

## Christians in Gilgit: negotiating subalternity and citizenship

Beimborn, Maria

Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

### Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Beimborn, M. (2014). Christians in Gilgit: negotiating subalternity and citizenship. *EthnoScripts: Zeitschrift für aktuelle ethnologische Studien*, 16(1), 67-95. <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:gbv:18-8-7746>

### Nutzungsbedingungen:

Dieser Text wird unter einer CC BY-SA Lizenz (Namensnennung-Weitergabe unter gleichen Bedingungen) zur Verfügung gestellt. Nähere Auskünfte zu den CC-Lizenzen finden Sie hier: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/deed.de>

### Terms of use:

This document is made available under a CC BY-SA Licence (Attribution-ShareAlike). For more information see: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0>

# EthnoScripts

ZEITSCHRIFT FÜR AKTUELLE  
ETHNOLOGISCHE STUDIEN

## Anthropology of Gilgit-Baltistan, Northern Pakistan

Jahrgang 16 Heft 1 | 2014

Maria Beimborn

Christians in Gilgit: Negotiating subalternity and  
citizenship

Ethnoscripts 2014 16 (1): 67-95

eISSN 2199-7942

### Herausgeber:

Universität Hamburg  
Institut für Ethnologie  
Edmund-Siemers-Allee 1 (West)  
D-20146 Hamburg  
Tel.: 040 42838 6208  
E-Mail: [lfE@uni-hamburg.de](mailto:lfE@uni-hamburg.de)  
<http://www.ethnologie.uni-hamburg.de>

eISSN: 2199-7942

Dieses Werk ist lizenziert unter einer Creative Commons Licence 4.0  
International: Namensnennung - Weitergabe unter gleichen Bedingungen.



## Christians in Gilgit: Negotiating subalternity and citizenship

Maria Beimborn

*„This is the greatest gift of deconstruction: to question the authority of the investigating subject without paralyzing him.” (Spivak 1988: 9)*

Intellectual projects are no doubt products of their times, but do they also belong to them? Partha Chatterjee, an early member of the South Asian Subaltern Studies Group, recently made that claim when heralding the end of Subaltern Studies – a historical approach that started to re-write (national) history ‘from below’. “The task, as it now stands cannot, I think, be taken forward within the framework of the concepts and methods mobilized in Subaltern Studies” (Chatterjee 2012: 44), he argues in *After Subaltern Studies*. It is especially two crucial ideas of the theoretical approach he is refusing: first, the externality of ‘the subaltern’ and second the image of the ‘subaltern rebel’.

Starting from Chatterjee’s argument this article critically reviews the Subaltern Studies project to then discuss empirical material from a fieldwork in Gilgit in 2013. Focusing on the socio-political situation of the Christian minority and their politics, the approach is revised as also recently developments like the notion of the ‘subaltern citizen’ are introduced and discussed. Is the Subaltern Studies project really outdated and the subaltern rebel a figure of the past? The article doubts it pointing to a need not only for new concepts that cast the paradoxes and complexities of contemporary subalternities in one theoretical notion but also to a reflected plurality of theoretical approaches as they enable us to tell different stories of modernity.

### Subalternity reconsidered

Subaltern Studies have always been subject to criticism, leading scholars to rework theoretical outlines and research questions. The political project of Subaltern Studies was formulated by a group of historians in South Asia in the 1980s but over the years was adopted in Latin America, Africa and also by scholars from ‘the West’. The concept was adopted and further developed in other disciplines, among them sociology, anthropology and pedagogy. Subaltern Studies began as a critical historical approach focusing on ‘people’s history’ in colonial times, strongly influenced by the paradigm of structuralism. By the 1990s it was reworked in the framework of Post-structuralism.

Questions of subalternity were linked to Postcolonial Critique. In that turn, the early structuralist claim of a 'subaltern consciousness' was reformulated as question: How does subaltern self-consciousness develop? Subaltern Studies became a field with diffuse borders. The now rather interdisciplinary approach has been increasingly addressing questions of subalternity in contemporary times: in postcolonial as well as in 'western' and global contexts. The critical approach is not only asking for societal and cultural mechanisms of exclusion and marginalization and the experiences and politics of 'the subaltern' but also of figurations of power and knowledge.

Who 'the subaltern' are and what subalternity is, has since the very beginning been a matter of debate. "I like the word 'subaltern' for one reason", Spivak stated in the middle of turmoil. "It is truly situational. 'Subaltern' began as a description of certain rank in the military", "(...) was later used under censorship of Gramsci (...) [who] was obliged to call the proletarian 'subaltern'" and "(...) has been transformed into the description of everything that doesn't fall under strict class analysis. I like that, because it has no theoretical rigor." (Spivak 1990: 141)

The concept has been, and still is criticized for being blurred and conceptually empty. Over time though, various scholars have put much effort to sharpen the notion – not least in order to point out the political program of the approach. And there is an ongoing debate on how essential / how partial different subalternities have been in the past as well as in contemporary societies.

Guha, often considered the founding father of the South Asian Studies Group, in 1982 only loosely defined 'the subaltern' when describing it as: "the demographic difference between the total Indian population and all those whom we have described as the 'elite'". While in the beginning she expressed sympathy for the conceptual vagueness, Spivak has been offering continuously new definitions of subalternity since the beginning of the 1990s, giving attention to different aspects of the societal status. The loose materialistic conceptualization in Subaltern Studies, which was taken from Gramsci's work on the proletariat in industrializing Europe, was abandoned, when in the 1990s she defined subalternity as exclusion from cultural production. Subaltern, she said in an interview, is "everything that has limited or no access to cultural imperialism—a space of difference" (De Kock 1992: 45). In 2005 she underlined the very practical and political dimension of subalternity, stating: "When we are talking about subaltern isolation we are not talking some fuzzy hegemonic identity, we are talking about the abstract structures of civil society to which the subaltern has no access." Defending the notion against its current misuse, she argues "[t]he subaltern is not one of those wishy-washy, weepy, whimsy, hybrid identities type concept at all" (Dhawan 2007 citing Spivak 2003, see also Milevska 2003). Another two years later she highlighted another aspect of societal exclusion: "subalternity is where

social lines of mobility, being elsewhere, do not permit the formation of a recognizable basis of action” (Spivak 2005: 476). An outline of the ongoing debate cannot possibly be done here, but even the short listing of some definitions – some of which we will discuss in more detail later – can at least indicate the richness of the Subaltern Approach. Let us now see what Chatterjee referred to when claiming the end of subaltern studies.

### Why does the indebted farmer of today’s India choose suicide? Reconsidering the subaltern paradigm

Guha’s early theoretical outline has caused an ongoing debate. Especially two interlinked arguments provoked dispute. Firstly that the “*politics of people... [form] an autonomous domain*” (Guha 1982: 40). And secondly his structuralist explanation: the claim of a ‘subaltern consciousness’. Chatterjee, in his recent article, claims that for this theoretical body time has come.

In *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (1983) Guha argued “the lower classes, historically on the defensive, can only achieve self-awareness via a series of negations via their consciousness of the identity and class limits of their enemy.” The subaltern, “learned to recognize himself not by the properties and attributes of his own social being but by diminution, if not negation, of those of his superiors” (Guha 1983: 18).

Chatterjee defends this approach to be appropriate at that time. Guha’s essentialism “was not a question of drawing the faces in the crowd (...) [T]he insurgent peasants of Colonial India were political not in a sense of the individualized bourgeois citizen of liberal democracy, they were mass-political subjects whose rationality had to be sought in the collective life of peasant community. He found his answer in the structure of rebel consciousness which he located, in turn, in the structure of the peasant community” (Chatterjee 2012: 46).

Subaltern Studies back then were accused of positivist essentialism, recovering a subject from archives that actually never existed. Spivak, referring to the political program of the critical historical approach of writing ‘people’s history’, claimed ‘the subaltern’ to be a necessary theoretical fiction. “I would read it“, she wrote, “as a *strategic* use of positivist essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest” (Spivak 1988: 13). She had highlighted the voicelessness of ‘the subaltern’ in her influential essay first published in 1988 *Can the subaltern speak?* (Spivak 2007) She contributed crucially to shaping Subaltern Studies’ twofold program: telling the history of the subaltern and speaking up against contemporary subalternity. Later on, though, she backed her defense of essentialism, claiming “Subaltern Studies had no need for such apologetics” (Spivak 2000: 332).

The whole debate around the subaltern consciousness, Chatterjee argues lately, was based on a misunderstanding. The figure of the ‘rebel consciousness’ was never meant to explain all peasant politics. Defending Guha and the early South Asian Studies group he points to Guha’s essay *Chandras Death* – a story of a non-insurgent peasant – and *Weapons of the Weak* (Scott 1985) to prove that they were aware of the diversity of popular politics as well as the need for their separate analysis. In his influential book Scott pointed to the myriad of forms of everyday practices of subaltern resistance: loud and confronting ones like insurrection and terrorism and silent and inverse forms that don’t involve direct confrontation with authorities, like i.e. desertion, false compliance, pilfering, slander or sabotage.

Subaltern Studies have always had a disproportional interest in and paid much attention to subaltern resistance. Subaltern politics of non-resistance, i.e. cooperation and collaboration, negotiations and involvements were widely ignored and poorly theorized. The figure of the ‘subaltern rebel’ and the structuralist framed argument of a subaltern ‘rebel consciousness’ led to such a limited focus and an overestimation of resistance and subversion in the margins of societies. Spivak’s introduction to *Selected Subaltern Studies* (Spivak 1988) can be read as a critique and redirection of Subaltern Studies, as an effort to abandon Guha’s theoretical framework and its essentialist notion of subalternity and shift away from structuralist explanations to the question of how subaltern self-consciousness emerges.

Another reading suggests that she preserved the idea of a ‘subaltern rebel consciousness’ in post-structural theory even though reworking it as “subaltern effect”. If misunderstood or not, there is a need for awareness that the plurality, complexity and ambiguity of the politics of the people, analyzed in the framework of subalternity, are not dismissed. The theoretical framework and political interest of the approach simply suggest framing any everyday practices and politics as resistance and subversion.

Let’s come back to Chatterjee’s funeral eulogy. He withdraws from two fundamental ideas of theoretical paradigms, firstly the conceptualization of subaltern politics as ‘external’ and independent domain and secondly the conceptualization of the subaltern subject as ‘subaltern rebel’. Both ideas had been criticized much earlier, i. e. in 1992 by Masselos, co-editor of various volumes of Subaltern Studies, speaking up against the stereotyping of ‘the subaltern’ in Subaltern Studies. Ludden in his introduction to *Reading Subaltern Studies* summarizes:

*“[Masselos] calls ‘the subaltern’ . . . a creation, a reification of historians, which combines a polarised social category with the ‘mentality of opposition’, and which he distinguishes from real subaltern people, in the real world (...). He rejects Subaltern Studies theoretical identification of subordinate social status*

*with mentalities of resistance and literary penchant for dramatising class opposition, both of which he traces to the activist world of the late 1960s and early 1970s. (...) In reality, he says, subaltern 'acts of resistance link up with, interact with, intersect with what is happening around them'. In his view, any theory of subaltern autonomy would tend to erase real subalterns from history.*" (Ludden 2002: 23)

Chakrabarty had challenged Guha's argument of subaltern politics being an autonomous domain even earlier. In braces he clarifies that subaltern politics are of course only a 'relative' autonomous and independent domain. In the same text he offers – again quite casually and in parenthesis – a quite short but rich outline of subalternity: "Subalternity – the composite culture of resistance to and acceptance of domination and hierarchy – (...)" (Chakrabarty 1985: 376). In a number of works he points to the complexity and ambivalence of subalternity – a point that will be argued at some length later.

Why then does Chatterjee disqualify the theoretical paradigm of early Subaltern Studies *now*? Drawing to the changing situation of contemporary Indian peasantry – the subaltern subject *per se* – he argues that:

*"(...) now the activities of the government have penetrated deep into the everyday lives of rural people and affect matters like the supply of water to their fields or electricity to their homes, or the access to their villages to public roads and transport to the facilities of schooling, public health services, public distribution to subsidies food grains or kerosene, and employment in public works, or indeed such novel necessities as the registration of lands and houses or births and deaths, should we not expect that even mass political action will no longer be characterized principally by the marks of negation."* (Chatterjee 2012: 47)

The point he makes is by no means valid exclusively with regard to Indian rural peasantry but true for most of the groups that have been described within the framework of Subaltern Studies, i.e. peasants, dalits, slaves, orphans, black people, ethnic and religious minorities. It is quite emblematic that the 'drastic change of the objective conditions of subaltern studies' in his opinion is caused by a changing style of governance and democratization – the role of subaltern subjects and the 'politics of the governed' in history and for change are neglected in that story. Under these new conditions he claims that the theoretical figure of the 'subaltern rebel' is useless: Formations of the political mass and mass-politics in contemporary democratic India cannot be understood applying the antiquated paradigm. Why do indebted farmers of today's India choose suicide despite the rich tradition of insurrection against money-lenders recorded by historians? Chatterjee keeps silence.

*“The subaltern rebel so meticulously portrayed by us, now seemed like a throwback to the days of the British Raj – a construct that historians of colonial India might find useful but one that would be of little help in understanding the contemporary Indian peasant. We now saw that the latter would have to be understood within a new framework of democratic citizenship, perhaps fundamentally altered from the normative ideas of citizenship in western liberal democracies, but nonetheless citizenship, not subjecthood. Subalternity would have to be redefined.”*  
(Chatterjee 2012: 45f)

He doesn't exclude the possibility that there still are and will be “relatively marginal zones” of subaltern insurrection. In those cases the approach still holds its validity, he argues. But “[j]ust as the relation between rulers and subjects have changed, so has the formation of the political mass” (ibid. 47). But nowadays the different groups are increasingly involved with government agencies and contemporary subaltern politics take forms of “[r]ather complex negotiations (...) between the insurgent movements and government agencies over what services and benefits should be delivered, to whom and through which agencies, and who should supervise the operations“ on the one and “the ordinary stuff of democratic politics“ in form of “constant tussles of different populations groups with authorities over the distribution of governmental services” on the other hand. “These tussles become political”, he thereby states, “because many of the demands cannot be conceded within the normal rules of legal and bureaucratic rationality. The usual way accommodating those demands is to declare them as exceptional cases that have to be dealt with by administrative adjustments to the normal rules, without, however, jeopardizing the normative rationality of the legal structure itself” (ibid.).

When it comes to the task of how to understand contemporary subalternities, I feel the need to add one point Chatterjee misses out on. His argumentation never leaves the frame of the national state. Do states form an autonomous domain? Not only federal and provincial governments but also the ‘politics of people’ – to borrow a common term of Subaltern Studies - are shaped and do interrelate with international and global politics as well as different institutions and social movements acting on an international and global scale. Additionally, the practices of global and international politics have changed: they are increasingly creeping into every day lives of even the most marginalized segments on the globe. Questions of exclusion and negation, of subaltern self-consciousness, mechanisms of formation of political mass/action and voice/lessness urgently need to be reconsidered and researched considering new complexities and involvements (see also Spivak 2000a: 332). Thereby it needs to be considered that while on the one hand



global democratic politics and global capitalism, i. e. in form of agendas of development or gender, subjectify and empower different groups that are rather excluded in national or local communities, on the other hand new subalternities arise. Subaltern status(es) become more ambivalent and complex just as the arena of 'subaltern politics'.

But is all that really *new*? And if not so, how to avoid throwing out the baby with the bath? Subaltern Studies today are much more than an antiquated structuralist project, as Chatterjee's article could make us believe. The approach is rather characterized by constant reformulations of its very fundamental concepts and a heterogeneous and pluralist theoretical body. No doubt the 'old' concept of subalternity needs to be reformulated, not only regarding the case of rural peasantry but also subaltern urbanism in the global south (see i.e. Roy 2011) as well as in respect of the 'old' subalternities, that might change and the 'new' subalternities, that are emerging under new societal conditions (in form of new figurations of power, new forms of governance, global capitalism etc). Spivak argued to women being the new subaltern of global capitalism while pointing to the ambiguity of oppression and empowerment, the voicelessness and the giving voice through and in global women politics (Spivak 2000b). She has not only analyzed the changing situation of subaltern women but also of scheduled tribes through political agendas of development and gender (Spivak 2000a). Others argued immigrants, illegalized people and people without papers to be 'the subaltern' of contemporaneous times (see Odem 2009; Chea 2010). Looking to approaches regarding questions of subalternity, we can see a rich and diverse theoretical body and methodological plurality, both with constant reworking under way.

Chatterjee closes his paper with an outlook on new projects to come. According to him not only the theoretical paradigm of Subaltern Studies is useless to understand subalternity in contemporary times, but also the historical methodology is incompatible with current questions. The methodology fails, he argues, when it comes to the study of visual communication i.e. cinema – a widely neglected field in Subaltern Studies but important archive of popular culture (especially in regions with universal illiteracy) especially when it comes to the search for subaltern voice. The historical method also fails when it comes to understanding everyday practices. He points to the "autonomous status of embodied or institutionalized practices whose significance cannot simply be tread of texts describing the underlying concepts." (Chatterjee 2012: 49). Looking towards the new projects to come he sees Subaltern Studies "shift to the ethnographic, the practical, the everyday and the local" (ibid.). The Subaltern Studies approach of his time therefore to him seems mistimed.

### The paradox of subalternity and citizenship

Pandey's book *Subaltern Citizens and their Histories* (Pandey 2010a) is not meant to be a restart but rather a critical rework of the conceptual framework and an emphasis of the political program of Subaltern Studies. The book is quite an innovative assemblage. Works on different subalternities, historical and contemporary ones, in India and the US are standing side by side. It is the result of a new conceptual outline of contemporary subalternity: the 'subaltern citizen'. "The immediate advantage of the term 'subaltern citizen'", Pandey argues, is that "it prevents the easy erection of a barrier between *us* (citizens, the people with history) and *them* (subalterns, people without), as well as between *our times* (the time of equality, democracy, the recognition of human worth) and *earlier times* (the time without reason and such understanding) (Pandey 2010b: 1).

The notion is meant to be a provocative theoretical figure, pointing out the simultaneity of subalternity and citizenship. That, Pandey argues, is a "fairly common contemporary condition" (ibid.: 5), established in the second half of the twentieth century. Subaltern groups in most parts of the globe have been "granted the status of citizens (right-holders, inhabitants, subjects of the state) without becoming quite 'mainstream'" (ibid.). Even for those without such a status, "their existence as relatively stable populations has been secured (...) by the essential character of many services they provide, and they have been able consequently to make certain kinds of claims on state and quasi-state resources" (ibid.). In contrast to Chatterjee, Pandey's conceptual reframing is not only an answer to the changing conditions of subalternity in contemporary society but also meant to finally recover the subaltern subject as an agent of history and change. In his eyes Subaltern Studies so far have failed. While using the term 'citizen', he excuses himself for not having found a more suitable term for now, as "a modifier for 'subaltern', an indicator of the political quality of all subalternity (and all dominance)" (ibid.). The concept is meant to disrupt historical and political narratives.

*"The pairing of the terms subaltern and citizen should accomplish precisely such a disruption, since the idea of the citizen flies in the face of almost everything found in the commonly received narrative of subalternity, which is a description and analysis of a condition anticipated as a condition of the down and out, the miserable, and the victimized. The word subaltern plainly reinforces what the charge of a critical historiography (...) has long been: the endeavor to recover subject positions, lives, possibilities and political actions that have been marginalized, distorted, suppressed and even forgotten. The term citizen helps to underline (...) the fact of historical agency and political arrangement*

*(or ‘persuasion’). It draws attention forcefully to the ‘citizenly’, the political quality in subalternity.” (ibid. 7)*

With his provocative theoretical figure, Pandey highlights the complexities and paradoxes marking the status(es) of subalternity. He explains that he uses the term citizen in two different senses: “first as the bearer of the legal right to residence, political participation, state support and protection in a given territory; the second, a more diffuse sense of acceptance in, and acceptance of, an existing order or existing social arrangements” (ibid.5). His definition cites and twists Chakrabarty’s notion from 1985 (claiming subalternity to be the combination of the resistance against and acceptance of domination). Chakrabarty’s concept was framed by ideas of ‘the state’ and ‘the people’ as separate spheres, the latter forming a relatively independent political domain. People’s (national) history was written as a history of native culture and subaltern insurrections, detached from official (national) history made by elites and political parties (see Ludden 2002: 8). Even though popular resistance to state power was a prominent field of study, subaltern politics were drawn as quite effectless on the national (elite) history. In contrast, Pandey’s concept of citizenly modulation of the subaltern subject directs the focus on the subaltern citizens’ potentiality and practices of changing history. Pandey’s paradox figure of the subaltern citizen, forcing attention to the citizenly forms and political quality of subaltern everyday politics, forms the background to the following discussion of ethnographic data from fieldwork among the Christian immigrant community of Gilgit. In the presented case we will thereby see that at certain times, the ‘citizenly’ needs to be understood in a very literal sense: even though formally citizenship and rights are negated to the immigrant community, their social organization, political practice and everyday experiences are throughout ‘citizenly’ – though in a sense that differs from concepts of liberal democracy.

### Christians in Gilgit

Last summer I spent six weeks doing research in Gilgit.<sup>1</sup> There are only few historical and not any contemporary accounts of the Christian minority living here, so I started with a broad focus reconstructing the migration and getting insights into the current socio-political situation, community organization and religious life. My research interest though was the political sphere, especially the relation between the minority and ‘the state’. The Christian households are scattered over the city and various conflicts crack through the community. To get grip of different perspectives and (hi)stories I needed to establish different access points. Changing and cutting fronts provided not only insights into the rivalries within the community but also created awareness of two things: firstly the plurality of actors and their networking

1 I am grateful to the DAAD for generously funding fieldwork in the town.

and negotiating with government agencies, politicians, local authorities, local middlemen, Pakistani churches and international donors; secondly that political positions, strategies and practices were multilayered as they were internal community politics as well as politics for the Christian community. The image of subalternity has been ascribed to the religious minority in Pakistan not only by international media but also by various scientists. The situation of Christians in Pakistan is generally portrayed as an inter-faith relation. Christians are described as culturally marginalized and discriminated minority in an (increasingly) 'Islamic state' (see Gabriel 2007). O'Brien has contributed to widen the picture by writing a history of Christianity in the region that starts long before the 'Islamization' of the state, the independence of Pakistan and even the 'mass-movement' – a term referring to a mass conversion around the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Punjab. *The Construction of Pakistani Christian Identity* (O'Brien 2006) was published in the Subaltern Studies Series of the Research Society of Pakistan. The work, being the first of that kind and based on a long-term ethnographic study, draws a rich picture of Christian history and culture. He fails though to recover the Christians of Pakistan as subject(s) of history and change. The collective identity drawn in his work is a subaltern identity in the classical shape of early Subaltern Studies. The image drawn of Pakistani Christians is that of 'sweepers', of a 'passive' and 'excluded' community. Community culture and especially religion are drawn as a separate sphere: a space of honor, lived 'equality' and 'ritual role reversing'; a place where the 'spoiled identity' is managed. In his concluding chapter he points to the 'struggle, resilience, and unconquerability' of the Pakistani Christian identity.

Drawing on the frame of subaltern citizenship, in the following pages I decided to tell a different story. We will focus on the relation of the Christian community with the surroundings, the struggles, involvements and negotiations with 'the state' as well as the disputes and cracks that run through it. Special attention will be directed to the 'citizenly' dimension of Christian politics in Gilgit. Different theories create different stories and as you will see, the following one is inspired by the notion of the 'subaltern citizen'. We will come across non-political politics as well as non-Christian Christian politicians, grassroot-democracy and favouritism, exchange systems in which citizenly rights are traded and not least stories in which the hegemonic narratives of impurity and honor, that structure Christian's social status, are subverted.

Externality – the central feature of subalternity – to my opinion is a somehow misleading idea when talking about the relation of the Christian minority of Gilgit and 'the state'. To start in the beginning: the immigration of Christians to Gilgit-Baltistan and especially to the city of Gilgit is directly linked to the (increasing) presence of 'the state' in the northern region. Talking about 'the state' in the context of Gigit-Baltistan is confusing as long as

there are at least two if not three powers of political governance: the government of Gilgit Baltistan, the Pakistani State and the Pakistani military. The installment of a central government in the announced region's capital Gilgit, and the increasing presence of the Pakistani state and military led to a fast increment of public space. Christian military sweepers being transferred back from the northern bases to the lowlands must have spread the notice in their communities that there is work up in the north, different people guessed, and that is how the migration started. The work of public cleaning – be it of streets, canals, offices or toilets – as well as handling certain materials like blood or excrements is widely stigmatized as impure. So while cleaning public space is an intolerable job for locals – the only locals performing such jobs are people with mental disorders and disabilities – not least because the discourse of im/purity is closely linked to the discourse of honor, for Pakistani Christians it has been a quite common work and important resource of income over decades. Today's situation, Pakistani Christians working in the 'spheres of impurity', also results of a historical arrangement: A great part of Christians stem from converts belonging to a group that has been discussed as the caste of sweepers (for a controversial discussion see O' Brien 2006: 37ff). Other job opportunities are scarce, and the public cleaning sector – as they are often government jobs – offers acceptable and secures incomes for Christians. That counts especially for people with low education. Sweeping jobs have led quite many Christian families to urban areas where they perform a great part of public cleaning. Gilgit forms no exception, as the minority also here performs the cleaning of the main streets and canals, the bazaar and public toilets in the city and main mosques. It is also mainly Christians who clean government offices, banks, the university, and hotels and who are holding the positions of sweepers in the military and its different institutions, i.e. it is Christians handling all 'the impure' in the local military hospital. In contrast to lowland cities, in Gilgit only the sweepers employed by the Pakistani state and military have the privileged status of government servants. The vast of public cleaning is organized through a contractor-system. Every two years the contractor-positions, called *tekedar*, are announced newly and due to government authorities the lowest offer wins. Until now it were always Christians holding these positions. The *tekedar* positions promise both: high influence within the community as well as easy access to government officials and social capital in form of relations – a good that is highly important to access certain goods and privileges. Both *tekedars* enjoy sovereignty in managing the work and can decide independently whom and to which conditions they employ their subcontractors. There has been an ongoing struggle for the *tekedar* positions in Gilgit, creating a serious antagonism between two extended families and a lot of trouble within the whole community. Enmity has increased and several cases have been filed in that ongoing conflict. But before telling that story, let me first sketch the general socio-political situation of the Christian immigrants.

It can be stated that the socio-political situation and the politics of Christians in Gilgit generally seem to be shaped by three factors: firstly, a lack of knowledge about Christianity; secondly, the political negation of citizenship; and thirdly an inclusion of Christians in the workforce. Even though we need to recognize that this is an unfavorable inclusion in many aspects it deserves consideration that it creates a certain intimacy between the minority and ‘the state’. Let us take a closer look at those three.

Gilgit-Baltistan officially presents itself as “self-governed region” characterized by ethnic and religious plurality (see <http://www.gilgitbaltistan.gov.pk/>). In the city of Gilgit, apart from Sunni and Shia, there is a community of Ismailis and the mosque of Ahmadiyya in the city center has lately (re)opened. The first Christians migrated to Gilgit in the beginning or mid-1980s. They are, also due to immigration from relatives, today forming the largest extended families holding various community offices and struggle with each other for the *tekedar* positions. Apart from them, there are various nuclear families and also single young men, the latter mostly performing temporary jobs in fields considered unacceptable by locals like private cleaning, construction work or painting. Additionally there are about 100 military sweepers, some with, some without families in Gilgit. The vast majority is living in poor conditions. Some of the households are loosely organized in neighborhoods. Other mechanisms of building solidarity networks between not-related families are marriage, the establishment of fictive kinship relations called *mubala bhai/ mubala behen*, and not least celebrating feasts in the churches as well as by private people. The latter as I learned during my stay can be based on shared Punjabi customs or be invented traditions. The churches and religious community life play an important role for community organization but are by no means the only space and form of community building and governance. In context of a struggle for a ‘real church’ a democratic council was held and the community elected their representatives. But this story will be told a bit later.

Today Gilgit counts about 50 Christian households, nuclear and extended families as well as compositions of non-related persons that reside in the city permanently. As long as I heard Christians haven’t suffered much daily discrimination, nor have there been any cases of faith-based violence. Over the years quite some ‘Christian’ infrastructure has been established: three churches (the so called ‘chapel house’ that has been closed after a conflict, one church called the ‘real church’ and one people refer to as ‘community’ or ‘house church’), a Christian cemetery, a school and an NGO, running different community and disaster relief projects in the region. Christian people used to praise their new home when talking to me, not only for natural beauty but also for the situation in the north being friendly and safe. Thereby they pointed to lowland Pakistan, where they felt insecurity and faith-based

violence increasing and fear rising<sup>2</sup>. I noticed however that quite a lot of security arrangements are being made: high walls have been built around the church compound, pupils are transported from hostels to school and back, wardens watch the gates of the Christian institutions, many private houses are protected by dogs and people generally don't stay out after dusk. The arrangements, people argued, are necessary because of the ongoing sectarian tensions between Sunnis and Shia and the masses are incalculable in times of turmoil. "We have to be careful, especially in Gilgit-Baltistan", were the words of a pastor. Being careful is also an imperative that shapes his politics. "We do not want to get involved in politics", he insisted and somehow denied the political dimension of his broad networking activities, institutional involvements, his negotiations with government officials, politicians, intelligence agencies, local authorities and not least the exchange arrangements between the Christian community and 'the state' that he shaped.

Local people are inexperienced and they lack knowledge about Christianity, is what I was told as explanation for the situation. And indeed I was surprised that locals hardly knew anything nor recognized the presence of the religious minority. "Are there any Christians?" I was asked various times. "Is it a sect of Islam?" is a common question towards the pastor who also experiences a lot of curiosity. "Some" he said, "come to church to see if we really worship idols." Till now conflicts between the Christian community and local opponents could be solved. In the pastor's eyes, the NGO and the school thereby play a crucial role. The NGO is running a peace project in which women from all faiths and local groups are provided a cost-free sewing training and the mixed groups are being educated in peace. The Christian school is a place where children from Christian families are studying together with local children. Due to its good reputation quite some local religious and political leaders send their children here. While the pastor highlighted the two Christian institutions as creating spaces for people of different faiths to come together, I'd like to point out that they create good grounds for networking, cooperation and exchange with local people and institutions.

---

2 Within the last years violence against Christians is on the rise. Various Christian neighbourhoods and churches have been attacked. Last year the attack of two suicide bombers blasting in the catholic church of Peshawar caused 85 deaths and various injured. The attack shattered the already frightened community. In 2011 Shahbaz Bhatti, the first ever Christian holding the office of a minister, had been killed by Therik-i-Taliban after Bhatti, in his office as minister of minorities, spoke up publically against the blasphemy law. The disputed law, installed under the military dictatorship of Zia- ul Haq in 1986, presents a serious thread for religious minorities living in Pakistan. Repeatedly Christians have been accused of blasphemy and punished with draconic sentences. The mob burning down a Christian neighbourhood in Lahore in 2011, causing various deaths and great fear, is argued to have happened after a sanitary worker allegedly blasphemed the Prophet Mohamed.

Christian residents are denied citizenship in the self-governed region so far. Legally they are citizens of the Pakistani state, while in Gilgit-Baltistan they have the status of immigrants. Even those who met the formal needs for citizenship weren't granted citizen status. The consequence is that Christians have no formal right to vote. That counts for all Christians in Gilgit-Baltistan: the community in Gilgit as well as the smaller ones concentrating around the military bases in Chilas and Skardu. According to the Christians I talked to, the status as immigrants modulates the precarious political situation of Christians in Gilgit-Baltistan: the lack of voting rights, the denial of land ownership and the impossibility to get permanent jobs in the region's government sector. These legal restrictions, which have been debated for some time, thereby aren't practically enforced on all immigrants. It would have needed further research to find out why these rules are unequally enforced on different groups and people who immigrated to Gilgit. In practice though, it becomes apparent that the regulations of citizenship are also negotiable in the case of the Christian immigrants. With the power of relations rules have been bent and even though not citizen status but citizen rights became accessible. In fact though, at the moment the religious minority has no legal political representation within the democratic government neither of the region nor of the city. There were rumors, that the region has reserved seats for the minority (that due to the immigration politics are vacant). Whatsoever Gilgit's Christians still hold their NICs of Pakistan and their old homes are registered as their permanent address. As long as I got to know, they don't make use of their voting right in their home towns and do not profit from their status as citizens of the Pakistani state – for which they are sometimes envied by locals. Another result of the unsolved political relation between Pakistan and the region of Gilgit-Baltistan and the latter's immigration politics is that the Christian immigrants practically have no access to goods and services provided to the poor by 'the state': neither to the services of the region nor to those provided through national welfare schemes. They could neither access the services and goods distributed through the Benazir Bhutto Income Support Program nor out of the Bait-ul-mal Fund.

As a third aspect of the situation and politics of Christians in Gilgit, I want to discuss the 'inclusion' of the minority and the intimacy between the minority and 'the state' created through work performance. Christians perform government duties not only for the government of Gilgit-Baltistan and the municipality of Gilgit but also the Pakistani state and military present in the northern region. Christians are not only present but deeply involved in the governance of public space: as government servants of the Pakistani state and military, as permanent workers, *tekedars* and subcontractors, sweepers, drivers, wardens, gardeners etc. They literally form a part of 'the state'. The term inclusion might be irritating here and no doubt it needs to be highlighted that it is a quite unfavorable inclusion, as long as most work they perform



is stigmatized as impure, polluted and dishonorable. Even though locals denied that the stigma of jobs and materials is passed on to those who perform them, I witnessed certain discomfort of locals with the Christian immigrants. To quote my local co-researcher, who joined me on two afternoons visiting Christian sweeper families: “See, I am not like the others.” He said that when shaking the hand of the mosques toilet sweeper. A government official left no doubts when explaining to me why the municipality organizes cleaning work through the contractor/subcontractor model: it serves to keep distance between the officers of the municipality and those handling waste, blood and excrements. In Gilgit-Baltistan as mentioned before not only Christians work in the ‘sphere of impurity’. As I learned from the same official, Christians even perform the better (paid) jobs as they generally work as *sweepers*, while the least honored job, that of the *coolis* – the collection and burning of waste – is done by local people with disabilities and mental disorders.

Looking to the very practice, the relation between the in wide parts poor and illiterate religious minority and local Muslim society as well as ‘the state’ is by no means characterized only by distance and avoidance but also by proximity and intimacy. Cleaning government offices and private houses demands and creates mutual trust. In contrast to the other representation of these relations, I want to argue, that Christians are much closer to the Muslim society and somehow much less excluded from ‘the state’ than generally perceived. Current works tend to mark the religious minority as ‘subaltern’ in a very classical sense (O’Brien 2006) and limit the picture to that of a structurally discriminated religious minority in a state that is discussed as ‘Islamic’ (Gabriel 2007). Such images of the situation negate the intimacy, which also shapes the relation between the religious minority and ‘the state’. At the end I am thankful to the local police and security agencies who with their mistrust made me realize the intimacy of that relation. While I had – not least because of the common representations of Pakistani Christians as excluded and subaltern – naïvely assumed my field of research laying at the very ‘margins of the state’, their attention and suspicion of misusing the Christians to access ‘the state’ from below helped to realize that I had entered into a quite intimate and sensible relationship characterized mainly by trust.

### Politics of ‘subaltern citizenship’

“Jesus kingdom is based on relations”. The pastor’s principle not only describes his ‘non-political’ political strategy but reflects the very conditions of the politics of the religious minority that, as we will see, is worth to consider also as an immigrant community. To fulfill his divine mission of the ‘uplift and development’ of the Christian community in Gilgit – the mission was conveyed to him in a dream shortly before graduating from a bible college in Lahore – the pastor has built up a quite complex network comprising west-

ern missionaries, foreign donors, local party politicians as well as independent candidates, different local businessmen, officers from the municipality, people from police and security agencies, influential Muslim citizens and his 'mother church' in Lahore, to just mention a few. Within less than 15 years, a lot of networking and support from a handful of local Christian families, he has managed to build a school, found an NGO (that has faced strong oppositions), and realized various projects of community development, crisis relief and peace education. He also managed to bend local rules and buy land to erect a Christian colony, with a 'real church', a women's training center, two hostels for pupils (where the Christian children from the Christian community of Chilas live during school times) and a house for his family. The eight plots for private houses, that together with the walled church area make the *pasban colony*, the Shepherd's Colony, were given to the church elders. The pastor's phrase tells a lot about his work and career in Gilgit. Settling down in the city as a young man with a great vision, the way to reach his aims was constant networking and negotiating. He is successful with his strategy of *doing politics* without getting involved into the sphere of formal politics. That somehow characteristic form of subaltern politics needs to be considered when sketching the field of Christian politics. When looking to political practice in Gilgit the spheres of subaltern and formal politics are difficult to be separate and I doubt that they are clearly conceptually separable. In Gilgit not only (theoretically bureaucratically accessible and distributed) goods and services provided by government agencies but also citizenship and (theoretically inalienable) rights are subjects of political negotiations that are not necessarily recognized or assumed as politics. Citizen rights have been traded like goods. It is maybe needless to say that the simple *having* of citizenship and citizen rights is nothing but a fiction of western liberal democracy. Looking to political practice, citizenship is rather to be understood as a subject and result of political struggles and democratic rights are only showing effect when practically claimed and acted out in certain ways. It is a difficult question how to talk about such practices like the trading of citizenly rights as goods: Should we name it corruption, subversion of power or cultural appropriation of rights? What I want to argue here is that not only in systems of favoritism but also wherever democracies become exclusive, certain forms of corruption like the 'trade' of citizenship, votes or rights (means things considered to be inalienable in the theory of liberal democracy) need to be assumed as possible profoundly 'citizenly' politics of the excluded. The same goes for accessing and trading goods and benefits provided by states and the global community. Through such 'citizenly' politics, the imagination of democracy and the claiming of rights outside the formal field of politics, the Christian minority of Gilgit has received various 'citizenly' goods in the past. Voting rights, to just mention one example, have been exchanged for the freedom of choice, and the community's contribution to election victory was honored

with a paved street to the church. Such practices linking the Christian community and the local political sphere need to be understood in their complexity and ambivalence as long as they move somewhere in-between trade, corruption, moral economy and democracy. Some exchange-systems thereby point quite far into the future: Building a school with a good reputation and accepting the children from influential local Muslim families is not only of help in the here and now as it helps to build moral relationships, but is also assumed as a good means to build a better future for all Christians in the country. The pastor is sure that education creates a moral bond between the privileged Muslim students and the Christian minority: When his students will be in power, they will somehow reciprocate, the pastor argued, pointing to evidence in the national history of Pakistan.

The pastor of the 'real church', embedded in a strong support network, is one among many Christians engaged in the field of politics. The first of five men I want to introduce is his antagonist in the religious sphere: the pastor of the so called 'house church'. The ongoing friction between the two pastors and their local supporters interfere deeply with community life. The pastor of the 'real church' and his people are being accused of being elitist, favoring their own people and lacking solidarity with the poor. The people of the 'house church' stylize themselves in contrast as the 'real Christians' with the 'good hearts' as they are caring for the needy. When listening to the other faction they point to the marginal role of the 'house church'-people and blame them for being stuck in a 'culture of poverty'. They are blamed of opposing their uplift strategy for the community. What is irritating is that both churches follow the same denomination and belong to the same Pentecostal mother church located in Lahore. As I attended church services and rituals in both churches, it seems that they follow quite similar cultural and religious practices. The reason for the community split isn't to be found in the sphere of religion itself but rather in the socio-political struggles, to which I will come at some later time.

The third Christian actor in the political field that I want to introduce – and this time people name his activities 'politics' – is a dreaded and widely condemned man. He is an offspring of one of the very first Christians that settled down in Gilgit. I had to puzzle together information from different sources to get a picture, firstly because the story from different factions of the community, local authorities and the newspaper differed substantially and secondly because people avoided elaborating the stories about him in detail. One reason behind was fear, as they mentioned, another an ongoing community conflict in which he was prominently involved and that was about to be fought in court. How come that man was so dreaded? He was sweeping the streets when he accidentally witnessed a crossfire in which a local politician was involved. It was his testimony in court that led to that the defendant was completely exonerated. After the incident the Christian sweeper, which

in contrast to most other Christians who originate from Punjab is from former NWFP, enjoyed great support from the family of the former defendant. The unusual alliance led to an enduring empowerment of the sweeper and his family: He became member of his supporters' party and started a political career in Gilgit, claiming to be the *sadder* of the Christians and as their president also their legal political representative. While he is recognized as the Christian *sadder* in society – even though locals made fun of the sweeper playing the politician wearing white clothes and black vest – the Christians themselves pointed out that he was never elected by the community nor did he act on behalf of them. The reasons why he was feared were two: his influential networks on one hand and his rule when he was holding the *teke-dar* position. Rumors told that he held the contractor-job of the municipality due to his networks to the local politician's family, whom he saved from jail. Christians remember these times as a 'reign of terror' arguing that he tried to establish a *chaudhary system* in the city. The term *chaudhary* originates from colonial times and is traditionally used for landlords as well as a title of honor. With *chaudhary system* people generally refer to a hierarchical system, working on the base of dependency, sometimes in form of bound labor or slavery. I knew the term from my prior research in Islamabad, where members of the Christian communities with the term *chaudhary* referred to the (Christian) landowners, as well as those men holding broker positions. Due to the fact that such systems provide benefits and social securities – just like any patronage-system – *chaudharis* are ambivalent figures. The reputation of the *chaudharis* I came across oscillated between good and bad. Usually these men were blamed for having appropriated the land and goods where their power grounded in illegitimately. In Gilgit the terms *chaudhary* and *chaudhary system* were only used in a negative sense. Stories ranking around the self-named president of the Christians accused him of corruption, of having created fatal dependencies by making his laborers drug addicted, and for having treated them like slaves. His image was drawn as that of an entirely bad man, sometimes even as 'the evil' itself. In the ascribed role of the nominal Christian betraying his community he was imagined as a mythical counterpart of all those, who played with the role of being 'the good'. He was also involved in a rivalry for the town's *teke-dar* positions – a conflict that had recently dramatized: The self-named *sadder* and his sons were suspected of having murdered the two brothers of the rivaling family. They were shot in the open street in 2012. When I did my research, the suspect had left Gilgit and while some people guessed that he fled the city fearing revenge, others told that with the help of his influential friends he got a *teke-dar* position in another town.

The fourth political actor that I wish to present here is the mentioned rivaling family: an extended, internally quarreling family to which the two murdered brothers belonged. During my fieldwork the family held office of

both contractor positions. The victims' older brother was in charge for organizing the cleaning of public streets and canals as well as the town market, being the *tekedar* of the municipality. His brother in law was holding the *tekedar* position offered by military. The latter's job is to organize the cleaning of the so called NLI market and a public toilet, which are both located on a former military compound in the very center of the city. Both men have settled down in Gilgit about seventeen years ago. Over the years they brought many relatives to the region. They were generally referred to as 'good people' as they were usually compared with the former *tekedar* and his rule. Lately though a vote of no confidence against the victims' brother in law had caused serious disturbance. I first met the men in front of the public toilet where he was hanging out with his workers. After we spent the afternoon together with his family, I was invited to attend a celebration in his house the other week. What was to celebrate was the 'first shave' of his oldest son. The huge feast, to which the whole community was invited and many families showed up, had the character of a Punjabi wedding. The shave of the boy was performed by his uncles and father – but that was a marginal scene. The climax of the evenly celebration was rather when the priest of the 'real church' opened the prayers and issued the blessing for the family and when shortly after that the guests lavished *hars* on the boy and his parents. *Hars* – necklaces made of flowers and money – are traditionally given to the bridegroom and his parents. These (money-) gifts publicly show off the family's social status. In such kind of feasts solidarity networks are not only made visible but also (re) generated, as long as giving *hars* is a social obligation that usually requires balanced reciprocation. The illuminated scene, which happened in the dawn in the courtyard of the family's house, turned out to be a great spectacle. One guest after the other posed with the freshly shaved boy and his parents in front of a plenty of pulled out mobile phone cameras. At night the guests were served generously with different meat-dishes and alcohol.

I had been curious about the ceremony as long I had never heard of, nor attended a 'first shave' before. There was a good reason for that, I learned that evening, because the first shave of a son isn't a Punjabi tradition, as the hosts insisted, but what not only ethnologists but also locals called an 'invented tradition'. By celebrating his sons 'first shave' the host while enhancing prestige and showing up as a respected man with a great solidarity network, at the same time became highly suspicious. Why did he celebrate such a costly community feast and why at that very moment? The people I talked to offered different explanations: While some argued that the host intended to create acceptance for the marriage arrangement of his under aged daughter, others related the feast to the unsettled murder of his two brothers in law – as in that context he had fallen in the community's disgrace. The whole murder-case was confusing: While the local newspaper had announced the self-made *chaudhary* as the suspected murderer, within the Christian com-

munity at least one more man was openly suspected and that was the feast's host. While the official story was one of envy between the two families rivaling for the town's *tekedar* positions, rumors circled around the inner-family problems of the victims. All stories and their variations offered deep insights into the structure and conflicts of the young Christian community in Gilgit. Still though as an ethnographer it was neither my job nor was it a good idea to get involved in the unsettled case too deep. The danger to slip into ethical dilemmas was huge. Here I just want to highlight one highly interesting aspect of the case: The double murder was widely discussed in public but in the Christian versions it was only as the murder of just one man. The second victim – brother of the first – was not only left out of the stories but literally wiped out of the community's collective memory. Why was that? It was on the cemetery where I got a hint as there was only one brother's grave. The second victim, who died shortly after the incident in hospital, had converted to Islam and was married to a Muslim woman. If my information is right, that tragic case of the two brothers was cracked in two not only in the narratives of the Christians, but also by local authorities. The case of the murder of the Christian man, who died on the spot, was still open, while the one of his converted brother seemed to be closed. To cite the local newspaper informing about the case shortly after the killing: "It should be clear that this is the first incident of this sort in the history of Gilgit-Baltistan". The article highlights that this was the first ever crime against the Christian minority, leaving no doubts that the murder was a "pure result of personal enmity". That was the result of the police investigation after hearing the testimony of the wounded brother in hospital. Such clarifications seemed necessary not least because the very performance suggested a link to sectarian tensions shaking the region for decades. It was a classical target killing: a masked man had shot at the two brothers during sweeping work from the back of a driving motorbike. While the case of the Christian victim was about to be handled in court, the case of his converted brother had been solved otherwise: within the legal framework of the sectarian tensions. As his wife's neighbors told, she had received compensation by the state which is a common relief given to families affected by acts of terrorism.

There are more figures and groups in the young history of the Christian immigrants' community, which should be mentioned when talking about politics. One that hasn't appeared so far, not least because I came across him quite late in my fieldwork and couldn't gather much information nor meet him to talk, is the democratically elected *saddar* of the Christians. The carpenter, who has his own business in the side road of Jutial, is the offspring of another one of the very first Christians who settled down in Gilgit. He somehow inherited his status from his father. An inscription on the cemetery honors him and his burial is remembered widely as it showed the great respect and central role the man played. His son not only administers the cemetery

today but also used to lead the prayers in the former community church. Today though he is an ally of the pastor of the 'real church' and holds office of an elder there. On Sundays it is him leading the small but impressive community's ritual. The tall man with the henna-red beard stands up in front of the community and after a twisted horn is blown raises his fist and shouts three times with his strong voice: *Jesus Christ victory!* Hands raise and the people echo his battle cry.

### 'Making a community' and struggling for a 'real church'

As mentioned before, Gilgit at the moment has two churches: a so-called 'real church' and a 'house church'. The status quo, even though it is contested, has been stable for at least six years. It is the result of a long struggle, complex involvements and negotiations not only within the Christian community but also with different local government agencies, Pakistani churches and international missions and donors. In the memory of the community, the struggle for a 'real church' is strongly connected with the 'making of community'. What that means and how it worked deserves a closer look. Thereby we will come across a whole range of politics: politics of citizenly and democratic self-empowerment of the immigrant religious minority, different forms of resistances and rivalries, negotiations and collaboration with 'the state', subversion of local power, and not least taking advantage of the local sectarian conflict in the minority's struggle for a place.

Not least was the name of the first public place for Christian prayers in Gilgit disputed. People referred to it as 'the catholic church', always emphasizing that it was not a 'real church'. Most called it the 'chapel house'. The place that after a dispute has been closed was established by nuns from Kohat/ Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa in the beginning of the 1990s. Local Christians used to hold prayers on Sundays and the nuns came every three months to perform ceremonies and give sacraments. "Sunday prayers was simply not enough, the church was in a bad condition and the area far away from people's home and not safe. Extremists were living around. The nuns disappeared and people weren't happy with the one leading the prayers afterwards. They stayed away." That was one story I was told. Another one, that even though it always created laughs disqualified the place as a proper church, told that after the nuns fled the place police filed a case against the Muslim warden who was hiding marihuana inside the church. A third one offers insights into the power games and ongoing community disputes in the field of religion and tells of the very beginning of community building of the Christian immigrants who started a life in Gilgit.

At the start of research my perspective on the Christian community was strongly shaped by the pastor of the 'real church', who indeed was a great starting point as long as he offered rich and well structured information of

the history of Christians and local institutions, especially the 'real church', school and NGO. I was very lucky to have met two Christian sweepers in university, as the fictive brothers generously helped me with my research and were open to discuss all thoughts and ideas. It was them who introduced me to many local Christian families, and while through the pastor I had come to know the uplifted, better off part of the community, they felt responsible to show me the 'real' situation, the poorer and other part of the community. They invested a lot of time to help me and were very talkative. For some reason though, the story I will tell soon was held back from me until the very end of my fieldwork. Sitting together drinking tea after another marathon of visiting Christian families in the city center, they started telling community history. The *saddar* of the community was elected before any church had been established. That time there was only the chapel house and there was no room for the community to meet regularly. A dispute arose between the people and the Catholic Church. People wanted a 'real church': a place to meet any time and a cross on the roof. The nuns filed a case against the whole community, accusing four men by name, for wanting to take over the property of the catholic monastery. The police started investigations and a couple of men were taken into investigative custody. One year before people had met in a private house and 'made a community': two representatives were selected carrying the title of *brothers*. While the duty of one of them was to visit families and to pray with them the other was elected as *saddar* of the Christians. The latter was in charge of arranging the community's affairs and organize help for people in great need. He was also responsible for negotiating the community's conflict with the nuns. There were four or five more of such plenary meetings to which each household was called to send a male representative. They all sat down in the *saddar's* house. About two years after he was elected as the religious leader of the first community church. A house was rented for church activities and prayers and it was his job to collect the money from the community to pay the rent for the 'house church' and community activities. At that time today's pastor of the 'real church' had already arrived at Gilgit. He was holding Sunday prayers in another 'house church'. People remember that he was trained by North-American missionaries and supported by the well-off Christian families who sympathized with his program of social uplift and development through education. In the aftermath of a conflict he and one of his elder who then led the prayers with him, parted ways. The conflict arose when the latter wanted to take better care of the poor families but the pastor rejected his request. As a result the church elder graduated and started studying at the bible college in Lahore. Today it is him leading the community church, the so called 'house church'. In the last years, this split of the Christian community has deepened, the two men told me. Sometimes the dispute between the pastors is acted out openly as rivalry, they argued, pointing to religious conventions that were held in Gilgit shortly



one after the other. That was a matter of truth as taking part was a sign of belonging and solidarity. As a result each side boycotted the other's convention.

The two brothers, who came to Gilgit without any relatives around, established a fictive brotherhood to help out each other in daily life and in times of need. They both belonged to the 'house church'. Church belonging has become a serious matter in Gilgit. In local debates not only 'real' Christians are split from 'nominal' Christians but belonging is also a matter of rich and poor. The two university sweepers were sure: their community comprises of the poor and honest people with good hearts. They are the real Christians as long as their church is caring for the needy and newly arrived. Knowing that I had been in touch with the other pastor and also attended prayers in the other church, their critique was sensible but they still tried hard to convince me that the other, economically better off part of the community was an elitist movement. They felt the situation deeply immoral and unjust as the other pastor had received great support from international donors and the mother church in Lahore and with that money now only helped their own people. They doubted the 'real churches' pastor being a good man as it was him who had started a morally highly dubious loan system in Gilgit. The better off people borrowed money to the poor demanding high interest rates. Morally on the right side, the needy gave back all the borrowed money once they realized the deceit. When asking the accused pastor, I heard another story of the so called *Christian welfare society*. It was the widely respected father of the elected *saddar* who founded the *komiti* (a common word used for rotating credit systems in Pakistan). When he invited him to lead the *Christian welfare society* the pastor refused. From his perspective the institution collapsed because the poor people misused it: they spent the credits on drugs instead of creating a business and as a result never paid the money back. He had his version of guilt and here the elected *saddar* was the morally dubious figure of the community. Blaming him of misusing his offices as he keeps money that he collects from the community for himself, he was responsible for various projects to have failed.

But now back to the story. How did the 'real church' come into being? With help of some North-American friends the pastor – by that time he had already started his school project and registered the NGO – bought a plot to construct the Christian colony that is supposed to stand as model for the region. That was back in 2004. After difficult personal and legal negotiations, the landowner, a local Sunni, was willing to sell and they bought the land in Jutial, paying an exaggerated price. The town engineer remembers when the pastor and his men came to him. After he had checked all the laws and as he found no regulations that spoke against building a church in Gilgit-Baltistan he authorized the construction. His story ended here as his role was marginal as long as the construction plans were already completed and the pastor and his people managed everything by themselves. The pastor remembers

all details from here. At the moment when the wall was built serious local resistance arose. The main opponents of the colony were some local mullahs but also the self-proclaimed Christian *saddar*, who was suspected to have spurred the mullahs on. The latter back then openly accused the pastor of bringing ‘western agenda and money’ to Gilgit and wanting to build an ‘American Colony’. The pastor suggested that he acted against the project as he feared to lose his power to him. Whatsoever the mullahs went to court and filed a case against the pastor. The situation got worse but then – to make use of one of the pastor’s parenthesis “Jesus is stronger than the Taliban” – the circumstances radically changed. In early 2005, Sunnis killed the local Shia leader and after a range of target killings, the leaders of both Shia and Sunni side fled the city. A curfew was imposed and the city remained paralyzed for several weeks. This outbreak of sectarian violence turned out to be a unique chance for the church project. Public attention was distracted and due to the fact that the church plot was located in the cantonment area, moving around during the curfew was possible here. With the help of community members and neighbors, who were stuck at home during the curfew and without work and income, the construction got started. Following the pastor’s story, everything went very quickly and when the curfew was over the church was built. Once the church was constructed, local opponents found no more support and so in 2006 the church was finally consecrated. Since then, construction in the Shepherd’s Colony went on. A women’s vocational training center was raised on the top and most houses have been finished. During my stay the boys’ hostel was completed. The struggle for a ‘real church’ though is going on. Recently the debate of the realness of the church is again on the rise as long as some critics argue that there shouldn’t be anything above a church – especially not a woman’s training center.

Negotiations and struggles for space and a recognition of Christians as citizens of the city are going on. The political project for next election period is already set: to get a filter plant for the community. In times of scarcity the Christian colony has no access to water. Even though they are legally eligible, the local wardens of water distribution deny supply. Whether that discrimination is grounded in faith relations or whether it is linked to their status as immigrants isn’t clear. What is clear though is that there is a base for ‘citizenly’ negotiations. Just as the pastor said: “Jesus’ kingdom is based on relations”.

### Thinking ambiguity. Multiplying modernity.

The situation of the Christians in Gilgit is marked by political negation *and* inclusion in ‘the state’, by subalternity *and* the potentiality of citizenship. Pandey’s theoretical figure of the ‘subaltern citizen’ is useful to shed light on such paradoxical situations as well as to focus the politics of the people living under such conditions:

*“[T]he phrase ‘subaltern citizen’ is not primarily intended to suggest the subordinate status of certain citizens, though of course it can be used precisely to describe such a condition in particular times and places. Nor it is used to describe a historical process of moving from status of subalternity to one of citizenship, although again such a process may indeed be traced in different parts of the world, not least in the context of the anti-colonial struggles of the eighteenth to twentieth centuries. I am concerned in the main with a somewhat different proposition, having to do with the potential that the subaltern possesses (or the threat s/he poses) of becoming a full member of community, the village, the ward and the polis.” (Pandey 2010b: 4)*

The situation of Gilgit’s Christians is widely marked by not being involved in democratic structures and not having citizenship. The field of ‘politics’ seems better to be avoided, when wanting to achieve something. Own political agency was generally downplayed by all actors. So is the early argument of Subaltern Studies right? Does the subaltern, do subaltern politics form a separated sphere? And does that sphere emerge through negation by the state and/or by self-negation in the field of the ‘political’? But then how about Chatterjee’s argument of increasing involvement and negotiating of subaltern subjects with the state due to democratization and creeping technologies of governance? Looking at the politics in practice of the self-designated community and its different quarrelling actors, we get quite another picture: ‘Citizenly’ democratic structures have been established, citizen rights are being claimed and negotiated, and – despite the status and rights aren’t ascribed – in practice they prove to be accessible and it is possible to act them out. The unsettled political relation between the region Gilgit-Baltistan and the state of Pakistan not least shapes the actual socio-political situation. In the immigrated minority’s struggle for a place, democratic participation, access to goods and political representation, citizen rights appear to be a negotiable and alienable good that can be traded and exchanged within highly privatized networks spanning between the minority and ‘the state’. Citizenship becomes a question of appropriation and practice rather than of ascription and belonging. Pandey’s philosophical argument of the potentiality of citizenship can be understood quite literally. While politics of the Christian community on the one hand seem to be shaped by a collective experience and awareness of negation and exclusion – a ‘subaltern self-consciousness’ – on the other hand they are formed by the experience and the vision of democracy and citizenship. Democratization is neither an ‘objective condition’, nor is political involvement of marginalized people necessarily a result of changing styles of governance (from above).

To understand contemporary subalternities there is an urgent need to reconsider citizenship and *democracy as imagination* and therefore as po-

tentiality. The ‘citizenly’ of subaltern politics is not only a matter of awareness on the side of the researcher but asks for the very recognition of ‘citizenly’ visions and practices not only under democratic conditions, but also where democracy seems absent. Such an approach requires reworking the very concepts of democracy and citizenship. How are democracy and citizenship imagined, experienced and acted out in everyday life? How does a citizenly self-consciousness emerge? What are rights as political practice?

Theoretical paradigms are coming and passing. They are linked to their times. But who is to decide about when it is time and what are the reasons to bury paradigms? And that time I see no need to throw out the babies with the bath. The image of the ‘subaltern rebel’, just as that of the ‘subaltern citizen’ are theoretical notions that are useful to direct attentions and create awareness of certain aspects of subalternity and power/knowledge in the past as well as in the present. Different times provoke different concepts and different concepts are useful to tell different (his)stories. Our time if anything is calling for the multiplying of (his)stories and tracing of their interrelation.

We are living in the time of multiple modernities. Concepts seemingly belonging to the past can be useful to understand the present; just as stories about the imagined *others* tell stories about the authorities who write them. Subalternities have always been partial and subaltern societal statuses complex and paradox. So are contemporary subalternities. They are marked by (partial) exclusion and (partial) inclusion, political negation and recognition, suppression and involvement, resistance and cooperation, struggle and negotiation, collaboration and sabotage, subalternity and citizenship. To research, tell and undo subalternities, paradoxical theoretical figures and attention to the potentiality of citizenship (as well as domination) are no doubt of great use. But I don’t see that they are able to replace concepts that Chatterjee argues to belong to former times. Researching among the Christian minority in Pakistan and Gilgit, not only the paradox concept of the subaltern citizen but also the un-modulated concept of subalternity proves to be useful. “What an abundance of water! And the impressive caliber of the water pipes!” This was the exclamation of an old man, when I asked him about his job. He has worked all his life making bricks in rural Punjab and has come to Gilgit only lately after his wife has died, to live with his daughter’s family. He found a job in one of the central mosques, cleaning the toilet. His story, and maybe also his experience subverts the dominant narration of impurity and pollution, which is linked to the precarious social status of Christians in South Asia. His narration can be read as an inversion, as it is a story of abundance and water, instead of impurity and scarcity. Water thereby is not only a strong symbol of purity and means of purification, but also privilege of locals. In the winter months water turns to a contested good in Gilgit: a hard time for non-locals and new immigrants. In many narrations that I came across during my fieldwork presence (personal) histories of labor migration were

represented as a divine plan. Coming to Gilgit, all the suffering and struggles of migration have been argued to be part of one's personal mission like the uplift and development of the poor Christian community, the building of a Pakistani nation, the establishing peace in the north, the fight against the 'evil' Christian *chaudhary*, the salvation of the unfaithful 'Christians-by name' and 'pagan' ethnic tribes of the north etc. Let me point to the fact that 'subaltern' resistance against structures of domination in the discussed case did not only take the form of an insurrection against 'the state' but that resistances also turned against the own community i.e. habitual practices or its subaltern identity. In Gilgit, one faction of the self-named Christian community is openly fighting against the Christian 'culture of poverty'. Their so-called 'fight against the broom' (the broom is the symbol of the menial cleaning-services) neither turns against the very precarious social condition of Christians which is based on the strict division of labor, nor against the South Asian narration of the Christian sweeper or discourses of im/purity, but rather turns against the 'sweeper community' itself – those of the own people who accept their fate and stick to a collective identity as the 'poor' but 'real' Christians.

It was already in the mid-eighties when Chakrabarty pointed to the ambiguity and paradoxical character of culture(s) of subalternity. The contradiction of resistance against and acceptance of a situation of domination was argued to be an effect of the very structural condition of subalternity. Chatterjee recently has argued that times have changed and so has subalternity, pointing to a shift from subaltern 'politics of resistance' to 'negotiation' and 'involvement' with the state. But are exclusion and the image of the subaltern subject as 'subaltern rebel' imaginations that belong to the past? Should the image of the subaltern subject be replaced by one of the 'subaltern citizen'? Revising the material from my research among the Christian minority in Gilgit I argued that to be a wrong move. Firstly I argued that the situation of the religious minority in Gilgit and their politics need to be understood in their wider context. The diffuse, ambivalent societal situation in Gilgit, shaped by religious plurality, ongoing sectarian tensions and the unsettled debate of the political relation between the Pakistani state and the region of Gilgit-Baltistan rather asks for reworking concepts of democracy and citizenship and a multiplication instead of the limitation of theoretical figures. Secondly I would like to point out that a reflected diversity of concepts enables the researcher to get rid of the paradoxes and complexities of subaltern societal positions, and the experiences and politics of contemporary subalternities that are crucially shaped by exclusion and inclusion as well as the imagination and potentiality of citizenship(s). And not least the diversity of theories and concepts brings the question of authority on the scene. At the end it is me who is responsible for the story told.

## References

- Chakrabarty, D. (1985) Invitation to a Dialogue. In: Guha, R. (ed.) *Subaltern Studies IV. Writing on South Asian History and Society*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, pp. 364-376.
- Chatterjee, P. (2012) After Subaltern Studies. *Economic and Political Weekly* XVII (35), pp. 44-49.
- Chea, P. (2010) Biopower and the New International Division of Productive Labor. In: Morris, R. (ed.) *Reflections on the History of an Idea: Can the Subaltern Speak?* New York: Columbia University Press, pp. 179-212.
- De Kock, L. (1992) Interview with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak: New Nation Writers Conference in South Africa. *Ariel: A Review of International English Literature* 23 (3), pp. 29-47.
- Dhawan, N. (2007) Can the Subaltern Speak German? And Other Risky Questions. *Migrant Hybridism Versus Subalternity*. <http://translate.eipcp.net/strands/03/dhawan-strands01en#redir> (accessed 01/04/2014)
- Gabriel, T. (2007) *Christian Citizens in an Islamic State*. Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Guha, R. (1982) On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India. In: *ibid.* (ed.) *Subaltern Studies I*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, pp. 1-7.
- Guha, R. (1983) *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Ludden, D. (2003) Introduction: A Brief History of Subalternity. In: *ibid.* (ed.) *Reading Subaltern Studies. Critical History, Contested Meaning and Globalization of South Asia*. London: Wimbledon, pp. 1-42.
- Milevska, Suzana (2003) Resistance that Cannot be Recognised as Such. Interview with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. *Journal for Politics, Gender and Culture* II (2), pp. 27-46.
- O'Brien, J. (2006) *The Construction of Pakistani Christian Identity*. Lahore: Pakistani Research Society.
- Odem, M. (2010) Subaltern Immigrants: Undocumented Workers and National Belonging in the United States. In: Pandey, G. (ed.) *Subaltern Citizens and their Histories. Investigations from India and the USA*. Abingdon: Routledge, pp. 161-177.
- Pandey, G. (ed.) (2010a) *Subaltern Citizens and Their Histories. Investigations from India and the USA*. New York: Routledge.
- Pandey G. (2010b) Introduction: the Subaltern and Subaltern Citizens. In: Pandey, G. (ed.) *Subaltern Citizens and Their Histories. Investigations from India and the USA*. New York: Routledge, pp. 1-12.
- Roy, A. (2011): *Slumdog Cities: Rethinking Subaltern Urbanism*. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 35 (2), pp. 221-238.
- Spivak, G. C. (1988) *Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography*. In: Guha, R. and G. C. Spivak (eds.) *Selected Subaltern Studies*. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 3-32.

- Spivak, G. (1990) Negotiating the Structures of Violence: A Conversation with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. In: Spivak, G. C. and S. Harasym (eds.) *The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues*. New York: Routledge, pp. 139-151. [Reprint of *Polygraph* 1989: 2/3, pp. 218-229].
- Spivak, G. C. (2000a) The New Subaltern. A Silent Interview. In: Chaturvedi, V. (ed.) *Mapping Subaltern Studies and the Postcolonial*. New York: Verso, pp. 324-340.
- Spivak G.C. (2000b): Discussion: An Afterword on the New Subaltern. In: Chatterjee, P. and P. Jeganathan (eds.) *Subaltern Studies XI. Community, Gender and Violence*. Delhi: Ravi Dayal, pp. 305-335.
- Spivak, G. C. (2005) Scattered Speculations on the Subaltern and the Popular. *Postcolonial Studies* 8 (4), pp. 475-486.
- Spivak, G. C. (2007) Can the Subaltern Speak? *Postkolonialität und subalterne Artikulation*. Wien: Turia & Kant [Übersetzung von Spivak, G. C. (1988) *Can the Subaltern Speak?* In: Nelson, C. and L. Grossberg (eds.) *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, pp. 271-313].

---

Maria Beimborn studied social anthropology at the University of Tübingen. For her Master's thesis she did fieldwork in a Christian colony in Pakistan's capital Islamabad. Currently she is research assistant at the International Center for Ethics in the Sciences and Humanities at Tübingen University. From October 2014 she will start research for her PhD thesis about social welfare and the state in Islamabad in a project at the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology at LMU Munich.