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# Anthropology of Gilgit-Baltistan, Northern Pakistan

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# Anthropology of Gilgit-Baltistan: Introduction

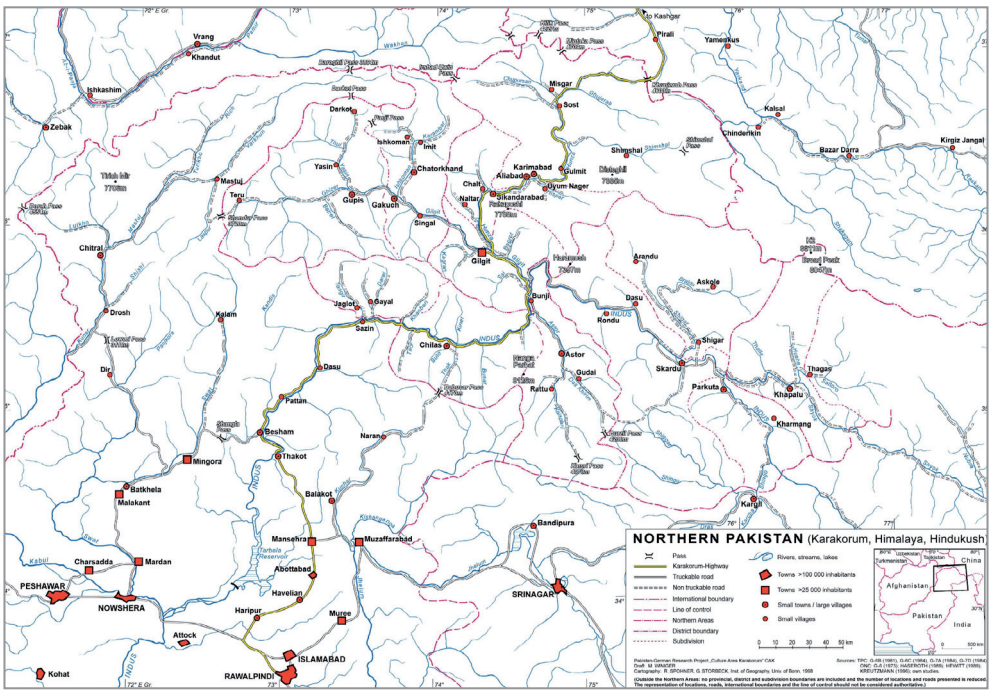
Martin Sökefeld

## Introducing Gilgit-Baltistan

Gilgit-Baltistan is a very sparsely populated (roughly twenty persons per km²) high-mountain area in the north of Pakistan. Its natural environment is usually described with superlatives – the longest glaciers outside of the polar region, home of the world's second highest peak (K2) and four more eight-thousanders, "the most spectacular and fascinating region of Pakistan," says a website for the promotion of tourism to the area.[1] This "spectacular" environment has a number of decisive consequences for human life. Gilgit-Baltistan is largely a high-mountain desert. Geologically, it spreads over three high mountain systems: Himalaya, Karakorum and Hindukush. Settlements are concentrated in the main river valleys and in the side-valleys, and the largest part of the region is simply uninhabitable because of slope, aridity, or height. Slope and aridity are decisive limitations for subsistence: Agriculture depends on irrigation which is mostly fed by melt-water streams from the glaciers. Slopes have to be terraced for cultivation and extensive networks of irrigation channels have to be constructed and maintained. The vast majority of GBs surface area is, however, simply uninhabitable and uncultivable. Over the last decades, the cultivated area had been extended with the help of development agencies, especially the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (AKRSP), but in most parts extension has reached its limits now because of unavailability of water for irrigation. The limiting factor is water in late winter and spring: When water is most needed for the beginning of the agricultural period, it is most scarce because of reduced outflow from the glaciers in the cold season. Beside various sorts of grains that are cultivated – formerly especially barley while today wheat and maize prevail – vegetables and fruits are grown, in the first place apricots, apples and walnuts. In the past, dried fruits played a very significant role especially for diet in winter. Agriculture was always combined with animal husbandry, not only because crops were insufficient but, even more importantly, because manure was required as fertilizer for the fields. Sheep, goats, cows, in the higher areas also yaks, and chicken are kept. There is a locally variegated system of transhumance. In summer, livestock is mostly kept on high pastures. Cows, goats and sheep descend to the permanent settlements in the valleys in September while yaks

1 http://gilgit-baltistan.com/about/ (accessed 10 February 2014)

are mostly kept on high pastures all year round. Like in other high-mountain areas, communities in Gilgit-Baltistan were probably never really self-sufficient in terms of food. To some extent, local produce was supplemented by trade and in some historical cases also by raids, and very often people simply starved in winter and spring, when stocks had run out and no fresh food was yet available.




*Many thanks to Professor Matthias Winiger, Bonn University, for his permission to reproduce this map here.*

The society of Gilgit-Baltistan is diverse in terms of language, religion and ethnicity. Five major regional languages are spoken, Shina in many local varieties, Khowar, Balti, Burushaski and Wakhi. Besides we find also speakers of Pashtu, Hindko, Gujri, Punjabi and other languages, who have migrated from other areas of Pakistan into the area. The national language of Pakistan, Urdu, serves as the lingua franca and English plays a growing role as the language of education. Except a small group of mainly Punjabi Christians all people in Gilgit are Muslims. However, they belong to different sects or *firqe*: Shias, Sunnis, Ismailis, and a small community of Nurbakhshis in Baltistan. Religious communities are endogamous today. People are also divided into patrilineal kinship groups which are often combined into larger *qoms* (extended kinship groups, "ethnic groups" or "nations", Sökefeld 1998a). Also valleys or sub-regions are important references for collective

identity. Political organization and belonging play an important role in this regard. Thus the people of Hunza and Nager identify differently although they live in the same valley – although largely on opposite sides – and speak the same language, Burushaski. But they belonged to opposed little kingdoms and today to different religious groups – the Nagerkuts to the Shia and the Hunzukuts mostly to the Ismailiyya. Beside these many different and intersecting dimensions of identification (Sökefeld 1997a, 1998b) people increasingly share a sense of (political) belonging to Gilgit-Baltistan, as opposed to the rest of Pakistan.

## Traditional political organization

Historically, two different political systems prevailed in Gilgit-Baltistan. The first was a non-centralized, "egalitarian" political organization in the southern part, roughly in what is today the district of Diamer. In these tracts which were colloquially called *Yaghestan* ("free, unruly country") communal affairs were regulated by the *jirga*, the assembly of men. All over Gilgit-Baltistan, people are divided into patrilineal *qoms* which are often locally ranked. Membership in the *jirgas* was mostly limited to the men of the landowning *qoms* like Shin and Yeshkun while "menial" and artisan groups like Kammin, Dom or Gujjur were excluded. Thus, political organization was not really egalitarian, yet it was marked by the absence of centralized rule.[2] In the greater part of Gilgit-Baltistan local rulers, *Rajas* or *Mirs*, ruled over valleys or parts of valleys. Before the British intervention a Raja was largely a *primus inter pares* who needed the support of at least a part of the local population in order to secure his position. While rajaship was hereditary in principle, there was quite fierce competition between claimants for rule and often a contender did not hesitate to kill his own brothers. During colonial rule, however, local rulers needed the recognition of the British in the first place, which guaranteed their power. As a consequence, being much less dependent on local support, many Rajas became more and more despotic. Especially the rulers, or Mirs, of Hunza and Nager were prominent and they continued their largely autonomous rule well into postcolonial times. In 1974 Mohammad Jamal Khan, the Mir of Hunza, was the last local ruler who formally lost his throne. Informally, however, he continued to wield much influence over local and regional affairs. His son Ghazanfar Ali Khan later even became a topmost executive officer in the regional government. While Raja-rule was formally abolished, the political significance of the *jirgas* in Diamer continues until today. Many valleys of Diamer district largely remain outside of administrative control even now.

2 There are some exceptions. In the valley of Tangir which is part of the 'egalitarian zone' Pakhtun Wali, a prince from Yasin valley, was able to establish his rule after 1895 until 1917 (Sökefeld 2002).

## Interconnectedness

While especially lowlanders consider high-mountain areas often as impenetrable zones of retreat and isolation which were "'opened up'" only by modern road-construction, this popular imagination is clearly contradicted by the history of Gilgit-Baltistan. Historical travelogues by Buddhist wayfarers and especially rock-carvings in many parts of Gilgit-Baltistan, most famously in the Indus Valley between Chilas and Kohistan, testify constant human movement through the area. In spite of the difficult terrain, the history of Gilgit-Baltistan is a history of movement and migration. When I conducted research on ethnicity in Gilgit in the early 1990s, I found that the mythical histories of even those groups which are considered the 'original' inhabitants of the town invariably refer to narratives of migration. While there is a significant distinction between 'original' settlers and those who 'came later', also regarding rights to natural resource utilization, in the last instance all people 'originally' came from elsewhere.

Thus, Gilgit-Baltistan was not isolated before the construction of the Karakorum Highway (KKH) which since 1979 connects Pakistan with the Chinese province of Xinjiang via Gilgit-Baltistan. Still, the KKH and subsequently the construction of other roads have greatly transformed life in the area. Exchange between the mountain areas and down-country Pakistan in terms of travel of people and transport of goods and thus the dependency of Gilgit-Baltistan on the road link multiplied greatly. Theoretically, the KKH is an all-season and all-weather road. In practice, however, the road link is not very reliable. It is frequently disturbed by both natural and political events. Often the road is closed for hours or even days due to landslides, especially on rainy days. Since January 2010, the KKH is continuously interrupted due to a large-scale landslide in Gojal. Here, a giant mass of debris has dammed the Hunza-River and road-traffic is substituted by a shaky boat-service (Sökefeld 2012a, b). But the road is also often closed because of blockades by protesting village communities or, recently, sectarian violence (see below). The precariousness of the road link becomes visible when, after a few days of closure, shops in Gilgit-Baltistan quickly run out of certain items. The road connection is supplemented by an even less reliable air link. There are two airports in Gilgit-Baltistan, in Gilgit and in Skardu, that are serviced daily by PIA from Islamabad, but flights are often cancelled due to bad weather conditions or the non-availability of aircraft and there is a usually a huge backlog of people waiting for a seat.

## Political history

That part of Gilgit-Baltistan's history which significantly shapes the present starts in the first half of the 19th century with the interventions of Raja Gulab Singh of Jammu. Gulab Singh was a Hindu vassal of Ranjit Singh's Sikh em-

pire in the Punjab. He was highly interested in extending his influence into the Himalaya, mainly with the goal to control trade routes (Stellrecht 1998: 23f). Troops under two of his generals penetrated the mountains. Zorawar Singh led campaigns towards Ladakh and Baltistan (Huttenback 1961), while Nathu Shah occupied Gilgit briefly for the first time in 1842. When, after Ranjit Singh's death in 1839 the Sikh empire was finally defeated by the British, Gulab Singh switched sides towards the new rulers. In the Treaty of Amritsar of 1848 he bought Kashmir for 7.500.000 Rupees from the British and linked it with Jammu to the State of Jammu and Kashmir and Gulab Singh became the first Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir. Under the Treaty of Amritsar the British also considered Gilgit and Baltistan as being under Kashmiri jurisdiction.[3] While Kashmiri rule over Baltistan was largely unchallenged, the control of Gilgit was hotly contested. In 1846 the area was snatched from Kashmir by an alliance of local Rajas led by Gohar Aman, ruler of Yasin, and the following years saw a constant tug-of-war over Gilgit in which the local contenders mostly prevailed. Kashmir was able to establish more stable control over Gilgit town and its vicinity only after the death of Gohar Aman in 1860 and Kashmiri rule became consolidated only after the British developed their own interest in the area (Sökefeld 1997: 257f). With Russia's advance in Central Asia, the British became highly concerned about a possible Russian intrusion into the Subcontinent through the unexplored chains of the Karakorum and Pamir mountains. Thus, from mid-century onward, the region saw increasing activities of British explorers and surveyors who tried to assess this danger. Gilgit-Baltistan became an important site of the "Great Game". In 1877 the British established a Political Agent in Gilgit as a permanent representative. Major John Biddulph, the first British Agent, remained in the area until 1881, the year in which the Agency was closed in consequence of a change of British policy. But it was opened again in 1889 by Col. Algernon Durand who established a British presence that continued until 1947. Beside the British Political Agent, there was a Kashmiri Governor in Gilgit, the *Wazir-e-Wazarat*. While officially the British and the Kashmiri representative were on equal footing in this arrangement of "dual control", the Political Agent was able to establish his de facto supremacy and also a reputation of British rule as strict but benevolent among the local population, while the Kashmiris suffered from an image of greediness and corruption (Sökefeld 2005). Further, the British were successful in extending their power beyond the area controlled by Kashmir. Most importantly, Durand conquered Hunza and Nager in 1891. As in other parts of the world the British mostly relied on indirect rule. Thus the local rulers like the Mirs of Hunza and Nager enjoyed considerable autonomy as long as their politics did not

3 Literally, the Treaty excluded Gilgit because it included only the territories "eastward of river Indus" while Gilgit is situated in the North-West of the River. Yet this exclusion was due to geographical ignorance rather than deliberately intended. For the full text of the treaty see Hassnain1978: Appendix II.

infringe on British interests. The British took pains to at least symbolically honor the importance of the local rulers, and in fact a close symbiosis between the British administration and local rulers and elites developed. Relation between the Political Agent and the Wazir-e-Wazarat remained conflictual until 1935 when the British "leased" the Gilgit Agency from the Maharaja of Kashmir for sixty years and thereby ended the problematic arrangement of dual control. However, the period of the lease was cut short by independence and the partition of the Subcontinent in 1947.

In late July 1947, two weeks before independence, the British 'handed back' the Agency to the Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir who sent Brigadier Ghansar Singh as Wazir-e-Wazarat in Gilgit. This was a time of turmoil as the British government had only shortly before agreed to the partition of the Subcontinent into 'Hindu' India and 'Muslim' Pakistan. The territory was divided between the two new states according to the religious affiliation of either the majority of the population of a given region or, in the case of the princely states, of the respective ruler. In the case of Jammu and Kashmir State the two principles of partition clashed: Here, a Hindu Maharaja ruled over a politically largely disenfranchised Muslim majority of about two thirds of the State's total population. Since 1931 there had been various movements of Muslims that demanded a share of power and political participation in the State. Since early summer 1947 unrest grew especially in the South-Western part of Jammu and Kashmir. For the time being, the Maharaja decided neither for accession with India nor for Pakistan but rather attempted to maintain an independent position. On the other hand, however, both states demanded the inclusion of Kashmir in their respective territories.

A few Hindu and Sikh traders aside the population of Gilgit was completely Muslim. Also in Gilgit people were generally in favor of Pakistan. The decisive force in the Agency was the Gilgit Scouts, the paramilitary troop established by the British. Also after the withdrawal of the British administration they remained under the command of two British officers, Major Brown and Captain Mathieson, now in the Maharaja's service. In September 1947, after some deliberations with the Wazir-e-Wazarat the local junior commissioned officers who mostly belonged to the ruling families of the area took a secret oath for accession with Pakistan (Sökefeld 1997b). Under the pressure of growing revolt the Maharaja requested military support from India. The Indian government was ready to grant assistance only under the condition of the prior accession of Jammu and Kashmir with India. On October 26, 1947, the Maharaja finally signed the "Instrument of Accession". By air, India started to send troops into the Kashmir valley and succeeded in stopping the advance of the revolt and securing the capital Srinagar.

When a few days later the news of accession to India reached Gilgit, the Gilgit Scouts arrested the governor on 1st of November, and declared the "Islamic Republic of Gilgit" which lasted for sixteen days. During this time the

request for accession with Pakistan was sent to the Government in Karachi. In the following *jang-e-azadi* (freedom war) the Gilgit Scouts first took the garrison of neighboring Bunji, where Kashmiri Hindu troops were stationed, and then successfully advanced to liberate Baltistan. The Scouts even took Dras and Kargil, i.e. places which had to be given up again later and which today are part of Indian Ladakh. After more than a year of war and negotiations in the UN Security Council, India and Pakistan agreed to a ceasefire that commenced on 1st of January 1949. Since then, the erstwhile State of Jammu and Kashmir is divided into one part under Indian administration and two politically different parts under Pakistani control, Azad Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan.[4]

I told this history in some detail because it has significant political consequences even today. Under international law, Gilgit-Baltistan remains a "disputed territory". Pakistan never formally accepted Gilgit-Baltistan's accession and the territory of the country which is outlined in Article 1 of the Constitution of Pakistan does not include Gilgit-Baltistan. Gilgit-Baltistan's postcolonial history is to a great extent shaped by this political marginalization which started when on November 16, 1947, Mohammad Alam, a *tahsildar* (sub-district officer) from Mansehra, arrived in Gilgit to take control for the Government of Pakistan as Political Agent. He deposed the provisional local government. In the following years Pakistan's administration largely continued the colonial system, including the colonial law, the *Frontier Crimes Regulation*. Exploitative taxes and forced labor were continued and there was no local participation in government affairs (Sökefeld 2005). All high officials of the local administration as well as army officers stationed in Gilgit came from 'down-country' Pakistan, mostly from the Punjab. The administration also did not touch the local rulers. The following decades saw a few incidents of protest against local rajas like in Punial in 1951 and in Nager in 1969. Protest was largely organized by men who had achieved higher education in Pakistani universities and who only fully realized the political disenfranchisement of Gilgit-Baltistan upon their return to the region. The most significant protest which developed into a short-term insurgency occurred in Gilgit town in early 1970. A minor dispute between a local school teacher and the wife of a Punjabi officer who threatened the teacher because her child failed an exam became a symbol for the arrogance and high-handedness of Pakistani control in Gilgit. A local political organization, the *Tanzim-e-Millat* ("organization of the nation") that had been established shortly before, took the lead and organized a protest demonstration. The leaders of the Tanzim-e-Millat were arrested and this further heated up the unrest. Protestors broke the jail and freed the arrested leaders. When a growing mass of people marched towards the offices of the authorities, a non-local official ordered the Gilgit

4 Later, in 1950, also China occupied a part which had been under Indian control: Aksai Chin.

Scouts to shoot the crowd. The Scouts, who were still a local troop, however, defied orders. The official himself took a gun and shot one protestor. The administration had to call in troops from the North-West Frontier Province in order to regain control.[5]

Although the revolt was defeated and many people were arrested, it led to some political reforms. In 1971, the secession of Bangladesh, the former East Pakistan, succeeded and the military government of Pakistan gave way to the civilian president Zulfikar Ali Bhutto who subsequently became elected as prime minister. Bhutto took a special interest in Gilgit-Baltistan. He amnestied all prisoners, replaced the agency system with a more regular administration, and renamed the region which before was still known as "Gilgit Agency" as "Northern Areas of Pakistan". He abolished the local rulers and the colonial law of Frontier Crimes Regulations and established a regional advisory council, the Northern Areas Council. It seems that Bhutto was on the verge of integrating the Northern Areas/Gilgit-Baltistan fully into the Pakistani state. Reforms were stopped, however, when Bhutto was deposed by General Zia-ul-Haq in 1977. Subsequently, there were further "reform packages" which mostly brought only cosmetic changes of Gilgit-Baltistan's political status. The last reform was the "Gilgit-Baltistan (Empowerment and Self-Governance) Order", issued by the Government of Pakistan in 2009. Under this order the area was called "Gilgit-Baltistan" and the regional council was renamed as *Gilgit-Baltistan Legislative Assembly* which, however, enjoys very limited legislative powers. The Order also established the *Gilgit-Baltistan Council* in which the Government of Pakistan has a strong representation. In tendency, significant issues are decided by the Council while the Legislative Assembly has minor competencies. Again, a kind of "dual control" has been established with a regional government and a regional legislation with limited powers on one hand and a strong administration under the control of the Government of Pakistan on the other.

Discontent with Gilgit-Baltistan's political status gave rise to a number of smaller political groups which are collectively referred to as "nationalists". They demand either greater autonomy of the area or even full independence from Pakistan (Sökefeld 1999, see also Sohaib Bodla's contribution in this issue). Although there has never been any poll on this issue in the area, it is safe to assume that the majority of Gilgit-Baltistan's population rather prefers the full integration of their area into Pakistan as the country's fifth province.

## Sectarianism

Beside the political reforms, another significant consequence of the revolt of 1970 is often pointed out in local discourse: violent sectarianism. The population of Gilgit-Baltistan is religiously diverse. All people are Muslims but

5 For details see Sökefeld 1997a:284ff.

they belong to different sects – Shias, Sunnis, Ismailis, and, in Baltistan, also a small minority of Nurbakhshis. The southern District of Diamer is exclusively Sunni, while all other districts are mixed. Shias greatly dominate in Baltistan, while Ismailis dominate Hunza-Nager district and Ghizer. The history of Islam is also a history of tension and conflict between Sunnis and Shias. It started as conflict about the question who were the legitimate leaders of the Muslim *ummah* after the Prophet Mohammad's death, the elected Caliphs, as the Sunnis believe, or, according to Shia faith, the Imams who are genealogically related to the Prophet. Over the centuries, this dispute congealed also into differences between Shias and Sunnis in terms of ritual, law and other doctrinal issues. This does not mean, however, that relations between both groups are generally characterized by open conflict. Also in Gilgit, most people emphasize that "in the past" relations between Shias and Sunnis were amicable and peaceful. In fact, mixed families and cross-cutting marriages were very common. The 1970s and 1980s, however, saw some incidents of violence between Sunnis and Shias. Things came to a head when in May 1988 a large party of Sunnis from Diamer and adjacent Kohistan attacked Shia villages around Gilgit. They wreaked havoc, destroyed many houses and killed more than one hundred people (Sökefeld 1997: 203ff). The actual number of victims was never officially disclosed. This happened in the last months of General Zia's rule. The army which had a strong presence in Gilgit watched the havoc for several days before it finally stopped the attackers and sent them back to their valleys. The events of *athasi* ("eighty-eight"), as they are generally referred to in Gilgit, were a point of no return in Shia-Sunni relations. Since then relations became highly polarized: There are no more cross-cutting relations. Many mixed neighborhoods saw the exodus of members of the smaller religious community, commensality almost stopped and in general solidarity and cooperation across the sectarian divide was greatly reduced. Many people in Gilgit explain this development with reference to the uprising in the early 1970s. They allege that in the years after the government initiated a divide-and-rule-strategy by sending "radical" Sunni *ulema* (scholars) to Gilgit who preached that Shias were not Muslims but *kafirs* (non-believers). Of course, this accusation was reciprocated by Shia *ulema* and the antagonism between both groups rather deepened and hardened with support from Saudi Arabia for the Sunnis and from Iran for the Shias. Whether the accusation that the antagonism was instigated by the government is correct or not, it certainly went out of hand and beyond control.

Since the 1990s violent events became a more or less regular affair. Every few years there are periods of *tensions*, as the times of violence are locally called, which cost many lives. The government tries to control violence by imposing curfew which often lasts for a week or more, by closing the Karakorum Highway and, more recently, by blocking mobile phone networks. A very violent period of tension which cost many lives occurred in early 2005

when, after a longer dispute about the representation of Shias in textbooks, the Shia Imam Agha Zia Uddin was killed in Gilgit (Ali 2008, Stöber 2007). In 2012 the conflict got a new dimension because on three different occasions busses were stopped by assailants in the Sunni areas on the Karakorum Highway and the Babusar Route. The busses were searched for Shias who were killed mercilessly. Routes and places have become sectarianized and especially Shias avoid travelling on the KKH because they feel highly insecure on the road (Grieser and Sökefeld forthcoming.). In Gilgit-Baltistan the Shia-Sunni antagonism became a basic premise of life which structures social and political relations. Even institutions that actively struggle to stay outside of the antagonism and to provide a neutral space, like Karakorum International University which was established in Gilgit in 2002, have difficulties to escape the sectarian and sectarianizing rationality (Ali 2010a).

## Development and community activism

Beside Shias and Sunnis, Ismailis are the third significant Muslim community in Gilgit-Baltistan. In Gilgit they have hitherto been able to keep a neutral position and they are not directly involved in the Shia-Sunni sectarian issue.[6] Besides their specific religious practices and orientations, Ismailis stand out by their extraordinary level of literacy and education. This is due to the outstanding engagement of the Aga Khan, the spiritual leader of the Ismailiyya, and the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) in the area. The AKDN comprises of a number of organizations which specialize in different fields of development like rural development and infrastructure (the Aga Khan Rural Support Program, AKRSP, and the Aga Khan Planning and Building Services, AKPBS), health (the Aga Khan Health Services, AKHS), education (the Aga Khan Education Services, AKES), culture and heritage conservation (the Aga Khan Trust for Culture, AKCS), as well as disaster management (Focus Humanitarian Assistance). In a way, AKDN doubles the not very efficient state administration and provides services which the state is able to provide only to a very limited extent. However, the AKDN agencies carefully emphasize that they work *with* the state and not against or in competition with it. They do not engage in advocacy or open criticism. Although AKDN-institutions are regarded as being almost sacrosanct and beyond critique, some complaints have been voiced after the Attabad landslide of January 2010 which cut off Gojal, the northern part of Hunza. The KKH was buried under a huge mass of debris which also dammed the Hunza-River and created a lake which measured up to thirty kilometers. Being cut off and feeling utterly neglected by the government many people of Gojal had expected particularly AKRSP to raise a voice for the disaster affected people and to work for the reconnection of the area. AKRSP workers, however, responded to this

6 In neighboring Chitral, however, where there are no Shias, Ismailis have often been attacked by Sunnis (Marsden 2005).

criticism by pointing out that the program could not relieve the state of its responsibility (Sökefeld 2012a).

AKRSP is perhaps the most important of the AKDN-organizations. It was formed in 1982 to counter poverty in the high mountain area (Gilgit-Baltistan and Chitral) and from its beginning practiced a participatory approach that followed a cooperative model which emphasizes and supports community self-organization (Wood, Malik and Sagheer 2006). In order for villages or neighborhoods to participate in the program, they were required to form Village Organizations (VOs) that jointly managed resources and saved money which was complemented with funds from AKRSP for particular projects. In order to promote women and especially their income generating capacity, specific Women's Organizations (WOs) were also formed in the villages. AKRSP is a 'non-communal' program, i.e. it is not limited to Ismailis and Ismaili majority areas. Especially in Shia areas like Nager and Baltistan but also in Astor VOs have been established, while it is not active in Sunni Diamer. In any case, the success of the program is much higher among Ismailis than among others. This is due to mainly two factors. On one hand, the Ismaili population is much more committed to the program. Their participation is motivated not only by economic considerations and the expectation of some material outcome, but more importantly by the Aga Khan himself. The Aga Khan, whose word is of utmost importance for Ismailis, continuously calls his followers to participate in such programs, to work for development and to acquire education. Thus, participation is considered almost a religious duty (Sökefeld 1997: 135ff). This strong motivation to participate in projects is of course missing for the members of other religious groups. On the other hand, non-Ismailis sometimes complain that the staff of AKRSP is much more committed to Ismaili areas than to the other parts of Gilgit-Baltistan. Perhaps there is also some imbalance between different Ismaili areas as Ismailis from Ghizer-District sometimes express the opinion that the program is very much centered on Hunza. Although also in Hunza the VOs and WOs do not always work perfectly, this kind of self-organization for community development has become a model. In Pakistan, the National Rural Support Program has been formed after the example of AKRSP. In Gilgit-Baltistan, AKRSP and the other AKDN-institutions have strongly contributed to the formation of an ethos of community activism, according to which particularly young men but also women are expected to work voluntarily or for a limited remuneration for their "community" which is mostly equated with the population of a village, a cluster of villages or even an entire valley. The idea that local populations have to organize for the betterment of life ("development") and that individuals should commit themselves to communal purposes have spread much beyond the Ismaili areas (see Walter, this issue). For instance, "community schools" which work on a cooperative basis and are funded through fees have sprung up in many places. They are mostly

English medium schools as English is regarded as the principal language of modernity and development.

## Gender

Society in Gilgit-Baltistan is strongly gendered, although gender-relations vary greatly according to sect and region. Among Shias and Sunnis *pardah*, i.e. gender segregation, is a strict norm which, however, especially in villages where women are required to work outside the house in the fields is not always tightly enforced. In principle *pardah* (the Persian word for "curtain") means that a woman should not have any interaction with men from outside of the close circle of her family. This means that a woman should largely be restricted to her house and compound. In any case, pre-marital and extra-marital (sexual) relations are anathema. In parts of Gilgit-Baltistan, 'relation' in this context is a very broadly defined concept which may include a word or a wink between a man and a woman who are not related. Any suspicion and rumor that a woman might be engaged in such a 'relation' befouls her *izzat* (honor) and consequently the *izzat* of her family. Therefore men are called to keep "their women", in particular daughters and sisters, under very strict surveillance and control. In normal life this control is mostly executed by the mothers of the families, but also elder brothers play an important role. In some parts of Gilgit-Baltistan, killings in consequence of (supposedly) breached honor are not rare. The important symbol of *pardah* is the veil. Women should be veiled outside of the house, but there is a large variety and range of veiling practices (for details see Kriebel, this issue). Among Sunnis in Diamer *pardah* is strictest and here it is strongly supported by a culture of jealousy and violent feuds.[7]

Among Ismailis in Hunza and Ghizer veiling practices are very lax and *pardah* almost non-existent – which does not mean that 'relations' are more accepted. In Gilgit town, however, where people of all the sects live, also Ismailis have to adopt *pardah* to some extent and Ismaili women are much less "free" than in rural areas. In a fascinating ethnography Katrin Gratz (2006) describes how women live *pardah* in Gilgit and how within the "gendered space" of the town women practice social relations and develop their agency. In Gilgit-Baltistan, female education has increased much in the last decades[8] and also employment opportunities for women have multiplied, especially as teachers in girls' schools. In Gilgit town also a number of "ladies'

7 Jettmar 1960. Because of feuds and strong Islamist influence Diamer has been inaccessible for research in the last decades. Nevertheless, there are two very interesting recent studies of neighboring Kohistan which strongly resembles Diamer. Both studies also touch gender relations (Jahn 2009, Knudsen 2009).

8 Again Diamer is an exception. Here about fifty percent of all children are not enrolled in a school and the enrollment rate of girls is much lower than that of boys (SAFED 2013).

markets" have been built, access to which is restricted to women, both as customers and as shop-owners or sales-persons. Thus, gender segregation is maintained although women enter new economic realms.

## Anthropological research on Gilgit-Baltistan

The "anthropology of Gilgit-Baltistan" began with the British explorations of the uncharted high-mountain areas in the mid-19th century. For the British colonizers knowledge of a certain area was a necessary precondition of being able to dominate it. Thus, explorers often preceded administrators, but also the administrators continued to collect all kinds of knowledge about local people, society and environment. In this body of literature, ethnographic information is often mixed up with history and geography. After his four years in the Gilgit area Political Agent John Biddulph published his book *Tribes of the Hindoo Koosh* (2001 [1880]) and also his successor Algernon Durand wrote about Gilgit. His book, *The Making of a Frontier* (1977 [1899]), was however more a political memoir of his term than an "ethnography" of the area. Decades later, a third Political Agent, D. L. R. Lorimer, was an even more prolific writer. He was Political Agent from 1920 to 1924, and being particularly interested in local languages, he even returned to the area after his retirement in order to pursue linguistic studies. Besides publishing extensively on Burushaski, Wakhi and Domaki languages, he also collected much ethnographic material which was published posthumously by Müller-Stellrecht (1979, 1980). Previously, the Political Agents Frederick Drew, another Englishman who was in the service of the Maharaja of Kashmir, had already written a book about *The Jummoo and Kashmir Territories* (1980 [1875]) which also contains sections about Gilgit-Baltistan. All in all, the British colonial literature about the area is quite vast.[9]

In the 1950s, German research interest in the area was established, starting with the German Hindukush Expedition of 1955-56 which was planned by Adolf Friedrich, Professor of Anthropology at the University of Mainz.[10] Friedrich was particularly interested in European and Asian mountain peoples. The expedition was part of a larger research project which intended to collect comparative data on all continents. At that time, German anthropology stood firmly in the tradition of culture history. The basic idea and interest was to discover "original" or "primeval" cultural forms. The idea was that certain styles of subsistence (e.g. hunting, pastoralism, agriculture) produce different forms of culture. Some representatives of this approach even thought that with the passage of time cultures "degenerate" to "hybrid forms" – at that time hybridity was not theoretically celebrated as it is today. Friedrich chose the high mountain area of northern Pakistan for the expedition

9 Beside the books already referred to also Knight (1991 [1895]), Leitner (1985 [1889]) and Schomberg (n.d. [1935]) should be mentioned.

10 This account of the expedition is based on Buddruss and Snoy 2007.

because he believed that the remote high mountain valleys in the Hindukush and Karakorum might harbor almost "original" cultures and also different "styles of culture" at a very close geographical distance to one another which would provide new insights into the history of culture. The area was seen as a kind of "refuge" of cultures. The members of the expedition, beside Friedrich, were Dr. Karl Jettmar, who that time worked at the ethnographic museum of Vienna/Austria, Dr. Georg Buddruss, a young linguist and specialist in Indian languages, and Peter Snoy, a student of anthropology at the University of Mainz. They did some ethnographic exploration in Gilgit town, where Buddruss started to study Shina language, and then moved south towards Chilas and Tangir which had formally joined Pakistan/the northern areas only three years earlier, in 1952. In Tangir they collected data on economy, forms of settlement, ethnic relations and remnants of "pre-Islamic" religion.[11] This was to become the major topic of interest for this first generation of German researchers in the Karakorum. Especially Jettmar focused on "pre-Islamic" religion. Later, the members of the expedition separated and travelled in different directions. Jettmar continued to Baltistan while Snoy did research in Bagrot in the vicinity of Gilgit (Snoy 1975). Friedrich went via Ghizer to Chitral, crossing the Shandur Pass, to study the Kalash and especially their form of shamanism. Unfortunately, Friedrich became seriously ill during his stay in the Kalash valleys and died in spring 1956 in Rawalpindi.

After this expedition, research interest in Gilgit-Baltistan even increased. Here, I will focus on anthropological research, but also linguists like Prof. Buddruss continued their research. The pivotal anthropologist was Karl Jettmar. He was especially interested in religion because he thought that religious beliefs and practices are particularly resistant to cultural change. According to this view, the research on religion opened a window onto "early" cultures. Therefore he was particularly keen to document and reconstruct pre-Islamic aspects of religion in Gilgit-Baltistan. Jettmar moved to the University of Heidelberg in 1964 and thus Heidelberg became the center of research on Gilgit-Baltistan in Germany. Jettmar also initiated long-standing archaeological research on the petroglyphs in Gilgit-Baltistan, especially in the Indus valley.

Although the particular scientific interest and theoretical approach of the German Hindukush Expedition have long become obsolete, the expedition established a remarkable tradition of German research in the area which continues more or less until today. German anthropology research turned on the one hand towards more recent history, i.e. archival research on the British era of Gilgit-Baltistan, and on the other hand to the ethnography of the present which is firmly based on contemporary anthropological theory. Especially Jettmar's students Irmtraud Stellrecht, who retired a few years

11 Jettmar was able to revisit Tangir and the neighbouring valleys in 1958, see Jettmar 1960.

ago as professor of anthropology at the University of Tübingen, and Jürgen Frembgen, who is curator for Islamic cultures at the ethnographic museum in Munich, carried anthropological research forward. Frembgen wrote his PhD thesis on the basis of field research in Nager and focused, among other things, on the political history of Nager state (Frembgen 1985). Irmtraud (Müller-)Stellrecht worked especially on 19th century history of Gilgit-Baltistan, and many publications resulted from this work (e.g. Müller-Stellrecht 1978, 1982; Stellrecht 1998).

Irmtraud Stellrecht also initiated the next phase of German research on Gilgit-Baltistan: An interdisciplinary project of Pakistani-German cooperation under the title of "Culture Area Karakorum" which was funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (German Research Council) and worked between 1989 and 1995. This project also involved physical and human geography and linguistics, among others. Research in social anthropology focused on topics like medical anthropology, social change, perception of environment and gender. Being part of this research network I myself came for the first time to Pakistan in 1991 to do fieldwork on ethnicity in Gilgit town (Sökefeld 1997). Other areas where anthropological fieldwork was undertaken within the framework of Culture Area Karakorum include Yasin, Shigar, Astor, Kohistan and Bagrot.[12]

But of course not only German anthropologists are working in Gilgit-Baltistan. Especially the works of Emma Varley and Nosheen Ali have to be mentioned for contemporary research in the area. Canadian anthropologist Emma Varley focuses on medical anthropology and worked, among other things, on the intersections of Islam, sectarian conflict, obstetric health and family planning in Gilgit town (Varley 2010, 2012). Nosheen Ali works very broadly on political issues which include sectarianism, militarization and the political status of the area but also the politics of conservation and the link between politics and poetry (Ali 2008, 2010a, 2010b, 2012, 2013).

## The contributions in this issue

Currently, the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology ("Institut für Ethnologie") of Ludwig-Maximilians-University Munich is the only anthropology department in Germany, where research on Gilgit-Baltistan (or Northern Pakistan, for that matter) takes place. In a way, the students at the institute in Munich form the fourth generation of German fieldworkers in Gilgit-Baltistan. Beside a number of other projects, there was a research cooperation established between the department in Munich, Quaid-I-Azam University in Islamabad and Karakorum International University in Gilgit. The cooperation worked under the title *Coping with change in Gilgit Baltis-*

12 See Gratz 2006, Jahn 2009, Lentz 2000, Marhoffer-Wolff 2002, Stellrecht 1997.

*tan* and was funded by the DAAD (German Academic Exchange Service) for the years 2011 – 2013. Part of this framework was the *Summer School Anthropological Fieldwork Methods* which took place in Gilgit in August and September 2013. The Summer School gave the impulse for this issue of *Ethnoscripts* on Gilgit-Baltistan. The articles by Anna-Maria Walter, Claudia Stadler, Maria Beimborn and Nadine Kriebel derive from fieldwork done within the scope of the Summer School. Nosheen Ali and Azam Chaudhary were teachers at the Summer School. These contributions are supplemented by articles by Sohaib Bodla and Anna Grieser.

In her article *Changing Gilgit-Baltistan: Perceptions of the recent history and the role of community activism* Anna-Maria Walter addresses the local "development rhetoric" in Gilgit-Baltistan. For a Western anthropologist who is used to view "development" with a critical eye, the positive evaluation of "modernization" and the optimism which prevails in GBs development discourse are at times quite unsettling. Drawing on the introduction of girls' schools in Bagrote and on the new social figure of the "community activists", Walter discusses the local appropriation of "development" and arrives at a re-evaluation of the anthropological critique of development.

Claudia Stadler addresses a peculiar kind of community activism which engages in *Citizen Journalism* in Gilgit-Baltistan. Citizen Journalism via online news-blogs is a new way of participating in the public sphere. Such blogs are seen as representing the voices of the local communities. The article mainly discusses the blog *pamirtimes.net* which dominates GB's blogosphere. Yet while the blog's activists claim to represent the whole region, others criticize that reporting on some areas prevail while others are neglected. In addition, access to the Internet is quite limited in GB and, because English is mostly used, there is also a language barrier which excludes many. *Pamirtimes.net* has expanded the possibilities of public participation of reaching even beyond the local context yet still it has to be analyzed within the structures and opportunities of local society.

Since a number of years there is a small – generally Punjabi – Christian community in Gilgit. Due to the peculiar history of Christians in Pakistan, they mostly work in the cleaning sector. In her contribution *Christians in Gilgit: Negotiating subalternity and citizenship*, Maria Beimborn thoroughly discusses the concept of subalternity and uses Pandey's concept of "subaltern citizen" to analyze the Christians' organization, struggles and commitments to show how they are simultaneously marginalized and included by the state.

In *The Ways of Revenge in Chilas, Gilgit-Baltistan, Pakistan: Shia-Sunni Clashes as Blood Feuds*, Azam Chaudhary addresses the problem of Sunni-Shia violence from a perspective of segmentary opposition. Analyzing the history of feuds in Diamer and describing the mechanism of *badal* (revenge) he argues that Sunni-Shia violence in GB has to be understood on similar lines.

Nosheen Ali addresses a different field of politics. In *Spaces of Nature: Producing Gilgit-Baltistan as the Eco-Body of the Nation* she analyzes the invisibilization of Gilgit-Baltistan from the dominant perspective of down-country Pakistan. From this angle, Gilgit-Baltistan is mainly imagined as a space of spectacular nature, devoid of human beings. She argues that this is also a consequence of the region's disputed status which requires the erasure of a specific regional identity of the people of Gilgit-Baltistan and emphasizes that this is replicated by discourses on environmental conservation which constructs the area largely as a space of nature in which people have no place.

Yet in reaction and resistance to the political disabilities deriving from the disputed status of Gilgit-Baltistan and to the denial of identity, a diverse movement of small nationalist groups which demand full autonomy or even independence has formed over the last twenty-five years. In *Making a Nation in High Mountains: Balawars and Balawaristan Nationalism in Ghizer District of Gilgit Baltistan* Sohaib Bodla describes the emergence of nationalist politics in the sub-district of Punial and shows how it grew, also with the help of new means of communication, from a minority perspective to a widely shared view.

Looking at the spatial practices of female students at Gilgit's Karakorum International University, Nadine Kriebel analyses the perception of *gendered space* in the town. Gender segregation is a dominant characteristic of society in Gilgit and the university is for many young women the first space in which they meet young men who are not their relatives. Interaction across gender boundaries as well as gender separation has to be negotiated. Kriebel shows how space and places are (temporarily) marked as being male or female and how *pardah*, the separation of the sexes, is a system of norms, values and practices which are interpreted and at times manipulated by individual actors.

Also Anna Grieser addresses the question of gender, but from vantage point of methodological perspectives and experiences: How can a female ethnographer work in a societal context of strict gender-segregation? She allows deep insight into her own rather difficult experiences of doing fieldwork in Gilgit. Her transgression of gender-boundaries in the course of fieldwork resulted in multiplying uncontrollable rumors. Grieser argues that the conditions of fieldwork are hardly controlled by the fieldworker her (or him)self but that it is shaped and constrained by – often diffuse – local power relations. In addition we learn from her article that local gender norms and values are not as clear and fixed as they often appear to be but that specific behavior is often evaluated in quite contradictory terms.

My own contribution *Disaster and (im)mobility: Restoring mobility in Gojal after the Attabad landslide* is about the ongoing consequences of a natural disaster that hit the Hunza Valley in early 2010. Taking advantage of the fact that *Ethnoscripts* is now published exclusively online it introduces a

new format to the journal: the visual essay. Mainly through photographs that were taken over a period of more than three years I show how a new traffic system was introduced in order to overcome the blockade which cut off the whole area of Upper Hunza.

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