Spring 2020

The Permanent Liminality of Pakistan's Northern Areas- The Case of Gilgit-Baltistan

Hamna Tariq
hamna.tariq@trincoll.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalrepository.trincoll.edu/theses

Part of the Asian American Studies Commons, Asian History Commons, Constitutional Law Commons, Defense and Security Studies Commons, Economic Policy Commons, Education Policy Commons, Ethnic Studies Commons, Human Rights Law Commons, International Humanitarian Law Commons, Islamic World and Near East History Commons, Legal Studies Commons, Other Public Affairs, Public Policy and Public Administration Commons, Peace and Conflict Studies Commons, Political History Commons, Public Administration Commons, Public Affairs Commons, Public History Commons, Public Law and Legal Theory Commons, Public Policy Commons, Social History Commons, Social Policy Commons, South and Southeast Asian Languages and Societies Commons, Urban Studies Commons, and the Urban Studies and Planning Commons

Recommended Citation
Trinity College Digital Repository, https://digitalrepository.trincoll.edu/theses/821
The Permanent Liminality of Pakistan’s Northern Areas: The Case of Gilgit Baltistan

Hamna Tariq
International Studies and Urban Studies Senior Thesis
Supervised by Dr. Garth Myers and Dr. Shafqat Hussain
Spring, 2020
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract ........................................................................................................................................... ii
Preface and Acknowledgments ........................................................................................................ iii
Introduction ......................................................................................................................................... 1
Definition of Terms: Liminality, Liminal Space, and Permanent Liminality ................................. 8
Roots of Liminality: A Geo-Historical Overview ........................................................................... 13
Identity Conflict in Liminal Spaces: The Rise of Sectarian Violence in Gilgit Baltistan ............. 20
Legally Liminal: The Inclusion-Exclusion Paradox ....................................................................... 25
In the Dragon’s Shadow: China’s Influence on Gilgit-Baltistan .................................................. 44
Abrogation of Article 370 and the Concretization of Liminality in Gilgit-Baltistan .................... 59
Conclusion ......................................................................................................................................... 62
Bibliography ................................................................................................................................... 64
Abstract

Since Pakistan’s inception, Gilgit-Baltistan, a sprawling region in Northern Pakistan, has not been granted provincial status due to its colonial association with the disputed region of Kashmir. Gilgit-Baltistan refutes its forceful integration with Kashmir, an unfortunate remnant of British divide-and-rule strategy, and demands provincial recognition and constitutional rights. Pakistan unfairly claims that it awaits the UN-sanctioned plebiscite in Kashmir to determine the region’s status. However, the likelihood of a plebiscite is little to none, since the Indian government officially annexed Indian-held Kashmir in August 2019, breaching the UN resolution on the plebiscite. A region that has been at the mercy of draconian empires for centuries, is now exploited by an independent country it fought to join. Numerous self-empowerment reforms have created a façade of devolution, while the federal government holds direct control over the region’s activities. China holds unconstrained access to the region, without the permission of the local government. State-sponsored sectarian violence undermines unity and stability. The people protest the region’s ambiguous status that disenfranchises its tax-paying and law-abiding population.

In this senior honors thesis, I argue that the government of Pakistan intends to concretize Gilgit-Baltistan’s liminal status. Employing an urban definition of liminal space, I describe Gilgit-Baltistan’s history of uncertainty and disillusionment, in the context of its regional neighbors claiming parts of it. I emphasize that boundary-making politics of South Asia and Pakistan’s absolute control over its deprived population maintain the territorial and political ambiguity of the region. It is to be seen if Gilgit-Baltistan initiates a nation-wide revolt against the colonial-like rule of Pakistan and has its valid demands for long-awaited recognition met.
Preface and Acknowledgments

In early August 2019, after India’s unexpected annexation of semi-autonomous Indian-held Kashmir, I abandoned my research on the socio-economic impacts of the Chinese-Pakistan Economic Corridor and started taking a serious interest in Kashmir’s developing political status. As a citizen of Pakistan, I was quite embarrassed to realize that my knowledge on Kashmir was fueled by nationalistic rhetoric I was fed in school and home and not rooted in unbiased facts. With the help of the faculty and the Trinity College Library’s surprising plethora of sources on my chosen topic, I was able to interview the Gilgit-Baltistan diaspora community and learn the decades-long state-sponsored oppression of my fellow countrymen. Nevertheless, although critical of the government of Pakistan; Through writing this thesis, I aim to present the political, economic, and social instability of the region consigned to oblivion. This thesis is an attempt to amplify unheard voices and highlight overlooked and under-researched intentions of the central government.

This thesis would have not been possible without the support and advice of the Trinity community and others. Dr. Garth Myers, my first-year advisor and academic advisor for the past four years, has encouraged, motivated, and supported me throughout my Trinity journey. He inspired me to understand urban perspectives on this and various other topics over the years. Dr. Shafqat Hussain not only recommended me to write on Gilgit-Baltistan, but eagerly connected me with the diaspora community and sent me numerous thought-provoking sources. Dr. Xiangming Chen’s insights into the Belt and Road Initiative in the Global South motivated three years of research on China’s increasing influence on Pakistan. Dr. Seth Markle’s International Studies seminar equipped me with the necessary research and writing skills to make this idea into a tangible reality. I am sincerely grateful for the unending support and guidance of the
Center for Urban and Global Studies and International Studies departments at Trinity College. Beyond Trinity’s community, I am grateful to Michael Kugelman from the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington D.C. for challenging and expanding my knowledge of South-Asian politics. Lastly, and certainly not the least, my mother for wholeheartedly supporting my academic decisions, and my brother, Hamza, for showing great interest in all my academic pursuits.
Introduction

‘Not Part of Kashmir, but of the Kashmir dispute,’ wrote Martin Sökefeld in the first book I read on Kashmir that influenced my decision to write my thesis on Gilgit-Baltistan. Nineteen years in Pakistan and I never really knew enough about this sprawling northern region of my home country. I was familiar with the region’s infamous flora and fauna, the spectacular mountain ranges, and, of course, mystical stories of fairies and dwarves hiding in the fairy meadows; however, I knew very little about its socio-political dynamics. Nineteen years in Pakistan’s education system and Kashmir was seldom discussed. A chapter on Kashmir was skimmed through in my AP-level History course with the sorry explanation, “it belongs to Pakistan, but India took it.” No mention of Gilgit-Baltistan, no mention of the larger geopolitical circumstances. It was not until a mere few months ago that I was told of its shocking complexity, seldom touched upon by Pakistan’s mainstream media.

As the northernmost region of Pakistan, it borders Azad Kashmir/Pakistan-held Kashmir to the south, the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to the west, Afghanistan to the north, and China to the east. Its strategical position has unsurprisingly been the cause of much debate and bloodshed over the centuries. As a region occupied by the Mughals, British, Dogras, and now Pakistan, it has longed for mutual recognition. Its defeat of the draconian Dogra rule post-independence from the British to expel colonizers and officially integrate into their chosen country led to an unexpected turn.

Gilgit-Baltistan’s relationship with Kashmir, a long-disputed region between India and Pakistan, was developed and officialized by the British. The British placed it under the Kashmiri state as part of their infamous divide-and-rule strategy. However, the British’s withdrawal from
the sub-continent left the region in limbo. All princely states in the sub-continent were allowed to choose which country they would want to join; the Hindu Maharaja of Muslim-majority Kashmir voted to join India. After region-wide protests and a nationwide war, the United Nations drew a ceasefire between Kashmir and divided it between India and Pakistan, with the guarantee that a future plebiscite in the disputed region will determine whether it belongs to India or Pakistan. The UNSC Resolution 47 detailing conditions of the plebiscite was signed in 1948. It has been 72 years and the plebiscite has not been held yet.

Gilgit-Baltistan, in the simplest words possible, is in limbo. It is part of a disputed territory because of the British, a territory it holds no similarities to. It has been asked to wait on the plebiscite for a final resolution. Thousands of lives were lost fighting the Dogras — the local rulers of Kashmir under British control — to live freely in an independent country; a dream cut short by Pakistan’s central government.

This thesis explains the historical socio-political and territorial liminality of Gilgit-Baltistan. I highlight the region’s odd political relationship with Kashmir, the formation of identity conflicts in liminal spaces, and its efforts in gaining provincial status. I further highlight China’s historical and present influence over Gilgit-Baltistan and its socio-economic impacts on the region. I argue that not only is the region in a state of limbo and ambiguity, but this liminality is concretizing. I introduce the concept of permanent liminality in relation to Gilgit-Baltistan’s constitutional status and argue that the government of Pakistan has played an active role in maintaining and propagating its liminality to sustain control over its resources. This permanence is especially manifested through Pakistan’s inability to grant the region provincial status even after India, in August 2019, revoked Article 370 of its constitution and officially integrated
Indian-held Kashmir into its borders. Finally, I prove that Gilgit-Baltistan’s status quo is not temporary, as promised by the federal government, but is indefinite in all its aspects.

I have used a wide variety of literature in this thesis; from recent newspaper articles on the effect of the coronavirus pandemic on Gilgit-Baltistan to books written in the late 19th century on the early history of the region. There are a few sources, however, that appear more frequently in this thesis and are worth discussing at this stage. Martin Sökefeld, a professor of social and cultural anthropology in Germany, has written extensively on the legal-constitutional dilemma in Gilgit-Baltistan. Sökefeld’s chapter in Chitrłąlekha Zutshi’s book, Kashmir: History, Politics, Representation, is quoted widely throughout this thesis. His chapter deals with pre-1947 and post-1947 political structure and constitutional status of Gilgit-Baltistan. He attempts to answer the crucial question on Gilgit-Baltistan’s role within the Kashmir dispute in regard to its demands for provincial recognition. I appreciate his explanation of the impact the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor has had on the socio-economic fabric of the region. ‘Not Part of Kashmir, but the Kashmir Dispute’, is an exceptional summary piece on all aspects of Gilgit-Baltistan.

‘Liminality and Resistance in Gilgit-Baltistan’ by Caylee Hong, Doctoral Candidate at the University of California Berkeley, provides the basis of my argument. Hong details the inherent liminality of Gilgit-Baltistan, especially manifested through recent state-sponsored political developments in the region. Hong’s description of the unrepresentative government structure in Gilgit-Baltistan helped me realize how liminality in law is intentionally disguised by the federal government. The resistance to exclusion through local, regional, and international means, as emphasized in Hong’s work, allowed me to understand the lack of judicial relief available to the people of Gilgit-Baltistan. Her paper is extensively quoted in the chapter on
Gilgit-Baltistan’s ambiguous and ever-changing while simultaneously remaining constant political structure.

Besides books and peer-reviewed journals, I also used a wide variety of reports and newspapers. The most frequently quoted report in this thesis is the United States Institute of Peace Special Report on the ‘Conflict Dynamics in Gilgit-Baltistan’ written by Izhar Hunzai, the CEO of the Agha Khan Rural Support Program operating in Gilgit-Baltistan. This report illustrates the history of sectarian violence in the hitherto volatile region. It elucidates that the surge in sectarian violence was not natural but propagated by the federal government to cause unrest and distress in Gilgit-Baltistan. Policy recommendations to alleviate sectarian strife are outlined at the end of the report, informing the readers of biased policies against the locals. I quote this paper liberally in my chapter on identity conflict in the region.

Although I have extracted news articles from numerous Indian and Pakistani outlets, I regularly reference pieces from Pamir Times, a voluntary and independent news portal of Gilgit-Baltistan, that provides first-hand accounts and opinions of locals. Various scholars and researchers from the region share their findings on the news portal. Understanding locals’ views on Pakistan’s treatment of Gilgit-Baltistan informed me of local movements and desperation brewing amongst its populace. Pamir Times is frequently quoted in the chapter on China’s impact on Gilgit-Baltistan’s socio-economic fabric.

To further enrich my understanding of this topic, I conducted interviews with three members of the Gilgit-Baltistan diaspora community in New York City. I was invited to an event on the tourism industry in Gilgit-Baltistan, organized by the region’s community members. Initially, I was hesitant to ask sensitive questions at a festive event, but the interviewees were passionate about my research and answered my questions enthusiastically. The interviews were
semi-structured and included eight questions on Pakistan’s refusal to grant provincial status to Gilgit-Baltistan, the region’s relationship with Kashmir, the interviewees’ reasons for migrating to New York, sectarian violence in Gilgit-Baltistan, and opinions on the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. In order to protect the identities of the interviewees, I have used pseudonyms. My first interviewee was Sarmad Shah, a Hunza resident for 35 years who had lived in New York for 34 years; the second interviewee was Ali Sheikh, a Gilgit resident for 18 years who had lived in New York for 6 years; the last interviewee was Jamil Iqbal, a Gilgit resident for 20 years who had lived in New York for 14 years. Their opinions, some similar and some vastly different, on the aforementioned questions are quoted throughout this thesis.

I have divided this thesis into eight chapters. After this introductory chapter, I explain why I decided to write on permanent liminality, a fairly recent urban-political theory, and I define some essential terms employed in the thesis; including liminality, liminal space, and permanent liminality. I share articles that inspired me to interpret the Gilgit-Baltistan dilemma through the lens of permanent liminality.

The third chapter is titled ‘Roots of Liminality’ and is concerned with the historical liminality of Gilgit-Baltistan. I argue that Gilgit-Baltistan has been under colonial rule in all its written memory and has always struggled for independence from colonial forces. I journey through the region’s forceful association with Kashmir under the oppressive Dogra rule that led the locals to revolt and eventually join Pakistan. This chapter presents the necessary historical knowledge needed to understand the region’s liminality.

The fourth chapter, ‘Identity-conflict in Liminal Spaces: The Rise of Sectarian Violence in Gilgit-Baltistan’ explores the relationship between constitutional liminality and sectarian
violence. I argue that sectarian violence is sponsored by Pakistan’s ruling elite to distract locals from protesting for recognition and demanding their constitutional rights.

The fifth chapter of my thesis, titled ‘Legally Liminal: The Inclusion-Exclusion Paradox’, outlines the changing political structures of Gilgit-Baltistan post-1947. I explain how Pakistan’s attempts to tighten control under the guise of self-empowerment reforms has led to more unrest in the region. I compare the different government structures of Azad Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan, that give more representation to the actual disputed region of Azad Kashmir and less to the region that is pleading for official provincial recognition.

The sixth chapter, ‘In the Dragon’s Shadow: China’s Influence on Gilgit-Baltistan’, explains the infamous Aksai Chin border dispute in Kashmir, leading to China’s increasing involvement in the Kashmir region post-partition. This chapter explores the socio-economic impact of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor on Gilgit-Baltistan’s urban infrastructure. The Belt and Road Initiative is possible because of the Karakoram Highway in Gilgit-Baltistan that connects neighboring China to Pakistan’s southern Gwadar Port and then to the Middle East and Africa. I explore China’s inability to uphold its promise of increased employment and transformational infrastructural development in exchange for using the Karakoram Highway. I argue that in order to sustain beneficial relations with China, Pakistan will maintain the liminal status quo of the Gilgit-Baltistan region.

The penultimate chapter in this thesis, termed ‘Abrogation of Article 370 and the Concretization of Liminality in Gilgit-Baltistan’, proves the government of Pakistan’s intention of keeping the region in perpetual limbo. Pakistan’s justification for holding off provincial recognition for Gilgit-Baltistan was based on Pakistan’s commitment to upholding the UN Resolution that requires both countries to maintain the status quo of divided Kashmir. However,
India’s recent annexation of Indian-held Kashmir did not result in Pakistan doing the same. It is highly unlikely, if not impossible, that a plebiscite will be conducted now that India has annexed its part of Kashmir. Despite this, Pakistan still hasn’t granted provincial status to Gilgit-Baltistan and will likely never do so.

The conclusion briefly summarizes the argument made and emphasizes its significance to the international community. I argue that Gilgit-Baltistan is essentially in permanent transition now and will continue to remain so unless the international community publicizes the human rights abuses and the disenfranchisement of its people. I further argue that numerous cases of permanently liminal regions beg the introduction of a sub-field on the topic.

*Writing Note:* Gilgit-Baltistan is referred to as GB in some parts of the thesis.
Definition of Terms: Liminality, Liminal Space, and Permanent Liminality

The Pakistani National Anthem rang through the brightly lit restaurant in a populated street of inner Queens, New York. The Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan to the United States, Asad Majeed Khan, sung along with New York’s Diaspora Gilgit-Baltistan Community as the gigantic banner on ‘Tourism in Gilgit-Baltistan’ hung behind him. The host for the evening thanked the Ambassador and led the group into a semi-formal prayer for proper recognition of Gilgit-Baltistan. The Ambassador did not comment on the region’s ambiguity but prayed along. While only managing to formally interview three community members, I struck up informal conversations with the other women at my table. Kausar, whose husband was from Gilgit-Baltistan, was taken aback when I asked about Pakistan’s refusal to grant Gilgit-Baltistan provincial status. “We are a part of Pakistan. We are Pakistan,” exclaimed Kausar. I reminded her that Gilgit-Baltistan was not constitutionally a part of Pakistan. “Oh, that’s what you are talking about. Now that will never happen.”

It was as if the ambiguity of the region was all-encompassing in a way that it was hard to pin-point anymore. After interviewing a few passionate supporters of provincial recognition for Gilgit-Baltistan, I decided to write on its struggle for acceptance. However, Kausar’s statement stuck in my mind. It felt she had given up on the fight for constitutional status, she had accepted the way things were and was satisfied. This could be due to several reasons; the obvious being that she had lived in New York for three years at this point and didn’t have to face the debate daily, and because she herself was not from the region. The concept of liminality jumped up to me in every text I read about the region. I understand its liminality, as will be explained below,
but I kept asking myself; how long can the state of limbo last? How can it be called liminal if it hasn’t reached its ‘final destination’ in centuries?

Johnson and Sørensen’s paper on permanent liminality in organizational studies informed my thought-process and this thesis. Although they focused on the permanent liminality of work-life balance, I read this theory as applicable to the current political situation in Gilgit-Baltistan. Murphy and McDowell’s work on the institutionalization of liminal spaces post-conflict further elaborates the concept of permanent liminality.1 I argue that the temporal liminal status of Gilgit-Baltistan has been made permanent because of the promise of an unachievable end-goal, the Kashmir plebiscite. This brief chapter will define important terms that will be employed throughout this thesis.

I use Victor Turner’s definition, as Caylee Hong explains it, to describe liminality; “a state of transition which is an unstructured in-between phase of rituals where participants transition from one social status to another.” He expands on the ambiguity of such a state, “liminal entities are neither here or there, they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial.”2 Hong uses the theory of liminality to understand the legal-political and territorial status of Gilgit-Baltistan. I expand on this concept by additionally using Stefan L. Brandt’s definition of liminality; “Liminality designates the condition ascribed to those things or persons who occupy or find themselves in the vicinity of the threshold, either on a permanent basis or as a temporary phenomenon.”3 Brandt employed this

---

concept to explain the blurring of the lines between ‘high culture’ and ‘pop culture’ in American cities.

I use the concept of liminal space to explain the vagueness with which Gilgit-Baltistan has been classified in history and law. Characterizing Gilgit-Baltistan as a liminal space helps explain the geo-political significance of the region and how the decision over space usage is in the hands of the central government. Once again, I use Stefan L. Brandt’s brief definition of liminal space- a space that symbolizes transition and chance. Brandt uses the concept of liminal space to explain urban visuality and aesthetic experience in post-modern United States, focusing on the ever-changing dynamic of post-modern cities. However, while employing Brandt’s definition, I also argue that ‘transitional’ does not imply ‘changing’. Transitional is a state of change, not change itself. Gilgit-Baltistan is in the transitional phase but that does not imply that the phase is moving to an endpoint. Thus, this phase is permanent.

As aforementioned, I am using Johnson and Sörenson’s explanation of permanent liminality and employing it to Gilgit-Baltistan’s socio-political status. “Permanent liminality has been conceptualized as a constant social limbo in which domains that are traditionally separated become situated in a zone of indistinction,” write Johnson and Sörenson. The existence of this zone of indistinction is apparent in the region. The locals carry Pakistani ID cards and Pakistani passports but cannot vote in national elections. Officials from Gilgit-Baltistan swear allegiance to Pakistan but are intermingled with the Kashmir dispute. The zone of indistinction is created.


5 Christian Garmann Johnsen and Bent Meier Sørensen, “It’s capitalism on coke!”: From temporary to permanent liminality in organization studies,” Culture and Organization 21, no. 4 (2015): 335
and propagated by Pakistan’s government — the vagueness of law and devolution of a federally controlled local government helps contain dissent.

It has been argued that permanent liminality, because of its inherent paradox, is just a loss of liminality. Essentially, if a state is in permanent limbo, then it is not in limbo anymore. I argue that permanent liminality does not result in a loss of liminality; rather it explains the inherent ambiguity bred by the state to waver the region from one end to another. If the region wasn’t liminal, there wouldn’t be nationalist movements nor assurance of a plebiscite. The people expect the transitional phase to reach stable ground, but the government of Pakistan keeps it intact. Although the region isn’t moving towards an endpoint, it is moving.

This thesis explains how liminality operates in Gilgit-Baltistan and why it is permanent in nature. The longevity of liminality in Gilgit-Baltistan is created and perpetuated by the government of Pakistan through instigating internal strife, disguising federal government’s control over the ‘devolved local government’, permitting large-scale development of the ecologically sensitive region without compensation, and promising a change in status once the long-awaited plebiscite is held. Its permanence is proven by the federal government’s inability to keep its promises to the people. Decennary self-empowerment orders have strengthened local political structures but maintained the hegemony of the federal government. Pakistan’s ignorance of China’s demand to grant Gilgit-Baltistan provincial status further entrenches the government’s stance of waiting for the plebiscite. Ironically, the plebiscite excuse fell through when India, in August 2019, revoked Article 370 of their constitution and annexed Indian-occupied Jammu and Kashmir in complete violation of the agreement signed with United Nations Commission for India-Pakistan in 1948 and the bilateral Simla Agreement of 1972, which Pakistan has quoted time and again to defend Gilgit-Baltistan’s ambiguous status. Pakistan has no concrete
justification left to avoid the demands for provincial status. Nevertheless, Pakistan does not need to justify her actions to an unrecognized region; thus, institutionalizing and concretizing the liminality of the region.
**Roots of Liminality: A Geo-Historical Overview**

Gilgit-Baltistan has been under colonial rule for all its written history. The people have fought for recognition for centuries but have always received the shorter end of the stick. This chapter explains the convoluted history of the region, starting from the first written works on the region. An overview of the rulers and empires presiding over the region will be given. At the crux of this chapter is the relationship between liminality and colonization. The current-day ongoing liminality of Gilgit Baltistan is a legacy of colonial rule. The British left no stone unturned when it came to expanding their power without considering the rights of the locals. Eventually the locals were able to break the chain—at least theoretically—of colonization, but its ambiguous status persisted.

Doctor G.W. Leitner, offers seminal accounts from the mid 19th century on the region then known as Dardistan. Leitner detailed the flora and fauna of the region, described its cultural and religious diversity, and the common linguistic bond that united the diverse Dards. Leitner, more storyteller than scholar, wrote excessively on folk tales, songs, and customs of Dardistan; thus, his works were less argumentative and more subjective in nature.6 Although Leitner’s intention was to provide an account of his travels across a virgin landscape, it informed how the British initially conceptualized the region. Nevertheless, it’s important to highlight Leitner’s reference to the “exertions of the Maharaja of Kashmir in promoting the advance of Hindooism,” in 1869 suggest that the region was under oppressive before the British invaded it.7

---

Leitner briefly describes the form of government in Gilgit, a city in Dardistan and capital of modern-day Gilgit-Baltistan, when he first visited the region in 1866 as, “practically without a ruler, the invading troops of Kashmir barely holding their own within a few yards of the Gilgit Fort.” 8 Leitner writes that the Gilgitis are kept quiet by the presence of the Dogra-led Kashmir army and chiefs of Gilgit are prisoners of the Kashmir government. He claims that the policies of Kashmir have killed the intellectual and moral life of Gilgitis. 9 Leitner vehemently opposed interference and annexation of the region. 10

This Kashmiri Government that Leitner refers to in all his writings is the Dogra rule from 1840 to 1947/1948 in the region. In early 1800s, the British colonizers, along with the local Sikhs, filled the power vacuum left by the Mughal Empire. 11 Gulab Singh, a prominent general from Punjab, ventured into the virgin Kashmir valley and established Dogra control for more than a century. 12 The British, although the supreme rulers of the Indian subcontinent, refrained from upsetting the powerful and power-hungry Dogras. To appease the opposition and prevent revolution, the British signed the March 1846 Treaty of Amritsar—referred to as ‘Sale Deed of Kashmir’— which sold Jammu and Kashmir for a mere 75 lacs (present-day 98,000 USD) to Gulab Singh. Article 1 of the Treaty of Amritsar reads:

“The British government transfers and makes over, forever, independent possession, to Maharaja Gulab Singh, and the heirs male of his body, all the hilly or mountainous country, with its dependencies, situated to the eastward of the river Indus, and westward of the river Ravi, including Chamba and excluding Lahore, being part of the territory ceded to the British government by the Lahore state, according to the provisions of Article 4 of the Treaty of Lahore, dated 9th March 1846.” 13

8 Leitner, Dardistan in 1866, 1886, and 1893, 53.
9 Leitner, Dardistan in 1866, 1886, and 1893, 56.
11 The Mughal Empire ruled the Indian subcontinent and much of South Asia from 1526-1761.
Thus, the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir, was placed in the ‘forever, independent possession’ of Dogra rule. The British readily sold this area off to deter any threat from internal opposition but to also avoid sending military and officials into the remote unchartered territory. However, at this point in history, Jammu and Kashmir did not include Gilgit. The Treaty of Amritsar loosely defined territory transferred to Gulab Singh. Not many had ventured out to the northernmost areas of Kashmir, thus, the exact location of regions such as Gilgit wasn’t penned down until much later, leaving them to the tyranny of oppressive rulers. In 1846, Singh breached the treaty by invading Gilgit, although it was located on the western and not eastern side of the Indus river, thereby annexing the area with the state of Jammu and Kashmir.1415 This violation of the Treaty of Amritsar would later become a point of contention post-partition. The people of Gilgit Baltistan region never officially accepted annexation with Jammu and Kashmir nor did they accept Dogra rule.16 The British turned a blind eye to this apparent infringement of the treaty and left Singh to his doing until the external threat in the northern region strengthened and threatened British’s colonial rule in the subcontinent.

The British, in fear of, “troublesome Afghanistan, unstable China, and aggressive Russia,” surrounding the Jammu and Kashmir area, decided to set up the Gilgit Agency.17 The Gilgit Agency, constituting the princely states of Hunza and Nagar, and the smaller entities of Chilas, Koh Ghizr, Ishkoman, Yasin and Punial, and the Gilgit Wazarat (consisting of Gilgit city, including neighboring towns), controlled the defence, communications, and foreign

affairs of the region with the help of a political agent in Gilgit City. The Gilgit Wazarat — part of Gilgit Agency—formed the part of the state of Jammu and Kashmir conquered by Gulab Singh, whereas the other areas of Gilgit Agency were under the paramountcy of the British Government of India. The Agency was created to thwart any threat from regional powers, notably after Russia’s capture of Kokand, just 600 miles north of Gilgit. They also doubted the Maharaja’s willingness to ward off Russian advances in the ‘Great Game’—the rivalry between Britain and Russia in Central Asia—that could lead to the downfall of British colonial rule in India. A dual administrative structure was configured; Gilgit Agency was headed by a British Political Agent and Gilgit Wazarat headed by a Dogra Wazir. Thus, the British ruled Gilgit Wazarat, part of Gilgit Agency, with the Dogras.

In 1935, the British leased Gilgit Agency, which included Gilgit Wazarat, for a period of 60 years from the then Jammu and Kashmir Dogra Maharaja Hari Singh to ease the tension of ‘dual control’. Mounting concerns over Dogra’s inadequate and corrupt rule over the strategically important region justified the move.

However, this is when the confusion over Gilgit Baltistan’s territory and its liminality became apparent. For decades, as can be concluded from the aforementioned history, Gilgit Baltistan has been in flux. Consisting of small independent mountain states from the 16th to the 19th century, Gilgit was conquered by the oppressive Dogras in the mid 19th century and leased to the British in the early 20th century; the region has been in never-ending wait of self-determination. The Maharaja of Kashmir assumed that once the lease ended, the whole of Gilgit

---

Agency, not just Gilgit Wazarat, will join Jammu and Kashmir. The British unequivocally stated in a March 1941 letter to the Maharaja of Kashmir:

“1) Hunza and Nagar: though these are under the suzerainty of the Kashmir State, they are not part of Kashmir but are separate states; 2) Chilas, Koh Ghizr, Ishkoman, and Yasin: Though these are under the suzerainty of Kashmir State they are not part of Kashmir but tribal areas.”

Nonetheless, when the partition and independence were imminent, the British ceased to the keep their promise and ‘returned’ the Gilgit Agency to the Maharaja of Kashmir on July 30, 1947, two weeks before partition. The ‘return’ of the Agency to the tyrannical Dogras meant its incorporation into a princely state that had never asserted complete political authority over it before. None of the local rulers or mirs were consulted before being handed to Kashmir. The Indian subcontinent gained independence on August 14, 1947 and was divided into Pakistan and India. Provinces in the Indian subcontinent had decided which country to join. However, Kashmir was a point of contention; with a Hindu ruler and Muslim majority the decision was deemed to be controversial.

William Brown, the Britisher in charge of transferring power over Gilgit Agency to Hari Singh, realized that the locals in Gilgit feared succession to India. A local Gilgiti told Brown:

“The whole of what was the Gilgit Agency is pro Pakistan. There is no doubt about it. We are all Muslims: do you blame us? We could never swear allegiance to Hindustan. If Kashmir remains independent, well and good. We shall be independent here but we can also keep the friendliest relations with our brother Moslems in Pakistan. If Kashmir accedes to Pakistan, even better. But if the Maharaja through pig-headedness, bad advice, political pressure, or attractive remuneration acceded to Hindustan then there will be trouble here.”

---

21 Bangash, “Gilgit-Baltistan — part of Pakistan by choice.”
22 Sökefeld, “Not Part of Kashmir, but the Kashmir Dispute,” 135.
On October 26, 1947, Hari Singh acceded Kashmir, including the Gilgit Agency, to India. Pakistan vehemently opposed this move on the grounds that the Dogra state had committed open atrocities against the Muslims and Hari Singh had fled the Kashmir Valley after partition and should not be allowed to take a decision on behalf of the Kashmiris. Immediately after, Major Brown received a telegram from the prince of Chitral, a princely state that had already joined Pakistan, that read: ‘Chitral is breaking off all relations with the Kashmir Government. Neither my state nor Gilgit can accept accession of Kashmir to Hindustan.’ This was seen as an informal claim by Pakistan to Gilgit. On November 1, after a successful coup, the Gilgit Scouts raised the Pakistani flag in Gilgit Agency and formed a provisional government that called the Government of Pakistan to take over. The Gilgit Scouts conquered hilly Baltistan on 14 August 1948 and officially integrated it into the Gilgit Agency.

Formally, Pakistan took charge of the region through the Karachi Agreement in 1949. However, Pakistan’s treatment of Gilgit Baltistan over the years can be described as ‘post-colonial colonialism’. Decades of suffering under Hindu Dogra and Christian British rule led the Scouts to revolt against tyranny and in the process lose hundreds of their own. However, in return, Pakistan refused to give this region provincial status and reinforced its limbo status.

The Gilgit region has had an unfortunate history of liminality. The British created a liminal space to protect it against Russian, Afghan, and Chinese invasion, without losing the

---

25 The Gilgit Scouts was a paramilitary force of the Gilgit Agency in the northern Jammu and Kashmir. They were raised from the local populations of the Gilgit Agency in 1889, and commanded by British officers. They played an integral role in fighting the war of liberation against the Dogras in 1947/1948.
26 Sökefeld, “Not Part of Kashmir, but the Kashmir Dispute,” 135.
27 Sökefeld, “Not Part of Kashmir, but the Kashmir Dispute,” 136.
necessary support from the Dogras. Since its inception, the Agency held an ambiguous territorial and political identity. Gulab Singh occupied Gilgit because of the vagueness and lack of clarity of the Treaty of Amritsar. The British, through maintaining an undefined political and territorial limit to the Agency, ‘returned’ it to the Dogra rulers. The borders remained undefined, causing much confusion and chaos during partition.

Current-day Pakistan takes advantage of the region’s liminality to further its own agendas; major Muslim vote bank if plebiscite held, undemocratic widespread Chinese development, persecution of Shia Muslims, etc. Since integrating with Pakistan, the region’s boundaries are territorially defined but remain politically and economically undefined.

**Timeline for rule over the Gilgit-Baltistan Region**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1842:</td>
<td>Occupation of Gilgit by Dogra of Kashmir</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1846:</td>
<td>Treaty of Amritsar; State of Kashmir founded; Territory demarcated at East of Indus.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1872:</td>
<td>British Empire establish agent in Gilgit; Gilgit ruled by Dogra Wazir and British agent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1935:</td>
<td>British Empire leases Gilgit Agency for a period of sixty years from Kashmir state.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 30, 1947:</td>
<td>British Empire returns Gilgit Agency to the Maharaja of Kashmir.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 14, 1947:</td>
<td>British withdrawal from the Indian subcontinent; Partition of India and Pakistan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 26, 1947:</td>
<td>Maharaja of Kashmir acceded Kashmir, including Gilgit Agency, to India.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 1, 1947:</td>
<td>GB overthrew Dogra rule and declared accession to Pakistan.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Identity Conflict in Liminal Spaces: The Rise of Sectarian Violence in Gilgit Baltistan

Belonging to a concretizing liminal space erases common conception of national identity. Additionally, if that betwixt space is heavily militarized, tightened, and monopolized, as to compress the physical and psychological space of its residents, the search for identity takes aggressive forms. Political forces, instead of directing the lost, fuel disturbances to shift internal priorities.

Gilgit-Baltistan celebrates two independence days, one on Pakistan’s official Independence Day, another to commemorate independence from Dogra Raj; however, despite celebrating two days of independence, the region is still in desperate search of tangible identity and recognition. According to Bouzas, this dislocation and confusion are exacerbated by the mandatory carrying of Pakistan National Identity cards (NIC) for all GB residents, but unique identifications cards for residents of Azad Jammu and Kashmir. Gilgit-Baltistan’s “waiting to-be-a-part-of-Pakistan” has created an identity conflict amongst locals that has manifested in the form of sectarian violence. However, it is imperative to clarify that the absence of national identity did not naturally led to an extreme association with religion. The government of Pakistan actively encouraged religious disparity in Gilgit-Baltistan to quell questions of national identity and thrust the relatively peaceful region in decades of unpolicied and unchecked sectarian violence.

Chitralekha Zutshi, a leading historian on the political culture of Kashmir, discusses how discourses of religious identity became embedded in Kashmir in the 1920s to solidify a basis for community formation.\textsuperscript{31} Unsurprisingly, such discourses were absent in the multi-lingual and multi-ethnic region of present-day Gilgit-Baltistan, as Gilgit-Baltistan had never intended involvement in the Kashmir dispute, nor did it comprise of a significant non-Muslim population. The majority of Gilgit-Baltistan’s population comprises of Shia Muslims, followed by Sunni and Ismaili Muslims. Nevertheless, the shared religious identity of different communities had rarely created violent rifts between the people of Gilgit-Baltistan.\textsuperscript{32} The only religious-based conflict that existed in the region pre-1947 was the Shia-Sunni conflict but that remained mostly unnoticeable and limited to localized disputes resolved by the community elders.\textsuperscript{33}

The formation of sectarian discourses as an identity marker stemmed from ideological imprisonment of the country by the draconian military regimes of Ayub Khan and Zia-ul-Haq, former martial-law-induced military leaders of Pakistan. Khan and Zia suspended political socialization and censored channels of political participation which compounded frustration amongst the already disenfranchised. The United States Institute of Peace released a detailed report on state-sanctioned sectarian conflict in Gilgit-Baltistan which comprehensively outlined Zia’s role in breeding disharmony in the hitherto disillusioned territory against the Shia majority of Gilgit-Baltistan. The report highlights Zia-ul-Haq’s militarization of the socio-religious fabric of the state, thrusting Wahhabi-oriented-Islamization in the penal code, constitution, and educational policy. The laws of the nation detailed in Pakistan’s constitution are consistent with

\textsuperscript{32} Antío Mato Bouzas, “Territorialization, Ambivalence, and Representational Spaces in Gilgit-Baltistan,” 211.
Sunni principles. Moreover, Zia-ul-Haq amended the colonial penal code to ensure that not only non-Muslims, but also non-Sunni Muslims, could easily be convicted of committing blasphemy. In the name of religious purification, Zia mandated imposition of religious taxes - *zakat and ushr* - and initiated orthodox-Sunni religious seminaries-*madrassas*. Zia-ul-Haq’s government unashamedly threw state support behind Sunni-led extremist groups, leading to the creation of pro-Shia armed organizations, causing brutal violence between the sects. His treacherous reign saw the state-sponsored Gilgit Massacre of the region’s Shia population in 1988, ingrafting ideas of exclusivity based on religious belief. Additionally, population transfers encouraged by the government of Pakistan have led Punjabi Sunnis, retaining their Pakistani citizenship and motivated by favorable resettlement policies, move to Gilgit-Baltistan and shift the demographics of the region. As the only Shia-majority region in the country, Gilgit-Baltistan is most affected by the government’s orthodox Sunni stance.

The vacuum of political identity ushered in government-sanctioned sectarian violence, a dangerous relief for the frustrated masses of Gilgit-Baltistan. The legal liminality remained whereas the psychological liminality of being ‘in-between’ was replaced with wrongly intentioned religious identity. Pakistan’s fundamental role in corrupting the peaceful landscape is most evident from the government of former president Pervez Musharraf’s notorious textbook policy allegedly implemented to form a general national identity to overcome ‘differences’ and ensure a blanket educational experience in the country. In 1999, Islamabad introduced amended textbooks, produced by the government-funded textbook board of Pakistan, authored by Sunnites

---

of the Deobandi School.\textsuperscript{38} \textit{Islamiyat} books were riddled with Sunni practices and presented Islamic practices in a strictly Sunnite way. History, Urdu, and English subjects included Sunni-only references, instigating feelings of further disillusionment amongst the majority Shia populace of GB. The government of Pakistan assured the immediate recalling of offensive textbooks but backtracked, “lending credence to the suspicion that the move for curriculum change was calculated to keep the flames of sectarianism burning.”\textsuperscript{39} GB Shia leader Zia-uddin negotiated with the Education Ministry to revise the biased syllabus for years on end; he was gunned down in 2005 for spearheading the movement against state-sponsored divisive tactics.\textsuperscript{40}

Even-after the region’s tireless struggle for freedom, the state kept pushing its colonial ideology on its bodies. The looming power vacuum provides an ideal breeding ground for religious tensions. However, the states’ intention to create a unified identity of Kashmir, which Gilgit-Baltistan is legally considered a part of, by distracting nationalist movements in Gilgit-Baltistan has led to increased localization and resentment in the region.\textsuperscript{41} The ideological paths of Kashmir and GB are diverging; nevertheless, this makes a negligible impact on Pakistan’s intentions to sustain the constitutional ambiguity of Gilgit-Baltistan.

Shireen Hunter of Georgetown University, writes about post-war identity conflict in Iraq; “Sectarian conflict is the result of two interrelated factors: years of discrimination against the Shias by repressive Iraqis governments and the failure to develop a sense of national identity

transcending tribal and sectarian affiliations; and fears generated among the Sunnis about their future economic and political position under a Shia-dominated government.”

Ideological warfare, rooted in recognition, has transformed into bloody sectarian violence, weakening the region internally. Inability to restrain state-sponsored sectarian violence can attributed to the government’s draconian censorship of political activity in the region coupled with a lack of representation in the National Assembly and the locals’ inability to access the Supreme Court. The compression and reorganization of public space have, “effectually caused irreversible cracks in the collective memory of Gilgit-Baltistan.”

Loss of initial purpose of recognition, replaced by sectarian identity, has merged the people with the magnetic force of their liminal territory, diving deeper into ambiguity and disillusionment legally and psychologically.


Legally Liminal: The Inclusion-Exclusion Paradox

Post-1947 Governance

The seeds of liminality sown by the British were believed to have vanished once Pakistan’s government, through the Karachi Agreement of 1949, officially announced administrative control over Gilgit-Baltistan. Residents of the region rejoiced and believed Pakistan would soon grant them provincial status. The people from the region never sought allegiance with Kashmir and were confident that the government of Pakistan would recognize this difference. After centuries of external and unfavorable rule, Gilgit Baltistan was finally accepted into their country of choice. However, unbeknownst to them, their ambiguous status was soon to be permanently entrenched.

The Federal Ministry of Kashmir Affairs and Northern Areas (KANA) — separate from the Azad Jammu and Kashmir government—was established in January 1949 and present-day Gilgit Baltistan was taken under its direct federal rule. While Azad Kashmir had its own semi-autonomous government at this point, Gilgit Agency (including present-day Gilgit Baltistan) were directly managed by the federal government. No leader from Gilgit was asked before control was handed to KANA. Additionally, KANA administered Gilgit and adjoining areas through the Frontier Crimes regulation (FCR), “a notorious set of laws that allowed collective punishments, outlawed political activity, and denied basic rights.” Residents were required to report to local police stations once a month.

The region remained under direct federal control until Prime Minister Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto visited the region and decided to grant it proper political and socio-economic structure. In 1972, he announced the abolition of all princely states (including Hunza, Nagar, Baltistan, and Gilgit Agency) and created a single administrative unit termed the Northern Areas. Bhutto formed the Northern Areas Advisory Council, an 18-member representative body chosen through direct elections and headed by a commissioner. However, this body had no representation in mainstream political institutions. The FCR was repealed but the region remained outside Pakistan’s political sphere. It is imperative to note that the realization to arrange the scattered territories and assemble a single administration in the region came 23 years after Gilgit-Baltistan swore allegiance to the country.

Military ruler Zia-ul-Haq’s Islamization policies of 1980s created indecisiveness and identity crises alien to the region. For centuries, culturally and religiously diverse people lived in harmony in the Northern Areas. Their liminal and volatile territory and ambiguous political status was the sole point of regional anxiety. The cumulative effect of the Iran revolution and Islamization led to an ideologically motivated battle manifesting itself through widespread sectarian violence against the Shia majority. Anti-Shia laws and biased educational syllabi pushed through Wahabi-oriented Islamization led to an infamous massacre of 400 Shia community members in Gilgit in 1988. Shia and Sunni militant organizations started operations in the disenfranchised region. Internal divisiveness diverted energy from the political struggle for provincial recognition and maintained the region’s political ambiguity for the next two decades.

46 Jamil Nagri, “Almost Pakistan: Gilgit-Baltistan in a constitutional limbo.”
Former President Pervez Musharraf’s creation of a Northern Areas Legislative Assembly in 1999, which was answerable to the federal government and unrepresented in Pakistan’s National Assembly, was another confirmation of Pakistan’s efforts to maintain the status quo under the guise of Article 257 of Pakistan’s constitution; “When the people of the State of Jammu and Kashmir decide to accede to Pakistan, the relationship between Pakistan and that State shall be determined in accordance with the wishes of the people of that State.” 48 Pakistan’s government had used the aforementioned article to repeatedly justify their colonial tactics in Gilgit Baltistan, which was considered part of Kashmir. Gilgit Baltistan remained adamant to integrate into Pakistan while the government of Pakistan ignored its decades-old demand, emphasizing that granting provincial status to Gilgit Baltistan would mean losing claim over the whole of Kashmir. Thus, Gilgit Baltistanis, who never wanted to be trapped in the dispute, were left to wait for the unlikely plebiscite.

Al-Jehad Trust v. Federation of Pakistan

With increasing devolution of power, Gilgit-Baltistan expected amalgamation to be on the horizon. The notorious Al-Jehad Supreme Court ruling of 1999 reversed all expectations and entrenched the ambiguity of the region’s political standing. In 1994, residents of Northern Areas along with the Al-Jehad Trust filed two constitutional petitions in the Supreme Court, demanding participation in national politics and access to an independent judiciary. In May 1999, the Supreme Court of Pakistan announced that the people of Northern Areas are citizens of Pakistan for all intents and purposes, are liable to pay taxes, are entitled to participate in the governance of

their area, and are qualified to seek jurisdiction from a local High Court. On the surface, the Supreme Court’s recognition of Northern Area residents as Pakistani citizens could have been seen as an informal announcement of official provincial status. As citizens, they have fundamental rights guaranteed to all; the right to representation, the right to vote, and the right to access justice through an independent judiciary. However, none of these rights were practically granted to the region. Additionally, the judgement also said:

“It may be observed that since the geographical location of the Northern Areas is very sensitive because it is bordering India, China, Tibet and [former] USSR, and as the above areas in the past have also been treated differently, this Court cannot decide what type of Government should be provided to ensure the compliance with the above mandate of the Constitution. Nor we can direct that the people of Northern Areas should be given representation in the Parliament as, at this stage, it may not be in the larger interest of the country because of the fact that a plebiscite under the auspices of the United Nations is to be held.”49

In essence, the Supreme Court validated the legitimacy of the requests written in the petition but maintained Pakistan’s official stance on the region. To ‘protect the larger interest of the country’, the Supreme Court effectively stated that representation of Northern Areas in the National Assembly is highly unlikely. Instead, locals are expected to be satisfied with minimal regional representation and access to the High Court, not the Supreme Court. The blatantly hypocritical judgement, that recognizes people of GB as citizens but refuses representation in the most critical decision-making body of Pakistan, concretizes the liminality of GB’s people “Al-Jehad Trust shows the role of the formal law in analyzing, describing and ultimately justifying this constitutional liminality,” writes Caylee Hong.50 The people of Gilgit-Baltistan lost faith in Pakistan’s judiciary after this convoluted ruling. Freedom House, an acclaimed think tank based

in New York City, researched on the judicial system of Gilgit-Baltistan. They highlighted that all judicial appointments in Gilgit-Baltistan’s High Court are subject to discretionary renewal by the bureaucracy, leaving the judiciary largely subservient to the executive government. In addition, final approving authority on judicial matters rests with Islamabad, further delegitimizing the court’s powers.51 The judicial system is then correctly deemed as an institution that, “explicitly linked to their liminality and exclusion.”52

*Gilgit-Baltistan Reforms OF 2009 and 2018: Liminality in Disguise*

The highly anticipated Gilgit Empowerment and Self-Governance Order of 2009 renamed Northern Areas to Gilgit Baltistan and, finally, recognized the administrative autonomy and quasi-provincial status of the Northern Areas. The people of GB expected widespread reforms but were, once again, left disappointed and appalled by the federal government’s inadequacy. This Act established a Legislative Assembly for the region which held limited, if any, power at all. The management of natural resources and tourism, the major industries in Gilgit Baltistan, were allocated to the Gilgit Baltistan Council directed by the Prime Minister of Pakistan.53

Caylee Hong outlines foundational issues with the supposedly revolutionary 2009 Order which perfectly illustrates the liminality of the region. Firstly, Gilgit-Baltistan was still lacking representation in the National Assembly, as the Federal Government reassured locals that the democratic deficit will be overcome once the Kashmir conflict is resolved. Thus, an

impermanent, transitory environment is retained in the region. Secondly, as discussed below, the 2009 Order substantiates liminality by excluding the region from the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court of Pakistan. An inferiority complex is manifested through this ‘some citizens are more equal than others’ ruling. Most importantly, the Order refers to the region as a ‘province’ without granting it provincial status. The vagueness of the ruling and the convoluted language of the federal Order reify the region’s enduring liminality.54

Ehsan Mahmood Khan, a Major-General of Gilgit Baltistan, described the 2009 order as, “a manifestation of the administrative linkage of the GB region with the federation of Pakistan, a part of Pakistan not forming part of a province,” in context of Article 258 of Pakistan’s constitution which grants the President freewill over regions without provincial status, highlighting the federal government’s shrouded legal control over Gilgit Baltistan.55

After nationwide protests and calls for change, the Federal Government approved the Gilgit Baltistan Order 2018, which replaced the 2009 Order. The only reform worth mentioning was that the Gilgit-Baltistan Assembly was transferred all powers previously exercised by the Council. The Prime Minister of Pakistan described the Order as a, “milestone for GB as drastic amendments had been made to ensure development of the region and uplift of the people.”56 However, Part IV Article 41 of the 2018 Order reads, “The government of Gilgit-Baltistan will be bound to the instructions of Pakistan’s Prime Minister,” amongst other ‘prime minister-

centric’ articles.57 Unsurprisingly, this Order was eventually rejected for reestablishing the status quo and for ignoring the repeated demands for recognition.

Gilgit Baltistan was a stone’s throw away from complete provincial status every time a new ordinance was announced. A constant feeling of disorientation and ambiguity plague the region leading to an eternal sense of incompleteness; an impatience for a verdict that will never come. Holden, a renowned anthropologist who has extensively written on Gilgit-Baltistan, applies Skakolczai’s work on liminality to the paradox of Gilgit Baltistan; “a temporary situation which becomes, ‘extended, lasting, all eventually but a permanent state.’”58

As will be discussed in later chapters, the inaction of the federal government cannot be disguised under the pretense of a possible plebiscite any longer. The region remains in perpetual limbo as updated ordinances seemingly devolve power but fail to recognize the people of Gilgit Baltistan’s nearly century-long demand.

Government Structures of Azad Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan

“We never wanted to be a part of Kashmir but if we are ‘Kashmir’ then why are we not given a representative government like theirs? The government of Pakistan has robbed us of our rights for decades,” emphatically claimed Ali Sheikh, one of my interviewees and a recent immigrant to New York from Gilgit-Baltistan. His desperation to witness more representation at home was evident during our interview. If Gilgit-Baltistan is part of the larger Kashmir issue, then why does Azad Kashmir have a more representative government? Although both areas have

no representation in the national parliament, Azad Kashmir has enjoyed autonomy since its integration into Pakistan. AK has a constitution, elected government, a prime minister, and a president. The 41-member elected government presides over all administrative matters except state’s finances. Although the Azad Jammu and Kashmir Council is headed by Pakistan’s Prime Minister who has the unchallengeable power to override laws passed by AJK’s elected legislature, it has very little authority in practice. The Prime Minister of Pakistan cannot overrule the Prime Minister of Kashmir when it comes to most internal matters.

Gilgit Baltistan, in contrast to Azad Kashmir, is ruled through ordinances instead of a constitution. The Gilgit-Baltistan Empowerment and Self-Governance Order of 2009 details the administrative system of the region. The Prime Minister of Pakistan, who presides over Gilgit Baltistan Council, is the de-facto president of the region in accordance to the 2009 ordinance. The 15-member Council includes six members from the 33-member Gilgit Baltistan Legislative Assembly and nine Pakistani parliamentary members appointed by the governor. Final authority rests with the governor, whose decisions cannot be overruled by the Assembly. Nevertheless, the governor himself is federally appointed along with the chief minister and is answerable to Islamabad, not the local people.

Numerous striking differences between political structures of the collective disputed territory are noteworthy. As above-mentioned, AJK is governed through its Interim Constitution Act of 1974 that spells out its status under United Nations Commission for India and Pakistan. In contrast, GB is ruled through ad hoc laws framed by the Government of Pakistan without

consulting the locals. The 2009 ordinance briefly refers to the UN resolutions without correctly identifying them.

Secondly, political officials of AJK take oaths of office to ‘remain loyal to the country and the cause of accession of the State of Jammu and Kashmir to Pakistan’. Whereas, oaths of office in GB demand local officials to ‘remain loyal to Pakistan’. Both regions are deemed disputed but declare allegiance to different entities, assuming that, “AJK is yet to accede, while GB has already acceded.”

Lastly, the State Subject Rule (SSR) has been abolished in GB but remains intact in Azad Kashmir. For the sake of clarity, it is essential to explain the relevance of SSR to the region. The News Pakistan published an article titled ‘The Case of Gilgit-Baltistan’ in August 2019, detailing the abolishment of the SSR, an often-forgotten human rights violation perpetuated by the national government. State-subject rule maintains the demographics of the region by limiting property purchase to the region’s residents only. Martin Sökefeld, in his chapter on the liminality of Gilgit-Baltistan in *Kashmir: History, Politics, and Representation*, emphatically opposed Pakistan’s revocation of the State Subject Rule (SSR) in Gilgit Baltistan. In 1974, former Prime Minister Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto abolished SSR and allowed residents from other provinces to buy land in Gilgit Baltistan. This violates all Kashmir agreements signed and ratified by India and Pakistan.

---

Most locals have repeatedly demanded restoration of SSR. Some viewed this as a sign of Pakistan’s official recognition of Gilgit Baltistan as a province. Some believe that the diversity of the region will be affected if SSR is enacted again. Instead, there should be a special bill of rights in Gilgit-Baltistan which would clearly define residents of Gilgit-Baltistan and safeguard their rights against encroachment and usurpation of their lands, jobs, resources and social and political rights. It is also argued that SSR was a colonial tool that trapped Gilgit Baltistanis within their region and thus should be revised.

However, Sökefeld disagrees. He believes that the revocation of SSR led to an imbalance in the region. Sunni Muslims moved to Gilgit Baltistan, shifting the Shia majority and causing unprecedented sectarian violence. In addition, rich landowners started buying swaths of precious land for profit. The locals were once again left baffled. One needs to understand that land is a precious commodity in the mountainous terrain. Not only has the revocation of SSR led to migrants from other provinces but has also increased land grabbing efforts by Pakistani nationals and neighboring China. The government of Pakistan allocated 500 acres of land for a special economic zone for trade with China in GB without seeking approval from locals.

The official website of Pakistan’s defence forces claims that Pakistan never abolished SSR because SSR was never formally established in GB. They claim that SSR was ‘theoretically’ extended to GB since GB was under the rule of Maharaja of Kashmir. It is interesting how the Pakistani government believes SSR was never extended to GB because it was

---

63 News Desk,” Call to Restore State Subject Rule in N.As.”
not directly under the rule of the Maharaja of Kashmir but also believes that GB is part of the Kashmir conflict. This further reinforces the ambiguity and liminality of the region.

**Resisting Liminality**

Gilgit Baltistan hasn’t remained quiet in the face of another colonial set-up. Martin Sökefeld credits Mirza Hasan Khan, a leading figure of the war for accession, for sowing the seeds of dissent amongst his community. He formed the first political party of the region, the Gilgit League, in 1956, which was dissolved once martial law was declared in 1958. Young men from present-day GB started attending esteemed Pakistani universities and gradually realized the façade of autonomy in their region. The Tanzim-e-Millat Party was formed, under the leadership of local leader Johar Ali Khan, in 1971 to demand abolition of the princely state and provincial status to the then Northern Areas. However, sectarian conflict seeped through the region causing rivalry amongst local political parties. The Gilgit Baltistan Jamhuri Mahaz was formulated in direct opposition to Tanzim-e-Millat. Sunni-dominated Jamhuri Mahaz supported accession of GB with Azad Jammu and Kashmir to create a unified state with a Sunni majority.

Zia-ul-Haq prohibited political activism and dissent across the nation in the late 1970s and early 1980s but political activity rose again in the late 1980s with the establishment of the Karakorum National Movement (KNM). Led by students and activists from the region, the Movement spelled its demands for provincial status and representation in National Assembly.

---

67 Sökefeld, “Not Part of Kashmir, but the Kashmir Dispute,” 139-141.
KNM was followed by the Balwaristan National Front (BNF) that too called for real autonomy but through the creation of an independent Gilgit-Baltistan country. BNF’s anti-Pakistan stance was cultivated and promoted by the Indian government. Although BNF’s intentions were to seek independence, the unintended result of their vitriol against the federal government led to a nationwide recognition of Pakistan’s neglect of GB.68 Pakistan People’s Party Gilgit Baltistan faction has gained prominence over the past two decades due to its allegiance with one of the largest political parties in Pakistan but also because of its disapproval of the removal of aforementioned SSR. Gilgit-Baltistan’s political parties, quite evidently, operate on opposing platforms. The Awami Action Committee (AAC), an alliance of political groups from GB, has long demanded autonomy for the region in some form. Efforts of AAC to secure rights for the people of GB came to light in the immediate aftermath of the 2018 Order. “There is a significant difference between the administrative structure in Azad Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan. There is a state setup in Azad Kashmir, while Gilgit-Baltistan is still being run through ordinances,” complained AAC when comparing GB and AJK governments.69 The AAC was attacked by police when protesting against the 2018 reforms in Gilgit, causing several injuries to local officials.70

Even though Zia’s tyrannical reign ended four decades ago, political dissent in Gilgit Baltistan is often censored by the federal government. Baba Jan, GB resident turned political activist, organized homeless people to seek compensation and rehabilitation from the federal government after the January 2010 landslides in Gilgit-Baltistan. In 2011, he and his fellow activists led the protest for the rights of uncompensated families and were met with open fire

68 Sökefeld, “Not Part of Kashmir, but the Kashmir Dispute,” 140.
from the police that killed several innocent civilians. He, along with 11 other activists, were convicted of being involved in political riots under the Anti-Terrorism Act and sentenced to 40-years imprisonment. Noam Chomsky, along with other prominent global figures, have signed petitions for his release but Jan remains in jail. Thus, the false promise of freedom of speech for ‘citizens of Pakistan’ evidently does not apply to residents of Gilgit-Baltistan.

Caylee Hong highlights international efforts to resist liminality in the region. “International attention is seen as necessary to contest constitutional liminality,” claims Hong. She highlights the European Parliament’s diplomatic intervention in Gilgit-Baltistan to demonstrate the necessity of engaging in international activism to have their demands heard. The 2007 European Parliament Report on the democratic deficit in Gilgit Baltistan led to the formation of the 2009 Order. This report not only heavily criticized Pakistan’s inability to grant democratic representation to the people of Gilgit-Baltistan but also connects GB’s plight with the international human rights regime by calling attention to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights that states that all people have the inalienable right to self-determination.

**Boundaries and Identity: The Politics of Mapping Gilgit-Baltistan**

Pakistan cannot openly include Azad Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan as an undisputed national territory as its official position, seconded by the country’s constitution, is that the region

---

is disputed and a UN-led plebiscite will decide its future. However, the irresponsible conciseness with which the constitution refers to, ‘such States and territories as are or may be included in Pakistan, whether by accession or otherwise,’ places Gilgit-Baltistan in an ambiguous enough position for the country to, “remain in compliance of UN resolutions as well as continue denying constitutional rights to the people of the region.” The 2020 United Nations official map of the world identifies the collective region of Gilgit-Baltistan, Pakistan-controlled Azad Kashmir, and Indian-held Jammu and Kashmir, as the disputed territory of Jammu and Kashmir, as per its official stance (Figure 1).

Strikingly, the contentious region’s political and territorial ambiguity is proven by analyzing mapping techniques employed across the sub-continent. The Official Indian Map, taken from the Survey of India, shows Gilgit-Baltistan as part of the larger Jammu and Kashmir disputed region. (Figure 2). Surprisingly, ignoring the politico-territorial reality, the map does not refer to Jammu and Kashmir, Azad Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan, as disputed. This depicts India’s official claim that Kashmir is and has been a fundamental part of the Republic. The lack of recognition of Kashmir’s reality in India confounds its international status.

In contrast, Pakistan terms the Azad Jammu and Kashmir region as ‘disputed’. However, after inspecting numerous maps shared by Pakistan’s government, Pakistan’s inability to concretize Gilgit Baltistan’s status is noticeable. Throughout history, Pakistan’s maps have portrayed different versions of Kashmir and Northern Areas. Drawing on sociologist Nosheen Ali’s analysis of Pakistani maps, Pakistan’s perception of disputed Kashmir is rooted in

uncertainty. In the 2012 Survey of Pakistan Map, the region identified as disputed Kashmir is just a blanket category labelled, ‘Jammu and Kashmir, Disputed Territory’ (Figure 3). This labelled region does not include Aksai Chin, China-occupied Kashmir surrendered to China by Pakistan through the 1963 Sino-Pakistan Agreement. The official Indian map encompasses Aksai Chin as India maintains that Pakistan was not authorized to cede disputed land. Interestingly, the Line of Control that divides Indian-held Kashmir and Pakistan-held Kashmir is absent, as that would symbolically map the Indian-held Kashmir and weaken Pakistan’s official claim to the entire territory of Kashmir. However, the region identified as disputed Kashmir does not include parts of present-day Gilgit Baltistan. It is clearly separated from the rest of Jammu and Kashmir and not labelled ‘disputed’. An indirect clarification on Gilgit-Baltistan’s official political status is presented; the government of Pakistan’s intention to maintain ambiguity is portrayed by the colors used to separate regions. Every province is colored differently, but the cartographers color present-day Gilgit Baltistan and disputed Jammu and Kashmir with the same ‘light green’. Although a boundary exists between both regions, “the colors connect but the lines divide.” Thus, the ‘calculated ambiguity’ towards the region, promotes indecision while enforcing deep political control. The official mapping agency of Pakistan does not directly categorize Gilgit-Baltistan as disputed.

The politics of urban planning are exemplified in the varying maps of Gilgit-Baltistan. Its liminality is kept intact because its status is disputed internationally. Its disputed status is not translated on Pakistan’s official map, thus creating a sense of uncertainty and speculation amongst its population and beyond.

78 Ali, Delusional States: Feeling Rule and Development in Pakistan’s Northern Frontier, 47.
Conclusion

“We are peaceful people. We don’t even need money from the Pakistani government. We just need recognition. We just need a proper identification,” pleaded Jamil Iqbal, one of my interviewees and member of the Gilgit-Baltistani community in New York City who had lived in Gilgit for 20 years. He emphasized the neglect and uncertainty his people had encountered for centuries that led to frustration spilling in the form of violence.

Betwixt and in-between, liminality as a legal uncertainty is evident in the region. Officially, the region is not a *de jure* but a *de facto* part of Pakistan. As Sökefeld explains, Gilgit-Baltistan is not part of Kashmir but the Kashmir dispute. He notes that the region is held hostage by the Kashmir dispute, deferring its accession to Pakistan. Reform packages promised more representation but maintained the supremacy of the federal government. Rights, short of legal and political integration, were extended to calm the masses. It may seem illogical that Gilgit-Baltistan fights for recognition from a politically unstable and economically disadvantaged nation that sustains a state of disillusionment and ambiguity. However, fairly recent memory of the struggles of their forefathers against oppressive rule to declare accession to Pakistan rationalizes their repeated demand for provincial recognition.

Nevertheless, it is naïve to substantiate the federal government’s efforts to obscure Gilgit-Baltistan’s political status by believing in the notion of awaiting a possible plebiscite to resolve the dispute. As I argue in the next two chapters, this uncertainty is intentional and fueled by opportunistic reasons that manifest the government’s plans to concretize and make permanent the region’s legal liminality.

80 Sökefeld, “Not Part of Kashmir, but the Kashmir Dispute,” 14.
FIGURE 1

UNITED NATIONS WORLD MAP
FEBRUARY 2020

FIGURE 3

POLITICAL MAP OF PAKISTAN

http://www.surveyofpakistan.gov.pk/Detail/NzBjM2U4ZDEtNjBjNS00Mjk4LThkYjQtQTcyYjMwM2I2Mzhi
In the Dragon’s Shadow: China’s Influence on Gilgit-Baltistan

Aksai Chin Border Dispute

For decades prior to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor agreement, Pakistan left no stone unturned to appease China; and in return, China secured a neighboring ally against hostile India. The Sino-Pakistan Agreement of 1963 was the first, and most significant, milestone in Sino-Pak history and solidified the strange bedfellows’ friendship. Simply put, China’s maps showed areas of Kashmir in China, leading to much distress in the subcontinent. The Johnson Line of 1865 placed Aksai Chin in Kashmir, thus after the Maharaja of Kashmir declared its accession to India, the Indian government claimed Aksai Chin. However, the Macartney-Macdonald Line of 1899 placed Aksai Chin in China. Nevertheless, a few years after the 1947 independence and partition, it was realized that Aksai China was easily accessible to the Chinese, who started developing major roads on it, whilst the Indians had to cross the treacherous Karakoram to access the region. Nevertheless, Jawaharlal Nehru, the former Prime Minister of India, maintained his claim over the region.

Pakistan, another claimant of Kashmir, voted to grant China a seat in the United Nations, leading China to negotiate disputed Aksai China with the Islamic Republic instead. Pakistan effectively divided the disputed region of Kashmir and granted China control over Aksai Chin, gaining a formidable ally in the region. China, in return, supported Pakistan’s stance on Kashmir, tilting the regional axis in favor of Pakistan’s plebiscite solution. The Indian government denounced Pakistan for ‘ceding Kashmiri territory to China’. However, Pakistan defended its

stance on the basis of the Macartney-Macdonald Line of 1899, instead alleging that China had ceded a part of its rightful territory to Pakistan.85

The accession of Aksai Chin is vital to understand the government of Pakistan’s intentions in Gilgit-Baltistan. Pakistan’s inability to grant provisional provincial status to Gilgit-Baltistan under the pretense of the plebiscite is hypocritical as is substantiated by Article 6 of the Sino-Pakistan agreement of 1963:

“The two Parties have agreed that after the settlement of the Kashmir dispute between Pakistan and India, the sovereign authority concerned will reopen negotiations with the Government of the People's Republic of China, on the boundary as described in Article Two of the present Agreement, so as to sign a formal Boundary Treaty to replace the present agreement: Provided that in the event of that sovereign authority being Pakistan, the provisions of this agreement and the aforesaid Protocol shall be maintained in the formal Boundary Treaty to be signed between the Peoples Republic of China and Pakistan.”86

Whether this region originally belonged to China or not is beyond the scope of this thesis but Pakistan’s readiness to temporarily give China a part of a disputed territory until the Kashmir crisis is resolved, proves that Pakistan could grant Gilgit Baltistan’s requests for provisional provincial status until the plebiscite is held. Thus, the Sino-Pakistan agreement debases Pakistan’s justifications for disenfranchising the people of Gilgit-Baltistan; begging the question: Why? In short, the government of Pakistan prioritizes its friendship with China over the rights of its own citizens manifested through the hotly debated China-Pakistan Economic Corridor.

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor

“Pak-China friendship is higher than the Himalayas, and deeper than the deepest sea in the world and sweeter than honey,” said former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to Premier of the People’s Republic of China Li Keqiang on Sharif’s first diplomatic visit to a foreign country after his win in the 2013 national elections. This point was the culmination of China-Pakistan relationships and the start of a ginormous infrastructure project that changed the fate of Gilgit-Baltistan and demonstrated its crippling authority over its own territory.

Gilgit-Baltistan provides Pakistan an extended border with China. China’s One Belt and One Road initiative, commonly referred to as the Belt Road Initiative or BRI, builds and funds construction projects spearheaded by China globally. In 2015, President Xi Jinping and former Prime Minister of Pakistan Nawaz Sharif signed a momentous agreement, later termed China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, commonly referred to as CPEC, promising $62 billion investment and infrastructural projects in Pakistan. The corridor would connect the Chinese northern province of Xinjiang with the deep-sea Pakistani port of Gwadar to cut China’s maritime distance and offer the country another strategic port in the Arabian sea.

The Chinese government has made ambitious promises to build modern transportation networks to connect Karachi and Gwadar, Karachi and Lahore, and Karachi and Peshawar. All projects are scheduled to be completed by 2050. The official website of the Corridor describes it as, “the enhancement of geographical linkages having improved road, rail, and air transportation system with frequent


China and Pakistan: An analysis of CPEC’s socio-economic impact on the country

Pakistan considered this deal with the Chinese government the lifeboat it needed to save its drowning economy. Nevertheless, it is essential to breakdown China’s economic investment in Pakistan to recognize the real beneficiaries of this corridor. CPEC is funded through direct investment, soft loans, and commercial deposits. Although widespread CPEC-initiated infrastructural development in Pakistan is expected to generate profit in the long-run, Pakistan has suffered tremendously under the load of unsustainable dependence on Chinese loans.

CPEC has contributed to an elevation of Pakistan’s external debt. Pakistan owns $6.7 billion in commercial loans to China by June 2022. Pakistan’s total external debt and liabilities increased by $31.6 billion between Fiscal Year 2015 and Fiscal Year 2018 to $96.7 billion, due to higher borrowing from China to finance the fiscal deficit. However, considering the current situation, Pakistan cannot even pay a fraction of that money by the set due date. Pakistan’s enthusiastic borrowing from its eager neighbor led Pakistan’s Prime Minister Imran Khan to borrow $6 billion from the IMF in 2019, making this Pakistan 13th IMF loan. Although the CPEC loan is 6% of Pakistan’s total external debt and liabilities, it does not indicate that Pakistan can return the money by the contractual deadlines.

---

92 Anwar, “CPEC and Pakistan’s Debt Burden.”
China-Pakistan Economic Corridor has also contributed to a sense of inferiority amongst Pakistanis. Firstly, Pakistan’s hyper-religious establishment has turned a blind eye to the persecution of Uighur Muslims in Xinjiang. Beijing has initiated a crackdown that includes imprisoning at least 120,000 in re-education camps. And yet, Pakistani officialdom, because of the importance of its partnership with Beijing, has ignored these abuses. Prime Minister Imran Khan dodged a question on this topic during an interview with the Financial Times, claiming he “did not know much about it”. The more that China continues to abuse its Muslims even as it casts a wider shadow over Pakistan, the greater the likelihood that Pakistan’s influential Islamists and their many supporters will turn on China; call out Beijing for its treatment of Muslims; and lambast the Pakistan-China partnership as a blasphemous bond.

The second reason why China’s influence is problematic for Pakistani society and culture is that its nationals in Pakistan—who are coming to the country in increasingly large numbers—enjoy an environment of impunity. This impunity has enabled appalling and unpunished behavior that has included attacks on local security forces, marriage scams, and the neglect of already-marginalized populations in Gilgit-Baltistan, the foundation of CPEC.

Chinese engineers, working on CPEC projects, have attacked local police in the city of Khanewal after being told they could not leave their housing complexes without security personnel. The Chinese engineers cut power supplies to the police camp in a local construction site, and they abandoned their heavy machinery on main roads in protest. However, no legal action was taken against the instigators. Instead, six policemen were suspended because they had

---

not “restrained” themselves.\textsuperscript{95} However, it is also important to note that Chinese workers in Pakistan have been targeted by terrorists which had led to increasing securitization and militarization of Gilgit-Baltistan. Nevertheless, Chinese citizens get a free pass in Pakistan.

Thousands of impoverished women in Pakistan have been the target of predatory marriage scams run by Chinese migrants. These brides are promised a better standard of living but are instead trafficked to China and forced into prostitution. Numerous reports indicate that Chinese businessmen have married local Pakistani women and taken them to China to force them into prostitution. According to a report from July 2019, 200 women, who are the wives of men from Gilgit Baltistan, have been locked away in the so-called ‘education centers’ run by China in Xinjiang province.\textsuperscript{96} Not surprisingly, the Chinese migrant ringleaders of these trafficking scams are not held accountable.

From a geopolitical standpoint, India’s relation with its least favorite neighbor has soured with the advent of this multinational project. Both countries have fought three wars over the disputed territory of Kashmir where CPEC is rooted. New Delhi expressed anger at China’s construction in Gilgit-Baltistan, calling it a breach of sovereignty and the United Nations resolution. China, in fear of international sanctions, has pushed Pakistan to grant Gilgit-Baltistan provincial status so that it loses its disputed status. However, despite Pakistan’s refusal to


recognize Gilgit-Baltistan as a rightful part of its territory, China has continued to use the Karakoram Highway.

**China and Gilgit-Baltistan: False Promises**

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, amongst unprecedented economic and regional-relationship dilemmas, has also failed to fulfill its promise of revamping Gilgit-Baltistan. The ‘lifeline’ of CPEC, the Karakoram highway that connects China to Pakistan, passes through Gilgit-Baltistan. Gilgit-Baltistan was promised employment, improved educational opportunities, a booming industry, and a stronger relationship with the federal government. Instead, the developmental impacts of infrastructural projects on Gilgit-Baltistan’s indigenous community has led people to question the success of this much-hyped initiative.

Although Gilgit-Baltistan quite literally provides China with a direct pipeline into Pakistan, Gilgit-Baltistan itself is not gaining from the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and has never gained from the China-Pakistan friendship. The government of Pakistan acquired lands of local farmers in 2012 during the realignment of the Karakoram Highway that connects both countries. Thousands of landowners were displaced and were never fully compensated for an unexplained breach of their human rights.\(^7\) Thus, alarms raised amongst the local population when the China-Pakistan corridor was announced. Without the Karakoram highway, the corridor would cease to exist. Thus, the residents of Gilgit-Baltistan were promised employment, industry, and a complete reconstruction of the neglected state. However, since its inception in 2014, CPEC has not led to a single dollar of investment in Gilgit-Baltistan, according to Taj

Haider, head of the Senate’s special committee on CPEC from 2015-2018. Locals complained of CPEC’s focus on Punjab, the largest province by size and population in Pakistan, and Gwadar, the deep-sea port referred to as the “gateway to Asia”, instead of GB which allows China to access Pakistan by land. Gilgit Baltistan’s role has been severely limited. Except for providing services of the road and some security-related assurances, GB has been largely excluded from the infrastructural makeover of the country.\textsuperscript{98} The government has highlighted different mega-structural projects scheduled to begin in Gilgit-Baltistan, but none have begun as of yet. The voraciously promoted Gilgit Karakoram International University Hydropower project, which would provide 100MW of energy to the deprived state, has been “under review of experts from both sides” since early 2018.\textsuperscript{99} Additionally, even if the proposed projects begin, Gilgit-Baltistanis fear the potential ecological, financial, and social harm to its residents. The locals indeed want to reap the benefits of CPEC but the analyses on potential repercussions of international development in a disputed territory and a noticeable lack of governmental concern have left many in the region worried.

Firstly, the Awami Action Committee (AAC), an alliance of political groups from GB, demanded GB be included as a third party in the CPEC agreement.\textsuperscript{100} However, GB was not included as a stakeholder and this deal was signed without the consultation of its peoples. Developmental consultant Izhar Hunzai, who researched the potential long-term impacts of CPEC, shared in a statement from 2016 that CPEC is a ‘black hole’ for the locals. “The

\textsuperscript{98} Khan, “Gilgit-Baltistan at the Crossroad of CPEC: Part 1.”
\textsuperscript{100} Shahid, “Gilgit-Baltistan: Pakistan’s Geopolitical Loophole.”
government has not engaged with us; we do not know exactly how much or what Gilgit-Baltistan’s role will be in CPEC or how we will benefit from it,” expressed Hunzai.  

Secondly, the government of Pakistan promoted the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor as the solution to rampant unemployment and underemployment in the underdeveloped region. However, China invited its local labor to work on all Chinese-funded infrastructural projects instead. Islamabad claimed that CPEC construction in Gilgit-Baltistan will create 1.8 million jobs in the region and sustain the region long-term, but China has planned to bring 400,000 of its own labor to the region.  

Political analysts from the region were, unsurprisingly, doubtful of Pakistan’s promises. Amir Hussain, a political analyst from the region, blamed CPEC for destroying the livelihood of the few employed locals. “The Chinese bring their own manpower wherever they go. For CPEC, around 400,000 of them will be working in Gilgit-Baltistan. How will the locals get jobs?” Hussain questioned. Additionally, the government revoked the licenses for local miners and handed all mining in the region to Chinese developers. Cheap Chinese goods have already flooded local markets of the north and surpassed the regional industry. Furthermore, China’s massive infrastructural projects are solely benefitting the federal government of Pakistan rather than the crumbling industry of Gilgit Baltistan. Yoana Barakova, a research analyst at European Foundation for South Asian Studies, expressed concern at the Pakistani government’s promise of distributing profits amongst the locals. “The region is

---


103 S Khan, “Skepticism in Gilgit-Baltistan over China-Pakistan Economic Corridor.”
completely excluded from high financial profits,” said Barakov.\textsuperscript{104} The timely decision to charge a fee on vehicles using the highway. Moreover, the road toll charged to Chinese trucks entering GB through Karakoram Highway is distributed amongst the federal government of Pakistan and the Chinese officials managing CPEC.

Thirdly, as mentioned before, China’s economic intervention was bound to be a point of contention between Pakistan and India, a claimant of the region. India fervently opposed China’s infrastructural projects in the region it deems Pakistani-occupied Kashmir. In July 2018, the Union Defense Ministry of India described CPEC as a challenge to Indian sovereignty. However, this is not the sole reason why India refuses to partake or support Chinese development in Pakistan.

The Indian government realized the massive scale of the Belt and Road Initiative would increase China’s regional and global power. China’s partnership in Pakistan gives Pakistan a strong ally in the region against India. Additionally, not only are the economic fruits of the corridor-led industry suspected to be reaped by the federal government, locals’ livelihood is projected to be severely impacted. It is feared that over the coming years, locals will be displaced to make space for Chinese settlements.\textsuperscript{105} According to certain news outlets, thousands have been displaced already.\textsuperscript{106} Moreover, China’s offer to build the controversial Bhasha Dam, a

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{105}Kaitlyn Howe and Izhar Hunzai, “The politics of exclusion,” \textit{South Asian History and Culture} 10, no. 1 (March 2019): 24.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
long-debated project stagnant for decades, has led to the land confiscation and subsequently displaced thousands without any compensation.\textsuperscript{107}

Beyond severe economic issues lie disastrous ecological problems. Pakistan is highly vulnerable to climate change. Pakistan ranked 8\textsuperscript{th} in the countries most affected by climate change from 1998-2017 according to the Global Climate Risk Index 2019.\textsuperscript{108} Major infrastructural development leads to a sharp increase in air pollution in an already smog-covered country. Gilgit Baltistan is especially vulnerable to climate change. Gilgit-Baltistan is at the confluence of three major mountain ranges: Karakoram, Himalayas, and the Hindu Kush. From alpine meadows to snowcapped glaciers, the region hosts a wide variety of unique flora and fauna. The recent surge in global warming intensified snow-melting and glacial recession.

Until 1978, the region was cut-off from the rest of the world and was only accessible by dilapidated roads and steep hiking trails. 1978 saw the commencement of the Karakorum Highway that was created with the sole purpose of providing a trade route with China. Thus, the social inclusion of Gilgit-Baltistanis was largely ignored for decades until Pakistan decided to establish a land route with its neighbor. The road enabled locals to travel back and forth and engage in other industries than agriculture. However, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor has negatively impacted the serenity of the region. A heavy influx of traffic and tourism from China on the Karakoram Highway causes air and noise pollution. Air pollution can stress sensitive high-altitude regions and affect the growth of mountainous forests that protect the region against

\textsuperscript{108} David Eckstein, Marie-Lena Hutfils, and Maik Winges, “Global Climate Risk Index 2019,” \textit{German Watch} (December 2019).
avalanches, soil erosion, and landslides.\textsuperscript{109} Emission of harmful gasses from traffic can cause serious health problems in the locals living in proximity to the Karakoram Highway. Emission from cars is amplified in Gilgit-Baltistan because the traffic moves uphill, thus using more energy and releasing more harmful gases. Locals have spoken out against the lack of planning by the federal government to address the environmental concerns that stem from a national project that takes more than it gives to the most affected area of Gilgit-Baltistan.

Amidst this chaos, another force now harms the debilitated northern region of Pakistan: Coronavirus. 333 people (at the time of writing) have been diagnosed with coronavirus in Gilgit-Baltistan, not far behind the significantly larger provinces of Punjab and Sindh.\textsuperscript{110} Chinese engineers remained under lockdown for an additional 4 weeks in Wuhan and other provinces of China when they returned for New Year’s Celebration.\textsuperscript{111} However, realizing the time-sensitive development in various parts of Pakistan, most were sent back to continue work on projects. Although Pakistan’s government claims that before traveling on special planes to return to Pakistan, Chinese engineers and workers were quarantined in their home countries, the government’s decision seems rushed. Major regions of China were closed for months on end but when it came to continuing time-sensitive projects in Pakistan, China immediately returned the labor and Pakistan readily accepted it. Minister of Pakistan Railways Sheikh Rashid Ahmed said, “Coronavirus would never affect the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and the Main Line (ML-1) project would continue according to the schedule.”\textsuperscript{112}

\textsuperscript{110} http://covid.gov.pk/.
Khunjerab Pass, the gateway to the world, through which Karakoram Highway runs, is closed annually from November to March, the snowiest months of the year. An extension of its closure was expected due to the violent spread of the disease in Gilgit-Baltistan. However, Pakistan opened the gates of Khunjerab Pass on March 28 to allow passage of trucks filled with necessary medical equipment to enter the already drained country. Numerous NGOs and political activists opposed this short-sighted decision to open the border. In response, Pakistan’s government has highlighted that not only is Xinjiang the least impacted of all provinces in China, but also the Karakoram highway sustains thousands of families in Gilgit-Baltistan. Pakistan’s government fails to understand is that the problem is not China but opening borders at a time when the health infrastructure of the region is already burdened. Dr. Misfar Hasan, a political activist from Pakistan, highlighted, “there are only a few ventilators and no trained doctors who can manage the seriously ill (in Gilgit Baltistan).” The region is ill-equipped to tackle the pandemic and the socio-economic and ecological impacts of continuing trade in these dark times will further debilitate the region and its population.

**Conclusion**

Jamil Iqbal, a prominent middle-aged member of the diaspora Gilgit Baltistan community in New York, who I’ve quoted briefly before, frowned when I asked his thoughts on the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. Standing amongst tens of his community members, he exclaimed,

---


“The Corridor’s royalties do not belong to us! They go through our province, but the federal government collects the toll. Gilgit-Baltistan has never benefitted from CPEC!”

China realized the enormous geostrategic relevance of the region and decided to profit off of it. The locals were left in the dark while the central government of China and Pakistan planned to revamp the region. Gilgit-Baltistan was not even consulted when the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor was officially agreed upon. “An atmosphere of secrecy and confusion regarding the whole CPEC project,” writes Director of South Asia Democratic Forum Siegfried Wolf, surrounded the region.

Most importantly, Gilgit Baltistan is not even benefitting from the multi-billion-dollar project. Locals were promised employment opportunities, tourism, and more representation. Instead, most CPEC projects are concentrated in the wealthy province of Punjab. In the immediate aftermath of the start of CPEC, locals experienced massive unemployment due to competition with cheaper Chinese goods. The government, furthermore, canceled the licenses of local miners and handed mining to the Chinese workers. Most shockingly, all major construction contracts go either to Chinese firms or Pakistani military-owned companies (MILBUS) at the expense of local entrepreneurs and work force. Pakistan has increased its military presence in Gilgit Baltistan to protect Chinese businessmen. The residents of Gilgit-Baltistan have long-needed security from sectarian violence and terrorism, but Pakistan extended this resource once the Chinese businessmen arrived.

China’s unaccountable actions in Gilgit Baltistan and beyond further emphasize the liminality of the region as the locals do not have the constitutional right to take up their complaints to the Supreme Court. Gilgit-Baltistan is now expected to bear the brunt of coronavirus without sufficient help from the federal government. Its constitutional ambiguity and
political liminality are manifested through the federal government’s refusal to fulfill demands for increase testing in hospitals and immediate cash-assistance for locals.\textsuperscript{116} As anthropologist Shafqat Hussain notes, ‘the continued failure of the Pakistani state to respond positively to the political demands of the people of the [Gilgit-Baltistan] has spawned an atmosphere of disenchantment and disdain’.\textsuperscript{117} The liminality of the region is apparent when it comes to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor; unrestricted access to a foreign nation without approval from the local community while falsely promising increased employment and development. The Chinese workers do not have to share profits or be concerned with Gilgit-Baltistan’s local population as it is not an official part of Pakistan. Consequently, it can be argued that Pakistan maintains GB’s liminality to authorize unrestricted access to the region for financial gain and to sustain mutually beneficial relations with China.


Abrogation of Article 370 and the Concretization of Liminality in Gilgit-Baltistan

Pakistan’s justification for maintaining a stronghold over Gilgit-Baltistan fell through on August 5, 2019, when India abrogated Article 370 and scrapped Article 35A from the Indian constitution, effectively annexing Indian-held Jammu and Kashmir. Article 35A empowered Jammu and Kashmir’s legislature to grant special privileges to ‘permanent residents’ of Kashmir — such as purchasing land, contesting local elections, availing state benefits — that non-permanent residents were not entitled to. Article 370 excepted Indian-held Jammu and Kashmir from the Indian constitution and allowed the local legislature to make its own laws in all matters except foreign affairs, defense, finance, and communications. Prime Minister Narendra Modi had promised in his manifesto that he would take this unpopular step, and to India and the global community’s surprise, he actually did.

However, this action cannot be attributed to the freewill of a sovereign state. The third perambulatory clause of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 47 of 1948 requests both governments to, “create proper conditions for a free and impartial plebiscite to decide whether the State of Jammu and Kashmir is to accede to Pakistan or not.” In addition, Article 1 (ii) of the Simla Agreement signed between Prime Ministers of India and Pakistan in 1972 to bilaterally solve the Kashmir issue clearly states:

119 The Constitution of India.
“That the two countries are resolved to settle their differences by peaceful means through bilateral negotiations or by any other peaceful means mutually agreed upon between them. Pending the final settlement of any of the problems between the two countries, neither side shall unilaterally alter the situation and both shall prevent the organization, assistance or encouragement of any acts detrimental to the maintenance of peaceful and harmonious relations.”

The abrogation of Article 370 and 35A not only violate international and bilateral treaties, but India’s own constitution. Dr. Abhinav Chandrachud, an advocate at Bombay High Court, declared this accession unconstitutional. He highlights that the basis of Jammu and Kashmir’s accession to India in October 1947 was that India would not exceed its boundaries without the consent of the people of Jammu and Kashmir through their elected representatives. By not consulting the elected representatives of the region before taking this decision, India has effectively violated the constitution. Chandrachud notes that the Indian government failed to take into account the opinions of the legislative assembly of the state on converting Jammu and Kashmir into a union territory, violating Article 3 of the Indian constitution.

India’s definitive, and illegal, move to annex Jammu and Kashmir, against the wishes of its residents, speaks volumes to the democratic deficit of the country. However, it also speaks volumes to the government of Pakistan’s incompetency in exercising a similar resolution for Gilgit-Baltistan, a region that has been awaiting recognition from the Pakistani government for seven decades. Pakistan’s establishment, as was expected, opposed India’s actions, creating a looming threat of nuclear war across the region. Azad Kashmir stood by Pakistan as the country sought international support to defy India’s actions. However, although politicians in Gilgit-Baltistan disputed this move, an air of uncertainty blanketed the region. Pakistan expressed dissatisfaction at India’s wrongful actions, but this anger seemed misplaced, misdirected, and

122 Simla Agreement, Article 1, Clause 2.
somewhat hypocritical. Gilgit-Baltistan, a supposed part of Kashmir, has pleaded for recognition to no avail whereas the Pakistani government expressed sympathy for Indian Muslims in recently annexed Jammu and Kashmir.

The government of Pakistan, as has been detailed in previous chapters, has time and again justified its unrepresentative policies in Gilgit-Baltistan by emphasizing the sanctity of the UN resolution and India’s upholding of all treaties concerning Kashmir. However, since the abrogation of Article 370, the UN resolution and the Simla Agreement are essentially defunct. Pakistan could grant Gilgit-Baltistan provincial status immediately now that India has done the same. However, its decision to maintain the status quo manifests Pakistan’s intentions of keeping the region in permanent limbo. It is important to note that such a move will invite opposition from the Indian government, Indian-held Kashmir, and Pakistan-held Kashmir, but that did not deter India from officially integrating Jammu and Kashmir. Although Pakistan’s basis of maintaining the liminal status of Gilgit-Baltistan fell through, Gilgit-Baltistan is still stuck in ambiguity. However, this time, its liminality is likely permanent.

Conclusion

Permanently attached to the Kashmir issue for the federal government’s benefit, Gilgit-Baltistan has suffered long enough as the most vulnerable region of Pakistan. Disillusionment and desperation for national identity creates an identity vacuum occupied by increasing religious identification manifested through sectarian violence. Resistance movements are shot down by the police and political activists are imprisoned. Contracted Chinese development is concentrated in all other regions except the most underdeveloped one. Uncertainty looms in the region as India includes Gilgit-Baltistan in its official maps. Devolution of power is a façade to temporarily pacify the disgruntled locals. There is not a structured place it came from and not a structured place that it awaits. Thus, its liminality is permanent, its wait for recognition endless.

“They occupy a liminal and interstitial space in the international legal and political order, an order that remains founded upon and grounded in the interests of sovereign nation states rather than in the claims of sub- or transnational actors, whether individuals or groups.”

Laurie-King Irani, associate professor of Anthropology at Georgetown University, similarly describes the statelessness of Palestinians living under occupation, an unrecognizable part of a recognizable whole. Gilgit-Baltistan’s struggle for recognition has not received comparable coverage, despite previous verbal interventions by the United Nations and the European Parliament. Its historical exploitation by the British, Indians, and China, due to its highly strategical position, shows it has been anomalous for centuries. Time will not tell what is to be done in the region. Time has already told the government’s intentions of maintaining the unpopular status quo. However, it remains to be seen if India takes additional steps to officially annex Pakistan-held Kashmir. There also might be a possibility that Pakistan loosens its control.

126 Laurie King-Irani, “Exiled to a liminal legal zone: are we all Palestinians now?” *Third World Quarterly* 27, no. 5 (2006): 924.
over the region while sustaining its liminality. Nevertheless, its liminality is entrenched and only challengeable under miraculous circumstances.

Permanently settled in the in-between territories have been seldom discussed in the disciplines of political geography and international studies. The creation and manipulation of boundaries by human governments is not only a result of specific socio-cultural regional policies or unique spatial structures, but it is an international phenomenon in all aspects. Permanent liminality transcends across boundaries, political processes, and culture. Consequently, the excruciating experience of prolonged political ambiguity is not only common to Gilgit-Baltistan or the West Bank. Although tax-paying US citizens, Puerto Ricans cannot vote in presidential elections and have no voting power in the US Congress. In the 2012 plebiscite, the locals chose statehood, but the complex web of bureaucracy killed this democratic decision. Hence, Puerto Ricans live a political paradox that concretizes their liminality. Kurds in the Middle East have fought tirelessly for a homeland — Kurdistan — but have never obtained a permanent nation state, instead trapped in the bordering countries of Turkey, Iraq, Syria, Iran, and Armenia. Additionally, the State of Somaliland is a self-declared democratic country but remains ambiguous as it is not recognized by any country or international organization; thus, it survives at the margins of global political processes.

Although varying in scope, the previous examples, amongst numerous others, emphasize the commonness of political permanent uncertainty. Instead of individualizing and separating these cases, a sub-field of permanent liminality in urban and international studies begs origination. Once permanently liminal zones are analyzed collectively, possible policy recommendations and global solutions can be brainstormed and implemented to address this seldom researched global security, social, economic, and cultural dilemma.
Bibliography

I. Blogs, Constitutions, Newspapers, Treaties, Websites, UN Articles/Reports/Resolutions


Eckstein, David, Hutfils, Marie Lena, and Winges, Maik. “Global Climate Risk Index 2019.” German Watch (December 2019).


Tariq


Sino-Pakistan Agreement, March 2, 1963.


Times of India Staff. “No cultural, religious repression of Uighur Muslims in Xinjiang: Pakistan diplomat.” Times of India, January 24, 2019.

https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b3aa0.html [accessed 26 April 2020]


II. Books and Journal Articles


Johnsen, Christian Garmenn and Sørensen, Bent Meier. “‘It’s capitalism on coke!’: From temporary to permanent liminality in organization studies.” Culture and Organization 21, no. 4 (2015): 321-337.


