to the role of sectarianized textbooks discussed in chapter 3 – it demonstrates the crucial role of institutional practices in cultivating sectarian anxieties, and hence, in producing the sectarian imaginary. While a sense of religious difference and bigotry might emerge in the space of the home, it has the potential to become more pronounced and volatile through administrative forms of classification – quite literally so in this case. These forms are reminiscent of colonial methods of categorization like the census, which objectified social identities, and served to produce notions of religious difference, instead of merely reflecting them (Cohn 1987). If the bio-data form was indeed

introduced at the behest of the military establishment – very likely since it is an army-run school – we can also view it as yet another form of the disciplinary practices of the modern state that end up giving “socio-political significance to the fact of difference” (Verdery 1994: 46). Ironically, such forms of difference can also be produced through struggles that seem to *resist* sectarianism, as I discuss below.

Sectarianized Equality

In July 2006, the government-run Karakorum International University (KIU) – which is the only university in Gilgit – held its first convocation. On this occasion, the university administration awarded an Honor Shield each to its first Dean and first Vice Chancellor for services to the university, as well as one to the most prominent mountaineer of the Northern Areas, Nazir Sabir, for outstanding performance at an international level. Sabir is the first Pakistani to climb Mount Everest.

Soon after the convocation, the *Aman Jirga* (Peace Jirga) of Gilgit⁷² passed a resolution which strongly condemned KIU for these honors, and argued that there were “sectarian interests” behind the selection of recipients. This was an allusion to the fact that no Shia was awarded an honor, as the first Dean and first V.C. were known to be Sunnis, while Nazir Sabir was from the Ismaili sect. The resulting controversy was covered in the local Urdu press, generating public visibility and debate. The Peace Jirga also wrote a sharply worded letter to the KIU administration, demanding an apology for its alleged discrimination.

Incidentally, I had joined KIU as a visiting lecturer on the very day that this letter was received by the KIU administration. The Vice Chancellor, who was also relatively new to the university and was not from the Northern Areas, seemed

⁷² This is a large coalition comprising prominent political, religious and civil society members from Gilgit. Drawing from both the Shia and Sunni sects, the Peace Jirga was established to resolve the heightened atmosphere of sectarian hostility which emerged in the wake of the textbook controversy in Gilgit.

genuinely stunned and incensed. He told me that the honors were given to recognize the achievement and contribution of well-known people, and that he did not even know what the sect of the awardees was. I myself was perplexed by the situation. The Jirga's letter neither questioned the merit of the existing awardees, nor did it propose a potential Shia recipient who was overlooked and could now be awarded. It simply accused KIU of malicious intent, and claimed that the university was promoting sectarianism in the region. Addressing the Jirga's concerns would effectively require the university to first think about people's sectarian affiliation, and then consider whether they deserve an award or not. It seemed to me that such an attitude is itself a form of sectarianism – precisely what the Peace Jirga aimed to counter.

Several faculty members who belonged to the region were also disappointed by the defamation of their university, and argued that the Peace Jirga should have issued a request for information, instead of jumping to an inflammatory resolution. Yet, subtly echoing the Jirga's logic, they simultaneously insisted that the university administration should try to maintain "sectarian balance" and "equal treatment." This was perhaps an indirect way of suggesting that sectarian considerations might have indeed shaped the decision-making process for granting honors.

I could not ascertain whether this claim had any validity or not, but of course agreed that no sect should be discriminated against, or unduly favored in any administrative policy undertaken by the university. However, over the course of my affiliation with KIU, and extended fieldwork in Gilgit, I realized that this was not the only meaning of "equal treatment" for my respondents. When people – government officials, Jirga members, and faculty members amongst others – employed the language of "sectarian balance" and "equal treatment" what they actually meant was that sectarian considerations *should* play a role in administrative policies. If you hire a Shia and Ismaili for two new posts, for example, it is assumed that Sunnis are being

discriminated against so a Sunni should also be hired. If a Sunni and Ismaili are awarded with honors, it is considered obvious that Shias are not being treated “equally” and hence, there should be “balance.” A supposedly liberal-democratic logic of equality is thus appealed to, but one that entails the reinforcement of sectarian identity instead of secular values. This logic holds even with different permutations, so members of each sect could and do claim discrimination whenever any university decision was undertaken that did not include one of their own. Hence, as I discovered in my four-month stint at KIU, whether someone was being given hostel space, employment, prominent responsibility such as heading an administrative committee, or an award, “sectarian interests” were almost always assumed to be at work. The discourse has been naturalized to such a bizarre extent, that it would continue to operate even when someone from the so-called victimized sect was not available for, or had not applied for a given position. Moreover, as my field interactions and interviews demonstrated, the discourse is not limited to the space of the public university alone, but rather, is prevalent more generally within government institutions in Gilgit.

The Sectarian Imaginary

The working of this discourse in the context of KIU helps to illuminate key facets of what we might call the sectarian imaginary in Gilgit. I develop this concept based on Charles Taylor’s notion of the social imaginary (2004). Taylor describes the social imaginary as “the ways (in which) people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations” (Taylor 2004:23). Adapting this concept, the sectarian imaginary can be described as the ways in which people imagine their social existence and interaction in relation to sectarian identity. While Taylor emphasizes the ways in

which people fit together, my use of the sectarian imaginary pertains more to the ways in which people feel they do not fit together. Further, sectarian identities and inter-sect relations in Gilgit surely encompass multiple perspectives, affects, expectations, and possibilities, but my purpose here is to point out some specific evaluative frameworks that serve to heighten sectarian tension in Gilgit.

To begin with, the sectarian imaginary in Gilgit entails a dominant tendency to view and assess people first and foremost as members of a sect. Second, there is the linked tendency to define and understand all sorts of non-religious matters through a sectarian lens – or *baat baat mein mazhab* in Javed’s terms. Third, there are prominent feelings of suspicion between sects, and a wariness that the interests of sectarian others are being served while one’s own security, status and rights are being undermined. And finally, there is the recurring rhetoric of “sectarian balance” and “equal treatment” which reflects and reinscribes the previous three tendencies, while purporting to be a critique of sectarianism. These dispositions form part of a sectarian imaginary that imbues social life in Gilgit, resulting in the production of sectarian distrust and tension.

The notion of a sectarian imaginary is useful in comprehending how sectarianism is locally understood, lived, and felt. The dominant ways of thinking that it entails and authorizes highlight the paranoid subjectivities and emotional ill-will which lie at the heart of sectarianism in Gilgit. Gilgitis themselves recognize this condition, describing it as one characterized by *taasub*. *Taasub* is commonly translated as prejudice, but in the Gilgit context, also denotes sentiments of suspicion, paranoia, anxiety, and resentment. In everyday talk, people in Gilgit commonly comment and worry about the extent to which *taasub* has spread, and how it hinders political unity as well as economic progress. Indeed, *taasub* has become the popular local idiom for

describing sectarianism, instead of the more literal term of *firqavariat* which means conflict based on sectarian difference.

Where do such sectarian imaginaries and paranoid sensibilities come from? Sometimes, the immediate cause is apparent, as in the case of sectarian bio-data forms in the Army Public School. However, I argue that beyond interrogating the immediate scenario, structures of feeling need to be understood in relation to structures of rule. Thus, instead of naturalizing sectarian paranoia as evidence of parochial religious sentiments, we need to contextualize it within the political-religious context that Gilgitis inhabit, and which I discussed at length in chapter 2 and 3.

As I have argued, state practices of sectarianization – including the sponsoring of sectarian organizations to divide and conquer, organized violence against Shias, and biased textbooks – have all served to polarize Shia-Sunni relations in Gilgit. Given this broader context, it is not surprising that sectarian identity has become the most rigid axis of difference in Gilgit. Over the last thirty years, there has been a marked increase in Shia-Sunni sectarian polarization in Gilgit, evidenced by trends such as a decrease in shared participation in religious rituals, adjacent living in joint neighborhoods, as well as in inter-marriage between the different Muslim sects. A suspicion based on sect from the religious perspective has been actively nurtured through the sponsorship of religious groups, while the perpetual fear of “sectarian interests” at work in government affairs stems from the many discriminatory practices that have in fact been implemented. As this discrimination has been particularly targeted at the Shias, their sense of victimization tends to be more acute than that of other sects. Their paranoia, thus, is a response to their victimization, as well as to the knowledge of intense political manipulation by intelligence agencies (Harper 2008).

Poetic Resistance to Sectarianism

No matter how pervasive, sectarian imaginaries do not exhaust visions of life and subjectivities in the Northern Areas. During my fieldwork I observed that people continue to sustain traditional cross-sect kinship ties through gift-giving and hospitality, while regularly asserting that sectarianism is a political ideology that “came from outside” in the region. The existence of social exchange and a critical consciousness, however, does not mean that people automatically live in harmony and peace. As Ring (2006) has argued, peace is the product of continuous, creative labor, not an assumed condition that exists in the absence of physical conflict. In this section, I highlight the creative labors of a literary organization in Gilgit, for countering sectarianism and creating peace in Gilgit.

Poetry recitation has a prominent place in the social life of Gilgit. Whether at casual gatherings, cultural celebrations, NGO conferences, or political seminars, participants are likely to quote couplets in Urdu or in one of their local languages. *Mushairas*, or gatherings dedicated to poetry recitation, are often organized in people’s homes, at hotels, and in public spaces, and are much valued as a source of pleasure and intellectual stimulation. While *mushairas* have been part of the Indo-Persian cultural landscape at least since the 16th century (Naim 1991), poetic performances have a particularly central place in the cultural and spiritual life of (male) Muslims in Northern Pakistan (Marsden 2005). The ability to use words for poetic, playful, and creative expression is considered the hallmark of intellect, and both the production and reception of poetic performances is deemed integral to Muslim personhood (Ibid). In Gilgit, I was often told that poetry is truly the *rooh ki giza* or nourishment for the soul. Local poetry that has been put to music is also very popular in the Northern Areas, and is enjoyed both through recordings and in live performances.

I will now turn to the work of a literary organization Halqa-e-Arbab-e-Zauq (HAZ) in critiquing and contesting political dispossession and sectarian hostility in the Northern Areas. Halqa-e-Arbab-e-Zauq may be translated as the Circle of Literary Fellows. It is a prominent national organization for Urdu writers and poets, which promotes literature and poetry through its publications and *mushairas* (poetry festivals). The Gilgit chapter of HAZ was established in 1988, at the initiative of a retired army major from down-country who himself was a poet, and was at the time posted in the Education department in Gilgit.

My first encounter with HAZ was at a *mushaira* that was held at the Karakoram International University, as part of the Independence Day celebrations in August 2006. Jointly organized by KIU and HAZ, the four-hour *mushaira* featured the most distinguished poets from the Northern Areas, as well as a few renowned ones from other parts of Pakistan. It took place in the university garden, in the late evening, against the backdrop of a mountain lit up with *charagan* by some KIU faculty members. No fee was charged for attendance. There were around 400 people present, all men except for six women: three female poets on stage who were from down-country, and three women in the audience including myself. We could be there because we taught at the university, and were also non-local. The vast majority of male attendees belonged to the town of Gilgit and near-by areas, while the rest were students at KIU.

Like many others, I too was completely enthralled by the poetic performances at the *mushaira*. In an Urdu that was both simple and eloquent, and a recitation that was deeply moving, the region's poets attempted to stimulate the audience with their reflections on politics, society, and love.⁷³ When I talked with KIU students and

⁷³ Barring a few couplets, most of the poetry that was recited at the *mushaira* was in Urdu.

faculty members after the *mushaira*, they expressed how they relished the poetry for the beauty of words and of thought, and especially for the *dard* and *josh* – compassion and fervor – that it embodied. The performance was valued for the way in which it appealed to, and nourished the creative, intellectual, and emotional sensibilities of the listeners (c.f. Marsden 2005).

Several poets powerfully captured the political dispossession of the Northern Areas, and criticized the attitude of the Pakistani government towards the region – this, ironically at a festival that was meant to celebrate the independence of Pakistan. Sectarian prejudice was likewise a prominent theme, with many verses criticizing the role of clerics in propagating sectarian hatred.

For example, a number of verses emphasized the poet's understanding of what it means to be a Muslim, and how his interpretation embraces difference and respect, instead of prejudice and othering:

I ask for the crown of goodness
They tell me I don't possess a head
In my true faith everyone is a believer
I see no one as mushrik (polytheist) and no one as kafir (non-believer)

Saadat Manzoor

It is a message overflowing with prejudice
'Shed blood!' is being commonly preached
When this is the meaning of being Muslim
I am a non-believer if this is Islam

Qadam Aman

The above verses can be read as poetic attempts to nurture a plural vision of Islam – which has always been present in the history and practice of Muslims in the Northern Areas, and elsewhere – in place of the more insular one that has recently become ascendant.

Other verses more directly challenge the perspective as well as the motivation of a bigoted mullah. For example:

The Preacher and Love are unknown to each other
He is oblivious to where his prejudice leads him
And I am so busy doing the deeds of love
That I possess no time for hate

Farid Sirang

Some are absorbed in the madness of religion, some are drowned in castes
Enemies of the nation are everywhere hiding in their trenches⁷⁴
It is only an excuse to get to the chief of the city
They make us fight, so that they can sit in meetings with him

Mushtaq Shirazi

Apart from criticizing an over-zealous interpretation of religion that clerics often promote, the above verse also articulates, and contests the patron-client relation that exists between state officials and clerics in the Northern Areas, and indeed, elsewhere in Pakistan (Blom forthcoming). The poet suggests that instead of religious guidance, the purpose of the clergy has become one of promoting sectarian conflict at

⁷⁴ When I interviewed him, the poet clarified to me that “enemies of the nation” here primarily refers to the *mullahs*, or clerics of both sects.

the orders of the ruler, reflecting the widely held local belief that state officials in the region have tried to use religion for divide-and-conquer.

I found it striking that critical poetry pertaining to political domination and religious conflict in the Northern Areas tended to attract the strongest applause from the audience. The applause may be conceived as an endorsement of how the sentiments expressed by the poets echoed with, and appealed to the feelings of audience members.

The performance of critical poetry at *mushairas* can be seen as a form of oral genre – such as folklore, songs, and jokes – which embodies a subversive script of resistance (Abu-Lughod 1986) against political and religious power, while also constituting an a rooted moral discourse (Raheja and Gold 1994) about the meaning of Muslim identity – one that contests the meaning of Muslimness that is envisioned in official, sectarian textbooks and similar forms of state policy. But Gilgiti poetic performances are not just “everyday” forms of resistance (Scott 1986) as linguistic expressive traditions have often been seen. Even though they are embedded in the rhythms of everyday life, they are neither ordinary nor hidden. Such performances constitute a critical public arena (Fraser 1992) and cultural intervention (Kershaw 1992), in which “the capacity for change may be highlighted and made manifest to the community” (Bauman and Babcock 1978: 45). If sectarianized textbooks create the conditions of possibility for conflict, then HAZ poetry festivals in Gilgit help to create the conditions of possibility for peaceful coexistence. Such performances both reflect and reshape the imagination, constituting a site of representation as well as transformation. I thus conceptualize them as a form of social struggle and collective action that is as concrete, meaningful, and transformative as a “movement.”

Transformation of attitudes is in fact an expressed goal that HAZ poets strive towards with their publications and festivals. As a key HAZ representative, Saqi Jan explained to me:

“We have to create religious harmony and local unity to ensure peace. We have worked harder for the promotion of tolerance and peace, than for the promotion of literature.”

Towards this end, HAZ has not only published and recited poetry that promotes an ethic of religious respect, it has also organized poetry events for the specific purpose of bringing *ulema* from different sects together in appreciation of a shared Islam – a contribution that has been especially critical in times of sectarian tension. While showing me pictures of these events, Sajid Rehman, a founding member of HAZ narrated:

“You can see here, that we have organized an *aman* (peace) conference ... a *seerat* conference (in praise of Prophet Muhammad)...and here’s a *mehfil-e-musalama* conference titled ‘*Hussain sub ka*’ (Hussain is for everyone⁷⁵). All to get *maulvis* from both sects (Shia/Sunni) to sit together. They would of course never come to a regular *mushaira* so we organized events according to their disposition; we talked only about Allah and the Prophet, and compelled them to come. After Agha Ziaduddin’s death, there were open killings in Gilgit. *Maulvis* from the two sects even refused to see each other’s face, and there was only talk of revenge and hatred. We tried on our part to break the tension, by organizing a *naatia mushaira* (poetry evening in praise of Prophet Muhammad) in which the religious leaders of both sects came together for the first time since the sectarian situation went bad. At this event, we also invited progressive-minded *alims* (religious scholars) and intellectuals from down-country who talked about the need for Muslim unity in the face of larger global challenges.”

Such efforts to “break the tension” by creating a space for “sitting together” and recognizing commonality are of profound value in the highly sectarianized context of Gilgit. The poetic veneration of common religious figures – even asserting that they

⁷⁵ “For everyone” here emphasizes that Hussain is not just a revered religious figure for Shias, but for all Muslims. Hussain has a special significance for Shia Muslims as he is their second Imam, and the yearly commemoration of his martyrdom is a key aspect of Shia identity and devotion.

are *common* – and a scholarly attention to the larger global context constitute creative strategies for overcoming sectarian conflict, cultivating social unity, and creating peace. These strategies are all the more significant for securing the involvement of influential local religious leaders, who ordinarily have the strongest stake in maintaining sectarian enmity. We might think of such HAZ events as creating “micro-publics of banal transgression” (Amin 2002:14) where the fixed patterns of interaction between people from different backgrounds may be destabilized and new ways of connecting established.

The cultural work of HAZ in countering sectarian animosity has elicited a mixed reaction from the religious clergy in Gilgit. As Saqi Jan, a prominent Sunni poet who is also a key official of HAZ said to me:

“There are *ulema* from both sects who welcome the work of HAZ members, and say ‘Recite!’ even when we recite verses that poke fun at their sensibilities. But there are others who dismiss poetry altogether, and view culture as a threat to religion. They want us to forget our history and culture, of which religion is a part. It is usually the Sunni *maulvis* who think like this. There is a better appreciation of culture in Shia and Ismaili communities in Gilgit.”

The displeasure of Sunni clergy in Gilgit at HAZ poets has also been vocalized in mosque sermons, in which Sunni poets of HAZ in particular have been accused of engaging in the *tauheen* (disrespect) of ulema. According to the poet Dildar Fikri, verses such as the following have been especially infuriating for the clergy:

The mullah here has a protruding belly
He thinks he is filled with faith

More tragically, in 2007, a member of an extremist Sunni religious group was caught before attempting to kill a HAZ-affiliated Sunni poet for “organizing conferences” and “uniting sects” (Personal interview). This demonstrates the extent to

which extremist Sunni organizations feel threatened by HAZ, and also the considerable risk that HAZ poets have put their lives into by their attempts at bridging the sectarian divide and recovering the ethic of religious pluralism.

The efforts of HAZ are sometimes dismissed even by the secular-liberal left in Gilgit, as it feels that HAZ events are more about “entertainment” than “real change.”

As a journalist-activist Suleman Shah mentioned to me:

“The Progressive Writers Movement took on empire. They invited *mazdoor* (labor) and *kisan* (farmer) leaders as chief guests at their events. HAZ poets invite government officials. They are complacent, and keen on pleasing officials than on boldly challenging them.”

Such critiques overlook the fact that entertaining performances also constitute subversive sites of “real change” and that it is precisely its more mainstream position that enables HAZ to have a wider appeal and reach. More importantly, the majority of poets affiliated with HAZ work for the local government in Gilgit. As government workers, they have severe limitations on political expression, participation, and protest, particularly in a heavily monitored space as the Northern Areas. Resistance in its directly political form is thus a luxury that they cannot afford given their economic circumstances. In such a context, critical poetry affords a creative means of expressing grievance and protest. It can be performed in a casual and amused tone, so as not to seriously offend – though at one famed HAZ *mushaira*, the Chief Secretary⁷⁶ who also happened to be the chief guest at the occasion felt snubbed and threatened to leave if “guests continued to be respected this way.” HAZ poetry thus embodies a critique of, and challenge to authority that can outrage both political and religious power in Gilgit.

The work of HAZ also helps to complicate our understanding of the state, as it contests the assumption that bureaucrats are unthinking “state agents” who simply

⁷⁶ The position of the Chief Secretary is the highest post in the bureaucratic set-up of the Northern Areas.

represent and reproduce state discourses and practices of rule. Their progressive efforts constitute both everyday forms of state-formation (Joseph and Nugent 1994) as well as modes of bureaucratic resistance to state logics of coercion and control. HAZ poets are simultaneously local and national; they experience the state as local inhabitants but also embody it and help to execute its policies. From this overlapping position, they seek to create spaces of poetic reflection and critique that can reach the government as well as society. They comment on the callousness of the Pakistan government, as much as they speak of sectarian prejudice amongst people in the Northern Areas. Sometimes, though, they discuss these problems as if the poets themselves exist outside of and above them, not as those who are embroiled in negotiating these complex realities. However, these are realities that they are moved by, and which they strive to understand and transform through poetry.

Finally, it is also important to note that Halqa-e-Arbab-e-Zauq is amongst several other literary organizations in the Northern Areas that seek to bring about progressive change through poetry. Prominent among these, apart from HAZ, is the Bazm-e-Ilm-o-Fann (BIF) or Society for Knowledge and Art. While HAZ is dominant in Gilgit, BIF is more active in Skardu. The motto of BIF reveals the organization's vision: *adab waseela-e-ittehad, muhabbat waseela-e-aman* – literature is a means for creating unity, love is the means for peace. As the head of the organization, Jalal Daanish, described to me:

“Gatherings that are on party or religious basis tend to create groups, and divide people. But our cultural events are open to everyone. There is no *sarhad* (border) in poetry, and this is the first step towards unity. Of course, polo events are also open to all, and they are important in this respect. But they are just for fun, not for learning and reflection.”

When I probed him about what “learning and reflection” does BIF aspire for, he explained:

“Look at the values that have destroyed our region. Like *aksariat aur aqliat ki soch* (the idea of majority and minority). Why should we ever think in these terms? Everyone has the right to live as they desire, once you accept that, why should numbers matter? In our region, we have so much *taasub* (prejudice) and *hasad* (jealousy/competitiveness) that destroys peace and unity. We want others to fail, so that we can pass. Schools also promote such thinking. That’s one reason I think the literate have done more to promote sectarianism than the illiterate. Instead, we should want ourselves to do well, and same for everyone else. In literature, there is neither space for *taasub* nor for *hasad*. We preach *insaniyat* (humanism) which is the central message of Islam. Also, at our cultural events, we especially try to target youth age 15-26 and talk about events such as the *jang-e-azadi* (Gilgit war of independence) which is absent from their history textbooks. We try to give the region’s youth of a sense of local history and culture which they don’t get from schools.”

The “learning and reflection” that the Bazm-e-Ilm-o-Fann promotes thus represents a literary vision for change that makes up for, and counters the failings of school-based education – which is perceived to promote bigotry and jealousy and deny a sense of regional identity and history. Jalal Daanish’s words themselves were a source of learning and reflection for me. They resonated with, and enriched my own analysis of the problems with the language of majority/minority and about *taasub* – which are key to the production of sectarianism in the Northern Areas as discussed earlier in this chapter. However, while literary events provide an important antidote, they alone cannot counter the vicious pervasiveness of sectarianism; institutionalized sectarianism itself needs to be rooted out for the recovery of religious harmony in the region.

Political Party Activism in Gilgit

In this section, I turn to more formal political efforts against sectarianism and political dispossession in Gilgit, as embodied in the activism of *qaum parast tanzeemain* – local secular-nationalist parties with leftist leanings. These parties have been mobilizing for social and political change in the region for more than two decades. While I was present in Gilgit when nationalist activists were organizing

public protests, it is the seminars and conferences that they organize for political education which I reflect on in this section. I wish to highlight, in particular, how – like literary activities – these seminars also constitute a critical public space (Fraser 1992) for progressive action in Gilgit, stressing social justice over sectarianism, debate over dogma, and “improving the bargaining position” over submission.

The contemporary landscape of political movements and parties in the Northern Areas can be described as flourishing. Apart from prominent national parties such as the PPP, PML (N) and Jamat-e-Islami (JI), and sectarian parties such as the SSP and TJP, the local political scene is dotted with more than a dozen homegrown secular-nationalist parties and coalitions, such as the Gilgit Baltistan Democratic Alliance (GBDA), the Gilgit-Baltistan National Alliance (GBNA), Karakoram National Movement (KNM), and the Balawaristan National Front (BNF). These groups are cross-sectarian and cross-ethnic in their leadership and membership base.

Secular-nationalist movements first emerged in the Northern Areas in the 1960s. At that time, these struggles were directed against the authoritarianism of local *Mirs* or princely kings as well as against the Pakistani government. Most of the activists of the time trace their political consciousness to their university life in Karachi, where multiple political and student movements were struggling to shape the nature of the new nation-state of Pakistan.

After the abolition of princely states in 1972, these movements lost some of their appeal to Pakistani parties such as the PPP, and also the fact that a key target of their activities – the princely state – was now disbanded. However, the emergence of state practices of sectarianization in the 1970 revived the impetus for local political mobilization. Thus, while state-backed sectarianism did in fact damage the regional social fabric by breeding a culture of suspicion and intolerance, ironically, it simultaneously fuelled local secular-national movements that sought to resist the state

project of rule. In effect, the process of state sectarianization led both to heightened sectarianism as well as heightened secular nationalism.

The Shia pogrom of 1988 not only marked a turning point in inter-sect relations in the Northern Areas – as discussed in the previous chapter – but also in the landscape of political movements in the region. The Balawaristan National Front (BNF), for example, is a prominent secular nationalist party in the Northern Areas that is demanding a sovereign and independent state for the region. While it was formally established in 1992, both its founding leader Nawaz Khan Naji as well as its current chairman Abdul Hamid Khan trace their political awakening to the sectarian violence of 1988.⁷⁷ The need for a nationalist party was felt much earlier than 1988, because in the words of Naji, every time the region's people appealed for economic rights to national political parties in Islamabad, they were told: "Your vote did not bring us to power, so why should we cater to your demands?" This made Gilgiti nationalists realize the significance of gaining political representation within the structures of the Pakistan state. However, it was the 1988 violence that radicalized Gilgiti nationalists, making them realize that the ethnically and religiously diverse region of the Northern Areas had no hope *within* a militantly Sunni state like Pakistan. Hence, the demand for an independent Northern Areas – or Balawaristan as they call it.

BNF leaders understood well that the 1988 sectarian violence had a religious project of disciplining local Shias, and also a political project of using divide and rule to disrupt political solidarity and detract attention from the existing political suppression of the region. They also believed that the state project was succeeding in breeding sectarian resentment at a social level, particularly due to the absence of political and economic rights. Hence, parties like the BNF aimed at directing people

⁷⁷ A founding member of the Karakoram National Movement expressed the same sentiment. The KNM, in fact, was established as a direct response to 1988, barely five months after the occurrence of the violence.

towards the “real issues” of political and economic justice as a means to counter the atmosphere of cultural intolerance that was fast taking root post-1988.

In such a climate, BNF activists decided to focus their mobilization around the issue of unemployment – a common concern of youth from all sects – as a means to counter religious intolerance as well as political alienation. Consequently, at their first *ijlas* (conference), BNF launched a “Berozgar Action Committee” (Unemployment Action Committee) to tackle unemployment in the region. Importantly, this first conference was held in Jalalabad – the worst affected Shia village during the 1988 sectarian violence. This was significant as the nationalists wanted to recognize 1988, and yet go beyond it. They wanted to emphasize that the Shias of Jalalabad were not just “Shias” – they were displaced people who were economically affected by the 1988 massacre as their homes and livelihoods were completely destroyed due to state-backed violence. Simultaneously, the emphasis on unemployment indicated that the lack of economic security is a common concern of people in the Northern Areas and hence, should be the main platform that everyone should mobilize on.

While such efforts constitute hope and guidance for the youth – as well as for the region as a whole – the actual support for nationalist parties remains limited largely because critical political activity is seen as a source of getting into trouble with the ruling military-intelligence regime. However, even if the actual membership of nationalist parties might be small, this does not mean that these parties are marginal to political action in Gilgit. On the contrary, these parties are quite active and visible on the local scene. They routinely organize seminars and strikes against ongoing political injustices in the region, and give statements on current events that make headlines in the local newspapers. I found it telling that Gilgitis often made it a point to clarify to me that they were not affiliated with any nationalist party, and that generally,

nationalist parties did not have much local support. Yet, this statement would be followed up with an expression of *hamdardi* with these groups.

Hamdardi is often translated as “sympathy.” But the literal meaning is “shared emotion and pain” which I think is a more accurate translation. When Gilgitis say that they have *hamdardi* with nationalists, they are not saying that they merely sympathize with the nationalist cause, or pity the nationalists’ suffering. Rather, I read their sentiment as a recognition of the shared grievances and interests that unites the party activist with a lay person. It is just that the activist has the courage – and perhaps the socio-economic position – to organize, and deal with the consequences of political action e.g. the persecution of self and family, the economic and social costs of not living a regular life, and the fear of the unintended outcomes of struggle. There is an implicit appreciation of the work of nationalists in Gilgit, and I was often told to meet them because of their *gehri soch* (deep thought and reflection) on the predicament of the region. In fact, I was amazed that it was often self-described “apolitical” Gilgitis – usually working in a government office, NGO, bank, or the university – who were most interested in my research, and actually pointed me to nationalist magazines, covert write-ups, and banned books that might be useful for my work.

Once I was attending a political seminar by the Gilgit Baltistan Democratic Alliance, and two acquaintances ruefully expressed how they wanted to come along but could not really do so. An ex-government servant, Jamil Khan said:

“My heart really desires to go and at least hear what they say, because they are speaking the truth. Even if nothing comes out of their activities. But the agencies monitor these events, and note down who comes to them. As a recently retired person, I cannot really take part in these activities. But one day I might. I want to speak up.”

A female friend, Shazia, wanted to participate as well, but could not really do so because there would be no other local woman present – political events in Gilgit tend to be exclusively male.

I will now turn to the key demands of nationalist parties, the political differences within them, and to their repertoires of mobilization. In recent years, nationalist parties in the Northern Areas have tried to build consensus around key political demands, recognizing that the main hindrance in the prosperity of the region is its political disenfranchisement due to the Kashmir dispute. Such local efforts to bridge party differences and establish a unified stance led to the establishment of the Gilgit-Baltistan National Alliance (GBNA) in 2002.

The GBNA was an alliance of 14 regional parties, with a two-point agenda: a) attaining constitutional rights and self-rule on the pattern of Azad Kashmir, and b) the representation of Gilgit-Baltistan in any future negotiations on the Kashmir issue. The alliance came into being after considerable efforts, as the parties had many differences on how they conceptualized the region's relation to Kashmir and to the Pakistan state, and what their preferred demands were. Now, they were able to overcome their differences in the service of a larger cause of posing a more united, and stronger force with which to confront, and negotiate with the Pakistani government. However, by 2007, serious rifts had emerged within the alliance as the more assertive parties within it felt that other parties had "softened" their stance on state injustices, because of fear or because of being co-opted. Or simply, because of life circumstances that posed varying limits on critique by differently positioned subjects. For example, one of the leaders of the GBNA was a retired Major whose son is employed by the army. Some alliance parties felt that under his leadership, the GBNA had become dormant because the retired Major had either been told, or himself feared, that his political activity would risk the employment of his son in the army.

Eventually, a new break-away group was established in February 2007 that called itself the Gilgit Baltistan Democratic Alliance (GBDA). The members of GBDA include the Boloristan Labor Party, the Balawaristan National Front, the Karakoram National Movement, the Gilgit Baltistan United Movement, Baltistan Students Federation, Bolor Research Forum, and Progressive Youth Forum. GBDA members acknowledged that breaking away was a hard decision, as they wanted to unite the different nationalist forces and there were many common interests that still united the different parties. However, a compromised stance and co-optation by the establishment left no choice but to create a more “principled” and assertive alliance.

Going further than the GBNA, GBDA demands, firstly, that the Pakistan army and civil administration need to leave the region, and second, that elections for an independent legislative assembly should be held in the region under the UN. By calling for demilitarization and elections under an international body instead of either Pakistan or India, the GBDA directly articulates a desire for political autonomy, and the rights of the people of Northern Areas to decide their own future. It is important to note that this assertiveness has come largely in response to the excesses of the Pakistan government in the Northern Areas, and its constant denial of constitutional rights for the region. Further, the position is in line with what many regional parties demand both in Pakistan as well as in Indian governed Kashmir.

The difference between GBNA and GBDA is critical, as it highlights how actors engaged in direct political action conceive their political opportunity structure (Jenkins and Perrow 1977, Meyer 1990) and frame their strategy accordingly.

For example, as the President of the GBDA argued at a political seminar, much to the amusement of the audience:

“We have become *bhikaris* (beggars). We have been knocking on the doors of Islamabad for years. Give us rights, please, give us rights. Anything will do. Even a dumb representative in Parliament. The more submissive we are, the

more we are taken for granted. But we have to change our attitude, and treat ourselves with respect. We are central, and have the resources that Pakistan wants. Yes, we need Pakistan for *aata* (flour) and *dalda* (cooking oil), but Pakistan needs us more.”

This reflects how political groups in the Northern Areas strive to negotiate the terms of marginality. It also shows an experiential awareness that as long as groups in the Northern Areas demand inclusion within the framework of the state – for example, by asking for constitutional rights – the Pakistan government does not really pay attention. There is a feeling that their cries fall on deaf ears. Only once they demand sovereignty and challenge the very terms of inclusion – for example, by asking the civil administration and Pakistan army to leave the area – does the region’s plight receive attention, and the government is potentially compelled to rethink its policy. Unfortunately, as the case of Balochistan amply demonstrates, the typical state response in Pakistan has been brutal repression which far from containing legitimate regional grievances, aggravates them and ultimately perpetuates more separatist tendencies.

To assert centrality and demand sovereignty, nationalists groups in the Northern Areas have also repositioned their attitude towards the Kashmir dispute. For years, they argued that Northern Areas had nothing to do with Kashmir. That they had fought a war of independence in 1947 to free themselves from the Dogras of princely Kashmir, precisely to reject Kashmiri rule in their territory. They challenged – and still do – the logic of coupling Northern Areas with the Kashmir dispute. However, groups within both GBDA and GBNA have been forced to acknowledge that their regional sovereignty *has* become linked to the Kashmir dispute, and that they have to engage with the dispute instead of rejecting it. It is only by engaging with the dispute can they turn it from a source of their political marginality into their political strength. It is this realist repositioning of attitude towards Kashmir that has led GBDA and GBNA to

assert Northern Areas as the legitimate fourth party to the dispute – apart from India, Pakistan, and Kashmiris.

In the words of a GBDA leader, this repositioning is not only demanded by their circumstances, it also serves to “improve their bargaining position.” However, this is not merely a strategic, or even a desperate move, to grab attention and change the status quo. It reflects a growing concern that the relation with the Pakistan government is doomed to bring despair and suppression, due to the colonial mentality which is embedded in the way the region has hitherto been ruled. Moreover, there is a strong feeling that the region has been taken for granted, and that it has been betrayed despite the struggle and blood with which the region opted for Pakistan. If the promise of sovereignty and respect within Pakistan has so far not been fulfilled, what is the point of pursuing it?

But for Gilgiti nationalists, improving the bargaining position within a given set of relations goes alongside challenging the very terms of the relation. We can say that Gilgiti nationalists challenge both the conditions and terms of rule, while simultaneously strategizing given the reality of these terms.

Unlike many nationalist movements elsewhere in Pakistan, Kashmir, and indeed in the world, it is significant that parties in the Northern Areas have not adopted militant means to attract attention to their cause – though the conditions of rule have surely been oppressive enough to have led to militancy, and may yet lead to it in future. There are multiple reasons for this anomaly. First, the region fought a war in 1947 *to be part of* the Muslim nation that Pakistan represented, and that struggle has been memorialized in ways that make it virtually impossible to now fight a war *against* Pakistan. Second, as I pointed out in chapter 2, the widespread participation of local soldiers in the Pakistan army has engendered loyalty, submission and admiration which counters any militant mobilization of rights in the region. Third, nationalists

know that militancy would neither achieve support from the local population – as embittered and divided they already are due to sectarian violence – nor from the Pakistani one which is already so unaware of the situation in the region. In conditions when even a street protest of 50 groups can produce illegal confinement and torture – and still attract no accountability and visibility – the utility of militant struggle is simply too little, and its possibility dim. Finally, when younger nationalist-leaning men even protest, they are reminded by their male relatives – some of whom may have fought in wars to defend Pakistan – that this is not only a betrayal of national dignity but also of family honor.

Quite apart from militant tactics, nationalist parties have very limited freedom even to peacefully promote their cause. A constant fear of arrests and torture by police and ISI personnel imposes serious limits on their activities, as well as on popular participation in these activities. Despite such obstacles, however, nationalist parties in the Northern Areas have persistently organized protests for expressing dissent, published news magazines for analysis and awareness, and conducted seminars and conferences for political mobilization. I will now review one such seminar that I attended in Gilgit during my fieldwork.

In July 2007, the Gilgit-Baltistan Democratic Alliance (GBDA) organized a political seminar on the “National Question of the Northern Areas.” This was the fourth of a series of political events organized by the alliance, the earlier three being on the “Bhasha Dam” held in Diamer, the “Karachi Agreement of 1949” held in Skardu, and the “Naming of the Northern Areas” which was held in Ghizar.

The seminar was held at a hotel in Gilgit, and was attended by around hundred people from Gilgit – all men – and myself. One or two representatives from each of the seven parties belonging to the GBDA spoke at the seminar. Over the three hours that the seminar lasted, the various speakers addressed a key concern: what is the

relationship of the Northern Areas to Pakistan, and what kind of a political set-up is desirable for the future? There were many common strands in the speeches, such as a retelling of the Gilgit war of independence, and the subsequent denial of constitutional status. Likewise, common demands were raised across speeches, such as the demand for regional autonomy.

But what I found particularly fascinating about the seminar was the degree of discussion, debate and disagreement that it entailed. On the historical and future boundaries of the Northern Areas, for example, a representative of the Balwaristan National Front (BNF) argued that Kargil, Ladakah and Chitral were historically part of the Northern Areas – or Balwaristan as they have renamed it – and hence the nationalist struggle is also about regaining this lost territory. The vice-president of the GBDA, on the other hand, argued that instead of new borders to replace arbitrary, colonial ones, we need open borders that permit freedom of travel and trade. Similarly, an audience member belonging to the Shia Tulba Action Committee (Shia Students Action Committee) requested to speak, and contended that society in the Northern Areas is deeply religious but their religious values are being ignored by the secularist tendencies of *qaum parast tanzeemain* (nationalist organizations). This is why these organizations lack popular appeal. To this, a number of GDBA members clarified that their use of “secular” does not mean “without religion;” rather, it entails the freedom of religion for all beliefs that people in the Northern Areas subscribe to. It was argued that it is precisely religion raised to the level of state that has caused division and conflict in the region, and that the protection of religious values is ensured precisely by not embroiling religion with politics. Yet another point of difference was raised when the Chairman of the Northern Areas Transport Union – also speaking from the audience – mentioned that the “special” constitution-less status of Northern Areas means that a 20 lakh luxury car is available for 2 lakhs to people in the region (since

there is no custom tax). He asserted that this affordability is the “constitution” that poor people want, and that the political constitution is perhaps important only to MNAs. Having a proper constitution would reduce this affordability, and “we will have to return to tractors.” Responding to this, a member of the GBDA argued that access to consumer goods should not justify acceptance of political violence, and is not as important an indicator of progress as the dignity of the people.

None of the issues regarding the “national question” in the Northern Areas were consensually resolved in the seminar. Rather, the seminar was a forum that facilitated a conversation and debate on key issues, instead of proposing and imposing already-formed positions. The discursive openness enabled a participatory public space, in which people could air their grievances as well as their different visions for the region’s future. I argue that cultivating such a culture of dialogue is a key mode of political engagement and education by nationalist parties in the Northern Areas. Both poetry festivals and political seminars in Gilgit thus constitute critical public arenas that enable critical expression, reflection, and contestation – which may not always be oppositional – but nevertheless productive of agentive capacity, an empowering sense of collectivity, and the possibility of a better future.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I firstly attempted to explore Shia-Sunni sectarianism in Gilgit in its routine enactment and negotiation, in relation to the sectarian imaginaries that structure thought and action, and in terms of emotional experiences of *taasub* and tension instead of those of militant violence. I focused on the arena of secular education because it is a key, micro-political site where sectarian anxieties are articulated and reinforced, and also to problematize the common-sense notion that secular education automatically counters sectarian antipathy. Simultaneously, I investigated literary and political struggles that seek to counter sectarianism and create

peace through critical public arenas that promote progressive visions of harmony and humanity.

Apart from these cultural-political interventions, everyday inter-sect relations in Gilgit also continue to entail the lived realities of overlapping identities, shared interests, co-existence and co-operation that constantly disrupt sectarian divisions. There is a vibrant public discourse in the Northern Areas about how its citizens must strive towards religious harmony, and not succumb to the machinations of the clergy or the state. That people are critically aware of a more harmonious past, recognize the divisive role of the state in creating a tense present, and mobilize to work towards a peaceful future offers a source of hope amidst grim realities.

CHAPTER FIVE

STRUGGLING FOR ECOLOGICAL SOVEREIGNTY

Interpretive Power

In earlier chapters, I have investigated how Pakistani state power has normalized particular meanings of national belonging and religion in the context of the Northern Areas, and how these are contested through local critical struggles. This final chapter examines land and livelihood as a terrain of state-subject struggle in the region. Specifically, I analyze the process of conservation as a form of ecological state-formation in the Northern Areas, through which the region's territory has been brought under direct state control and pastoral livelihoods undermined. This process has also served to produce the Northern Areas as the very "nature" and tourist paradise through which the region is discursively constructed – as I discussed in chapter 1. Hence, it is important to understand representation and conservation as relational processes of state-making in the Northern Areas.

Over the last thirty years, almost 40% of the territory of the Northern Areas in Pakistan has been converted into government-owned protected areas, in the form of national parks, wildlife sanctuaries, game reserves, and hunting areas. Indeed, it is not unusual to hear that state authorities wish to transform the biodiversity-rich Northern Areas into a "living museum" for wildlife. This vision has been critically supported and shaped by international conservation NGOs, particularly the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), both of which have a major presence in the region.

In this chapter, I explore the conflicts and contestations that such a vision of conservation has generated in lived practice. My focus is on the trajectory of the very first experiment embracing this vision – the Khunjerab National Park (KNP) that was founded in 1975 – as well as more recent community-based conservation programs of

international trophy hunting that have become popular in Northern Pakistan. I examine three key concerns: First, what are the ideals and ideologies that underpin the projects of biodiversity conservation in the Northern Areas? Second, how do these projects reconfigure the place of nature as well as the state in the region? And most importantly, how and why are these projects resisted by the subjects of conservation – the villagers of Shimshal whose land provides the very ground on which conservation projects are executed?

My analysis is not aimed at dismissing the necessity for ecological protection; rather, I question the particular Western conceptions of “conservation” that have become dominant in global development practice. I argue that national parks in Northern Pakistan as well as more recent community-based conservation approaches are deeply problematic, as they are contingent on relinquishing the very land and livelihood on which pastoral communities are founded. Such projects often assume that practices of local societies are the key threats to nature, instead of appreciating that “nature” is embedded in social relations and cannot be “protected” without recognizing indigenous values, rights, and ownership. Faced with displacement and suffering as a result of conservation projects, villagers of Shimshal in Northern Pakistan have responded with courage and creativity, and hitherto managed to protect their homes and pastures from being seized in the name of global conservation.

But the Shimshali struggle against the KNP is not just about the protection of local land and livelihood against national and global interests. At its heart, their struggle is an epistemic one: it challenges the dominant meanings of “nature” and “conservation” in global environmental practice, questions whose knowledge counts as “expertise,” and contests the very process through which “global” development ideals and projects are framed and terms of “community participation” defined. By creating a Shimshal Nature Trust which proposes indigenous ownership of local land

and ecology – as opposed to a national park or revenue-sharing conservation schemes – Shimshalis engage in what Jean Franco has called a “struggle for interpretive power” (1988). This involves active appropriation and new repertoires of representation through which marginalized communities carve a space of maneuver within dominant paradigms (Pratt 199, Cornwall et. al 2007). Shimshalis have to strategically represent and position themselves in relation to conservation, in order to claim voice and value, and simply, to survive. Simultaneously, they puncture the epistemic privilege through which state and international institutions construct particular visions of the world as natural, and particular interests as the right, universal, and inevitable path of progress.

From Natural Areas to Neoliberal Resources

The idea of a “natural protected area” such as a national park for biodiversity conservation emerged from an ahistorical construction of nature, in which nature was viewed as a pristine, peopleless wilderness instead of a lived social landscape (Cronon 1995). Inspired by Enlightenment and Romantic values, this imagined wilderness had to be created, scientifically managed, preserved, and toured – primarily by urbanites for their own use and luxury. Such valuations of nature emerged in the context of an ongoing unfolding of liberal capitalist modernity, which produced the “natural” and the “social” as separate and distinct realms of existence. The mutual constitution of society and nature had to be discursively and materially disengaged, so that both labor and landscape could be freed up for primitive accumulation (Marx 1887). Capitalism, hence, is in itself an environmental project that fundamentally operates through the restructuring of society’s relation with nature (McCarthy and Prudham 2004). The social alienation and environmental degradation resulting from the process of capitalist development was partly the reason behind the conservationist impulse to find and preserve “untouched” and “endangered” nature – untouched by, and endangered from capital.

The nature-society relation has undergone significant changes under recent conditions of neoliberal capitalism. To begin with, nature has been transformed from a factor of production external to capital into a commodity that itself must be bought and sold according to the dictates of capital (O'Connor 1994). In practice, this commodification of nature has been achieved through the institutionalization of tradeable pollution permits, transferable fishing quotas, intellectual property rights over crop varieties, the privatization of public utilities, and other such market-based mechanisms for managing nature. Far from the claims of "efficient" and "sustainable" use, these practices in effect deepen the exploitation of natural resources and heighten the inequities characterizing their access. Countries in the global south, and particularly their indigenous communities who depend directly on natural resources tend to lose out the most, as their rights and use values are delegitimized to make way for the interests and exchange values of global elites.

In the specific arena of biodiversity conservation, neoliberal values have steadily encroached and become dominant over the last thirty years. In the 1970s, the protected area model and its conception of nature as divorced from society began to come under severe criticism for being exclusionary and ineffective, both from within the conservation community as well as from rural communities whose rights were being superseded by the imperatives of biodiversity preservation. By the early 90s, a series of conferences such as the 1982 and 1992 World Congress on National Parks and Protected Areas (WCNPPA) as well as the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, had decisively transformed the discourse on biodiversity conservation against the "island mentality" (McNeely 1993) that had hitherto guided the management of protected areas. The aim now was not strict preservation, but rather conservation combined with "sustainable development." International conservation organizations such as the Conservation International, WWF, and IUCN subsequently set about

investigating how the goals of conservation could be achieved while simultaneously ensuring “community participation” and “benefit-sharing.”

Part of the answer that they came up with was decidedly neoliberal: the use of protected areas for the promotion of market ventures such as ecotourism, trophy hunting, and bioprospecting, which would commodify nature to serve mostly Western consumers, but also give local communities a share in the resulting revenue. This commodification of nature is presented as “conservation,” employing the circular logic of selling nature in order to save it (McAfee 1999) and saving nature in order to sell it (Breunig 2006). It is also presented as a form of “community-based conservation” for “sustainable development” while simultaneously perpetuating a protected area model of conservation that is fundamentally anti-community: protected areas mostly convert commonly-owned pastoral and agricultural land into state-owned territory, in which subsistence-based uses of nature such as grazing and farming are severely curtailed. Frequently, indigenous communities are altogether evicted from their lands to create the imagined “natural” landscape, leading to an alarming number of “conservation refugees” around the world (Geisler 2003). Indeed, subsistence uses are delegitimized by the very definition of “biodiversity” which has come to be constructed as a national and global preserve that needs to be protected mostly from local “threats” such as “unsustainable grazing practices” (see, for example, IUCN 1999: 31). Through such logics of protected areas as well as their neoliberal uses, global biodiversity conservation has opened up a new frontier for the appropriation of local space by capital and state, thus embodying a form of what Harvey has called “accumulation by dispossession” (Harvey 2003).⁷⁸

⁷⁸ However, it entails the nationalization of community land instead of its privatization as Harvey posits.

The accomplishment of this neoliberal conservation depends critically on the rhetoric of “sustainable development” and “community-based conservation” in which it is cloaked. This rhetoric is a particularly ingenious way of neutralizing critique, because it seemingly addresses concerns of both ecological damage and social inequality, while simultaneously rendering nature and communities more available to capital. Such incorporations of environmental agendas into neoliberal regimes have arguably done more to sustain neoliberal capitalism than their outright dismissal (McCarthy and Prudham 2004).

The discourse of community-based conservation has also helped to re-legitimize the protected area model, leading to a vigorous expansion of protected areas particularly in the developing world. Between 1986 and 1996, there was a 60% increase in the number of natural protected areas in Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America (Breunig 2006). The justification for this increase comes not only from conservation practitioners who emphasize the role of conservation in the development of the community, but also from experts in the fields of biology, ecology, and environmental studies who draw upon the legitimizing power of science and economics to authorize protected areas as the most effective tools for saving biodiversity. The actual formation of protected areas as well as their neoliberal projects is propagated and implemented by international conservation organizations, as well as by funding mechanisms such as the Global Environment Facility (GEF) which is in turn implemented by other multilateral institutions like the World Bank and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

While critiques of neoliberalism often target the policies promoted by organizations such as the World Bank and IMF, those of conservation organizations have only recently come to be recognized as linked to the realization of a neoliberal agenda (McCarthy and Prudham 2004, Igoe and Brockington 2007, Heynen et. al

2007). This is partly due to the ways in which the aim of conserving biodiversity has become naturalized as “commonsense” – an abstract, global value to be aspired towards by everyone for the sake of the earth as well as for future generations. Certainly, attention to the sustainability of the natural world and equitable access to it is of ultimate significance, and is made possible precisely by a language of environmental conservation that has the potential to offer a powerful counter to an ecologically and socially destructive consumerism driven by capitalist modernity. However, what this commonsense environmental ethic has come to embody in actual conservation practice deserves critical study, as the latter constitutes one of the modes through which rural livelihoods around the globe are being superseded by agendas of neoliberalism (c.f. McMichael 2006).

The Context of the Khunjerab National Park

The region of the Northern Areas encompasses some of the world’s highest mountain ranges, and is incredibly rich in plant and wildlife diversity, supporting several rare and endangered species such as the snow leopard (*Uncia uncia*), markhor (*Capra falconeri*), and Himalayan ibex (*Capra ibex siberica*).

For the British colonial regime in the subcontinent, the region that today forms the Northern Areas was strategically critical as it lay at the heart of the “Great Game” – the Anglo-Russian rivalry during the latter part of the 19th century that led to the conquest of large sections of mountain territories in the Hindu Kush, Karakoram and Himalayan ranges by the British. While the colonial administration wished to accomplish “more prompt, more imperative, and more direct” control in this territory than in the rest of the subcontinent (Banerjee 2000), the difficulty of the terrain and the power of local princely kingdoms meant that they could only establish arrangements of indirect rule. The northern region of the British Empire thus remained a fluid frontier zone with multiple, intersecting systems of authority and alliance,

rather than a borderland with clearly established boundary lines (Razvi 1971, Haines 2001, Rai 2004).

Naturally endowed regions such as the Northern Areas were of further significance in the colonial context, as the control and conservation of nature was directly tied to the political, economic, and cultural imperatives of empire (West and Brechin 1991, Arnold and Guha 1995). For example, colonial bureaucracies of forest conservation in South Asia helped to secure timber resources for commercial exploitation, and enabled the management of indigenous populations (Guha 1989, Gadgil and Guha 1995, Sivaramakrishnan 1999). Numerous parks as well as game reserves were created in Asian and African colonies for the hunting privilege of ruling elites (MacKenzie 1988, Rangarajan 1996), as well as to service strategic needs (Rangarajan 2006). Indeed, the first forest regulations in present-day Northern Areas were instituted to meet the fuelwood requirements of the Kashmiri troops stationed in Gilgit (Schickhoff 2006). However, as a consequence of the political sensitivity and geographical inaccessibility of the Northern Areas, the British administration could not establish an extensive regime of forest and wildlife management in the way it had set up in other parts of the Indian subcontinent.

After the 1947 partition of the subcontinent, the Pakistan state gradually began a process of territorialization that sought to incorporate the Northern Areas firmly into its circumference of authority. However, it was only during 1972-1974 that – aided by community struggles against the local Rajas – the Pakistan state was able to abolish the princely states of Hunza and Nagar as well as the regimes of other “little kings”, and create a single, directly ruled administrative division called the “Northern Areas.”

A year later, in 1975, the Northern Areas Wildlife Preservation Act was passed under which the Northern Areas administration could declare any area in its domain as a national park, wildlife reserve, or wildlife sanctuary, and alter the boundaries of such

areas as deemed necessary. Through a government notification in the same year, the Khunjerab National Park was subsequently established by the then Prime Minister, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, as the first national park in the Northern Areas.

The KNP covers an area of 2270 sq. km, and comprises the grasslands of the Khunjerab, Ghujerab, and Shimshal valleys in the upper Hunza region of the Northern Areas. During the time of princely and colonial rule, the village communities who inhabited this area enjoyed grazing rights on its pastures and paid livestock and livestock products as tax to the Mir (princely ruler) of Hunza (Mock 2008). Some pastures like that of Shimshal had been bought from the Mir and were directly owned by the local agro-pastoral communities. After the abolition of the Hunza state in 1974, other local communities also assumed complete ownership of the lands formerly controlled by the Mir.

The official rationale for the KNP was the protection of the endangered Marco Polo sheep, as well as the preservation of other Asian wildlife species such as the snow leopard, blue sheep, and Himalayan ibex. The park was recommended and delineated by the famous American field zoologist George B. Schaller, who was affiliated with the Wildlife Conservation Society and visited Pakistan several times between 1970 and 1975. It was designated as a Category II park; according to the guidelines provided by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN), this meant that human activity such as grazing and hunting would be banned and visitors would be allowed only for “inspirational, educational, cultural and recreational purposes at a level which will maintain the area in a natural or near natural state” (IUCN 1994).

The proposal to create the park was inviting for the Pakistani government as it served to bolster a sense of nation-pride linked to the protection and conservation of Pakistan’s natural resources. This was particularly significant in the context of the

Bhutto government, which had been implementing a sweeping agenda of nationalization in the rest of the country. The government also hoped that the KNP would become Pakistan's first national park to be recognized as a World Heritage Site under UNESCO's World Heritage Convention. In this way, the nation could achieve glory not only within its own boundaries, but also within the global community of nations.

The creation of the KNP can thus be seen as a form of "ecological nationalism" – a useful concept by Cederlof and Sivaramakrishnan that captures how metropolitan-secular practices of nature devotion such as the establishment of national parks serve to legitimize and consolidate the nation (Cederlof and Sivaramakrishnan 2006). However, I would argue that their theorization of the connections between nature and the nation is limited due to its lack of attention to the state. The appropriation of nature by the nation-state is not just about the struggle to define the nation in terms of landscape, and to channel this landscape in the service of national development. It is also fundamentally about reordering space and its use to accomplish the territorial sovereignty of the modern state (Vandergeest and Peluso 1995, Peluso and Vandergeest 2001, Neumann 2004). In many parts of Africa, for example, the creation of an "artifactual wilderness" through protected areas has been central to the process of colonial and postcolonial state-formation, as it strengthens the state's proprietary claims on land by facilitating the enclosure of existing commons (Neumann 2004).

Likewise, the establishment of the Khunjerab National Park in the Northern Areas was more than just an expression of ecological nationalism. It embodied, what I could call, a process of *ecological state-formation* as it helped to affirm and expand the Pakistan state's territorial control in the Northern Areas. Amongst the communities that came under the sphere of the park, it is still commonly believed that the creation

of this park right at the Pak-China border was at least partly a move to territorialize this disputed border area by declaring it a natural “protected area.” After all, the former princely state of Hunza had strong ties with China, and the Chinese government had already established a claim to a part of the Northern Areas called the Transkarakoram Tract.⁷⁹ It is also significant that the park was formed barely a year after the region was actively re-constructed through a process of re-naming the territory, re-drawing its administrative boundaries, and radically reconfiguring local systems of authority. The reshaping of landscape through the formation of national parks – intentionally or not – feeds into such modes of spatial regulation that are not only effective in but also constitutive of state rule. Moreover, as I argue later in the paper, such practices of ecological state-formation in the Northern Areas have intensified in recent years, with the aid of new neoliberal projects of biodiversity conservation.

Contesting Conservation

While all the other villages that were going to be affected by the Khunjerab National Park eventually accepted its authority, the village of Shimshal still refuses to negotiate any deal. This has been a major impediment in the implementation of the KNP, as two-thirds of it is comprised of Shimshali territory.

Shimshal is located at the north-eastern periphery of the Northern Areas, along the Pak-China border. It comprises about 2700 sq. km of high altitude land in the Central Karakoram region, and is exclusively⁸⁰ controlled by an agro-pastoral

⁷⁹ This claim was accepted by the Pakistani government in 1963, leading to the transfer of the Transkarakoram Tract to China in return for a Chinese-controlled area that the communities living on the Pakistani side had demanded.

⁸⁰ “Exclusive” in the sense that only villagers of Shimshal own and manage this vast terrain. The administrative role of the local or the national state has historically been limited, largely due to the rugged, inaccessible terrain of Shimshal. Shimshalis used to pay grazing taxes during the Mir’s reign, but after the abolition of the Hunza princely state in 1974, no income taxes are paid to the Pakistan government.

community of approximately 1700 people – all adherents of the Ismaili sect of Islam. Within this area, Shimshalis maintain several village settlements, enough irrigated land to fulfill their food requirements, and over a dozen communal pastures for seasonal herding of their sizeable livestock population.

Shimshalis offer a number of reasons to explain why they have been resisting the conversion of their territory into a national park. To begin with, Shimshalis argue that the Khunjerab National Park was created without any consultation with the affected communities regarding its boundaries, regulations, or management. They were simply informed that most of their pastures and even some of their village settlements were now part of a state-owned national park. More significantly, the main apprehension of Shimshalis regarding the KNP is the loss of their land and livelihood. The community of Shimshal serves to lose the most from the park due to its exceptionally high dependence on livestock herding as a source of livelihood. In 1995, Shimshalis owned a total of 4473 goats, 2547 sheep, 960 yaks, 399 cows and 32 donkeys (Ali and Butz 2003), and they continue to have the largest livestock holdings in the Hunza region. An enforcement of park regulations would entail a complete ban on grazing and hunting in most Shimshali pastures, so that wildlife species and their habitats can be preserved. This would directly threaten Shimshali livelihoods not only because of the loss of pastures, but also due to the prohibition on hunting certain wildlife predators of livestock. As Shimshali villagers commented:

“We are supposed to protect the snow leopard, even though it eats up our goats and sheep and causes a huge economic loss for us. Who will compensate us for this loss? We have to pay the price for conservation.”

“First our rights should be honored, then those of wildlife.”

These statements embody a complex challenge to the modernist, universalizing agenda of biodiversity conservation that privileges the protection of wildlife for the

“future of the earth” over the protection of pastoral livelihoods and futures. For Shimshalis, conservation – as promoted by international conservation organizations – is not of inherent local value because it entails an appropriation of their territory, and because one of the rare species that needs to be protected is a deadly predator of livestock. Yet, they claim to respect the ideal of global conservation, and indeed, are forced to respect it because of the consequences that challenging this global value (through local hunting for example) might entail in a context where it is already threatening them with displacement. Precisely to prevent this displacement by the Khunjerab National Park, Shimshalis have themselves tried to appropriate the discourse of conservation through practices such as a self-imposed ban on wildlife hunting:

“We believe in conservation. That’s why we imposed a ban on wildlife hunting ourselves 10 years ago. In other places, if a snow leopard eats up livestock, it tends to get hunted down in a retaliatory killing so that the helpless shepherd can recover his loss by selling the leopard’s pelt.”

In fact, Shimshalis go beyond claims of merely fulfilling the responsibilities that modern conservation expects of them. They claim ownership of the very “nature” that external authorities wish to “conserve,” by pointing out their historical role in *producing* this nature:

“My ancestors planted the trees in Shimshal. How can someone come and tell me that these trees do not belong to me?”

“The Markhor⁸¹ is alive because of us.”

Through such statements, Shimshalis challenge the dominant tendency of viewing nature as a magically self-existing, “untouched” entity, instead of one that is historically produced and fundamentally linked to human activity and labor. These

⁸¹ Markhor (*Capra falconeri*) is a goat-antelope that is found mainly in the western Himalayas. This specie has been declared endangered by the IUCN.

statements can also be read as claims to a nativist form of ecological nationalism, in which the right to place is asserted through a discourse of lived landscape, nature intimacy, and stewardship (Cerderlof and Sivaramakrishnan 2006).

To support this assertion of local sovereignty based on a historically grounded, indigenous conservation, Shimshalis further point out the state's incompetence in conserving nature:

“We have inhabited and tended this difficult terrain for centuries. What does the DFO⁸² or the consultant know about conservation? A while back, a park official came and told us that we need to sign an MoU and give up the rights to our territory for the KNP so that wildlife habitats can be protected. I told him, ‘Come, I will show you the area where we have protected wildlife.’ And he responded, ‘I don’t think I can trek that far.’ Then I politely asked him, ‘If you cannot walk to the area, how will you ever conserve it?’”

“In areas where the KNP has been implemented, hunting by state officials has become more common and convenient. This is why the wildlife populations have decreased in these areas. And now the government is putting more pressure on us to accept the park so that wildlife in our areas can be exploited. International organizations also want to put pressure on us, because they have killed nature in their own areas.”⁸³

Such statements assert a local aptitude for conservation that is presented as superior to that of state institutions and international organizations,⁸⁴ and challenge the common portrayal of Shimshalis as incapable stewards of nature (Butz 1998). This is significant, as the discourse of the state and conservation NGOs in the Northern Areas is centered precisely on problematizing the lack of local “capacity” in attaining conservation goals, which helps to justify an international organization’s own role in

⁸² Abbreviation for the District Forest Officer, the key government official responsible for implementing state policies of conservation in the Northern Areas.

⁸³ The occurrence of illegal hunting by state officials in the KNP has even been acknowledged by the WWF, which is the main international organization that has been pushing for the formalization of the park (WWF 1996). Moreover, a higher-up official at WWF also acknowledged that “wildlife in Shimshal is most likely being conserved well” (Personal interview).

⁸⁴ Research elsewhere has also demonstrated that replacing local forms of control with state control is not always productive for conserving nature, because the state is generally unable to enforce its own conservation policies (Guha 1989, Saberwal 1999, Agrawal 2001b).

creating, planning, and managing state-owned conservation zones. My point is not to romanticize the local community, and its interest and capability in conservation. Rather, I wish to point out that conservation agencies in the Northern Areas assume a priori that local communities lack credibility and experience with respect to conservation, and do not research whether community practices might have a positive role in wildlife conservation in areas where there remain sizeable numbers of rare species.

The tendency to undervalue the role of local communities in sustaining nature has indeed been a constitutive feature of global conservation discourse. It is assumed that natives lack ecological values that are supposedly the preserve only of Western elites (Gareau 2007). The nature-society relation in communities across continents has come to be described through “degradation narratives” that perpetuate the stereotype of an essentialized, irresponsible native – often without the support of any scientific analysis – as they help to justify national and international interventions for protecting the “global commons” from its local users (Brockington and Homewood 2001, Neumann 2004). These narratives emerged from, and build upon a long-standing colonial discourse that helped to legitimize the appropriation of nature for varied interests including commercial exploitation, hunting pleasure, and strategic needs (Rangarajan 2006). Today, they continue to thrive in conservation discourse, despite the rhetoric of including and valorizing the “local community.” Indeed, as I will elaborate later, the rhetoric of community participation not only serves to obscure, but also helps to achieve the exclusionary and self-serving narrative of national and international conservation.

Representation and Power: The Case of the Shimshal Nature Trust

Until the mid-90s, Shimshali villagers obstructed the implementation of the KNP through informal resistances such as the disruption of information-gathering

mechanisms, refusal to follow administrative regulations, and the blocking of government and NGO officials from entering the community (Butz 2002). However, the pressures on them to submit to park authorities kept increasing, as new programmes and funds for conservation poured into the Northern Areas in the wake of a renewed global – and subsequently, national – concern for biodiversity preservation. In this context, the confrontational stance of Shimshalis that emphasized a complete rejection of the park was proving to be counterproductive, and served only to reinforce the stereotype of Shimshal as a backward and “wild” community. Realizing this, a group of men belonging mostly to Shimshal’s first generation English-educated elite – and often employed in development NGOs based in Gilgit or Islamabad – began to rally community members around a politics of appeasement and engagement, instead of one that endorsed confrontation.⁸⁵ They strongly felt – and feared – that a small, marginal, border community like Shimshal could eventually suffer massive state action unless it was able to counter its negative image, and negotiate cordially with conservation organizations. As one of them said to me, they had to “fight with dialogue.” After much deliberation, they came up with an answer: a community-based organization called the Shimshal Nature Trust (SNT) that would manage and showcase Shimshal’s conservation efforts, and represent the community in dealings with external organizations.

Created in 1997, the key purpose of the SNT was to formally articulate, and give material force to the representational claims discussed in the previous section – claims to livelihood dependency, native authenticity and ownership, environmental responsibility, and a place-based conservation capability. As the “Fifteen Year Vision and Management Plan” of the SNT explains:

⁸⁵ Their intervention was openly vilified at first, particularly by some notable village elders who accused them of being bought by the state and conservation NGOs.

“Our largest challenge is not to develop a system of utilizing the natural surroundings sustainably, but rather to express our indigenous stewardship practices in language that will garner the financial, technical and political support of the international community, and that will persuade Pakistani authorities that we are indeed capable of protecting our own natural surroundings” (SNT 1997).

The SNT “management plan” is precisely a response to this representational challenge: how to counter the language, and hence, the power of a global conservation discourse that refuses to acknowledge indigenous values and rights? The plan describes the socio-economic context of the Shimshali community, the ways in which a conservation ethic has been historically practiced, and the community-initiated programmes through which natural resource management is envisioned in the future.⁸⁶ Following the tropes of developmentalist writing, these programmes are divided up into implementation phases, with various activities planned for each phase. The SNT management plan has been distributed to all the major government and non-governmental organizations working on conservation and development in the Northern Areas, and is also accessible through the Internet. Between 1999-2002, SNT members also conducted a series of “workshops” in Gilgit with different “stakeholders” to create awareness and legitimacy for their approach towards conservation.

The very language, format, and content of SNT practices reflect how communities have come to understand, and reconfigure the nature of the power exercised by international conservation organizations. The global discourse of “community-based nature conservation” and “sustainable development” is appropriated by positing Shimshalis as the original and most suitable conservationists, who are equipped to ensure the sustainable future that international conservation

⁸⁶ These programmes include a community-enforced ban on wildlife hunting which was mentioned earlier. Keeping local needs in mind, the ban does not apply to the small number of ibex that are hunted for meat by yak herders in the winters.

NGOs are striving towards.⁸⁷ Moreover, the “participatory” approach adopted by NGOs in recent years – in part a response to the failure of and resistance to earlier development projects – is reconstituted to argue that effective participation must entail complete *ownership*. As the management plan explains:

“While we appreciate recent efforts by external agencies to develop community-based nature conservation projects it is not enough that external initiatives be managed locally; rather, a culturally and contextually-sensitive nature stewardship programme should be developed and initiated, as well as managed, from within the community” (SNT 1997).

The existence and legitimacy of such a community-centered programme is then established by describing how indigenous ways of environmental management have historically been based on ecologically sound practices such as land use zoning, as well as on culturally-specific values such as the “Islamic religious ethic of nature stewardship” in which nature is respected as “God's ultimate creation” (SNT 1997). The emphasis on such a “moral ecology” (Gold 2002:9) grounded in religion has an important discursive effect – it provides a way to unsettle the scientific authority of international conservation agencies, by highlighting how interpreting nature and its conservation through ethical values is more locally appropriate and significant than one based on scientific principles.⁸⁸ Indeed, local meanings of nature are inseparable from religious sensibilities and cultural practices. The terrain of wildlife such as snow leopards is itself imagined as a sacred space where mountain spirits reign supreme, and need to be appeased for protection. Long-standing religious and cultural institutions have also enabled Shimshalis to collectively organize for conservation

⁸⁷ Indeed, due to the unequal power relations embedded in global conservation regimes, indigenous communities around the world have had to re-present themselves as environmentally responsible subjects to ensure their survival (Martinez-Alier 2002). This suggests that a claim to traditional property rights and livelihood dependency has increasingly become insufficient for preventing the appropriation of their rights.

⁸⁸ At the same time, a scientific approach is also drawn upon by asserting that nature conservation by the Shimshal community would be based, in the first place, on up-to-date statistical information collected by local youth.

efforts ranging from hunting control to pasture management. The SNT itself is managed partly by local volunteer corps and boy scouts, who are affiliated with the *jamat khana* (religious centre) in Ismaili-Muslim practice.

Despite the existence of a cooperative social and institutional structure, Shimshal neither constitutes a homogenous community nor an autonomous zone of resistance. The approach towards conservation agencies and the making of the SNT were contentious processes that community members have had to negotiate with much difficulty. But according to my interviewees, it was the threat they faced from the KNP and the need to unite against it that made them realize the need to overcome internal differences for mutual defense. A sense of community was hence both a driver and an outcome of their struggle.

Moreover, while the key purpose of SNT is a strategic celebration and vindication of an indigenous, ecological sovereignty, the role of external support has also been integral to their success. Indeed, SNT members themselves emphasize that foreign scholars from universities in Japan, Canada, and the U.S. have played a critical role in shaping local consciousness and enabling community initiatives.⁸⁹ The SNT also acknowledges that for activities such as a wildlife census, as well as in monitoring and evaluation, the support of organizations like the WWF and IUCN is especially needed and welcomed.

Unfortunately, such collaborations have never materialized, as international conservation organizations continue to insist that any project of conservation in Shimshal must be linked to the conversion of community-owned land into the KNP. Even if it is now occasionally acknowledged – as the new rhetoric of respecting the “community” demands – that Shimshalis have responsibly taken care of the

⁸⁹ The SNT management plan itself was compiled and edited by David Butz, a geographer who has been working in Shimshal since 1988.

environment, it is argued matter-of-factly that their main livelihood practice of livestock grazing poses a fundamental threat to wildlife survival, and hence they cannot be trusted with the task of conservation.

Reorienting Livelihoods

I would like to investigate this “livestock-as-threat” rhetoric in more detail, as it has been a cornerstone of conservation discourse and practice in the Northern Areas, particularly in relation to the Khunjerab National Park.⁹⁰ Within state as well as NGO discourse, “illegal” livestock grazing has been constructed as directly destructive of wildlife security and biodiversity, as precious wildlife species have to compete with livestock for grass, and are also susceptible to diseases transmitted by them. If only we could restrict the grazing of livestock in protected areas, the argument goes, wildlife and their habitats would remain intact. It is precisely because of this logic that grazing activities are completely banned under a Category II national park such as the KNP.

As highlighted earlier, “degradation narratives” that blame environmental loss on marginal communities are deeply embedded in global conservation discourse. The specific case of condemning livestock grazing has a long history in the Indian sub-continent, particularly in areas of the western Himalayas where grazing has been held responsible for causing massive soil erosion in the hills and intensified flooding in the plains (Saberwal 1999). As Saberwal argues, such an alarmist discourse is neither borne out by empirical evidence nor by ecological theory; rather, it only serves to empower bureaucratic institutions by enabling them to increase the land under their authority.

⁹⁰ In the general conservation discourse in the Northern Areas, “indiscriminate hunting” is perhaps regarded as the most significant factor for decreasing wildlife populations. However, state-community conflicts generated by the KNP have revolved more around the issue of habitat loss due to livestock grazing, which is why I have decided to focus on it.

In the particular context of the KNP in the Northern Areas, the conviction with which livestock grazing is claimed as a threat to wildlife is likewise unjustified. First, there is no acknowledgment that at least in the territory of Shimshal, most wildlife populations exist above the level of agricultural land as well as of pasture land, and hence the image of wildlife and livestock competing for the same piece of grass is misleading. Even in areas where wildlife and livestock co-exist, it needs to be acknowledged that yaks eat different plants than wildlife and hence, not all livestock is “competing.” Second, neither the park management nor conservation NGOs have conducted long-term scientific studies that systematically investigate the relations between livestock and wildlife populations in and around the park area. Third, state and NGO officials acknowledge that the populations of wildlife such as the Himalayan ibex have enormously increased since the implementation of the KNP. For example, according to a preliminary scientific estimate, the ibex population in the KNP has gone up from 300 in 1975 to almost 6000 at present. This increase is attributed to the ban on hunting wildlife that was imposed by the KNP and largely obeyed by the local communities. If, as officials often claim, the ban on livestock grazing has not been similarly respected by communities, then it becomes hard to assume that livestock is a potent threat to wildlife since the latter has continued to grow.

Indeed, the enormous growth in some wildlife species has proved to be more of a threat to livestock instead of the other way around. This is due to the decrease in the availability of grass, as well as a higher rate of predation. The massive growth is also not always in the interest of conserving wildlife, according to a number of Shimshali elders. They point out that the Blue sheep in Shimshal has multiplied in thousands since the ban on hunting, but now it is dying of disease as such large

numbers cannot be sustained naturally.⁹¹ They claim that a more sustainable balance between livestock and wildlife was traditionally achieved through local hunting, and now this balance is upset. On the other hand, a state official claimed to me that the Blue sheep is dying in Shimshal because of catching a disease from livestock, heightening the need for pressuring Shimshalis to accept the KNP and respect its ban on livestock grazing.

In highlighting these contrasting claims about the livestock-wildlife relation, my purpose is not to unquestioningly uphold the local interpretation and demolish that of the state and global conservation agencies. Sure, livestock grazing might in fact threaten wildlife survival in particular areas, and what is actually happening in Shimshal can only be ascertained after in-depth study. What I wish to emphasize, however, is that ecological change is a complex process that is ridden with considerable uncertainty, and that this uncertainty is hardly conceded in the self-assured claims and prescriptions for protected areas (cf. Saberwal 1999). Indeed, this uncertainty has to be eclipsed in order to produce a simplistic, causal logic of livestock-as-threat, which legitimizes the state-NGO claim over nature and undermines that of local communities.

What have been the implications of this logic in practice? The ban on grazing in the KNP was marginally enforced till 1989, when the newly formed government organization – the National Council for Conservation of Wildlife (NCCW) – drafted a plan for a stricter enforcement of the Category II criteria. The affected villages nevertheless continued to practice their customary grazing rights, particularly since the government was not forthcoming with the promised compensation. Things came to a

⁹¹ Interestingly, George Schaller – the initiator of the KNP – also acknowledged that the “scarcity” of certain wildlife species is inherent in the ecology of the habitat: “The answer to the scarcity of the ibex lies in the habitat. In this severe environment, this refuge of the ice age, the habitat is simple and fragmented, tiny meadows scattered among barren expanses. The mountains simply cannot support many ibex, nor, therefore, many snow leopard” (Schaller, 1980: 112).

head in 1991, when the government used the paramilitary Khunjerab Security Force to evict herdsman from the park's no-grazing zone and even killed some of their livestock. Eventually, in 1992, all the aggrieved communities except Shimshal signed an agreement with the KNP authorities, that allowed them some concessions on their grazing rights as well a share in park-generated revenue in return for accepting the authority of the park (Knudsen 1999).

While the coercively enforced ban on livestock grazing was somewhat relaxed, it soon gave way to a new emphasis on a reduction in livestock holdings. This reduction has in effect become a pre-condition for obtaining the community share in park-generated revenue such as entry fees. In fact, as a state wildlife official informed me, the very point of sharing the park revenue with the community is to enable them to engage in “conservation activities such as the reduction of their livestock over a period of time.”

In recent years, this new logic of equating community conservation with livestock reduction – which stems from the livestock-as-threat discourse – has meant that park officials have withheld payment of the community share in KNP's entry fees for long periods on account that the concerned communities are not reducing their livestock.⁹² Such a claim about livestock holdings has thus become a tool in the hands of KNP officials to deprive communities of their promised share in the park's entry fees.

The push towards a decreased ownership of livestock as well as the claim that this is not happening is either way problematic, given that the number of people involved in animal husbandry in the Hunza region has already declined substantially over the last thirty years (Kreutzmann 2006). Even in Shimshal – which has always

⁹² These communities do not include Shimshal; they belong to the seven Upper Hunza villages that accepted the authority of the park, and are hence, entitled to a share in park revenue.

been exceptionally dependent on a pastoral economy – the trend is changing fast. Community members commonly express that livestock holdings have been on the decline over the last five years. Shimshali women who historically had the sole responsibility of tending livestock in the summer months,⁹³ have increasingly begun to stay back in the village instead of going to the pastures with their animals.⁹⁴ This reduced involvement in pastoral activity is primarily attributed to the demands of education, agriculture, and off-farm employment. Traditionally, older women went to the pastures with their children, and particularly depended on the support of their daughters. Now, girls are busy in their school routines, while their mothers are occupied in taking care of school-going children, in various household and agricultural tasks, and some also in jobs in government or non-governmental organizations.

While people in Shimshal – old and young, men and women – generally consider livestock as a crucial source of income,⁹⁵ insurance, and community identity, many simultaneously feel that it is very difficult to continue with animal husbandry in today's world. There are simply very few people *willing* to take care of livestock. Such changing patterns and perceptions of pastoral activity in Shimshal, as elsewhere, are both a condition and an outcome of the process of becoming “modern” and “developed.” In the itinerary of “development”, a pastoral way of being is rendered primitive and almost an antithesis of modernity, whereas an urban, elite lifestyle that is divorced from ownership of land or labor is authorized as normative. This delegitimization of pastoral or peasant livelihoods is embedded in the very ideals of capitalist modernity and development, (McMichael 1995), and is propagated through channels such as modern schooling.

⁹³ May 15th – October 15th

⁹⁴ A number of Shimshali men and women said that earlier, 60-75% of women used to be in the pastures during summer. Now, the percentage has dropped to 25-30%.

⁹⁵ Yaks in particular are highly valued, as each yak can fetch up to Rs.45,000 or \$750.

I do not wish to romanticize a pastoral life, nor do I intend to argue that the exclusionary ideals of modernity and development are unthinkingly internalized by pastoralists. What I wish to highlight is that under conditions of modernity where there is already a decline in the appeal and practice of livestock grazing, pastoral livelihoods are further devalued through the discourses and practices of conservation. Perhaps this is to be expected, as the ideals of conservation themselves stem from those of modernity, evidenced for example by the way in which the livestock-as-threat discourse represents and reinforces modernity's denigration of the "primitive pastoralist."

Moreover, in the neo-liberal context, the livestock-as-threat discourse has proved to be a more powerful discourse of accumulation, facilitating the institutional agendas of state authorities as well as of international conservation organizations. It is not surprising, then, that despite overwhelming evidence of decreasing livestock ownership and grazing in the Northern Areas, KNP officials continue to claim otherwise in order to retain their hold over communities and their resources. As one KNP higher-up told me:

"I know that livestock holdings have increased in the Khunjerab area. These communities are very smart. If you visit the KNP without informing them, you will see how much livestock they keep in the no-grazing zone. But if you inform them before going, they will hide their animals and make you believe that their animals do not pose a threat to wildlife. Communities cannot keep their animals, and also claim a share in the entry fees."

Conservation NGOs, on the other hand, concede that dependence on livestock herding is indeed decreasing in areas affecting the KNP. This, however, does not necessarily bring any credit for the community. As a manager at an international conservation NGO remarked:

"Communities are not reducing their livestock because they care about conservation. It is happening itself because people are increasingly seeking off-

farm employment. It is only when they will consciously reduce livestock that we will achieve true community participation.”

In other words, it is not just particular conservation outcomes that are desired; rather, a disciplining of community attitudes is being struggled for, and represented as the legitimate form of participation. Community participation is thus reconfigured as a measure of how well people in the Northern Areas have internalized the international conservation discourse, and sacrificed their own livelihoods for its sake.

Because it is believed that communities are not “participating” well, international conservation organizations have sought to go beyond the process of awareness-raising regarding the negative impact of livestock on wildlife conservation. They wish to actively steer people away from livestock herding by providing alternate sources of income (WWF 1996). These alternate livelihoods must ideally be linked to the implementation of the park, so that people can realize that conservation can be a source of their “development” as opposed to pastoralism. Linking the global project of conservation to “income-generating opportunities” at the local level has become known as “community-based conservation” in the discourse of international conservation NGOs operating in the Northern Areas, and it is to its contested operations that I now turn my attention.

Community-based Conservation

One way of providing conservation-related alternate livelihoods is to give people jobs in the very management of protected areas. This was recommended in the WWF-drafted management plan for the Khunjerab National Park (WWF 1996), as a means to compensate pastoralists for the loss of grazing rights, as well as an incentive for more pastoralists to give up livestock grazing. Consequently, park jobs have been used by the government Directorate that manages the KNP to lure Shimshalis into accepting the authority of the KNP, and respecting its grazing restrictions. The offer

was enticing for around 18 people in Shimshal, who responded to the government's call for job vacancies in the KNP. However, village elders as well as members of the SNT saw the offer as a government tactic, designed to create disunity among Shimshalis. They eventually managed to convince all the applicants to take back their applications in the larger interest of Shimshal. As an SNT member explained:

“We asked these people: ‘What jobs could the KNP offer anyway? A guard, or an office boy? The Director of the KNP would never be from Shimshal, would he, even if Shimshal forms two-thirds of the park?’ You see people are feeling helpless, and they want jobs to earn cash. But we told them that they should not give up their ancestral land and their yaks for a job of Rs. 3000 per month.”

More recently, community-based conservation in the Northern Areas has become synonymous with projects of ecotourism and the international sport of trophy hunting. The latter has particularly come to dominate the conservation scene in the Northern Areas over the last ten years, during which twenty-two “Community Controlled Hunting Areas” (CCHAs) have been created in the region. These have been established primarily by IUCN, through the GEF/UNDP funded Mountain Areas Conservancy Project. The CCHAs have a strong appeal for communities, as 75% of the revenue generated through trophy hunting goes to the community that manages the relevant area.⁹⁶ Communities also earn income through the porters and guides that accompany the hunter. Moreover, hunters are also known to be generous, and might give up to \$3000 as a donation for local development after a successful hunt.

International conservation organizations in the Northern Areas promote trophy hunting as a form of “sustainable community development” because of the cash it generates, which is either distributed evenly to all the households in a village, or saved with a recognized community-based organization that can utilize the funds for local

⁹⁶ The cost of a hunting permit varies with different wildlife species: for an ibex it is \$3000, for a blue sheep it is \$6500, and shooting an Astore Markhor can cost up to \$40,000.

development projects. Trophy hunting is also represented as a useful tool for conservation: the income that can be generated by occasionally catering to the needs of rich Pakistani and foreign hunters is deemed to be a significant disincentive for local hunting which might be undertaken for subsistence, cultural significance, pleasure, or trade.

Conservation agencies perceive no contradiction between projects such as the KNP that seek to preserve landscapes in their “natural state” for the protection of wildlife, and projects such as the CCHAs that turn this wildlife into a commodity that can be killed for pleasure. In many cases, a CCHA is in fact located right along the boundaries of a national park, in what is called the “buffer zone.” It is assumed that the hunting of treasured wildlife in these buffer zones does not disrupt their natural habitats, but the practice of livestock grazing and local hunting – happening for centuries – does. In effect, local use values of nature are delegitimized in order to secure its global exchange value.

This commodification of nature in the name of conservation is perfectly aligned with the interests of hunters. As trophy hunting faces increased resistance in North America and Europe, “hunters, like multinational industries, flee to grounds where they can escape those restrictive conditions” (MacDonald 2005). The continuation of their sport, however, is dependent on the protection of wildlife in these freer areas from local use and abuse. This link between local conservation and global hunting is captured tellingly in a Safari Club International (SFI) sticker which I saw at the head office of a prominent international conservation organization in the Northern Areas. It read: “Conserve Now, Hunt Later.” No wonder that conservation agencies perceive no contradiction between saving nature and selling it: they want nature to be saved precisely so that it can be sold, and killed later.

Community-based trophy hunting also serves the interests of the state, and particularly of the local forest bureaucracy that oversees the management of protected areas. It provides an important source of revenue, and also reinforces the power of the state to distribute patronage through the granting of hunting quotas to particular communities. This serves as an indirect means for regulating community behavior. Indeed, the KNP management has used trophy hunting as a lure to put pressure on Shimshalis for giving ownership of their land to the KNP:

As a KNP official explained:

“In 2006, we gave a permit to an American hunter to hunt in Shimshal. The community got its due share for the trophy as well. We then allowed the creation of a Community Controlled Hunting Area as an additional incentive. Since then, we have given more permits, but we will not release the money till Shimshalis sign an MoU in which they accept the KNP and its regulations. We have to bring these communities in line. They think they can extract the benefits of the park, without obeying the writ of the government.”

Hence, “community-based conservation” schemes that provide a community share in trophy hunting and in park entry fees, have come to perpetuate a state-community relation in which the very terms of participation are based on exclusion and dispossession, as they require communities to surrender ownership of their land on the one hand and abandon their livelihoods on the other. These projects have become forms of political and social control that help to entrench the power of the state over rural spaces and communities, thus extending the ecological state-formation that the creation of the KNP already initiated. This ecological control is further buttressed, and underpinned by more sinister tactics to put pressure on Shimshalis. For example, in 2006, the Directorate of the Khunjerab National Park lodged a court case against a number of Shimshali youth for assaulting park rangers who had been sent to Shimshal. Members of the Shimshal Nature Trust, however, contend that there was only a verbal argument between the rangers and local youth, and that the case has been filed only to

malign Shimshalis and further coerce them into accepting the authority of the KNP. Such a coercive use of the legal and policing apparatus of the state remains integral to the making of environmental subjects under neoliberalism, and is often overlooked in recent analyses of nature and power in terms of eco-governmentality (Goldman 2001) and environmentality (Agrawal 2005).

Analyses of community-based conservation initiatives elsewhere have also demonstrated how environmental agendas framed in participatory terms have served to intensify state power, often diminishing the political and economic security of rural communities instead of enhancing it (Neumann 2001, Agrawal 2001a, Li 2002, Breunig 2006). These agendas are defined by a dense network of national and transnational actors that cut across the traditional divides of state, non-governmental organization, and corporation (Igoe and Brockington 2007). What is truly baffling and dangerous about the global conservation agenda is its insistence on promoting activities such as tourism and trophy hunting – which commodify nature primarily for the leisure of rich, Western consumers – as *sustainable alternatives* to local subsistence-based livelihoods. In this neoliberal logic, the “sustainable development” of a community becomes equated with the ability to raise cash incomes through the market, and the development of nature is presumed to be achieved by turning it into a commodity that is subject to market forces of production and exchange. Such logics of neoliberal development cannot be implemented without the necessary cultivation and appropriation of local subjectivities. Through promises of “benefit-sharing,” already marginal, local communities are first expected to compromise their own livelihood concerns and take on the burden of conserving “nature,” and then led to treat nature as a resource from which they can and must profit from.

The appeal and importance of such market-driven approaches to nature management for local communities should not be underestimated. In a context where

the state is pushing for park development but shows very little interest in social development, communities like Shimshal tremendously value the revenue that they may get from projects like trophy hunting, as it can be directed for self-help initiatives ranging from water channels to health care provision. What they find problematic, however, is the contingency of “community-based” conservation schemes on relinquishing the very land and livelihood on which communities are founded. This reflects the contradictory meanings that conservation has come to entail for environmental subjects around the word: they wish to avail the material benefits of conservation – “alternative livelihoods” – without losing control over their historical land and resources.

The discourse of alternative livelihoods is also problematic because it assumes that a pastoral community’s relationship with nature is merely about economic need, and hence alternative sources of incomes would, and should automatically translate into a reduced dependence on nature – ideally, a total surrender of it so that it becomes a “protected area” for state and capital. What is erased in such a discourse is the central role of nature and pastoral activity in defining a community’s identity and its forms of belonging. In Shimshal, for example, pastures are not only the material means of production but also symbolic resources that are considered key sites for historical events, spiritual renewal, and cultural celebrations (Butz 1996). They are also particularly cherished by Shimshali women as places that provide respite from the constraints and anxieties of village life, by offering a meaningful experience of independence, female solidarity, and peace. Hence, the value of land and nature for Shimshalis is simultaneously material and symbolic, encompassing identity, history, and livelihood (c.f. Moore 1993). Ultimately, it is the very source and meaning of life, which is why both its commodification and compensation is considered unthinkable.

Conclusion

At the end of my fieldwork, in summer 2007, many Shimshalis whom I met were deeply concerned about the criminal charges filed by KNP authorities against Shimshali youth. They feared that such strategies of harassment would continue to be deployed, till Shimshalis caved in and agreed to accept the park and its anti-grazing regulations – like their neighboring seven villages had done almost fifteen years ago. But the biggest hurdle, in their opinion, was not just dealing with the park authorities – they had cajoled, negotiated, and kept them at bay so far. It was the regime of global conservation itself which posed a key threat to their survival, as it had attained an overriding commonsense legitimacy over pastoral values and concerns. As one response to this material, discursive, and epistemic challenge, Shimshalis had come up with the innovative idea of the Shimshal Nature Trust, which constructs itself in the image of a conservation NGO, but represents the interests of the community instead of those of national and international conservation organizations. By creatively appropriating the conservation discourse, the SNT sought to validate an indigenous ecological sovereignty that not only protects local needs, but also addresses global environmental concerns in a more effective manner.

Ten years after the establishment of the SNT, however, a number of its members expressed a sense of disillusionment about their initiative. As one of them commented:

“We created the SNT to engage with outside interests, and make them understand our concerns. Instead, we have become perceived as more of a threat, and portrayed as anti-state. This is completely false. We are eager to work with the state, and with international NGOs. We know that conservation is important. All we are saying is, don’t make a park that will prevent us from owning our lands and living our lives.”

These were the last impressions with which I left Shimshal in June 2007. By 2008, however, the tide had changed. Shimshalis had managed to sign an MoU with

the Northern Areas Wildlife and Parks Department, which clearly acknowledged and guaranteed the land use rights and settlements of Shimshal, in return for cooperation in transnational and national conservation efforts – something Shimshalis were always prepared to do, but on their own terms. Subsequently, the Khunjerab National Park authorities have also withdrawn their legal case against Shimshali youth. SNT members now speak with a sense of relief and hope, instead of frustration and fear.

It can be argued that the epistemic “struggle for interpretive power” (Franco 1988) which Shimshalis engaged in was ultimately successful, though the future course of interactions between Shimshalis, state actors, and international institutions remains to be seen. Critical struggles from below – like those of Shimshal – have both benefited from, and contributed to peasant struggles elsewhere that have sought to reclaim their space and agency in global development projects (McMichael 2006). They also create openings for alternate visions of being and becoming. Indeed, Shimshalis hope to change the dominant “global” discourse on conservation itself, by arguing that they are central makers of the development project, instead of its beneficiaries, and that they are eager to imagine new social futures with “government participation” and “international participation.” This would counteract the existing framework whereby epistemic and material powers are concentrated in the hands of a transnational-national nexus of institutions, the agendas of which are scripted from above while allowing “community participation.” In effect, like indigenous communities elsewhere, Shimshalis are working towards an ecological sovereignty in which their community governs itself as well the resources on which it depends – as it has always done.

Despite the Shimshali achievement, however, the normative narrative of biodiversity conservation remains wedded to projects that act in the name of community, but are unwilling to listen to it. Indeed, what I have tried to point out in

this paper is not only the unwillingness, but the structural *inability* of the global conservation nexus to understand and value the interests of local communities. Embedded in the global discourse of biodiversity conservation and sustainable development are *assumptions* – e.g. about nature as divorced from society, and livestock as an irredeemable threat to wildlife – and *interests* such as those of conservation organizations, their corporate financiers, and hunters, which make it *unthinkable* to acknowledge that a local community can own and manage a protected area. What gets authorized, instead, are two linked processes: one is that of ecological state-formation which enhances the power of the state to territorialize nature and to regulate subjects through the control of nature. The other is the commodification of nature through an agenda of “green developmentalism” which “abstracts nature from its spatial and social contexts...reinforces the claims of global elites to the greatest share of the earth’s biomass and all it contains...and speeds the extension of market relations into diverse and complex eco-social systems, with material and cultural outcomes that do more to diminish than to conserve diversity and sustainability” (McAfee 1999: 1-3). In the Northern Areas, the end result of these processes is that almost 40% of the territory has been declared as some form of conservation enclosure, most of which seek to commodify nature for global use and exchange value at the cost of local sovereignty and livelihood.

To be sure, my critique of community-based conservation is not aimed at dismissing the participatory turn in global development and biodiversity conservation. It is surely a necessary corrective to earlier approaches which were characterized by a top-down imposition of agendas and frequent use of violence. Indeed, it is precisely the rhetoric of “participation” and “community empowerment” that enables negotiation on the part of Shimshalis. At the same time, however, we need to

recognize the ways in which such rhetoric facilitates and conceals the manipulation, violence, and displacement that is still widespread in conservation practice.

I also do not wish to suggest that the role of conservation organizations in the Northern Areas has been entirely negative. Both the WWF and IUCN are staffed with several local managers who are all too aware of the dilemmas that conservation poses for their region and people, and have pushed their supervisors to be more sensitive to local contexts. These organizations have also undertaken important initiatives that address local needs of conservation, such as trainings of communities in restoring pastures, in protecting livestock from predators, and in addressing concerns of deforestation and overhunting. Importantly, they have also attempted to go beyond the drafting of management plans for protected areas, to undertaking valuable research on topics such as local understandings of ecology and wildlife management.

Initiatives such as these have the potential to promote a more meaningful attention to the “local” in conservation practice. For example, a report by IUCN titled *Customary Laws: Governing Natural Resource Management in the Northern Areas* examines customary and statutory regimes of resource control in the region, arguing that the former favors conservation and sustainability whereas the latter promotes exploitation (IUCN 2003). It further explores how communities in the Northern Areas have had a varying historical experience of nature-society relations, and how differently situated actors within communities offer diverse explanations for declining wildlife populations. People point out that road construction, urbanization, and less rainfall due to climate change have been key threats to wildlife survival in their regions. While acknowledging that local hunting has been a threat, they also highlight how it has increased only in the last two decades due to the availability of modern weapons as well as the pressures of new market-generated economic needs.

Importantly, not one person in this comprehensive study argues that livestock is a threat to wildlife. This reinforces the findings of my own fieldwork in Shimshal, which revealed how people perceive wildlife and livestock populations as part of a complex ecological process in which a complementary relationship between plant, animal, and human life has been historically developed and maintained by local communities. From their perspective, they have been conserving all along and cannot understand why they must discontinue their practices *for* the sake of conservation. A shepherd from southern France has poignantly echoed this sentiment: “shepherds...are trapped between the desire to do what they know and want to do and the requirement to act as a manager of space and biodiversity. The most difficult thing is perhaps to explain that, all told, this is one and the same approach” (Grellier 2006: 163).

Such reflections on biodiversity enable and invite a deeper analysis of environmental issues than that permitted by the dominant conservation discourse that pits local irresponsibility against global concerns. One hopes that for the cause of environmental sustainability as well as of social justice, such local understandings, values, and aspirations are not only researched, but actually allowed a central place in framing the agenda of biodiversity conservation.

CONCLUSION

Gilgitis commemorate two independence days every year: 14th August and November 1st. The former is the independence day of Pakistan, while the latter is celebrated as the independence day of the Northern Areas.⁹⁷ I was part of the independence celebrations in Gilgit on 14th August, 2006, and was astounded to see the genuine fervor with which Pakistan's independence day was marked in this disenfranchised, marginalized territory – with over three days of seminars, polo matches, music festivals, and *melas* (carnivals). But at the local government university, when people wished each other “Azadi Mubarak” (Happy Independence Day), they sometimes casually followed it up with a knowing smile and said “Pakistan ki Azadi Mubarak! Hum to pehli November tak lar rahay thay” (Happy independence day of Pakistan! We continued to fight for ours till November 1st). Some also said, “Ours is yet to be determined,” suggesting that people in the region are still awaiting the fulfillment of freedom. The celebrations on November 1st are similar to those on August 14th, except that they are organized primarily by local cultural organizations and schools. The day is also marked by protest seminars and rallies by nationalist organizations, in which participants highlight the political repression of the region, and assert demands for regional rights.

In 2007, the local state administration in Gilgit announced a new day for celebrating the region's independence: November 21st. The decision was apparently taken in order to counter the power of nationalist parties such as the Gilgit Baltistan United Front (GBUF), which had organized prominent street demonstrations three weeks earlier on November 1st to condemn the authoritarianism of the Pakistan state in

⁹⁷ It was on November 1st 1947 that the Gilgit Scouts had revolted against Brigadier Ghansara Singh – the local representative of the princely ruler of Jammu and Kashmir, Maharaja Hari Singh – and declared their independence from Kashmir.

the region. The policy was aimed at co-opting dissent: by extending government recognition to the Gilgiti struggle for independence, nationalist parties would be deprived of dominating the day's symbolic power and using it as a successful platform for mobilization.

This belated and grudging recognition was severely resented by local nationalist parties, which perceived it as an attempt to distort the history of Gilgit-Baltistan, by denying its historically marked independence day of November 1st. A prominent regional leader described the policy as “official buffoonery,” and a “big joke” on a region that continues to be deprived of real freedom but now had three independence days. He also pointed out that this misrepresentation of history was the latest tactic in a long series of policies that denied regional identity and democracy in the Northern Areas.

I narrate this episode, in conclusion, to highlight how tactics of *illegibility* constitute a continuing trait and effect of state power in the Northern Areas. It is not just that the constitutional status of the region remains undefined, and rule of law suspended in this strategic territory. Rather, the region is named, mapped, elaborated and governed in ways that serve to render the very identity and history of the region invisible. This erasure is a result of a series of historical unfoldings, not united by a grand scheme but by disparate acts of calculated ambiguity and a cultivated, callous ignorance. It has now seeped into the national consciousness, and become structural. In effect, the region's people are characterized by a “structural invisibility” in which “they are at once no longer classified and not yet classified (Turner 1967: 95-96). They are concealed and made unrecognizable within political discourses and cultural imaginings of Pakistan. If state power operates through the construction and legitimization of particular visions of reality and forms of knowledge (Gramsci 1977,

Foucault 1982), then the production and institutionalization of disguise, illegibility, and ignorance is a key aspect of this normalization process.

The violence of state knowledge – its claims, methods, forms, and effects – is indeed a key thread which runs through the state-making processes that I describe in this dissertation. I variously explore how state practices construct the Northern Areas and what the Pakistani nation is allowed to know about the region, how intelligence agencies track regional subjects and knowingly permit hate-mongering clerics, how exclusionary visions are perpetuated as “Islam” in textbook representations, and how Western and state notions of conservation are presumed to represent “global,” “advanced” knowledge while rural values and practices are considered irrelevant and dispensable. The critical struggles that I discuss in the dissertation expose and puncture the epistemic insularity and violence of such authorized forms of knowledge. They strive to re-envision the terms of belonging by transcending categories of power, but also by simultaneously improving their “bargaining position” within existing frames of rule.

Along with examining the deployment of knowledge, my dissertation also looks closely at the deployment of difference for enabling state power. The quest for a singular, universalizing vision of the Muslim nation has led institutions of the Pakistan state to deny, delegitimize, and discriminate against sectarian difference, violating norms of equal citizenship as well as the very spirit of Islam as practiced in the Northern Areas. State institutions operating in the region – particularly the KANA bureaucracy and the military-intelligence apparatus – have instituted a divisive process of sectarianization that has produced division by denying difference (such as in textbook representations of Islam) or by actively harnessing social cleavages to cultivate sectarian animosity. Regional subjects have thus come to inhabit a sectarian imaginary which breeds resentment, prejudice, and suspicion along sectarian lines.

Through practices of sectarianization, the regional space itself is objectified as sectarian, and this objectification has become the very rationale for deflecting political citizenship and centralizing state power. Hence, we can say that it is division – not homogenization – that has been the key impulse of rule in the Northern Areas. This is similar to long-standing practices of colonial governmentality that produced difference – such as along racial, gendered, and religious lines – while simultaneously deploying it to justify and intensify colonial rule (Chatterjee 1993, Scott 1995, Roy 2005). Such practices make differences consequential, as people come to *see* difference as real, essential, and meaningful. They become social facts, and may be internalized in disempowering ways by the subjects of power. As people in the Northern Areas have often said to me: “We have become so prejudiced, perhaps we don’t deserve to be free.”

This feeling of resignation is part of the emotional dispositions that both effect and are effected by state hegemony. Such emotions, along with those I discussed at length in the dissertation – the sentiments of loyalty and pride in military service, and suspicion and resentment towards sectarian others – demonstrate how the state as a process of lived hegemony (Lieberman 1995) is centrally dependent on the work of affect (Suvin 1997, Stoler 2004).

Ultimately, my multilayered, ethnographic analysis of state-making reveals the state not as a coherent structure of legibility and integration, but as an unwieldy assemblage that operates through illegibility, disintegration, and emotional regulation. The state in Pakistan’s Northern Areas embodies what I call politically disorganized subjection – a slant on “politically organized subjection” (Abrams 1988) – whereby rule is accomplished through the cultivation of erasure and ambiguity, divisiveness and manipulation, and emotions like loyalty and suspicion that simultaneously produce consent, coercion, concealment, and conflict. I have tried to elaborate key

state-making processes of this politically disorganized subjection – representation, militarization, sectarianization, and conservation – which reveal the contradictory, contingent and contested nature of state practice. Moreover, in my analysis, regions are not a backdrop, but the very ground – literally and figuratively – on and through which state subjection is (dis)organized. Thus, critical regional struggles over sovereignty, territory, and identity continually serve to make and remake state power.

The region of the Northern Areas faces a particularly vexed context of state sovereignty, due to its specific territorial, religious, and environmental configuration that make it a central and “sensitive” area. Its centrality is indeed precisely the reason for its marginalization and invisibility. But this does not mean that the Northern Areas is simply an exception or an anomaly in the larger context of the Pakistani nation/state. Rather, I conceive of it as an extraordinary zone where the norms of rule are especially manifest and exaggerated. While the region remains deprived of meaningful citizenship under the garb of the Kashmir dispute and is reduced to a sectarian quagmire, state and nationalist discourse in Pakistan proudly claims ownership of its beautiful mountains, while righteously defending Islam and the “Kashmir cause” as integral to the meaning of Pakistani nationhood. If national self-definition depends on, and is sustained by what is denied and depoliticized (Butler and Spivak 2007), then the Northern Areas provides an exemplary crucible on the back of which the Pakistani nation and state operates.

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