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Jellyfishing in the Postcolonial Nation State

Baltistan through the Zomia Lens

The Partition of India and Pakistan in 1947 divided the western Himalayan region of Baltistan in two parts. Being subject to internal colonization and nation-making by the two postcolonial nation states, the Balti community, like many other communities in the Himalayan region, has recently voiced demands for self-rule and experienced a cultural revival. The situation in Baltistan is here seen through a Zomia lens, focusing on what James Scott (2009) terms "jellyfish" strategies of the community's history, language, and culture to avoid being governed. This strategy allows for the community's escape from their rulers into a new, "virtual friction of terrain" in the form of ICT (information communications technology) and the internet. This article points out that South Asian minority communities like the Balti often find themselves suspended between demands of self-rule and a politics of development where they compete over access to the resources of the nation state. A preliminary history of connectivity in Baltistan is also included.

Keywords: Baltistan—Himalayas—Zomia—connectivity—internal colonialism—self-rule

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When I was an undergraduate student studying political science at Lund University in Sweden, the class read Graham Allison's book *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* (1971). It is a book that investigates the Cuban Missile Crisis from three different theoretical perspectives in order to show how the researcher's choice of theoretical lenses brings out and emphasizes different aspects in the explanation and interpretation of the events (and to challenge the dominant rational choice model at that time). The book made a deep impression on me that, I think, has led me to be consistently unfaithful to theory, to try and shift my perspectives and cut through the empirical data differently.

When I first read James C. Scott's book *The Art of Not Being Governed* (2009), I found myself wondering what I would see in my previous research about Baltistan, a region in the western Himalayas, if I looked at it through a Zomia lens. Zomia is Scott's name for a Southeast Asian upland region that has "not yet been fully incorporated into nation states" (ibid., ix). The reason, he suggests, is that the people who were living in Zomia did their best "to keep the state at arm's length" (ibid., x) by deploying various strategies.

What perhaps struck me the most when I first put my mind to the study of Baltistan was how many of the things that were going on in the region today were linked to the community being a disadvantaged minority demanding civil rights in a postcolonial nation state. Up until that point I had mainly been approaching the issues as a sociologist taking a social movement perspective, often with a tilt toward identity politics. But I never really did question the nation state framework. What if I got it all wrong? Like many other communities that ended up on the peripheries of the new, independent nation states of India and Pakistan, Baltistan became an object of internal colonialism and state- and nation-making, part of a new geography with a new geopolitical agenda. What would I discover if I looked at the activities and events that I had documented in Baltistan through a Zomia lens, as parts of a strategy to, if not avoid, at least try to maneuver away from the governing attempts of the new, postcolonial rulers?

It made me curious. In my view, Scott's work on Zomia challenges much of history writing as we know it and is a groundbreaking piece of work in its alternative reading of state-making. In my examination of the Zomia quality of Baltistan's relationship with the nation states of India and Pakistan in this article, I do not attempt to do full justice to it. Instead, I will merely try to make use of some parts of the conceptual

framework, taking my cue from the Zomia literature (van Schendel 2002; Scott 2009; Michaud 2010, 2017; Schneiderman 2010; Samuel 2015; and others).

Quite a lot of criticism has been leveled against the Zomia thesis, especially from historians and anthropologists of Southeast Asia. The challenge has mainly been two-pronged. First, Scott's argument is too general and lacks a solid empirical base and, second, he is a reductionist due to taking methodological shortcuts and oversimplifying the issues (Michaud 2017). For instance, according to Victor Lieberman, a historian of Southeast Asia and Eurasia, the evidential base presented in *The Art of Not Being Governed* is too weak to support the theoretical superstructure (2010, 336). In his opinion, the thesis is both ahistorical and one-sided, as it omits local dynamics within the hills and only offers a single, monocausal explanation in the form of "lowland provocation." He goes on to demonstrate this at length by suggesting other, contradictory contexts and alternative explanations (ibid.). Political scientist and Marxist scholar Tom Brass, a well-known researcher in subaltern studies, also lashes out at Scott's work, calling it a "populist historiography" (Brass 2012, 124) based on "ecological determinism" (ibid., 127) where the hills are good, and the valleys are bad, and where development and modernization are portrayed as historical evils. In his eyes Scott's work represents a neoliberal, even libertarian agenda celebrating a society that is free from the state (ibid., 126). A portion of the criticism against the theoretical basis of Scott's concept of Zomia also points out that it is more of a metaphor that, in effect, invents a reality rather than describes it (Jonsson 2010, 192).

I find it hard to argue against the empirical and methodological challenges, but I disagree with those who want to disqualify Zomia as a theoretical approach. Whatever the faults of Scott's thesis might be, its strength is the lens it offers for a reversal of perspectives. In fact, this exercise could be seen as one of the major tasks for social scientists. As Jean Michaud (2010) points out in his editorial in *Journal of Global History*'s special issue on Zomia, picking up from Willem van Schendel's (2002) challenge to area studies, the Zomia lens is an opportunity to explore other sides of marginality in the Asian highlands that are outside the nation state framework and what has been regarded as *comme il faut* answers by mainstream research.

As I will discuss later in this article, there are indeed alternative readings of modern Baltistan that can be discovered through the Zomia lens about its history, culture, and people. The readings that I intend to propose contest the master narratives of the nation states, some of them crossing paths in the current Baltistan Movement to create an autonomous geographical entity called "Greater Ladakh." I will use the term "Baltistan Movement" in this article as a label for the cultural revival and its political turn that has been going on in the Balti community over the past three decades. The keenest propagators are activists involved with local NGOs such as *Skarchen* (Morning Star) in the Indian part of Shyok Valley, KASCO (Kargil Social and Cultural Organization) in Kargil, and BCDF (Baltistan Culture and Development Foundation, formerly BCF, Baltistan Cultural Federation) in Skardu, organizations that I have studied closely during fieldwork in the region (Magnusson 2006, 2011a, 2011b, 2016).

I will also discuss if the so-called "jellyfish" strategies are deployed in the construction of the history of Baltistan. If so, is it a post-literate community by

strategic choice? Also, are the recent efforts to reclaim the Tibetan *u-chen* script for vernacular Balti a double-edged sword? Is the performance of Balti pop-*ghazal*s a way of sharing alternative narratives within the community and preventing them from being appropriated? Lastly, do community activities carried out on social media get protected by what I call the "friction of virtual terrain"? These are the main questions that I attempt to explore in what follows in this article.

Competing nationalisms and the religious framework of national identities

When we talk about Baltistan not wanting to be governed by Pakistan or India, it suggests a resistance against being incorporated into the master narratives of the nation states. It also assumes a distinct national identity propagated by these two countries. But it can alternatively suggest that there is a different Balti narrative, identity, and heritage that is separate from those of the nation states within which they are located, and that Baltistan might have different ethnolinguistic and socioeconomic interests.

On the one hand, the master narratives of post-Partition nationalisms are what Charles Tilly (1994, 133) calls a "state led" nationalism based on the idea that the people (that is, the citizens) "identify themselves with the nation and subordinate their interest with that of the state" (ibid.). Minority community nationalism, on the other hand, is a "state-seeking" nationalism where the community claims autonomy or a separate state, "on the grounds of having a distinct, coherent cultural identity" (ibid.). As we shall see, in reality, the coherence of the Baltistan Movement's state-seeking nationalism is contested both in terms of who belongs to the community, the nature of its heritage, and its geographical boundaries.

In Subrata Mitra's (1995, 57–58) terms the Baltistan Movement can be classified as a post-independence, sub-nationalist movement. As such, it provides a special case of cultural nationalism:

> These separatist movements are seen by governments as fissiparous tendencies and threats to law and order. The "subnationalists", themselves, however, contest the authority of the successor "nation" states, and consider them claims justified by their unique identities derived from their affinity with a particular language, religion, ethnicity or region.

According to Mitra (ibid., 58), what seems to be distinctive of the South Asian sub-nationalist movements is that they mix national sentiments, such as independence, with material and economic interests, such as access to the state's development resources. Separation from the master culture of the nation state can thus contradict the movement's "politics of development." Another significant feature of such movements is their participation in transactional politics, where they become rivals in competition over the state's resources. Their claims to legitimacy often draw on "language, race, ethnicity, history, and geography" (ibid., 61).[1] Looking back at attempts of autonomy, succession, or self-determination in post-Partition India and Pakistan they have, in all instances so far, proved counterproductive (Fazal 2012, 165–66).

A component of nationalisms that is not taken into account so much by Mitra is the use of religion as ideology for post-Partition, state-led nationalisms. When his article was published in 1994 India had only recently begun to abandon its secular politics to let the nation's communal Hindu/Muslim conflict take its logical course, as witnessed, for instance, by the destruction of Babri Masjid in Ayodhya in 1992 and the violent riots targeting Muslims in Gujarat ten years later. Another telling example of religious nationalism, as staged by the dancer and choreographer Venuri Perera in her dance performance titled *Kesel Maduwa,* narrated by Susan Reed in this special issue, is Sri Lanka's civil war and continuing adversity between Buddhist Sinhalese and Hindu Tamils, which has now spread to engulf other religious minorities on the island.

In his contribution to this special issue Peter van der Veer talks about religion as the essence of Indian nationalism, where the Muslim minority is seen as secondary citizens and made the target for national mobilization. Religion is the source of national identification. It is nationalized to provide the framework for a national identity. As is clear from Mari Miyamoto, Jan Magnusson, and Frank Korom's contribution, this is also true about Bhutanese nationalism, where the regime is trying to fix the national identity within a specifically Buddhist framework. In Charles Taylor's (2017, 14–15) terms, this kind of national identity "disembeds" the people, making it "independent of any particular social order or community" they might have belonged to before (as quoted in van der Veer, this issue). It does not, however, "disenchant" it. In fact, it might just accomplish the opposite.

The other side of the Line of Control (hereafter LoC) is subject to the Hindu nationalization discussed by van der Veer but not targeted in the same violent and discriminatory way as in Sunni-dominated Pakistan. The Shi'i community in Pakistan has been variably estimated as being between 5 and 25 percent of Pakistan's total population.[2] The Shi'ah are mainly based in Sindh, the Kurram Valley, and Gilgit-Baltistan, with others residing in major cities, such as in Karachi and Lahore. Their persecution in the Indian subcontinent traces back several hundred years. It was somewhat tempered during the colonial period but returned with strong force after Partition, culminating in June 1963 when the Muharram processions were attacked "in the worst anti-Shia violence so far" (Rieck 2016, 331).

The Shi'ah were disadvantaged and continued to suffer during the military rules of Generals Zia ul-Haqq and later Pervez Musharraf, when sections of the Sunni majority were radicalized and turned to violent terrorism. At the forefront was the militant terrorist group called Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (Army of Jhangvi) that killed numerous Shi'i Muslims in repeated terror attacks during the decade of 2003 to 2013 (ibid., 336).[3]

Although sectarian clashes have been more common in Gilgit, they also take place in Baltistan. The Baltistan Movement's combination of state-seeking nationalism with Shi'i faith makes it an attractive target for Sunni/state counterterror activism. In the 1980s, the pro-Sunni Anjuman-Sipah-e-Saba, encouraged by Zia-ul-Haqq, extended its activities to Skardu, where sectarian differences over the moon sighting to mark Eid-ul-Fitr in May 1988 led to a violent clash of the two communities, wounding and killing hundreds of people (Feyyaz 2011).[4]

During my fieldwork in Skardu in 1994, the hotel in which I was staying was burnt down by a street mob of Sunni hooligans marching down the Main Bazaar. Shi'i-

owned vehicles passing through Sunni dominated regions on their way to or from the south were frequently ambushed with shoulder-fired missiles and automatic high-speed assault rifles.

Baltistan after Partition, especially the development of connectivity

Baltistan is a high-altitude region in the western Himalayas. After Partition it was split in two parts by the Line of Control, leaving the Balti community forcibly divided on both sides of the border. Unlike many border areas that are usually quite porous and permeable, the rugged geography and a never-ending conflict between India and Pakistan shut the LoC tight. Cross-border interaction within the community became almost non-existent. Together with Gilgit, Baltistan formed the Northern Areas of Pakistan, until the Government of Pakistan issued the "Gilgit-Baltistan Empowerment and Self Governance Order" in 2009 (see Ministry of Kashmir Affairs and Northern Areas 2009). However, because the territory is still under dispute, it is not a formal province. This region is where a large part of the Balti community in Pakistan has resided historically and contemporaneously. Baltistan is divided in two administrative parts—Skardu and Ghanche. The most recent census conducted in 1998 counted 303,214 persons living in Baltistan (214,848 in Skardu and 88,366 in Ghanche).

On the Indian side of the border, Baltis live in the districts of Kargil or Ladakh. Balti villages are found in the Hardas area just west of Kargil, in Wakha, southwest of Kargil near Mulbekh on the road to Leh, and in Shyok Valley (Turtuk, Taksi, and Thang) northwest of Ladakh. In the latest Indian census, conducted in 2011, the population of these villages, taken together, was 7,613 persons.[5] Scattered groups also live in Kargil (which has a Balti neighborhood called Balti Bazaar) and in Leh.

The Balti community consists predominantly of Ismaili Shi'ites or Nurbakhshi Muslims.[6] The two groups taken together as a single community of Shi'i Muslims form a large majority, perhaps as large as 80 percent, in the area. The vernacular language that they speak is a Tibetan dialect.

For the Balti community, Independence, Partition, then division meant the transition from one mode of colonial domination and subalternity to another (Sökefeld 2005). The new, internal colonizers were the Indian and the Pakistani nation states. With them came state- and nation-making projects and new master narratives founded on the contention between India and Pakistan, as well as between religious faiths. As peripheral parts of two rather different states the trajectories of the two Balti communities also became different, with the community in India being a little better off. The life of the Baltis residing on the Pakistani side of the LoC was conditioned by the unclear geopolitical status of the territory, which resulted in limited infrastructural investments and a lack of civil rights. For many years, for example, it was impossible for Baltis to make cross-border phone calls or to obtain a travel visa. Contacts between the communities were few. Some people would meet while on pilgrimage or when studying abroad and sometimes carry family letters and photographs (Magnusson 2006).[7]

Clearly, when the communities living in these peripheral regions of the Himalayas were first internally colonized it was not in order to improve their lives by making

them citizens, giving them access to the benefits of the state, or even to impose the hegemony of a master narrative. This rhetoric arrived later. The interventions of India and Pakistan in Baltistan were driven by the hostility between the two states after Partition. A military infrastructure was put in place along both sides of the border all the way up to Siachen Glacier, the infamous highest battleground of the modern world. It meant the construction of support lines in the shape of roads and airstrips. Transport and communications infrastructures were put in place, but they were not really accessible to the local communities. When a proper road was completed between Srinagar and Kargil in 1964 it was not because of the conflict with Pakistan but rather a reaction to the trouble with China, the construction of a Chinese military road along the border in the second half of the 1950s, and the Sino-Indian conflict in 1962. It would take another ten years before the road was permanently open to civilian traffic.[8]

Not surprisingly, Pakistan nurtured a closer relationship with China. In the late 1950s the two governments decided to cooperate in the construction of what was then termed a "Friendship Road" that would cut through the high mountains between the Northern Areas (now part of the province Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) and Xinjiang. It took twenty years to complete and is better known as Karakoram Highway (KKH).[9] The road did not really connect to Baltistan, though. Before Partition, Skardu, the main town of Baltistan, was connected eastward by a pony trail to Kargil. As soon as the Indo-Pak conflict broke out, the Pakistani army was quick to construct jeepable roads and suspension bridges, but the main westward route at that time was a seasonally open jeep track connecting Gilgit to Skardu via the Deosai Plain, not the Indus river passage.[10] It took a few more years before a gravel all-weather link road was extended from KKH to Skardu via the Indus route.[11] However, communication continued to be vulnerable, due to severe geographical and climatic conditions, which caused roadblocks along the makeshift route.

Because of the border conflicts with Pakistan and China, India constructed a handful of airstrips in the border area that were strictly for military use. The runway outside Kargil town was built in 1959 and used for the Indian Air Force's Douglas Dakota DC3 aircrafts. When the Sino-Indian war broke out in 1962 the runway was abandoned, after which operations were shifted to Leh.[12] The Transit Halt of Indian Soldiers Enroute (THOISE) landing strip was located near the LoC in Shyok Valley, a part of the pre-Partition region of Baltistan that was captured from Pakistan in the 1971 Indo-Pak war. It took until 1975 before the airport in Leh was opened to civilian traffic. At the time of writing, the airport in Kargil has only been reopened for Indian army traffic, predominantly its old AN32 twin engine Russian transport aircrafts bought in the 1970s.[13] When the Sino-Indian border situation became stabilized several of the military airstrips in the region were abandoned and left defunct. They have only recently been brought back to life to revamp army support lines (the Daulet Beg Oldie, Fukche, and Nyoma airstrips). Today four airlines operate daily civil flights in and out of Leh (Air India, Jet, GoAir, and Vistara). Air India also operates limited flights to THOISE, where local civilian passengers are allowed on board (Singh 2009).

The recently introduced Indian UDAN-RCS scheme (*Uṛe Deś kā Ām Nāgarik*–Regional Connectivity Scheme) to improve regional connectivity as part of the Indian

government's National Civil Aviation Policy (NCAP) will resurrect and bring civil aviation to some of the old military runways lying across the region. In the second UDAN-RCS bidding round the airline Mehair Seaplane Services out of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands was selected to operate a Czech-made LET 410-UV twin-engine nineteen-seater turboprop aircraft on a route between Srinagar-Kargil-Kishtwar-Jammu starting from the summer of 2018. The military airstrips in Chushul and Fukche are on the UDAN-RCS scheme's list of unserved airports but are located in northeastern Ladakh, which are not in the Baltistan region (see Airports Authority of India 2016a, 2016b, 2016c, n.d.).

When the Indo-Pak conflict escalated after Partition, the Dogra government in Skardu cleared a dirt landing strip in September-October 1947. On October 27 India took control of Skardu, and Dakotas were used to drop supplies into the city. They could not fly above the high-altitude mountains but had to navigate lower along the Indus Valley (Kumar 2007). The landing strip remained unused, although during those days a small so-called Harvard aircraft landed on a sandy plain on the outskirts of town that the pilot had mistakenly taken to be an airport.[14] With the help of locals, the Harvard was able to take off again. After the siege of the Skardu garrison in 1947–48 the Indians surrendered and the area fell into the hands of Pakistan. On October 19, 1948 the Government of Pakistan hired three hundred porters to turn the landing strip into a proper 200-x-1,200-yard airstrip. It was completed by the end of November the same year. A British designed, twin-engine Bristol 170 PAF-freighter/airliner flown by a certain Captain Ashgar was the first aircraft to land there on March 16, 1949.[15]

The Government of Pakistan authorized Orient Airways to operate Dakotas with supplies and passengers from Peshawar and Rawalpindi to Skardu as early as 1948.[16] The Dakotas were later replaced by the turboprop aircrafts Fokker F27 Friendship 200 and Franco-Italian manufactured ATRs (1980s), Boeing 737 jets (late 1980s), and Airbus A320 jets (2015).[17] Skardu Airport, or Quadri Air Force Base as it is also called, is located in a wide valley eighteen kilometers out of town. A civilian passenger lounge was not built there until the 1980s. Over the years the Skardu flight from Islamabad has had one of the highest cancellation ratios in the world, due to extreme weather conditions, technical and scheduling issues, and a lack of experienced pilots.

As the Northern Areas of Pakistan became more accessible, various projects were implemented mainly in the area of rural development under the custody of the Swiss-based Aga Khan Foundation (AKF).[18] The AKF also provided basic educational and medical facilities for the area. The army, road, hydropower works, as well as AKF projects meant employment opportunities in the local labor market. Access to transport also provided a new opportunity structure in terms of employment, business, and education through migration to the cities of the south (Sökefeld 1999; Jensen 2007; Magnusson 2006).

At a point when the development in the area seemed to have stagnated in the 2000s, Pakistan's government struck a new deal with China. The two nation states had had formal diplomatic relations since 1951 and settled their border issue through an agreement signed already in 1963. Relations took a new turn in 2013 with the introduction of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). CPEC consists

of a series of agreements between Pakistan and China regarding large Chinese investments, estimated to be around US$46 billion, in energy projects, railroads, highways, pipelines for gas and oil, and optical fiber networks as part of a new "Silk Road" with access to the Arabian Sea. The development of CPEC started in 2014; the developers plan to finish it by 2030. The investments are part of China's current foreign policy, called the Belt and Road Initiative, to strengthen infrastructure and improve connectivity and transportation as a form of political leverage. With large-scale investments like CPEC China seeks to expand its soft power by building bilateral relationships and bringing its allies closer (Cui 2018). In the case of Pakistan, CPEC is best understood as foreign aid in the form of technological and infrastructural knowledge and investments. For Gilgit-Baltistan, CPEC, the reconstruction of KKH, and construction of new hydropower facilities has meant the influx of thousands of Chinese workers and a large number of People's Liberation Army (PLA) soldiers to provide security for them. The non-participatory approach and lack of benefits for local communities has caused resentment and protests as well as animosity between the Chinese workers/soldiers and locals (Abid and Ahfaq 2015). In terms of development, Skardu and Ghanche seem to remain peripheral to the benefits of CPEC. "We are yet just smelling the so-called prospects and hazards [of CPEC]. There is no presence of any [PLA] army in Baltistan. So far only a few Chinese tourists can be seen in Skardu but not in Ghanche," as one of my local informants summarized the situation.[19]

Even though the Balti and Ladakhi communities residing on the Indian side of the LoC have definitely been peripheral to the nation state, the Indian government has been more responsive to their demands for development resources than is the case in Pakistan. Protests against slow and inadequate development in the 1950s led to the creation of a special office for Ladakhi affairs and, eventually, a restructuring of the administration of the region. In the 1980s, the Indian government started to use the so-called Autonomous Hill Council or Autonomous District Council model to co-opt peripheral communities by letting them take part in the decision-making. On paper, the model decentralized much of the decision-making about the region to a council elected by a regional constituency. The council makes decisions about development policies and disposes a regional budget. Ladakh got its Hill Council status in 1995 and Kargil in 2003. As Martijn van Beek comments, "the council has considerable freedom to formulate its own development plans, and therefore radically reconsider the overall direction and content of development in Ladakh" (1999, 441). A problem with the Hill Council solution has been, however, that local political conflicts or the "destructive logic of electoral politics" (ibid., 445) and cultural rights politics between local communities have, in practice, slowed down the development process and weakened national and state-level administration in Ladakh (ibid.; Bhan 2009).

Despite the fact that communal politics seem to have paralyzed part of the development process, various development projects are in progress across the region. Perhaps the most extensive of them has been the Watershed Development Program (WDP), a national program that was initiated in Ladakh in 1995. It was a rural development initiative focusing on irrigation, farming, and afforestation. A core idea was the involvement of local NGOs as "Project Implementing Agencies" (PIA), something that led to a "mushrooming of new NGOs in the region which hoped to

benefit from available money flows" (Nüsser, Schmidt, and Dame 2012, 8). As is noted by John S. Mankelow (2003, 51) in his study of the implementation of the WDP in Zangskar, starting an NGO and becoming a PIA offered a business opportunity for local entrepreneurs, and to stop the money from ending up in private pockets responsibility for the implementation was eventually taken back by Ladakh's Hill Council.

Some of the more recent development projects in the region have been concerned with ecological issues, energy, water management, education, public health, and nutrition. They include the construction of a channel diverting the Indus River to irrigate barren land along the south side of the Indus Valley, the construction of hydropower stations (most recently in Alchi), the introduction of compact fluorescent lamps and solar power installations, the promotion of water harvesting constructions such as the ingenious artificial glaciers to reduce water scarcity, and small-scale water control solutions to reduce the damage of flash floods. After its introduction of Operation Sadbhavana in 1998 the Indian Army has also become an active partner in regional welfare and development (Gujja et al. 2003; Nüsser, Schmidt, and Dame 2012; Morup and Joshi 2003; Wiley 1997; and see also Tata Institute of Social Sciences n.d.; Indian Army n.d.).

Development and connectivity

Why do states build roads, railways, and airports, and worry so much about connectivity? In terms of internal colonization they are primarily means for the center to access the periphery to bring it under its control and administration (compare with Jonathan Demenge's 2015 work on road construction and development in Ladakh). As Piers M. Blaikie, John Cameron, and David Seddon (1980, 176) have shown, the construction of roads in Nepal led to a large increase in government revenues by "customs and surcharge on imported vehicles, fuel, spare parts, sales tax, licensing and registration of vehicles, vehicle tax, route operation tax for passenger carriers, and tolls." In the eyes of the state roads are also symbolic for state-building, as they bind the nation together. For instance, in the year 2000, the Indian Ministry of Rural Development launched its Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY), a program with the ambitious target to build "good All-weather roads to all Rural Habitations with a population of more than 500 persons by the year 2007" (National Rural Infrastructure Development Agency 2004) including the Hill States.

A vague idea about the link between connectivity and development and nation-making continues to dominate the master narratives about the need to connect the nation states' peripheral regions to the center. A more recent example is the Indian Ministry of Civil Aviation's UDAN-RCS scheme mentioned earlier in this article. It is part of the NCAP introduced in 2016 to improve regional connectivity in the country by "mak[ing] flying affordable to the masses," as is stated in the scheme's vision (Ministry of Civil Aviation, n.d.). It is a demand-driven, market-oriented program where airline operators are bidding for concessions to operate unserved or underserved airports or airstrips. In return they are subsidized through tax exemptions and by not having to pay any kind of landing charges. The first round

of bidding included 406 unserved airports or airstrips in the country, some of them along the LoC in Jammu and Kashmir, Kargil, and Ladakh.

Putting the internal colonization perspective aside for a moment, the two nation states' rhetoric about infrastructural investments in their peripheries changed from the initial national security discourse to an economic growth discourse, linked to the work of influential development and Marxist economists in the 1950s, such as Gunnar Myrdal, P. A. Baran, Oskar Lange, Charles Bettleheim, and P. C. Mahalanobis, the main architect behind the Indian government's second five-year plan (rapid industrialization!), and then moved on to a rural development and human well-being discourse (compare with van Beek 1999; Magnusson 2011c; Demenge 2015). In the economic growth discourse modern infrastructure is a way to escape from "underdevelopment" by pulling all parts of the state into its economic machinery, while in the rural development and human well-being discourse infrastructure emphasizes access to modern services and empowerment (compare with Robertson 1984 on "evolutionary functionalism"). What we see in the case of India and Pakistan is that the initial security discourse that left Baltistan and the local communities in the periphery has given way to an economic discourse such as the one on CPEC and a human development discourse such as the one on UDAN-RCS, where the communities are included and often the designated subjects.

Looking specifically at the way the governments of India and Pakistan motivate the development of information and communications technology (ICT) connectivity in their peripheries today, the economic growth and human well-being discourses have been merged in the sense that economic growth is stated as a necessary step for human well-being. For instance, the current vision of the Special Communications Organization (SCO), a public-sector organization working under the government of Pakistan's Ministry of Information Technology (IT) to provide telecom services in Baltistan, is to "*empower people* through state-of-the-art information, communication and telecom services in the most difficult mountainous region of Pakistan" (Special Communications Organization n.d., emphasis added). The ambitious fiber optic cable project included in the CPEC agreements links the centers together, and according to a former prime minister of Pakistan it will also "facilitate trade, tourism and IT awareness in the region and generate economic opportunities particularly in Gilgit-Baltistan" (see *Dawn* 2013).

Here, as in the case of other kinds of connectivity, the link between ICT and development is more complex in reality and often left unexplained when investigated closer. For instance, as long as there are people and places that are not connected, ICT actually increases inequality to make offline communities even more peripheral. Even if they become connected, there would still be a gap between those who can afford expensive technology and those who have to do with old and/or inexpensive gear and poor connections. There are centers and peripheries in ICT networks too, and empowerment does not automatically follow from being online (Unwin 2017).

In her review of research discourses, Chrisanthi Avgerou (2010) shows that the evidence supporting arguments of ICT-enabled development is rather weak. In many cases the transfer and diffusion of ICT in so-called developing countries is considered to be unproblematic, and the ways its social embeddedness may influence the impact

are not really investigated further. However, there are studies that try to find out more about how people make sense of and accommodate ICT in their lives. Some researchers have taken an interest in what they imagine to be a clash between ICT and certain "cultures." Luckily, others have moved on to accept the idea of "culture" as an ongoing accomplishment. Looking closer at the transformative aspect of ICT the causality is often postulated, although some researchers have found that ICT can have unequal effects on different categories of people that may result in power struggles (ibid.). For instance, using an intersectionality approach to study the empowerment of Ugandan women by giving them mobile phones, Linda Paxling (2015) shows how the project had gender-sensitive transformative aspects. With a similar perspective on how age, gender, and diversity are represented, silenced, or prioritized in ICT design in Europe, Nelly Oudshoorn, Louis Neven, and Marcelle Stienstra (2016) demonstrate how the neglect of such aspects might result in social exclusion.

Returning to the subject of internal colonization and the Zomia lens, I want to make a distinction between "real connectivity" and "virtual connectivity." Roads and airports are distance-demolishing technologies that overcome the friction of physical terrain by making the periphery reachable and accessible to the state and thereby possible to govern. What about virtual connectivity, however? Once roads, airports, and ICT are in place they do not only serve the rulers. They also provide opportunities for peripheral communities to access resources and places that were previously not available to them. In that sense the process of modern internal colonization can be quite a double-edged sword. More importantly, what separates physical connectivity from virtual connectivity is that ICT puts the periphery online with the rest of the world and thus lets its inhabitants move into a new, transnational terrain with its own friction, thereby letting people who choose to do so take refuge in virtual places out of the state's reach. Of course, it is a very idealistic proposition that immediately raises questions about who controls the infrastructure of optical fibers and servers, the possibility to survey and filter traffic, and the power to shut users down. For various reasons that will become clearer through my discussion in the following paragraphs about Baltistan and the friction of virtual terrain, controlling the infrastructure might not be as easy as it seems.

International colonialism and jellyfish communities

As already argued, Baltistan became an object of internal colonialism after Partition. This was an experience it shared with many other peripheral communities living on the edge of the new postcolonial and independent nation states. It also involved absorption, displacement, and/or extermination of the previous inhabitants. As Scott notes, it

> involved a botanical colonization in which the landscape was transformed—by deforestation, drainage, irrigation, and levees—to accommodate crops, settlement patterns, and system of administration familiar to the state and to the colonists. One way of appreciating the effect of this colonization is to view it as a massive reduction of vernaculars of all kinds: of vernacular languages, minority peoples, vernacular cultivation techniques, vernacular land tenure systems, vernacular

> hunting, gathering, and forestry techniques, vernacular religion, and so on. The attempt to bring the periphery into line is read by representatives of the sponsoring state as providing civilization and progress—where progress is, in turn, read as the intrusive propagation of the linguistic, agricultural, and religious practices of the dominant ethnic group. (2009, 12–13)

The nation states set out to mop up the areas that had been hard to rule because of their geographical inaccessibility. The task was to bring the communities living in these areas under administration, incorporate them into the national economy, and tax them. This was the "last enclosure" (ibid., 11) made possible through the use of the modern distance-demolishing technologies described in this article, such as air transport, the construction of bridges and roads such as the Karakoram Highway, and the construction of telecom networks. It was also a project of state- and nation-making and the projection of a national identity, culture, language, and religion, perhaps best manifested in the establishment of a national educational system and national broadcasting of radio and television based on the practices and language of the dominant ethnic groups.

According to Scott (2009) hill societies like Baltistan are primarily characterized by two things. First, hills are "shatter zones" and "zones of refuge," where the communities, to a large extent, are formed by people that want to escape from state-making projects. It is a perspective that contradicts the idea of peripheral societies as undeveloped and primitive and in need of state-aided modern development and progress. Second, in hill societies ethnicity, culture, identity, history, and religion have a "jellyfish" capacity, meaning that they are fluid, flexible, hybrid, adaptable, and porous. They change as a strategic choice to manage state-making attempts and to keep the wannabe rulers at bay.

By invoking Scott's "zone of refuge" concept, I do not suggest that Baltistan's residents resisted incorporation into the modern nation states on all accounts. Indeed, the community did and does want its share of the state's services and resources. In so doing, however, they resist being governed by the state and its nation-making projects, which are crafted and carried out by the dominant ethnic groups and their own master narratives. Baltistan is definitely a space of political resistance and cultural refusal, as Scott (2009, 20) would term it, and thus a place where people try to avoid the internal colonizer's state-making efforts. Much of the current local tension in the region has been the result of the large influx of state administrators and armed forces that bring their political, cultural, and religious claims of superiority. By talking about Baltistan as a zone of refuge, then, I do not mean that the community wants to be left behind or left out in terms of progress and development. At the same time, it does want to escape from state-making projects. It is from this perspective of resistance that we should investigate the subaltern's ability to jellyfish its traditions.

When distance-demolishing technologies overcame the friction of terrain, the high mountains were no longer enough to protect Baltistan from internal colonization. As the weaker party in relationship to the states the community had to find other ingenious means of resistance. In a previous work Scott (1990, 19, 157) asserts that subordinate groups develop a subtle low-profile resistance by voicing their alternative discourse in cultural expressions that lend themselves to a double

reading, with one reading being innocuous and, if necessary, providing an avenue of retreat. It has a hidden transcript that challenges the discourses of the colonizer. This is the case, for example, with the Balti pop-*ghazal*s that I will discuss in more detail in the following paragraphs. Another strategy of the weak that has been noted by Richard Tapper (1990, 66–67) in his studies of state formation among Middle Eastern tribes is to maintain a "diffuse form of organization" (ibid., 67). The idea is to maintain a repertoire of alternative political institutions and ideologies "by which they can adapt to conditions of autonomy as well as to the . . . aggressive policies of outsiders" (ibid.). Being socially, economically, and politically disorganized by choice is a strategy. It is not because they were less civilized or less developed in the past, as is the common narrative propagated by the colonizers.

Jellyfish Baltistan

It was often the acephalous character of the frontier communities that frustrated British rule during the heyday of the empire. The British were used to having a clear counterpart to deal with and were confused when they encountered numerous fluid communities whose relationships and politics seemed to be rather non-hierarchical and constantly changing their shape. As Malcolm Yapp concludes in his study of how the British failed to control tribes and states in the Khyber region in the late 1830s and early 1840s, "Like the jellyfish, the absence of a backbone to be broken was the greatest defense of the tribes against the waves of state power that beat upon them" (1983, 186). It is precisely this jellyfish factor that Scott (2009) takes further by treating it as a strategic choice. In his reading of the concept, it allows for freedom in maneuvering not only in the political relationship to rulers but also in the construction of ethnicity, identity, culture, history, and religion. In a community where history and culture are only oral and vernacular it is possible to forget and remember the past selectively, for there is no single, written authoritative history or genealogy. In a zone of refuge, moreover, there is no dominant ethnicity or identity but a mix, something that allows the community to express and enact itself from a repertoire of strategically appropriate identities (ibid., 229–30).

How does the jellyfish strategy work in modern South Asian nation states? Peripheral communities like the Balti cannot escape completely from them. In fact, there are a number of good reasons for these communities to entertain a relationship with the state and thus choose a more sophisticated strategy than being merely acephalous. Cherishing their peripherality, these communities still want access to modern services, funds, and the various development programs a modern state can provide. So how do they maneuver vis-à-vis the state to be able to make legitimate claims on state-controlled benefits such as economic resources, opportunities for education and employment, as well as to politically influence and negotiate successfully the allocation of these benefits? It is a situation that creates a double-sidedness where the community pragmatically makes do with the ambiguity of not wanting to be governed by the state but at the same time wanting to share its benefits. It is a perspective that allows a bit more agency to be ascribed to the objects of colonialism than the categorization thesis put forward by Benedict

Anderson and others. Peripheral communities are not just victims of colonization but can be strategical agents in their use of state-institutionalized forms of communal identification, even down to an individual level (van Beek 1997, 21).

A very clear example of this double-sidedness is the tribalization of the people of Ladakh and Kargil after independence, and especially the events from the late 1960s up until the early 2000s. Ladakh and Kargil are two adjoining areas in the western Himalayas bordering Pakistan and Tibet. The total population is around 275,000 with roughly a 50/50 balance between the areas. After Partition, Ladakh and Kargil became part of the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir. As mentioned earlier, the areas were later recognized as autonomous districts. In this process they became so-called hill-tribes by the power rested in the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. The whole idea of autonomous districts was, as already indicated, a state strategy intended to incorporate peripheral communities into the post-Independence Indian nation state. After a long period of agitation, sometimes violent, during the 1980s, Ladakh finally received its hill-tribe status in 1995, while Kargil had to wait until 2003 (Stuligross 1999; Sonntag 2004).

According to the Indian Constitution, Article 46, so-called "scheduled tribes" are protected by legislation and eligible for various state-sponsored schemes, programs, and other benefits. The implementation of the article led to a kind of race for tribalization between peripheral communities. In the case of Ladakh and Kargil it has been thoroughly researched by the Dutch sociologist Martijn van Beek (1995, 1997, 2001) who had the opportunity to witness the events at first hand. The agitations for regional autonomy and scheduled tribe status seem to have started in the late 1960s. In 1980 an "All Ladakh Action Committee for Declaring Ladakh a Scheduled Tribe" (LAC) was formed to negotiate with the Indian government. The argument I want to make here is, of course, that it is Article 46 that motivated LAC to jellyfish what was commonly referred to as "Ladakhis" into a number of ethnic tribes, and that these tribes were invented, not really existing in an essential way.

A few years into the 1980s a group of Ladakhi political leaders came up with a list of ten tribes that they submitted to the Indian government. The government responded by conducting a "mini-census," sending out eighteen jeep loads of social scientists to tour the countryside in order to find evidence of valid grounds for the suggested tribes. As a result, eight of the tribes on the list were declared to have the qualifications of a scheduled tribe.[20] A community that did not make the cut but that was on the original list was the Argons (mainly represented in the Kargil area). It was found to be too unstable for scheduled tribe status (any person of mixed Buddhist and Muslim descent can belong to it). It was therefore suggested by the government that people who identified themselves as Argons should instead register as Bots, the largest recognized scheduled tribe category in Ladakh (van Beek 1997, 21–41).

The story of the "tribes" of Ladakh, farcical as it may seem, serves to prove my point. The communities living in Ladakh and Kargil strategically jellyfished as tribes in order to fit the Article 46 framework provided by the state, and the jeep teams seem to have bought it. There is no ethnic base for these tribes; they are primarily constructed as administrative categories that effectively incorporate people in the periphery of the nation state as citizens, but at the same time the scheduled tribe

status allows them to make legitimate claims on autonomy and to contest with other scheduled Indian tribes over affirmative action and special state-sponsored benefits.

Jellyfishing the history of Baltistan

Jellyfish histories of Baltistan are brought to the fore in the way they are represented by learned local authorities and cultural and political Balti activists. Academic researchers are involved as well. Just like Scott predicts, their versions drift apart, diverge, and lack a clear point of reference in written, authoritative texts. They tend to accumulate previous interpretations to reflect current interests and power relations at the time of telling and writing (compare with Scott 2009, 230–31).

The vernacular history of Baltistan has been passed down from generation to generation. One of its present custodians is the well-respected Sadiq Ali Sadiq, an elderly resident of Kargil's Balti Bazaar. In recent years it has also appeared in the shape of self-combined bits and pieces picked up here and there by activists within the Baltistan Movement.

The people who have been writing academically about the history of Baltistan are outsiders to the community, foreigners like myself, in some instances actually employees of the state. Reviewing material that is academic or claims to be academic research, I find it to be characterized by two things. First, when it comes to the early history of the region, there are very few sources upon which to draw. In the sources that are available, for example those used in the works of Christopher Beckwith (1987) and Helmut Hoffman (1990), respectively, the region of Baltistan is considered very peripheral. Second, researchers largely disagree about events in Baltistan from about the first century CE up until today. Much of the debate concerns the dating of when Tibetans ruled Baltistan and when the community was converted to Islam.

According to vernacular history, what was to become Baltistan was originally the place of the Mons, who were later replaced by the Dards. This came to an end around 300 BCE when a Mongol king by the name of Nyi Thistan attacked Ladakh and took control of the southern part of the area that was to be Purig (Rizvi 1993, 10–11). Beckwith and Hoffman, on the one hand, date a Tibetan occupation of the area to roughly the seventh and eighth centuries. This was the period when the Tibetan *u-chen* script and Buddhist doctrine were introduced in the community, they conclude. Ahmad Hasan Dani (2001), on the other hand, argues that there was a previous period of Buddhist influence in the first century that spread to Baltistan from Gilgit or Kashmir. Of course, there are no good sources to prove any of this. They are fair guesses by proxy. According to Dani (2001, 232), the Tibetan period ended in the thirteenth century when Amir-i-Kabir Sayyid Ali Hammadani arrived in Baltistan. Allegedly, he was accompanied by a group of supporters with an intent to convert the local population (Rizvi 1993, 71). On the contrary, Banat Gul Afridi (1988, 26–27), quoting Hashmatullah Khan Lakhnavi's *Tārīkh-i Jammun* (published in 1939), states that Amir-i-Kabir Sayyid Ali Hammadani never went to Baltistan. Instead it was his nephew, Mohammad Nurubaksh, that converted the community to Islam. Hashmatullah Khan Lakhnavi's work is considered the most authoritative Urdu source, and local historians often quote it. However, Hashmatullah Khan Lakhnavi

was not an academic researcher. He was an administrative officer in the service of the Jammu and Kashmir government when it was still a princely state.

Lakhnavi collected written texts as well as oral narratives for his book. The section on Baltistan has been translated into English and published in Pakistan (Bray 2013), but Andreas Rieck (1995), for instance, does not accept its authority. He proposes that Mohammad Nurubaksh never went to Baltistan. Instead he calls on a Sufi narrative of history to argue that the person who brought Islam and Shi'ism to Baltistan was, in fact, an Iraqi preacher by the name of Mir Shams al-Din who escaped to the region in the fifteenth century. In the foreword to Rizvi (1993), Ahmet Yurur puts Mir Shams-al-Din and the conversion in the seventeenth century. Rizvi himself, however, still adheres to the fifteenth-century date in the rest of the book (ibid., 72). Sridhar Kaul and H. N. Kaul (2004, 120) claim that Shams-al-Din came from Khorasan in Persia in the sixteenth century. In another of his publications, Dani (1997, 225) credits two Shi'ite missionary brothers from Persia with the conversion, Mawlana Sayyid Mahmud Shah Tusi and Mir Sayyid Ali Tusi, traveling from Yarkand in the sixteenth century. The German missionary of the Moravian church in Ladakh and one of the classic Tibetologists August Hermann Francke approaches the issue a bit differently by looking at when local Balti rulers started to include Muslim names in their pedigrees. In this way he dates Muslim influence to the fourteenth century when the name Sultan Sikender enters the list (1907, 90). Wolfgang Holzwarth (1998, 302) quotes Firishtra's (aka Muhammad Qasim Hindu Shah) *Tārīkh-i Firishta* to propose that the first Muslim ruler in Baltistan was Ali Ray who got there in the fifteenth century.

There are reasons to be skeptical concerning Holzwarth's assumption, since *Tārīkh-i Firishta* was written on commission from Ibrahim Shah II, king of the Sultanate of Bijapur (now in Karnataka) around the turn of the seventeenth century to renew the Indian historical narrative after the Muslim conquest. Firishtra was from a Persian family and grew up in what is now Punjab in Pakistan. Before Ibrahim Shah II entrusted him with history writing, he had made his way up the ranks of a military career. The British historian Peter Jackson (1999, 50–51, 151) points out that *Tārīkh-i Firishtra* is a secondary source, quite similar to *Tārīkh-i Jammun* and Godfrey T. Vigne's *Travels in Kashmir, Ladak, Iskardo, the Countries Adjoining the Mountain-Course of the Indus and the Himalaya North of the Panjab* (see the following paragraphs) in its random collection of material and reliance on hearsay and legends, which sometimes even included imaginative interpretations. In other words, they were compendia of folklore, not necessarily accurately researched histories utilizing objective data culled from manuscripts, inscriptions, and so on.

Scott would probably take this disagreement between historians to prove his point in more than one way. First, we can see how the history of Baltistan has been rewritten, probably not as much by the academics as in their sources, depending on purpose and interest at the time. It is rather obvious how the genealogy of Muslim rulers/converters in Baltistan, such as the Maqpon dynasty, has been assembled over time to be better situated in current situations. This suggests how legend is often not clearly separated from facts. Some of the classical sources on which a good part of the research depends are, when scrutinized closely, rather questionable. For instance, a classic source that has been used by researchers is Vigne's aforementioned *Travels in*

Kashmir, Ladak, Iskardo (1842). Vigne was not a historian but a British barrister, cricket player, and travel writer. In the mid-1830s he traveled extensively in the region, randomly collecting all kinds of material for his book. The problem, though, is that he employed very little source and fact checking.

The second point is that Scott would probably point out that the Muslim rulers mentioned in earlier paragraphs were not actually *rulers* but more likely persons using Baltistan as a zone of refuge and using the friction of terrain to escape from valley rulers. This is hinted at both by Holzwarth (1998) and Rieck (1995), when they discuss Baltistan as a place for Nurubakshi leaders to hide out at a time when followers of that school were being persecuted. In vernacular history, the founder of the Maqpon dynasty of rulers in Skardu came from Kashmir, perhaps as another refugee from the valley? Pascale Dolfus (1995) suggests the idea that it was not "rulers" or "leaders" that came to the area but Muslim traders securing their trade routes. If we look back on the situation before the advent of modern distance-demolishing technologies we are thus more likely to find that the friction of terrain meant that ruling from a distant state center was an impossible task in practice.

Third, Scott would probably question whether or not the Balti community was converted after all. He would suggest that it was more likely that the people of Baltistan jellyfished ruling attempts by appearing as Muslims in public when they felt it was appropriate to ward off or please the new rulers to be. This view is supported by the works of Nicola Grist (1995), Smriti Srinivas (1995), and Rieck (1995), who all point out that there was no institutionalized religion in the region until perhaps the (late) nineteenth century. Once again, according to vernacular history, people would indeed project themselves differently depending on the existential situation. Religion was just a "thin layer over a plethora of pre-Islamic beliefs and superstitions" (Rieck 1995, 165). Besides this, the "religion and sword thesis" adapted by some researchers must be critically questioned, as Muslim conquest and rule does not automatically lead to the conversion of the subdued to the Islamic faith (Eaton 1993, 113).

Moving on to the bric-a-brac historical narrative presented by the Baltistan Movement, activists there make clear differences in strategic maneuvering, depending on current agendas and to what extent it is necessary for the activists to jellyfish it. During one of my periods of fieldwork in Ladakh, I met up with an activist from Skarchen. Just like Franke, he produced a list of names of rulers, but with a somewhat more aggressive interpretation. On the list were the names of rulers from 1190–1915 CE. Contrary to both Francke and the other mentioned researchers, the first Muslim name on his list was Ibrahim Shah in the thirteenth century. Ibrahim Shah, he explained, was the founder of the Maqpon dynasty that ruled Baltistan for twenty-four consecutive generations. The start of the dynasty, he continued, was the end of an authentic lineage of Balti kings, and the Maqpons were in fact representatives of a foreign political force of oppressors that, over the years, eroded and "muffled" the true culture of Baltistan. This is a narrative that puts the Golden Age of Baltistan in the Tibetan period before the arrival of Muslims in the area. It does not really distinguish between being independent or under Tibetan rule but primarily serves to represent the culture of Baltistan as Tibetan and the Balti people as ethnic Tibetans.

According to another activist in a different part of Baltistan, Tibetans had never ruled the region. The people of Baltistan, he argued somewhat self-contradictorily, were originally Dards, but a massive migration of Tibetans "more than a thousand years ago overwhelmed the culture of the Dards and mopped up their racial character." In his narrative, then, the Tibetans were the oppressors, with the Dards as the authentic inhabitants of Baltistan.

Although they are both activists in the Baltistan Movement, their narratives are quite different. But why? It is most likely because the latter version works better with the idea of a "Greater Ladakh," a separatist concept that started to appear in the 2000s. In its most extensive version Greater Ladakh includes, from west to east, Chitral in the northwestern corner of Pakistan, Gilgit, Azad Kashmir, Baltistan, Kashmir, Kargil, Zanskar, Nubra, Ladakh, Chang Tang, Lahaul, and Spiti. As is obvious, the Balti community is not the only community included as being a part of this imagined geopolitical entity, the Dards in its western parts being just one of them.

In fact, the imagined border of Greater Ladakh roughly resembles the historical border of Ladakh Wazarat, an administrative domain in the Dogra-ruled princely state of Jammu and Kashmir. This state was established after the Anglo-Sikh wars in the middle of the nineteenth century and the Ladakh Wazarat domain in 1901. It is thus a construct from the time of British colonial rule that disentangles Baltistan from the Golden Age of the Tibetan empire and Central Asia in order to dock it in a modern, colonial South Asian geography and history. This is obviously a whole different entity and with a different agenda on most accounts. It does not turn back to pre-Islamic history, only to the situation before Independence, Partition, and the making of the two new nation states.

As we have seen, different bits and pieces of the various historical narratives are floating about with "facts" being used liberally. They are assembled and reassembled by the narrators to serve their own purposes. As is evident from the preceding discussion, the history can be both ancient and recent. Its golden age can be set in the era of the Tibetan empire or in the modern colonial, pre-Independence era. It can be Buddhist and Muslim, Tibetan and South Asian. Some of it is oral and some of it is written and even academic. The written sources are used as references in the oral versions presented by the Balti activists while a good portion of the academic versions actually rely on old, questionable, and unverified oral sources. Taken together, these narratives provide the jellyfish "history of Baltistan" with its fluid, flexible, hybrid, adaptable, and porous shape, as in the case of the activists' invention of a new history fit for the Greater Ladakh project.

Post-literate Baltistan?

As part of the revival of Balti culture there have been a number of contested initiatives to reintroduce a Balti script. In the community's narrative it is said that the script fell gradually out of use under the Muslim influence and was replaced by the Perso-Arabian script *nasta'līq* that is used for Urdu. Because of the LoC, this is more valid for the Pakistani part of Baltistan today. In India, where Baltistan overlaps with Ladakh,

the *u-chen* script is used everywhere. As we shall see, though, its use by Balti speakers has also run into problems.

It is said in the Pakistani part of Baltistan that just up until recently *u-chen* was preserved by only a few elderly custodians, such as the well-known cultural personality Abbas Kazimir in Skardu. When the Baltistan Movement started to gain momentum some local activists in the town began to arrange free classes in *u-chen.* Still, there is not much more proof that *u-chen* is a Balti script other than the oral tradition and that rock carvings in Tibetan script are to be found in some places in Baltistan, such as in Bodhi Shagharan (the Buddhist polo ground) above the fort in Shigar Valley. When the community is learning *u-chen* today, it is primarily based on an association between the vernacular language, an archaic form of a western Tibetan dialect related to Purig and Ladakhi, and that *u-chen* suits its phonetics.

The story of the disappearance of Balti script is related to the version of Balti history that presents the pre-Muslim Tibetan period as the Golden Age of Baltistan. When Muslims began to rule in Baltistan they appropriated the written language, the narrative holds. But what if the community went vernacular and post-literate by choice in order to protect its language from being replaced by Urdu, the language of the rulers? Although the state can condition education and employment by only using the scripts of national languages, vernacular tradition can survive and continue, even thrive. If this is true, the current revival of a Balti script could actually be a counterproductive strategy and reopen the appropriation of Balti language. As we shall see, the production of Balti texts in *u-chen* has unavoidably led to trouble for its instigators.

A typical example of the appropriation of language is a schoolbook project that was launched by the Baltistan Cultural Federation (BCF, now BCDF), an NGO formed in Skardu in 1998. After Independence, Urdu, written in *nasta'līq* script, became a national language and, along with English, the medium in schools, courts, offices, media, and administration. Even though the right to preserve, promote, and teach (without prejudice) "provincial languages" is protected in Pakistan's Constitution, this has not been the case in practice.[21]

During the first four years of existence, under Abbas Kazimir's leadership, the BCF decided to try and revive Balti script by printing one thousand textbooks in *u-chen* to be used in elementary schools. When word got out about the project, local Muslim leaders began to campaign against *u-chen* as an un-Islamic script, and they went on to print an alternative, competing textbook in which Balti was transliterated into *nasta'līq*. Ultimately the competing book was officially chosen for teaching, and the BCF books never reached the schools (Magnusson 2011a). Another similar BCF project during this time was to put up sponsored store signs in *u-chen*, mainly in Skardu's New Bazaar. The project was met with some success in the sense that the signs stayed up despite criticism, but as a shopkeeper pragmatically remarked to me, the primary reason was probably to save the cost of having to have them repainted.

More recently, a number of Balti scholars and social activists once again attempted to revamp the *u-chen* literacy project, or *yige* as the script was now called in the community. As part of this project a group of local teachers were trained to read and write in *yige*. Within the framework of BCDF a *yige* primer app was developed and can

be downloaded from APKPure.com.[22] It is based on a phonetic spelling system and easy to use even for children. The project was met with the same kind of resistance as the BCF's schoolbook project.

Vernacular Balti, when written down in *u-chen/yige*, has become an object of contention and appropriation not only in relation to the nation states but also in relation to other neighboring communities. For instance, the Kargil activists limit the concept of Greater Ladakh to Tibetan speakers, thus defining its borders more narrowly to include only Baltistan and Ladakh. What is interesting in this case is how Ladakhi nationalists sit uneasy with this and how Balti activists end up in a position where they accuse Ladakhis of kidnapping *u-chen* from other Tibetan speakers in the region (compare Gupta 2013b, 44–47). It is not only connected to the tribalization issue discussed in this article but also has historical roots that go back to the time of the Dogra rulers. During that time the rulers officially replaced *u-chen* with *nasta'līq*. After Independence and Partition *u-chen* became an important symbol in the rise of Ladakhi nationalism. In the early 1950s, the Ladakhi political leader and member of Jammu and Kashmir's assembly, Kusho Bakula, started lobbying for Tibetan to become the official language of Ladakh, calling it *bodhic*, *bodik*, or *bod-yig* and linking *u-chen* exclusively to Buddhism and Buddhist culture. This claim has remained at the core of Ladakhi nationalism during the cultural revival of the 1970s, the violent conflicts of the 1980s, and it continues today (Aggarwal 2004).

What is the advantage of the spoken word over the written word for a post-literate community that wants to avoid being governed? In one of his earlier books, Scott (1999) talks about public and hidden transcripts. The strategy of the oppressed community is to lend an innocuous quality to its cultural expressions. There is a hidden, backstage meaning that is only available to members of the community, and a public and more harmless meaning that can be referred to if the rulers question it.

In my previous work on Baltistan, I have used this approach to analyze the Balti pop-*ghazal* phenomenon (Magnusson 2011b). It is sung in Tibetan, but it is a mix of a Persian form of poetry and an Indian/Pakistani form of pop music. The *ghazal* has its roots in seventh-century Arabic verse and came to dominate Persian literature in Muslim parts of South and Central Asia by the thirteenth century. In the eighteenth century, Urdu *ghazal*s had become very popular in India. The *ghazal* had its own distinctive character as a genre, but the basic form was still present (Manuel 1988–89, 1993). In South Asia today, there is a distinction between light classical *ghazal*s and pop-*ghazal*s. The former is based on improvisation and elaboration in a public poetry recital, a so-called *mushā'ira* (Qureshi 1969), while the latter is performed as the vocal part in a modern band (Manuel 1988–89). *Ghazal*s have often been used in Bollywood movies as soundtracks to romantic interaction between the main characters (Skillman 1986; Manuel 1988–89; Qureshi 1969, 1990). Pop-*ghazal* is one of the major formats of music recording in South Asia. It is a simplified version of the classical *ghazal* without space for elaboration or improvisation (Manuel 1993, 106).

When pop-*ghazal*s with Balti lyrics were released they became very popular in the community. They were recorded on cassettes, CDs, VCDs, and DVDs. Many of them also became available on websites such as YouTube. Looking closer at the production of Balti pop-*ghazal*s, much of the material comes from a joint venture between KASCO

and Skarchen, two pro-Balti NGOs on the Indian side. Together, the organizations have three business subsidiaries that hold the rights to the music: Universal Balti Music Zone, Kargil Vision, and Sarwar Cassette House Kargil.

One of the most prolific composers of Balti pop-*ghazal*s is Riyaz Munshi from Kargil. His *ghazal*s are produced in the Hindi pop-music style. The first album *Niyamtsar* (a Balti name for a friend you grow up with and then marry) was released in 2003. It was followed by *Rgazoom* (Admiring the Beauty), *Zoom* (Zoom), *Sning Tam* (Speak from the Heart), *Chakbu* (Bunch of Flowers), and *Strogi Totee* (Pigeon of Life). The albums were available on both sides of the LoC, and in 2006 Riyaz Munshi released an album with lyrics written by the Skardu poet Hassan Hasni (*Tsarang Hasni's Special*). *Hai-Lay Hrgamo* (Hey Joy) was released on VCD in 2004. It features music videos telling small stories in a Bollywood format. For instance, *Rjait Pa Mait Yang* (I Can't Forget) alternates lines between a Balti romantic couple against the backdrop of a pastoral high Himalayan landscape with the singer, standing by a jeep, eventually surrounded by happy Buddhist monks. The vocal is sung in Balti and the lyrics have a conventional romantic content:

> I have not forgotten you. I swear by God, I can't forget you. If you can't look at me in a loving way, at least dare to look at me with hatred. I have not forgotten the moment when we apologized to each other, touching chins. I wish you could remember those moments before the fortnight moon. Alas! I do not forget that moment of promises and pledges.

The DVD *Sning I Shokboo* (Written in the Heart) was released in 2007, and it includes Bollywood-style dance choreography. The video to the song *Shoksi lay Rgamo* (Hey You, Come Here) tells the story of the spirit of a Balti woman who has been killed in a car accident. The spirit appears in front of a man who has stopped his SUV by the roadside to rest for a while. Its content is romantic in the sense that it is intended to illustrate a Balti saying that the spirit of a person who dies with desire in his or her heart must roam the earth.

Even if the videos include clear elements of public education about Balti folklore such as dress and customs, the hidden transcript is found in the choice of language and in the intangible Balti spirit that is conveyed by the material. There is a sense of shared meaning and belonging only offered to members of the community. But what is really clever about this strategy is the separation of form from content that gives the pop-*ghazal* its dual reading. The conventional *ghazal* consists of Perso-Arabic, Muslim love poetry, but when sung in Tibetan it conveys a deeper, hidden message of an independent Balti culture that is only fully perceivable to members of the community. Should outsiders ever challenge the *ghazal*'s deeper meaning as an anti-state or un-Islamic expression, the allegation could be rebuked with reference to the fact that the *genre* is an artistic form that belongs to and is even an important part of the ruler's culture. By incorporating elements from the master culture as just described, the minority community jellyfishes its own traditions.[23] An ironic twist is perhaps that Munshi's first albums were subsidized by Indian government grants, as both KASCO and Skarchen are funded as PIAs (Project Implementation Agencies) in the Indian Watershed Development Project.

The friction of virtual terrain

The Indo-Pak and Sino-Indian conflicts during the years following Partition and the large-scale military presence along the border region led to a rapid construction of military communication lines. The development of civilian connectivity, however, followed at a slower pace. At the time of Partition, Baltistan in Pakistan had a single telegraph connection located at the Sub-Post Office in Skardu. By the late 1960s a telephone exchange with fifty lines had been established (Afridi 1988, 306). In the following three decades the exchange in Skardu continued to be the main telecommunication node on this side of the border. Some private users owned microwave satellite phones. When cordless phones became available in the market people started using the handsets more or less as local mobile phones, as the transmitters were designed to be powerful enough to give an extended reach over quite a distance from the base station. On the Indian side, Kargil was linked to a computer communication network in 1988–89, when a Network Informatics Centre District Unit was opened in town. In the mid-2000s mobile phone services were introduced on both sides of the border, using technology that prevented the networks from spilling over the border and only allowing postpaid subscriptions.

When broadband connectivity put the Balti community online in the 2000s there was a rapid increase of cross-border community interaction. Global, almost unrestricted internet access for private users provided a new platform for Balti revival and content, such as Riyaz Munshi's pop-*ghazal*s. To connect private subscribers, the internet service providers (ISPs) used a technology called ADSL (Asymmetric Digital Subscriber Line), where the signal is carried by the old telephone lines already in place, allowing up to 8Mbps download speed.

Satellite internet connectivity for private subscribers in Kargil was introduced in 2001. Two years later an optical fiber connection (OFC) was ready for commercial use. Until 2012 the only ISP was Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited (BSNL), a government-owned private company, which was started to take over telecommunication services from the Government Department(s) of Telecom Services and Telecom Operations. Business was then opened up for the private ISP Airtel. In the more rural parts of the region, BSNL provides a kind of mobile USB dongle broadband access service up to 7Mbps called WiMax.

On the Pakistani side, Baltistan came online in 2004. At that point all internet traffic was routed through an SCO-exchange (Special Communications Organization) run by the army. In the beginning the public ISP was a private company called Comsats. But it was closed in 2007 and SCO is now the only ISP in the area. Baltistan is connected to the internet by an OFC from Gilgit and by satellite. Most of the private subscribers continue to use ADSL.

Both BSNL and SCO enforce censorship of content and, as we will see, traffic surveillance, phone tapping, and filtering. Nevertheless, there is plenty of Balti online activity of both a cultural and political nature. For instance, a search for "Baltistan" on YouTube will return around two hundred thousand hits. Comparing the online activity on both sides of the LoC, there are very few restrictions affecting Balti users in India. In Pakistan the thumbscrews are on, but, even so, pro-Balti content is readily accessible. Cases from my own research include the Skardu-based Balti

journalist Manzoor Parwana from Rondu Valley in Pakistan. Parwana is a pro-Balti anti-government political activist demanding independence from Pakistan. He has been persecuted, arrested, and jailed on several occasions for that. In 2009 he ran for a seat in the Gilgit-Baltistan Legislative Assembly but did not get enough votes to win. During the campaign he started a Facebook page and later also a blog and a Twitter account. In April 2018 he had 4,899 Facebook friends (around nine hundred of them living in Baltistan) and was a member of 357 Facebook groups. He is mainly using these platforms as a "digital pulpit" in the political debate concerning Baltistan. He also uses it as a media broker of news and editorials about Baltistan (Magnusson 2016, 103–5). Another case includes the Balti activist Senge Hasnan Sering who uses social media to share pro-Balti political material. He was one of the activists who taught the previously mentioned Tibetan script classes in Skardu, but he left Pakistan to escape the negative attention the Balti revival was attracting. From a new base in the United States, he started to participate in various events to voice his pro-Balti political agenda. In 2010 he started a Facebook page and also maintains a Twitter account. Approximately 25 percent of his Facebook friends were living in Baltistan by April 2018 (ibid., 101–3). One also finds a type of "small-scale" Balti activist on social media. They are the large number of ordinary, individual users who, unlike Sering and Parwana, are unknown in the community. The small-scale-acts people can be very prolific in posting photographs, YouTube clips, chatting, and so on. Taken together, the mass of this content and activity provides a kind of virtual Baltistan that transgresses the LoC division of the community and that is protected by a new kind of digital friction of terrain.

We might ask why this virtual terrain is so hard to rule when it is, in itself, a part of the state's distance-demolishing technology? Why, as owners and providers of the OFC, cannot the state be in total control of all gateways, servers, and private accounts? Why is it not blocking access to foreign websites and IP addresses with pro-Balti and anti-state content? Why does it not remove content and shut down domestic accounts? Let me try to address these questions in the following paragraphs.

It is not as if India and Pakistan are not trying. In fact, it is quite the opposite. Compared to, for example, western European countries, the so-called freedom of the net is lesser in India and especially in Pakistan when it comes to obstacles to access, limits on content, violation of user rights, and surveillance. While Germany scores 20 on Freedom House's "freedom of the net" score (1–100, the lesser the score, the freer), India scores 41 and Pakistan 71. For one thing, Freedom House puts internet penetration in Pakistan at just over 15.5 percent. It is obviously the peripheral and remote areas that make up the majority of the impenetrable portion.

Looking at restrictions on connectivity in Pakistan, internet services are frequently shut down during religious and national holidays. They are also shut down occasionally to prevent the spread of information when incidents occur in conflict-ridden areas. If we look at Pakistan's track record over the past few years, both ICT users and bloggers have been arrested. Individual web and IP addresses have been shut down after so called blocking-orders on the grounds that the content is blasphemous, immoral, or damaging to the state and its representatives. This more or less covers just about every kind of content, if interpreted in a partisan way.

State control over ICT has been legislated in the 1996 Telecommunications Act, and more recently in the 2016 Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA). Censorship, filtering technologies, and data-collecting spyware such as FinFisher are commonly used by state authorities.[24] Pakistan's intelligence agency, Inter Service Intelligence (ISI), even has a mandate to take preemptive actions against cybercrimes, although there are, at least in theory, requirements of transparency and accountability when action is taken. Despite the rules, private users do have access to international news websites and the websites of various domestic political groups. Neither social media nor communication apps were blocked in 2017 (Freedom House 2017a).

Just like in Pakistan, India has the necessary legal instruments in place to restrict, block, and survey internet content and users.[25] In comparison with its neighbor there is not the same level of government control exercised over the internet infrastructure and access to international gateways. There are several programs on the way to increase internet penetration, though, such as the Digital India Program launched in 2018 (http://digitalindia.gov.in/). According to Freedom House, the government does not routinely practice blocking, but action is increasingly being taken by local authorities in times of unrest. Between 2013 and 2016 more than three thousand social media sites were temporarily blocked, mainly in Jammu and Kashmir. Net surveillance is legal, but to what extent it is in operation is unknown. However, every month thousands of phone taps are granted throughout the country, and there are official restrictions on the level of encryption of private and ISP traffic. Official requests to access private social media accounts like Facebook are often granted. A government agency called Central Monitoring System (CMS) can legally intercept online activities like WhatsApp chats directly but is unable to read encrypted conversations. Finally, there are known cases of content manipulation, although there is no evidence of government involvement in such activities (Freedom House 2017b).

At the same time, there are many checks on government actions intervening in ICT. For instance, the nodal agency for cyber security, Indian Computer Emergency Team (CERT-IN) reviews all requests to do so by government agencies. After the ruling in the so-called Shreya Singhal case in 2015, all blocking orders must be accompanied by written explanations and can be petitioned (although the actual orders and actions remain confidential; see Arun 2016). Another ruling defines the right to privacy on the internet as a fundamental civil right (see Supreme Court of India n.d.). Demands on content removal are voiced frequently but seldom enforced (Freedom House 2017b).

To sum up, both Pakistan and India seem to have the legal instruments necessary to control domestic internet traffic and websites if they wanted to. There are some checks on actions carried out by government authorities, more so in India than in Pakistan, but in theory content and communication that is seen as against the interests of the state and nation could be detected and stopped by the government, if desired. So why is questionable content still online, then? One of the reasons, of course, is that none of the states under discussion wants to be defined as totalitarian. Another reason is that ICT is crucial to the modern state. A third reason is that the sheer mass of private users and websites is complex and overwhelming. India is the second largest internet consumer in the world, while in Pakistan there are almost

fifty million mobile broadband users. There is simply not enough technology and staff in place to handle it. Mobility in the virtual terrain is extremely fluid with innumerable social media posts and chats simultaneously taking place. Content is shared, transformed, copied, and pasted faster than it can be chased down.

It could be objected that the desktop political and cultural activism of a small community, such as the Balti people, also has a geographic equivalent that makes it easier to control. Many of the users are dependent on local ISPs, and the traffic is routed through local servers and limited numbers of gateways. Ruling the local network thus looks like a more manageable task. In reality, the systems of surveillance, if in place and operable, work inconsistently and intermittently, and most of the available resources are directed to cybercrimes and illegal ICT use (Freedom House 2017a). Ruling virtual Baltistan is not a first priority for the various government agencies occupied with ICT control.

Viewed through the Zomia lens, the virtual terrain is a creative landscape for jellyfishing. But more than that, the strategy to take refuge in a virtual terrain is indeed similar to that of the tribes residing in the Khyber region, when they jellyfished the British attempts to rule by appearing to be without a backbone. The ICT backbone that hosts the terrain of virtual Baltistan actually belongs to the ruler—the nation state. It is a part of the state's infrastructure and distance-demolishing technology. To demolish it in order to overcome the friction of the virtual terrain means breaking a part of the state's own backbone, a price that is too high to pay.

Gone jellyfishing

In the first few pages of the introduction to *The Art of Not Being Governed*, Scott (2009, xi) apologizes for going too far with his sources in arguing for the Zomia case. I could have offered a similar apology about the application of his concepts to this case study of Baltistan. On closer introspection, however, doing social science research is a wider enterprise that sometimes has to include attempts to break out of the box, so to speak, to challenge what is normatively considered common knowledge in a field of research by trying to reverse common perspectives that are taken for granted. To my mind, this is what Graham Allison (1971) did in his study of the Cuban missile crisis mentioned at the beginning of my article. I realize that I cannot argue with certainty that I am *correct* about the Balti community's jellyfishing activities within the postcolonial predicaments posed in India and Pakistan, but I do think that I have introduced some thought-provoking and fresh ideas of what has been going on there since Independence and Partition that merit further examination. Indeed, future studies of the region's situation require a different angle to stimulate new approaches.[26] "Going too far," in this sense, has been my objective. It has been my intention to rock the boat a bit in order to expand our perspectives on contemporary Baltistan. In the process I have also endeavored to provide a preliminary history of postcolonial connectivity in the region, compiling some new information and data as well as some rather obscure details about it that should shed new light on this understudied topic.

In his introduction, Scott (ibid., xii) also clearly states that the Zomia thesis does not hold when applied after World War II, since modern distance-demolishing technologies have put an end to the friction of terrain. His statement is, admittedly, devastating to my own enterprise here, as I deal almost exclusively with the period after World War II. With my exploration of Baltistan in the virtual, ICT-enabled world, however, I believe I have demonstrated that the Zomia lens can still be valuable in an exploration of the relationship between the nation state and its peripheral communities. The virtual terrain works in a way that is similar to the public and hidden transcript of the pop-*ghazal*, discussed in this article. It is ambiguous, as it represents both a distance-demolishing technology and, at the same time, a friction of terrain that paradoxically becomes a new zone of refuge that is available as a cultural and political space for the Balti community beyond the current reach of the state.

What is perhaps specific to a postcolonial Zomia lens is the balance between secessionist anti-state nationalisms, such as the one propagated by the Baltistan Movement, and making demands on those states for civil rights and access to development resources. In the eyes of the state it may imply a willingness from the side of the movement to let go of its demands if the price is right (Minow 1995).

Finally, as suggested by Anderson (2006, 166), jellyfishing can be a double-edged strategy to deploy, since it

> snips up bits of earlier local memories, genealogies, folktales, cosmologies, and so forth, melts them down, and tries to recast them into a powerful, structurally singular narrative. One can say that these snippets "survive" but one feels that that is stretching the meaning of the word . . . this transformation of time is a force at least as demonic as it is salutary. It hollows out pasts and it destroys presents. (ibid., 183)

Seen from this perspective, the strategy and dangers behind the postcolonial reinvention of Baltistan are perhaps not so much different from those of the homogenizing strategies deployed by the state to incorporate its peripheral communities into the master narrative of the nation state.

Author

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Notes

1. For some examples of post-independence sub-nationalist movements in South Asia, see Mitra (1995, 62).

2. The numbers vary greatly, depending on the sources being consulted. Karl DeRouen and Paul Bellamy (2008, 587) argue that there are no exact figures but estimate a range of 5–15 percent. At the same time, a 2012 Pew Survey quoted only 6 percent of respondents claiming to be Shi'ah (see Pew Research Center 2012). The disparity most likely has to do with the Shi'i use of *taqīyya*

(dissimulation) as a way of hiding their religious affiliation under threat of persecution. See Korom (2003, 12, 99–100, 230–31).

3. Named after the Sunni cleric Haq Nawaz Jhangvi, one of the founders of *Anjuman Sipah-e-Saba*.

4. It later lost the *Anjuman* (Association) to become *Sipah-e-Sahaba* (Guardians of the Prophet's Companions), then *Millat-e-Islamia* (Nation of Islam), and now *Ahle Sunnat Wal Jamaat* (People of the Traditions and the Community), a Deobandi Muslim organization.

5. Hardas: 1,480, Wakha: 1,773, Turtuk: 3,371, Taksi: 886, and Thang: 103. The villages in the Shyok Valley are in an area taken by the Indian army in the 1971 war with Pakistan. Data cited from Census of India (2011a, 2011b).

6. Nurbakhshi is a branch of the Kubrawiyah Sufi order that became Shi'ite during the Safavid dynasty in Persia (1501–1732 CE). According to legend, it was introduced into Baltistan during the sixteenth century (or was it?) and has stayed intact despite proselytizing movements (Esposito 1995, 272; Glassé 1989, 304; Rieck 1995).

7. For a thick description of life along the LoC and the relationship to Kashmir, see Gupta (2013a).

8. It is now a section of National Highway 1D.

9. Also known as Pakistan National Highway 35, China National Highway 314, and Asian Highway AH4.

10. When I took this route back in 1992 it was still a very rough jeep track beyond Astore Valley. The route is now called "Deosai Park Road" and the area has become a national park.

11. Strategic Highway 1.

12. Douglas Dakota DC3s were used extensively to transport troops and supplies to Ladakh and Kargil. The first Dakotas landed in Leh as early as in 1948. Pilots would fly freestyle up the Himalayan valleys and land on unprepared surface. The Indian Air Force was using the DC3 for so-called "sorties," flying into areas that were more or less surrounded by enemy lines (Mankotia 2016).

13. Air Mantra attempted to run seventeen-seater civil flights from Kargil in 2013 but went out of business shortly thereafter.

14. "Harvard" was the British name for the small, single-engine training aircraft At-6 or T-6 Texan designed by North American Aviation. In the 1971 Indo-Pak war the Pakistan Air Force actually used it in combat to disrupt Indian transport convoys.

15. I am indebted to Yousuf Hussain Abadi, a local historian from Skardu, for this detailed information about Skardu Airport.

16. Orient Airways was founded in India in 1946. After Partition the airline decided to run its business in Pakistan and later (1955) became Pakistan International Airways (PIA).

17. Aerei da Transporto Regionale or Avions de Transport Regional (Regional Air Transport).

18. AKF, now Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN), is funded by His Highness the Aga Khan, the 49th Imam of the Shia Imami Ismaili Muslims, who are in majority in this part of Baltistan. Some agricultural projects were also run by the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

19. Due to the sensitive nature of the topic, my informants must remain anonymous to protect their own well-being.

20. The eight recognized scheduled tribes were Balti, Beda, Bot, Drokpa/Dard/Shin, Changpa, Garra, Mon, and Purig-pa (van Beek 1995, 35). The Indian Census in 2011 lists twelve tribes.

21. The Constitution of the Islamic State of Pakistan, Articles 28 and 251.

22. Accessed April 18, 2021, https://apkpure.com/bcdf-balti-elementary-book/com.wBCDFBaltiElementaryBook_6136813. APKPure.com is a website providing Android apps that are no longer available from Google Play.

23. Magnus Marsden (2005) has made similar observations in his study of a Sufi *ghazal* band known as The Nobles that performs in Chitral, located in northwestern Pakistan. In his analysis, the band's indigenous *khovār* lyrics provided a way for the local community to "handle and respond to the pressures to Islamise," to resist the imposition of "puritanical visions of Islam," and to continue what were increasingly being labeled as non-Islamic local cultural traditions (ibid., 124).

24. Spyware is a kind of software that can be remotely installed on a device without the user knowing about it, often by piggybacking on normal updates of ordinary software. FinFisher is an IT company based in Germany that develops and sells solutions for "offensive IT intrusion" (FinFisher n.d.).

25. Section 144, Code of Criminal Procedure, Section 69A, Information and Technology Act, Section 5, India Telegraph Act.

26. Such as the rich collection of essays in a recent special issue of *South Asian History and Culture* dedicated to Gilgit-Baltistan; see Holden (2019).

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