Intersections of Sectarian Dynamics and Spatial Mobility in Gilgit-Baltistan

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Sectarianization of Places and Movements

Gilgit-Baltistan, the high mountain area in the north of Pakistan and especially its capital Gilgit, is a sectarianized space. Sectarian affiliation is a highly significant category for the perception and ordering of places: People generally know where people of which sectarian affiliation—Shia, Sunni, Ismaili, and in Baltistan also Nurbakhshi—live, and villages, urban wards or sometimes entire valleys are sectarianly 'tagged'. The spatial sectarian segregation is fairly well known by all people and 'sectarian geographies' are also made obvious by visual markers such as flags, banners, graffiti, large writings on the mountains, as well as buildings for religious worship. The sectarian geography is not static though: It is not only that particular *places* are affiliated with one of the sects or with sectarian conflict but also *movement* and *mobility* are affected by and framed within a sectarianized rationality. While the term 'sectarian (or religious) movement' is mostly understood metaphorically, meaning that social movements are based on or aimed at religious affiliation, we will take it literally. In this article we will explore relationships between sectarianism and spatial movements in order to not only grasp how people perceive, order and occupy space but above all also to understand how they navigate in such space.[1] We depart from the hypothesis that not only a place is sectarianized but also movement and mobility as places are created and delineated by moving within and between them.[2] The sectarianization of place, space and movement cannot be separated.

By *sectarianization* we refer to social and political processes through which the affiliation with particular religious groups acquires more and

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[1] Here we refer to transitory movement, both by car and on foot, in and outside the city, as well as to permanent movement such as shifting residency.
[2] Cf. Ingold 2009.

more significance in various areas of social life.[3] The way in which sectarian identities and relations between the religious communities are imagined are contested and change in history; they have not always been as important as they are today. Yet today sectarian affiliation significantly structures people's imaginations and actions. This for instance means that sectarian identities become more important than identities related to kinship, language or regional belonging, or that affiliation with a particular sect becomes a kind of premise that to a large extent structures social perception and interaction.

By using the term *sectarianization*—instead of *sectarianism* that implies a more fixed condition—we intend to emphasize the dynamic character of these processes through which sectarian geographies are produced. Sectarianization often includes, but is not restricted to episodes of violence. While violent assaults are mostly limited to Sunnis and Shias—Ismailis being involved only as sporadic victims—everyday sectarianization, i.e. the application of sectarian logic to daily action, concerns the lives of the members of all sects. As Khan argues, sectarianism, in a process of structuration, is both formed by and in turn affects everyday life.[4] Sectarian logics prevail both in everyday life and in special events, such as violent attacks in Gilgit and along the highway connecting Gilgit-Baltistan with down-country Pakistan. Sectarian violence is enacted in other parts of Pakistan too, but in Gilgit the sectarian composition of the town's populations with Shia and Sunni communities of almost equal size has made (often violent) conflict a regular manifestation of sectarianism.

Our article focuses foremost on the city of Gilgit, the social and physical environment that is most strongly affected by processes of sectarianization. But we also refer to movements beyond the city. First we will present a brief history of sectarianization in Gilgit. Secondly, we will discuss the connection between religious/sectarian polarization and spatial differentiation, before we will analyze how people actually move in and between sectarianized places and how movement itself becomes sectarianized.

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[3] 'Sect' or *'firqa'* refers to specific traditions of beliefs and practices of Islam as they developed historically. In this article, we consider only the larger Islamic groups of Gilgit-Baltistan, i.e. Shias, Sunnis and Ismailis, although processes of differentiation can also be observed within these groups, for example among Sunnis between Barelwis and Deobandis. Ismailis are sometimes subsumed under Shia Islam, although Ismailis themselves would hardly ever call themselves Shia.

[4] Khan 2006: 234. Khan criticizes the narrow standard perceptions of sectarianism that define it as either an 'alternative mode of politics' or as pathological effects of religious schisms.

A Brief History of Sectarianization in Gilgit

From the beginning, the introduction of Islam to the region of Gilgit-Baltistan took place in the shape of spatially and sect-wise differentiated proselytizing movements. It can be said that Shia Islam was first introduced from Central Asia in the North around mid of the 16th century. The Ismailiyya came from Badakhshan in the northwest probably in the late 18th century, while Sunni Islam came from south and southwest to Gilgit-Baltistan since the early 19th century.[5]

To some extent, the present geographical distribution of the sects still reflects these spatial trajectories of Islamization: The southern district of Diamer is exclusively Sunni. Nager in the north and Baltistan in the east is mostly Shia (with a small minority of Nurbakhshis) while Ismailis prevail in Hunza in the north and in Ghizer in the west. However, many geographical areas and political districts are mixed: In Baltistan, especially in Skardu, there are also Sunnis; in Astor we find Shias beside the majority of Sunnis; in Ghizer there are Sunnis beside the Ismailis; and in the Hunza-Nager District almost all-Ismaili Hunza is spatially juxtaposed to Shia Nager. The city of Gilgit, being the political and economic center of the region, which stands at the geographic crossroads of movements from all directions, is religiously mixed. There are no official and reliable figures as the census counts only affiliation with a 'religion' (i.e. Islam) and not with 'sects' (*firqa*), but roughly estimated the three major sects are almost equally represented in Gilgit. Just like the valleys and districts of Gilgit-Baltistan, also in Gilgit city the space is subdivided. Although there are some mixed wards too, most are occupied by one sect. Wards 'belonging' to Shias or Sunnis are often even considered so-called 'no-go areas' for the respective other sect.

Sectarianism, sectarian violence included, has a long history in the area. While people in Gilgit today often insist that before the 1980s (or the 1970s) there was no sectarian violence in the area, this is not entirely correct—it is rather a reflection of the fact that in the recent past sectarianization became much more intense. However, British colonial sources from the end of the 19th century already mentioned violence by Sunnis against Shias. For instance John Biddulph, the first British Agent in Gilgit, wrote about the people of Chilas:

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[5] Rieck 1997.

Tough but comparatively recent converts to Islam, they are bigoted and fanatical beyond all other Dards, owing, it is said, to Chilas having been at all times a favourite resort to Moolahs from Swat. Being Soonees, every Shiah who falls into their hand is put to death without being reserved for the usual alternative of slavery.[6]

Defining an event or specific point in time as the beginning of sectarianism is less a question of historical accuracy than one of political narratives. Those different narratives are strategic representations of and about religious communities (as well as about state and religious institutions) that are being used to mobilize public and official opinion, for example in order to support the demand for the full integration of Gilgit-Baltistan into Pakistan.

Many people in the area attribute sectarianization to outside influences like the 'Sunni Mullahs' in Biddulph's quote. Sectarianization is intimately related to a process of 'Neo-Islamization', i.e. a process intended to turn 'nominal' Muslims into 'good', observant Muslims. According to historical sources, Neo-Islamization started at least in 1842 when a Sikh army under the Muslim general Nathu Shah conquered the area. Frederic Drew, an English geologist in the service of the Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir, reported in 1875 that Nathu Shah, the commander of the Sikh army which attacked Gilgit in 1842, was eager to replace local syncretism with 'real' Islam:

> [Nathu Shah] acquired over these Dards a great influence, and he exerted it to make 'good Muhammedans' of them, to get them to attend more carefully to the forms of their religion. It is a fact that before Nathu Shah came (say in 1842) the Astor people used to burn their dead and not to bury them as Muhammedans should.[7]

Oral history in Gilgit attributes the institutional separation of Shias and Sunnis in the city to the Kashmiri governor Sardar Mohammad Akbar Khan who was appointed in spring 1898.[8] The story goes that when he was ordered by the (Hindu) Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir to build a Hindu temple on a plot in the very center of Gilgit, he quickly asked the citizens to immediately build a mosque on that very spot. Being Muslim, he wanted to prevent the construction of a temple in Gilgit's center. The mosque was jointly built by

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[6] Biddulph 1971: 15.
[7] Drew 1980: 429, see also Biddulph 1971: 56.
[8] Gilgit Diary, March 30, 1898; India Office Records L/P&S/7/102.

Sunnis and Shias and according to local tradition it was initially also used for prayer by both groups. Sometime later, however, Sardar Mohammad Akbar Khan ordered both communities to jointly build an Imambarga for the Shias. After that, it is said that Shia and Sunni prayer became separated.[9] This is not entirely true as Shias and Sunnis continued to use many places of prayer jointly. Many people say that being Shia or Sunni was of little importance then and that one often did not know exactly to which sect another person belonged. Yet the story of Sardar Mohammad Akbar Khan indicates that the increasing separation of Shias and Sunnis went hand in hand with spatial separation. For the small place that Gilgit was at the end of the 19th century[10], this spatial separation was considerable: The Sunni mosque was situated in the central bazaar area while the Imambarga was built in the quite distant ward of Nannihet.

Subsequently, Neo-Islamization and sectarianization was related to distant and different places outside of the area: for Sunnis, the *madrasa* of Deoband in northern India acquired considerable importance, while for the Shias places of learning in Iran became significant. In the first half of the 20th century, religious scholars (*ulema*) from Deoband and from Iran came to Gilgit. Men from Gilgit-Baltistan traveled to these places for education and returned as *ulema*.[11] Over the years, social distance between the sects in everyday life increased. It is impossible to date these processes precisely; yet people point out that from the late 1960s Shia-Sunni marriages became less frequent. Much later, commensality between the sects also became restricted, especially when the consumption of meat was involved, as Shias and Sunnis have to follow different ritual prescriptions for the butchering of animals. This separation was greatly increased by the emergence of violent sectarian conflicts.

Intermittent British colonial references to violence between Sunnis and Shias notwithstanding, sectarian relations in Gilgit were overwhelmingly peaceful. The first violent event occurred in the month of Muharram of 1975, when shots were fired from the Sunni Jama Masjid at the Shia Ashura procession (*julus*) by which the Shias commemorate the martyrdom of the Imam Hussain. The Shia *julus* passed through the center of Gilgit and ended

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[9]   For more detailed stories about the governor and the separation of Shias and Sunnis in Gilgit see Sökefeld 1997: 185f.
[10] At the turn of the century, Gilgit must have measured roughly three by one and a half kilometers and the population did not exceed a few thousand people.
[11] Rieck 1995.

in Saddar Bazaar, close to the Sunni main mosque. Already in 1972, Sunni *ulema* had protested against the route of the procession, but the Shias insisted on their 'customary right'. In 1975 the Shia procession was fired at from the Sunni mosque. Even after this incident the Shias were not ready to change the course of the procession and therefore the *julus* was prohibited by the administration for the next two years. Only then the Shias consented to end the procession at the (Ismaili) Jamaat Khana Bazaar instead. Once again, sectarianization and conflict were related to space and movement.

The reason why the course of the Shia Ashura procession became locally contentious during that particular time is mostly attributed to outside influence and to political developments. Gilgit-Baltistan is not a constitutional part of Pakistan but, due to the still unresolved Kashmir dispute, a 'disputed territory' under the administration of Pakistan. This special status brings about a number of political disabilities. For instance, until today the people of Gilgit-Baltistan have no right to participate in elections for the National Assembly of Pakistan. In spite of the local insurgency against the Kashmiri Governor which terminated Kashmiri rule in November 1947 and aimed at the accession of Gilgit-Baltistan with Pakistan, this accession never took place in a full legal sense. To the contrary, in the first postcolonial decades the Pakistani administration largely continued a colonial mode of governing Gilgit-Baltistan.[12] While a number of minor events indicated that many people in the region were not happy with this state of political affairs, a major upheaval occurred in the winter of 1970–1971 when a petty local dispute escalated to a popular uprising in Gilgit city; in its course the jail was broken and the police station was set on fire.[13] The Gilgit Scouts, the local paramilitary troops, did not subdue the protests but, to some extent, sided with the protesters. Frontier Scouts from the North-West Frontier Province were called in to put an end to the unrest.

Local discourse in Gilgit conventionally explains the subsequent development of militant sectarian conflict as a strategy of 'divide and rule', employed by the Government of Pakistan: in order to prevent a further joint uprising of the local people, non-local 'radical' Sunni *ulema* were sent to a *madrasa* in Gilgit in order to preach against Shias. Through this intervention allegations that Shias are not 'real Muslims' became more vocal and frequent and were reciprocated by the Shias. These Sunni *ulema* were Deobandis, who

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[12] Sökefeld 2005, Ali 2009.

[13] Sökefeld 1997: 284ff.

were much more critical towards the Shia, and gradually Deobandis replaced Barelwi *maulwis* in most mosques of Gilgit. The 'Deobandization' of Sunnis in Gilgit was accelerated when General Zia-ul-Haq[14] seized power in Pakistan and started his politics of Islamization which was much more sympathetic with the Deobandi than with the Barelwi model of Sunni Islam and which did not take the Shia version of Islam into consideration. After the mid-1970s, there were minor incidents of sectarian violence.

Sectarian violence reached a different scale when in May 1988 Sunni armed forces (*lashkar*) from Diamer and Kohistan districts attacked Shia villages near Gilgit. More than one hundred people were killed and many houses destroyed. In the following years there were many events of sectarian violence between Shias and Sunnis in which many people were killed, although not as many as during the event in 1988. Often, once a Sunni or Shia leader was killed, retaliation or an almost indiscriminate firing followed. Such periods of violence are recurring, and are locally referred to as 'tensions' or 'tension times'. This expression captures very well the pervasive feelings of threat, insecurity and fear that grip the city during periods of violence and that linger on after actual violence has ceased. Even weeks after a violent episode people are hesitant to leave their neighborhoods and desert the bazaar before nightfall. Gilgit city has become highly militarized (both by military presence and small arms and heavy weapons in civilian households) and tensions are often followed by extended periods of curfew and constriction of mobility, both within the city and also on the highways.

After 1988, thinking in sectarian terms became an inevitable premise of social life in Gilgit. Departing from Charles Taylor's concept of "social imaginary",[15] Nosheen Ali speaks of a pervasive "sectarian imaginary" in Gilgit:[16] the town's society is imagined in sectarian terms and as a consequence it is impossible to think and to act without taking one's own and other's sectarian affiliation into account. In an atmosphere of perceived general insecurity, to differentiate between Shia and Sunni became regarded as vital. Social relations became largely polarized, which implies both increasing

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[14] General Zia-ul-Haq seized power in 1978 through a military coup. He deposed the democratically elected Prime Minister Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto of the Pakistan People's Party. Zia greatly increased his powers, strengthened the position of the military, banned all political parties, disbanded Parliamentary democracy and fostered Islamization of the state, society, and economy. His rule reflects the idea of a 'military-bureaucracy technocracy'. See e.g. Haqqani 2005: 131ff.

[15] Taylor 2004, 2007.

[16] Ali 2010.

separation between the communities and growing cooperation within one's own community.[17] Many issues that are not 'religious' in itself, are viewed from sectarian perspectives and a kind of 'sectarian rationality' has developed, in which parity of the three sects is of utmost importance. Nosheen Ali, for instance, refers to calls for 'sectarian balance' or so-called 'equal treatment' by the general public. For example, if an award is given to a Shia student by the university in Gilgit, it is demanded by the public that this needs to be balanced by prizes given to a Sunni and an Ismaili student, too.[18]

Moving in Sectarianized Spaces

As Tim Ingold explains, places are created by the intertwining movements of different people; by moving along paths, places are knit together.[19] Sectarianization, however, is a process in which the routes and knots of different factions are at least partially untied: Shia and Sunni places, paths and movements are increasingly separated. Sectarianization results in a growing differentiation of events, places and movements which even leads to 'no-go-areas'. Although this is not a necessary outcome, violence often occurs at locations where Shia and Sunni movements still overlap or intersect—like the attacks on Shia travelers on the Karakorum Highway in the Sunni areas of Kohistan and Diamer that happened in 2012 to which we will refer below.

Even though there are still cross-sectarian relations and affairs today, such as weddings or funerals to which guests are invited and entertained regardless of their sect, social life has become more and more enclosed within the religious communities. Crosscutting ties have lost much significance. The growing social polarization of the sects is accompanied by spatial differentiation: many families who lived in neighborhoods or villages in which the other sect prevailed moved houses to areas where their own religious community lives in a majority. Many settlements are even organized around belonging to a specific area of origin and accordingly to a specific sect, as is obvious e.g. in 'Kashrot' (Sunni Kashmiris) as well as in new settlements, such as Ismaili 'Yasin Colony' or Sunni 'Diamer Colony'.

The sectarian segregation of residential areas also affects the mobility between places both within the region as well as within Gilgit city. Movement

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[17] Sökefeld 1997: 217ff.
[18] Ali 2010: 744f.
[19] Ingold 2009.

into the spaces of the 'others' became reduced. Often specific precautions and strategies, such as avoiding certain areas, are taken by persons who feel particularly vulnerable to sectarian attacks. Particularly in times of heightened insecurity following periods of tension, many people do not go to their work places if they happen to be situated in parts of Gilgit dominated by the other sect. Trespassing or visiting other valleys also requires considering the inhabitants' sectarian affiliation. Sunnis feel that they can easily enter Ghizer, Diamer, and Astor because they do not have to pass through Shia areas while traveling there, while Hunza, Nager and Baltistan are rather avoided. Conversely, Shias can go to Hunza, Nager, Astor and Baltistan, but not to Diamer.

The term that people mostly use when referring to this restriction of mobility due to sectarianization is "having become stuck" (*phas gaya*). It refers to the feeling of being trapped within one's respective ward of the town, unable to perambulate Gilgit freely (or having to go a detour) and also having limited options to leave the city. Ismailis who are able to move more or less freely in any ward and district, nonetheless frequently discuss this problem of restrictions of movement of the other two sects. We want to elaborate this by referring to examples of the districts of Hunza-Nager and Ghizer. Due to the cultural heritage sites of two historical forts and a popular image of an enlightened and peaceful society Hunza is the favorite destination for Pakistani and foreign tourists. But during an informal interview conducted in 2012 Jameela, a female teacher of Gilgit's Sunni ward Kashrot, points out that she and her family do not see Hunza as that good a destination as do outsiders. Due to Shia settlements en route, Hunza seems inaccessible to many Sunnis. Instead, she praises Ghizer, which also has an Ismaili majority population, but no Shia settlements to pass. In comparison to Hunza, she describes Ghizer as peaceful and as a safe destination for day- and family-trips for everyone, regardless of sectarian identity:

> J: That district is most peaceful—Ghizer. Peaceful and... all people who want to go out and make fun or want to go to a picnic, they go to Ghizer. To Phander, Khalti Lake, and Sher Qila. They want to visit that district much more as compared to all other. Not all people can go to Hunza. We [Sunnis] can't go there because on the way towards Hunza there is [Shia] Nomal; [and also Shia] Nager is there. So Sunnis can't go [there]. Ghizer is the most peaceful [area of all]... Shias also like go [there]. Ghizer is the most peaceful [area of all]... Shias also like

to go [there]. It's a neutral district. Neither Shia nor Sunni. The people are also good. And it's a beautiful area.

A: But then even if you would go to Hunza - then nothing would happen [along the way] in Nager, no?

J: But people... there is a chance... maybe... A head of police was murdered in that area... five, six years ago. They were going to Hunza for a picnic, then they went back, then they were... fired [at]. In Nomal, or from that way, on the way back to Gilgit. Nomal or Nager. Although he was police head.

A: But maybe they fired at him because of some other reason.

J: Because of that... because he was Sunni. So that's why.[20]

Even small clusters of single-sect villages along the highway or road can be perceived as impassable obstacles or as a threat. Indeed though, there is no 'neutral district', as Jameela claims, either. Just like villages of Nomal and Nager prevent Sunni travelers from going north, a cluster of Sunni villages has to be passed on the way to Ghizer, which is often considered an obstacle by Shias. This is made obvious by Istiqlal, a Shia employee of the agriculture department. While telling about his business trips to Ghizer in 2012 and 2013 after the most recent tensions, he makes efforts to describe his trips as unproblematic. Later on though, he indicates that he was driving in a government vehicle and points out that this provided him security whereas he would not have traveled there in his private car due to the Sunni villages on the way.[21]

Even so, this does not mean that movement to areas of other sects came to a total halt. Business or work-related trips as well as family visits make people move in and through areas which they consider unsafe; but in these cases the movement is done consciously and cautiously. Particularly government employees transgress boundaries regularly, especially since they are frequently transferred to different administrative centers and areas within Gilgit-Baltistan, often regardless of sectarian affiliation. Likewise, travel

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[20] In this and other quotations from interviews the interlocutors' speech has been edited only very slightly in order to keep the original style of language.

[21] Some families own motorbikes, while few families own a car. Government departments and non-governmental organizations provide their higher employees with vehicles, which can easily be distinguished from other vehicles by their color and type (the latest models are white Suzuki Jimny and Potohar). The cars of the most prominent organization are the brand-new white Toyota Hilux pick-up trucks of the Aga Khan Development Network.

agents who guide foreign tourists in Gilgit-Baltistan are forced to move within the whole region according to their guests' wishes. Many guides perceive this as a risk and decide according to the current situation whether they feel able to take the responsibility to expose themselves and their guests to such a risk. While cancelling some of their tours and losing much of their income, some Sunni tour operators for example reluctantly resumed journeys to Ismaili-majority popular Hunza in the summer 2012 and dared to again pass the Shia areas of Nomal and Nager on the way.

Analogously, moving around in Gilgit city became more and more difficult, in particular — but not exclusively — during times of 'tensions'. After sectarian target killings in the autumn and winter of 2011 and throughout 2013, many people restricted their daily movement within Gilgit city to 'safe' routes through areas that are inhabited by people of their own sect. Before passing through areas of the other sect, the current situation is evaluated and decisions about where to move are made very carefully. Trespassing was often commented upon in conversations and interviews, referring to the danger of being recognized by someone of the other sect. Ihsan, a Sunni employee of the education department points out that he goes to work with his government car (like Istiqlal), but nevertheless fears the route since his office borders a Shia *mohalla* (ward). He remarks: "Yes, I go to work every day, but my father is always afraid when I leave and calls me five times a day to make sure I am safe." He and other Sunnis try to reduce the danger of being targeted by taking a longer detour along the River Road that touches Sunni neighborhoods, rather than moving along the main road through the Shia ward of Khomar. Movement, both by car and on foot, within Gilgit city and between localities in Gilgit-Baltistan is to some extent avoided but cannot be stopped completely. When moving is necessary, it is done consciously and cautiously.

Unlike other cities that provide a "relative anonymity and frequent shifts in surroundings and neighbours",[22] Gilgit is hardly anonymous and movement within and out of the city is easily monitored by citizens as well as by law enforcing or other agencies, putting additional strains on movement and travel. Although private cars in Gilgit are hardly tagged with markers of sectarian affiliation, the town is so small and the number of available roads so limited, that any movement of individuals can be monitored easily. Many of the attacks of 2012 occurred along the main roads in Gilgit. Even though

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[22] Reid 2005: 485.

the main roads in Gilgit city are patrolled by army vehicles and interrupted by army checkpoints after roughly every kilometer, they are not considered safe. Especially men with prominent positions in government departments or religious institutions are careful to use specific routes and avoid others. Only Ismailis say that they feel unrestricted where to go and which routes to take. Taxi drivers do not restrict themselves much and take the risk to service all parts of the city, regardless of their sectarian affiliation.

As indicated before, Gilgit city is under close monitoring and surveillance by the army and police. Army checkpoints (in Gilgit referred to as 'check posts', giving them an air of permanency) have been established at most intersections and army and police pick-up trucks patrol the roads. In times of tension this surveillance is increased. After curfew had been relaxed again, following a significant violent incident in April 2012, almost every fifth vehicle on the main roads were pickup trucks manned with around five soldiers carrying automatic weapons and a mounted machine gun. In the months following this incident many 'check posts' were converted from provisional sandbag posts to permanent brick-walled, plastered and white-washed constructions, some of which were even decorated with colored light bulbs and bannerettes during religious holidays. Cars carrying only male passengers are regularly stopped and searched at the 'check posts'.

Since spring 2013 even public transport locally referred to as 'Suzukis' which previously passed freely are checked. Only the 'ladies' seat' in the front is spared. Other vehicles with female passengers are so far neither stopped nor searched. Women point out that they can overall move more safely through the city since so far only men have been targeted.[23] In general, however, women are constrained as well, as they are mostly not allowed to move without male company. As Emma Varley observes, during the 2005 sectarian tensions, many Sunni men did not even feel able to accompany their wives or female relatives to the hospital, afraid of being targeted along the way or

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[23] Movement of women, especially in and to public areas like main roads and bazaars, is restricted anyway, due to the idea of keeping *pardah*, i.e. gender segregation, although women regularly visit households of their agnate and affine relatives (see also Gratz 2006: 639ff.). Due to the costs involved in traveling and the inherent feelings of insecurity and fear of assaults, they nevertheless prefer close-distance and group visits, and in most cases they have to be accompanied by a male family member. Men, however, have traditionally moved more freely in town and between districts and often move on their own—although even married men may be reprimanded by their parents or wife for roaming around, and may be severely scolded by their mothers when they did not return home before nightfall.

within the 'high risk' Shia *mohalla* where the government hospital is situated. "Sunni women were thereby forced to measure their maternal health risks against the possibility of husbands or male relatives being injured or killed while accompanying them to hospitals in Shia *mohallas*."[24] Thus, effectively the movement of both men and women is affected by sectarianization.

Sectarianization of Public Transport

Since only a small number of families afford their own car, most people use public transportation such as the Suzukis (small, canvas-covered pick-up trucks, operated and used by all sects) for moving within the city and passenger vans for traveling outside to other places. Besides this, there are also a small number of privately owned taxis for transport in the city or between adjoining villages. Although the vans that service the routes between the villages and valleys can be used by anyone, they are also incorporated in the sectarian logics and practices. A van's number plate indicates a certain area of origin, as do the travel agent, the destination and the bus stand. Thus vans, too, are sometimes associated with a specific place and sect. Such information may be used to identify vehicles for targeting along the roads, as for example when a van going from Gilgit to Haramosh was struck by a bomb hidden in a drainage channel under the road during Ramazan 2012. Although it was not clear who had planted the bomb, people observed and discussed that it was a Shia coaster carrying Shia passengers being hit at a Sunni village.

In 2012, sectarian violence led to an attempt to further segregate public transport. Two Suzuki-routes are operated from the eastern margins of Gilgit to the city center. They start in the mixed *mohalla* of Jutial, pass through Shia Khomar and enter the main bazaar through the Sunni Kashrot area. These Suzuki-lines are operated and used by passengers of all sects, and dispassionately labeled 'number 1' and 'number 2'. In March 2012, however, the fact that they are passing through both Shia and Sunni dominated areas became regarded as problematic and they were branded as insecure. Consequentially, on March 26, 2012, Shias started a new Suzuki-route which bypassed Sunni Kashrot and passed through Nagrel instead. It was called *Panjtan* ('number 5'), a reference to the *ahl-e bayt*, the five members of the house of the Prophet Muhammad which are highly revered by Shias: the

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[24] Varley 2010: 66.

Prophet himself, Ali, the first Imam, Fatima, Muhammad's daughter and Ali's wife, as well as their sons Hassan and Hussain. Four days later, Sunnis established their own route which led from Jutial via the river road to the center, avoiding Shia Khomar. This route was named *Haq char yar* ('four true companions'), referring to the four Caliphs Abu Bakr, Usman, Umar and Ali, who are highly respected by Sunnis, but who, with the exception of Ali whom they consider their first Imam, are not accepted by the Shias as legitimate leaders of the *umma*. Nine days later, the new routes were banned by the local Government on the ground that they had been established without governmental approval. It is said that the Government wanted to prevent a further reinforcement and institutionalization of sectarian segregation.

Movement and Sectarian Violence on Travelers

Sectarianization is not limited to Gilgit, restricting and channeling movement, but also affects places beyond the city. The Karakorum Highway (KKH), celebrated as 'the life-line of Gilgit-Baltistan' which links Pakistan with China, is the only all-weather connection that theoretically is open throughout the year between Gilgit-Baltistan and down country Pakistan.[25] Although the KKH is often blocked by landslides (and oftentimes even by demonstrators) and although there are many accidents, the highway is still more reliable and accessible than the expensive and erratic air service between Gilgit and Islamabad.

Haines argues that by 'opening up' the mountain area through the KKH Pakistan enacted an idea of modernity and created an instrument for national development and trade.[26] Now, more than three decades after the completion of the road, Gilgit-Baltistan is highly dependent on the import of food and other goods from Pakistan and China. The movement of people on the road has also increased manifold; people travel from Gilgit to Islamabad or vice versa due to employment, education, or family visits. Traveling and trade on the KKH has become indispensable; but as people in Gilgit often complain

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[25] Cf. Allan 1989. The road via the Babusar Pass also connects Islamabad and Gilgit. It is shorter than the KKH, but only open from May to October and is not convenient for trucks.

[26] Haines 2012: 7.

that the road at the same time enables an increased influx of suspect and alien persons from other parts of Pakistan.[27]

During *tensions*, the authorities often close the KKH in order to prevent the proliferation of violence. In recent years, the road itself has however become a stage for sectarian violence. In January 2005, the Imam of the main Shia mosque in Gilgit, Agha Ziauddin, was killed and his assassination triggered a prolonged period of violence with many victims. Gilgit was put under curfew and the roads were initially blocked. Four months later, on April 28, 2005, a vehicle was attacked in Diamer, sixteen passengers were wounded and the Shia driver killed.[28] On July 17, 2005, a bus going to Rawalpindi was stopped on the KKH near Chilas, five passengers were killed and six wounded.[29]

Seven years later, in 2012, such attacks on the roads between Gilgit and down-country Pakistan occurred again and lead to prolonged periods of restricted movement and communication in and around the focal point Gilgit city. In three incidents buses were stopped, the passengers were ordered to leave the vehicles and the identities of the male passengers were checked by the assailants who searched for Shia men. In one case, the killing of travelers was a reaction to preceding violence. All three cases lead to more violence in Gilgit and other places in Gilgit-Baltistan.

The Kohistan Incident

The first incident took place along the KKH at Harban Das, the last village of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province, bordering with the Diamer District of Gilgit-Baltistan on February 28, 2012, just after 8 a.m. Men in army uniforms stopped three coasters and one bus with altogether around one hundred passengers on the way from Rawalpindi to Gilgit and killed fifteen Shia men and one Ismaili. Random pieces of information and rumors about this incident spread in Gilgit roughly one hour later.

Since retaliatory violence was feared in the town, schools, offices and shops started to close. In Nomal and in various villages in Nager on the KKH leading north from Gilgit, Shias burnt tires and erected barricades. Here, vehicles were stopped and searched for Sunni passengers, while at the same time Sunni contractors and laborers working in Nager were taken into safe

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[27] Sökefeld 1999.

[28] Ahmed 2012: 197.

[29] Dawn retrieved 21.07.2005, cited after Varley 2008.

custody by locals in order to protect them. In Gilgit, around noon, one Sunni was shot. Different groups of protesters raised slogans against Sunnis, against the Chief Minister of Gilgit-Baltistan (a Shia), the Government, and the Pakistani Army. Subsequently, the Government imposed Section 144 (ban of public assembly), and control was handed over to the Pakistan Rangers and Gilgit-Baltistan Scouts, giving them the right to shoot-on-sight. The Gilgit-Baltistan Government announced three holidays and asked the people to stay at home if possible. Later on, Shias began to hold organized protests and demanded the payment of compensation to the families of the victims. The Sunni inhabitants of Diamer blocked the highway to protest "against the use of their territory for the heinous killings."[30]

The Chilas Incident

Four weeks after the February incident, on March 28, 2012, two Sunni leaders were arrested in order to be interrogated about the February bus attack. Two days earlier the new Shia Suzuki-line had been established in Gilgit, followed by the introduction of a Sunni Suzuki-line short after. In the following days, Sunnis in Gilgit and in Chilas, the capital of the Diamer district south of Gilgit, protested against the arrest of their leaders and Shias protested against the ban of the new Suzuki-lines which the Government had announced immediately after their creation; public transport in Gilgit and on the KKH was blocked. On April 3, a hand grenade exploded at a Sunni demonstration in Gilgit, killing two and wounding forty-five persons. The incident triggered firing throughout Gilgit. Rumors about attacks on both Sunnis and Shias in Gilgit started to be spread by text messages.[31]

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[30] The Express Tribune 2012a.

[31] According to an unreleased police report, ten people in total were killed (among them two Ismailis, two Shias and four Sunnis) and forty-five (forty-two Sunni and three Shia) wounded on that day in Gilgit alone. In retaliation for the Shia casualties, around thirty-four Sunnis were taken hostage in Nager. One Sunni was killed in Nager and one in Hunza. According to police reports, around twenty-two people lost their lives and forty-seven were wounded in the whole of Gilgit-Baltistan on that day. At the same time, just like historical events are interpreted and framed within certain narratives, such figures are also subject to a 'politics of numbers'. Gathering, interpreting and publicizing figures is always subjected to various influences, as well as to narrative adjustment.

At the same time, Sunnis protested in Chilas as well. When news about the blast in Gilgit reached the protesters, they decided to march towards Gilgit—reminiscent of the 1988 attack by the *lashkar*, the Sunni armed forces. About twenty kilometers from Chilas, around forty men gathered on the KKH near Bunar Das and stopped a convoy of five buses with around five hundred passengers on the way from Rawalpindi to Gilgit. The passengers were forced to descend from the buses and Shia men were singled out and killed.[32] Three buses were set on fire.[33] In the same vein as the earlier incident at Harban, the assailants selected the Shias by three criteria: firstly, they checked their identity cards for Shia names; secondly, they checked whether their place of residence was in Shia villages and wards; finally, they searched the upper part of their bodies for flagellation-marks from Ashura processions. Twenty-five policemen who accompanied the convoy—a security measure introduced after the earlier incident—were present but did not intervene, possibly for fear of being outnumbered and not being able to control the situation. Some Shias could hide among Sunni and Ismaili passengers, who were brought to nearby houses from where they were later on collected by the police and the army and brought to Gilgit. In the night the Government blocked the mobile phone networks and imposed curfew on Gilgit, restricting the movement within the city, but in effect also between the valleys.

In the aftermath, many Gilgit neighborhoods were searched for weapons and more than eighty men were arrested—according to one interlocutor, all of them had already been on a Government blacklist. A special force of four hundred soldiers, rangers and policemen was deployed by the Government on the KKH to patrol around-the-clock between Gilgit and Basari, the last village of Gilgit-Baltistan before entering the border to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.[34] Gilgit remained under curfew for twenty-six days and the two main mosques of the

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[32] Some Shia men were scared and ran towards the Indus River where four drowned. Nine men were shot and one woman died from a heart attack.

[33] The buses of the biggest provider of overland traffic, the Goverment's Northern Areas Transport Corporation (NATCO), were also stopped but not set on fire. Although most bus service providers are not sectarianly specialized, one provider called 'Masherbrum' is said to belong to a Shia, and mostly used by Shias. These were the buses that have been set on fire.

[34] The joint *jirga* of Diamer had also offered the local government to guarantee the security on the KKH in Diamer. They proposed that they would ensure this with the help of two Jeeps and the necessary petrol and asserted that the youth of Diamer would take over the responsibility to prohibit any such events in future. The offer was turned down by the Government though, and instead army was employed to patrol the highway.

town were closed for fifty-three days. During the first days of the curfew, movement within the city was completely banned. Food and water supply, access to fields, water channels, offices, businesses, banks and health and educational facilities was greatly disturbed, jeopardizing the ill and putting many people, especially daily wagers, under economic pressure. Later, the curfew was lifted for some hours every few days and from the third week on it was lifted during daytime so that people could resume their work.

Although the convoy system had failed to protect the travelers, it continues to be practiced, resulting in much-lamented prolongation of travel time.

The Babusar Incident

During the summer of 2012, after the curfew had been lifted at the end of April, tension decreased in Gilgit. Ramazan, the Muslim month of fasting, started on July 21. During Ramazan only minor incidents of violence occurred in and around Gilgit. People started to focus on the concluding holiday of Eid, fearing more violence during the festivities. Four days before Eid the four big religious parties in Gilgit-Baltistan (Jamiat-e-Ulema-e-Islam/JUI-F, Majlis Wahdat-ul Muslimeen/MWM, Jamat-e-Islami/JI and the Shia Ulema Council/SUC) formed the *Aman Committee* (peace committee) and vowed to promote sectarian harmony in Gilgit-Baltistan.

One day later, on August 16, buses were again attacked; this time vehicles going from Gilgit to Rawalpindi via the Babusar Pass. Assailants in army uniforms stopped the buses with a roadblock of stones; Shia passengers were forced to descend and were shot. Two protesting Sunni passengers were also killed. Later, the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan claimed the responsibility for the attacks on the Shias.[35] After this incident it was rumored that even the intelligence agencies reckoned with another attack during Eid. In Gilgit, most shops remained closed. While normally on Eid people busily visit their relatives and friends, most people visited only family members in their close vicinity and postponed other visits because they feared traveling and getting stuck in someone else's house. On the second day of Eid, firing started in Gilgit. Some people were killed in Sakwar, Khomar and Kashrot. For the next two days people were waiting for curfew to be imposed and mostly stayed at home, discussing the situation via their mobile phones.

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[35] The Express Tribune 2012c.

Repercussions of the Violence on the Road

In all three cases, the law enforcement agencies had problems to identify and arrest the attackers. The assailants of February and April were later on identified as men from Diamer and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa who had vowed revenge for earlier target killings of Sunnis. They had apparently been trained and supported by Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and Jundullah, an Islamist militant group associated with the TTP.[36] Apparently those who were involved in the grenade blast in Gilgit in April could be identified by CCTV cameras which had been installed in the bazaar in winter 2011.

After the attacks, the highway remained closed for all travelers for several weeks. The closing greatly disturbed the mobility and the lives of the people of Gilgit-Baltistan. Even though the restrictions imposed on traffic by the authorities were always lifted again, there were longer-lasting repercussions on the practices of people.

Following the incidents, people were extremely hesitant to travel on the KKH. Many buses left Gilgit half empty and therefore the travel agencies reduced the number of vehicles. If movement was not absolutely necessary, people preferred to stay at home. Those who had to travel tried to catch a plane even though the airfare was repeatedly increased. Due to the run on air tickets and frequent unfavorable weather conditions, people often had to wait for a ticket for many days or even weeks when flights were either booked out or canceled.[37]

The restriction of travel experienced by the people was clearly sectarianized. While Shias became absolutely hesitant to travel on the Highway between Gilgit and Islamabad, in order to avoid the Sunni areas of Diamer and Kohistan/Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Sunnis for some time avoided traveling north, fearing the Shia area of Nager. Yet, while very few Sunnis actually have to travel north from Gilgit, Shias in general cannot completely avoid traveling south, as going to Islamabad is required for many purposes. While Ismailis had not been directly threatened they also feel insecure and some of them still employed another strategy. Ismailis generally bear the

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[36] The Express Tribune 2012b.
[37] Pakistan International Airlines has scheduled one to two flights accommodating around fifty passengers from Gilgit to Islamabad every day. These flights require good weather conditions since the small aircrafts are navigated on visual flight—the cancellation rate is around 45 percent. See Japan International Cooperation Agency and Government of Gilgit-Baltistan 2010: 39.

same names as Shias and fear to be mistaken for Shias. Many Ismaili travelers therefore resorted to carrying fake identity cards with unequivocally Sunni names and Sunni places of residence. Such concealment of one's own religious belonging—called *takīya*—is also permitted in Shia Islam.[38] Yet, because many Shia men are marked by the scars of flagellation on their bodies this particular strategy might not necessarily work for them. For Ismailis, travel on the KKH is sectarianized also in another way: There are a few hotels and restaurants owned by Ismailis along the road in Kohistan and Diamer districts. Ismailis traveling by individual vehicles invariably have their breaks at these and avoid stopping at Sunni places.

Sectarianization, Space and the Weakness of the Strong State

Local discourse routinely, but often also contradictorily, implicates the state and government in the process of sectarianization. In Pakistan, the state is said to be both strong and utterly weak at the same time. To some extent this paradox dissolves into an opposition between state and government: the state is conceived of as 'the establishment', consisting of the army and the bureaucracy, while the government consists of elected, temporary power holders. Here, the state is conceived of as being much stronger than the government, as the government does not have the power to oppose the army or the bureaucracy. This is particularly pertinent in the case of Gilgit-Baltistan where the administrative bureaucracy is deputed by the federal Government, while the local Government under the Chief Minister only enjoys limited competences. Yet this distinction is not always made in daily discourse and often 'state' and 'government' are used synonymously.

According to local discourse, sectarianization and in particular the recent ambushes on the KKH expose either the weakness of the state or its complicity in sectarian violence—or both. We have already pointed out that the beginning

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[38] Bodily markers, such as dress or style, may also indicate one's belonging to a specific community. The color black for example is mainly assigned to Shias. Many Shia women wear black intentionally, while Ismaili women deliberately avoid black clothes or accessories. In spite of this though, Sunni women may wear black for fashion. In contrast, such markers may on the other hand be used strategically for 'sectarian impression management' in order to divert conspicuousness. For example, while Sunni men are asked by their religious leaders to grow a long beard, some say that they intentionally shave clean in order to pass as an Ismaili.

of sectarian violence in the 1970s is often explained as the state's effort to control Gilgit-Baltistan through a strategy of 'divide and rule' that pitted Sunnis against Shias. As the area's political status has not fundamentally changed since then—Gilgit-Baltistan has neither been fully integrated into the Pakistani state nor has it enjoyed full autonomy—this situation persists until now. People in Gilgit frequently hold the state's 'agencies', i.e. the security institutions, responsible for sectarian attacks. In two of the ambushes, the attackers used the state's symbols, i.e. army uniforms. Furthermore, the state itself is often considered as being sectarian and biased.

Indeed, sectarian conflict sometimes arises from state policies, as was the case with the 'textbook controversy' in which the Shias protested against the Sunni bias of textbooks that were used in Gilgit's schools and which resulted in a period of massive sectarian violence in 2005.[39] Sectarian violence against Shias is not limited to Gilgit; but is endemic also in other regions of Pakistan, most importantly in Jhang district in southern Punjab, the Khurram Agency in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and, more recently, Quetta in Baluchistan. Shias often consider Pakistan a Sunni (and, by implication, an anti-Shia) state. Gilgit-Baltistan is the only larger political entity of Pakistan with a majority Shia population. In Gilgit even Sunnis sometimes explain sectarian violence as the state's strategy to put Shias in their (subaltern) place, as does Hafeez, a local Sunni academic, who stated:

> The Shia Muslims in this time are stronger in Gilgit city than Sunni and other communities. Whatever the Shia want, they can do. In Gilgit city especially. Whatever! The Government failed in front of their coalition. All the agencies failed. So, ISI [Inter-Services Intelligence, the army's biggest security agency] has totally failed, totally failed in the Shia areas. Nobody is ready to work with ISI, MI Military Intelligence [intelligence arm of the Pakistan Army], [or the] Special Forces in Gilgit-Baltistan, so, when they failed they tried to... they wanted to make the Ahle-ta-Shia realize that they are stuck in Gilgit city. In the Kohistan incident the basic theme was that the Shia are stuck in Gilgit city. They cannot do anything. Whenever the Government wants, the Government desires, it can demolish the Ahle-ta-Shias. Because they don't have any route. The routes are only for Ismailia and the Sunnis. Kohistan is also Sunni, Skardu is Shia - but Skardu does not have any

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[39] Stöber 2007, Ali 2008.

routes [leading out] - Gilgiti Shias can only go by air. But the airport in Gilgit is located in the Sunni Kashrot area, Ahle-ta-Sunna area, so, the Government showed: you are stuck in Gilgit city. So you realize that... what do we say... you don't show your power in front of the Government!

Hafeez directly links the Government's effort to control the Shias with the sectarianization of space and the blocking of the Shias' movement and mobility. Here, the sectarianization of space is referred to as the Government's last resort to control the Shias. Since other means to control the Shias have failed, sectarian violence rather exposes the weakness of the state, even if in Hafeez' view the Government is able to "demolish" the Shias. The inconsistency of Hafeez' statement is quite typical for local discourse about sectarianization.

For those people who do not assume the state's complicity in sectarian violence, the state's weakness is exposed even more obviously: all efforts and instruments to protect citizens and ensure travelers' security have failed. Most of the state's efforts to prevent sectarian violence also targeted both movement and space. The imposition of curfew in Gilgit town intended to prevent further violence by tying the people to their homes. Heavily armed army patrols plied the streets of Gilgit and they continued to do so even after curfew was lifted. For several years now, army bunkers keep watch at important crossroads in town and new checkpoints have been established where vehicles are frequently stopped and searched. CCTV cameras have been installed at pivotal places in Gilgit in order to generally monitor movement in the town, although much to the dismay of many, they are rather often out of work.[40]

Such "spatializing strategies" of control[41] are not limited to Gilgit town but also extend to the KKH. After the Kohistan incident additional police stations were established along the highway. Buses are not allowed to move independently any more but have to form convoys with often more than twenty vehicles that are accompanied by police guards. However, while these measures produce hardships for travelers who often have to wait for hours for the formation of convoys as well as for the logistics of escorting, they did not prevent the subsequent attacks on Shias on the road. To the contrary,

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[40]   Pamir Times 2012a.
[41]   Cf. Merry 2001.

during the Chilas incident in April 2012, a whole convoy was stopped by the assailants and policemen simply watched Shias being killed and fire being set to buses.

The Government's prohibition of the new, sectarianized public Suzuki-routes in Gilgit which were immediately abandoned was more efficient. Yet, this was an easy task compared to ensuring safety on the KKH. Many people lamented the introduction of the new routes as a further sectarian division of public space. A commentator wrote on the news-blog Pamir Times: "Local people should vocally demanded [sic] of the Government and administration to take notice of the situation and stop the process of systematic segmentation of the society."[42] Others, however, regarded the new routes as measures of protection in view of the Government's inability to provide security, and thus as a sign and consequence of the Government's weakness.

Blaming the Government as weak and/or complicit also helps to exonerate local society from responsibility for sectarianization and violence. There is a strong local imaginary and narrative that people in Gilgit are essentially peaceful and live in 'sectarian harmony'. Thus, the commentary from *Pamir Times* quoted above maintains that "the residents of Gilgit city have a history of living together peacefully, despite of believing in different interpretations of Islam and there seems to be no reason why they shall not move back towards that era of harmony and peace."[43] According to local discourse, this sectarian harmony is unfortunately and maliciously disturbed time and time again by acts of inter-sectarian violence perpetrated by outsiders or by 'foreign hands'.[44] Yet, the incidents of violence also provide the stage for inter-sectarian sympathy and bravery. Thus, it is recounted how during the Chilas incident some Shias could hide among Ismailis, who passed them as kin, and were later protected by sympathetic Sunnis in their houses. Other stories tell how in Hunza a Shia hotel owner hid a group of Sunni traders and their families in his hotel, protecting them from raiding Shia youth, or how Ismaili villagers in Gojal hid Sunni workers for days in their homes in order to protect them when the wrath and revenge of Shia raiders from Nager was feared. Here, too, violence and protection are intimately connected with

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[42]   Pamir Times 2012b.
[43]   Ibid.
[44]   The opposition of locals/people of Gilgit versus people from outside who are held responsible for many social evils is a dominant mode of identification in Gilgit. See Sökefeld 1997.

issues of place and space: People are in danger because they are in the 'wrong' place and they are protected by putting them in safe places.

Such accounts are supportive of a narrative of essentially friendly relationships between the sects and the condemnation of violence which disturbs the sectarian harmony in the area. As Fregonese narrates for Beirut, one can also find a "double imaginary of openness and closure [which] is constantly reproduced and negotiated"[45] in Gilgit. The discourse about Gilgit's and Gilgit-Baltistan's inhabitants' 'true nature' constantly oscillates between praise for openness, interaction, and hospitality on the one hand, and regret of closure, fragmentation, and hostility, on the other hand. Further, the narrative of Sunnis protecting Shias or Shias protecting Sunnis again exposes the weakness of the state: Local people protect others who are in danger, while the state is unable to provide security for its citizens.

Conclusion: Dynamics of Sectarianization in Gilgit

Loosely and rather metaphorically, using Norbert Elias' term we could speak about a figuration of sectarianization in Gilgit-Baltistan. From the rather specific issue of doctrinal differences between Shia and Sunni Islam, a broad field of interlocking issues developed that is densely interwoven with everyday life in Gilgit-Baltistan. Doctrinal differences had direct impacts on daily life in Gilgit, as in the case of Shia-Sunni commensality, which ended more or less because one sect's way of slaughtering animals is not accepted as *halal* by the other sect. The most pervasive effects of sectarianization are however generated indirectly through violence—actual violence in many cases, but also anticipated, expected, imagined and feared violence; we could even say that sectarianization *is* violence. Many of the behavioral manifestations of sectarianization can be understood as actors' efforts and strategies to prevent and avoid violence. A sectarian logic evolved, which almost invariably evaluates social situations and political constellations from sectarian perspectives. Individual as well as collective actors and the Government adhere to this logic and, because they accept its premises, contribute thereby to the further entrenchment of sectarianization.

In this paper, we showed that sectarianization is intimately connected with issues of mobility, space and place. We have seen that from the beginning

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[45] Fregonese 2012.

sectarianization was closely tied to issues of geography and movement. Sectarian differentiation in Gilgit was also expressed in the creation of spatial distance. Movement and the use of urban places by one sect—the Shias with their *julus* in the month of Muharram—were the occasion of the first instances of sectarian violence. Yet, our focus was not on sectarianization and 'religious movements' in the narrower sense; but rather on the sectarianization of apparently 'religiously neutral' movements, on travel within and beyond Gilgit. We have seen that there is no religiously neutral movement and place in and around the city. The sectarian logic applies to all kinds of places—valleys, regions, villages, neighborhoods, markets, streets, etc.—which become sectarianly marked and are thus considered as either safe or dangerous. Most of the people's strategies to evade and avoid sectarian violence are related to the appraisal of places and movement in sectarian terms.

In his article *Against Space* Tim Ingold[46] challenges the notion that places exist in (empty) space, that human existence is essentially place-bound and that we move *between* places. Instead, he points out that we live as "wayfarers", moving along paths and thereby binding places together. Places are "knots" where movements of people meet and intertwine. Drawing on this conceptualization we can understand the dynamics of sectarianization as a process of partially untying these knots: Shia and Sunni "threads", paths and movements are increasingly separated. Shia movements bind Shia places and movement of Sunnis bind Sunni places. Sectarianization results in a highly uneven canvas with large 'holes' and no-go-areas which, however, cannot always be completely avoided. Violence occurs mostly at locations where the threads of Shia and Sunni movements overlap and intersect.

This uneven, perforated canvas unfolds in a political environment dominated by a state, which in the eyes of many locals, is itself of sectarian character, being either complicit in or too weak to prevent violence and the process of further sectarianization. Also the state is not a religiously 'neutral space' but intimately implicated in the dynamics of sectarianization.

Acknowledgements

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[46] Ingold 2009.

Crossroads Asia which is generously funded by the German Federal Ministry for Education and Research. Permission for fieldwork has been granted by the Pakistani Ministry of Interior. While the sub-project focuses on social and cultural changes in the water management of Gilgit city, the sectarian logics are so much pervasive that they come up in interviews time and time again. Additionally, the conduction of the fieldwork was also constrained by the sectarian conflicts of 2012, as well as by further security alerts.

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