



## The Baltistan Movement and the Power of Pop *Ghazals*

This article investigates the role of locally produced pop *ghazal* music in the politics of the people of Baltistan, a community living in the western Himalayas on both sides of the border between India and Pakistan and characterized by its blend of Shi'ite and Tibetan culture and its vernacular Tibetan dialect. The pop *ghazals* conjure up an alternative narrative of local history and belonging that is situated in a Himalayan, rather than South Asian, context. Pop *ghazals* are emblematic for local resistance against the postcolonial nationalism of the Indian and Pakistani nation-states and are at the core of the Baltistan Movement, a western Himalayan social movement emerging in the past two decades. The analytical perspective is a continuation of MANUEL'S (1993) work on the cassette culture of northern India that explores the political power of the pop *ghazal* further by drawing on SCOTT'S (1990) concept of hidden/public transcript and SMELSER'S (1968) social strain model of the dynamics of social change.

KEYWORDS: Baltistan—Himalaya—Tibet—Kargil—Skardu—*ghazal*—cassette culture—hidden/public transcript—social strain—social change

CAN POP music play a role in Himalayan contemporary social change? In the Baltistan Movement of the western Himalayas, pop versions of the traditional Arabic, Persian, or Urdu *ghazal* sung in the vernacular Tibetan dialect seem to have acquired a political power by innocuously expressing local political resistance against the nation-states of India and Pakistan. This is accomplished not only by their Tibetan lyrics but also by conjuring up an alternative narrative of belonging situated in a historic western Himalayan rather than postcolonial South Asian context. The production, distribution, and social consequences of this form of Balti music is a continuation of the sociopolitical mobilization facilitated by the so-called cassette culture of northern India (now including digital media). What makes this comparatively small Himalayan community especially interesting is its blend of Shi'ite and Tibetan culture and the way the pop *ghazals* transcend the Indo-Pak border today.

Before Partition, Baltistan and Ladakh constituted an administrative area in the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir called Ladakh Wazarat.<sup>1</sup> As a result of the Gilgit Rebellion in 1947 Ladakh Wazarat, and therefore also the Balti community, was divided by the Line of Control (LOC) between India and Pakistan. Today the name Baltistan refers to the part of Baltistan that is on the Pakistani side of the border, the districts of Baltistan and Ghanche, but members of the Balti community are also found in Kargil, Ladakh, and Nubra on the Indian side.<sup>2</sup>

In the last population census of Pakistan (conducted in 1998) the population in Baltistan was 303,214 persons (214,848 in Baltistan, 88,366 in Ghanche). In the 2001 census of India, the population in Ladakh was 232,924 (117,637 in Leh district, 115,287 in Kargil district). As a community the Balti people are predominantly Muslim. On the Indian side Muslims dominate in Kargil (around 80 percent Ismaili Shi'ite) and Nubra (Shia and Sunni), while Tibetan Buddhists dominate in other parts of Ladakh. Only about 7 percent of the population is Hindu, Sikh, or Christian. The Baltis in Nubra are concentrated in the western part of the valley along the Shyok River and are Nurbakhshis.<sup>3</sup> There are no statistics available regarding the sizes of the religious communities on the Pakistani side but there are various unreliable sources stating different numbers depending on which community they take sides with. However, if Shias and Nurbakhshis are taken together as one community (the Shia community is consistently given as slightly larger than the Nurbakhshi one), in comparison to the Sunni community the former comprises a large

majority, perhaps as high as 80 percent. But the small Sunni community includes higher officials appointed to run the local government, high-ranking army and police officers, and so on. The Balti people are generally of the Shi'ite faith but the vernacular language they speak is a Tibetan dialect, and many of the cultural traditions have a strong Tibetan influence.

Subsequent wars between India and Pakistan sealed the border tight and made it less permeable than would usually be the case in a border area. At the end of the 1970s, improved communications, an increase in development and mobility, and the economic and educational opportunities this facilitated led to a new awareness in the Balti community about its status in the two nation-states (JENSEN 2007; SÖKEFELD 1995). As with other communities on the margins of Indian and Pakistani ethnicity, religious affiliation and identity were politicized in order to access state-controlled development resources and in the struggle for local autonomy (see SAMADDAR 2005; STULIGROSS 1999; SONNTAG 2004).

This process marks the beginning of the so-called “Baltistan Movement,” a social movement that defies the present geopolitical standoff between India and Pakistan. The movement originated in Balti student circles in Karachi during the late 1980s (MAGNUSSON 2006), but it soon spread to the Balti community in India. It was part of a new phase in the identity politics of Pakistan perhaps best known through the emergence of the Muhajir Qaumi Movement (MQM), a student organization in Karachi that came to play a central role in Pakistan's domestic politics in the 1990s.<sup>4</sup> What is significant about these movements is their urban, ethnic, and sectarian base. Rather than being formed in ethnic areas across the country, they were started by young people from these areas who had gone to the city to study. As VERKAAIK (2004) argues, these movements can be seen as challenging Pakistan's hegemonic “postcolonial state nationalism.” In comparison to the elite-driven and centralized state, they represent a form of ethnic/sectarian street-level democracy and a revival of the identities of a variety of communities throughout the country.

This article concentrates specifically on the role of local pop *ghazals* in the identity politics of the Baltistan Movement in reaction to the postcolonial nationalisms of India and Pakistan. As MARSDEN (2005, 124) concludes in his study of locally produced *ghazals* in Chitral, a small town in the northwestern corner of Pakistan, the popularity of the *ghazals* was not just a continuation of Sufi traditions in general, and a result of the influence of popular media, but also a way for people in Chitral to “handle and respond to the pressures to Islamise,” to resist the imposition of “puritanical visions of Islam” and to continue what were increasingly being labeled as non-Islamic local cultural traditions. By following Chitral's most popular band, The Nobles, Marsden demonstrates how the band's Khowari-language music develops a local style of Islam to contest the religious and cultural homogenization of postcolonial nationalism in Pakistan. As a target for postcolonial integrative policies, the Balti community is facing a similar dilemma that is further complicated by the community's spread across both sides of the Indo-Pak border.

POP *GHAZALS* AND CASSETTE CULTURE

It was at the beginning of the twenty-first century that Balti activists in Kargil and Nubra started to produce the first Balti pop *ghazals*. It was a new phenomenon in the Balti community but as a genre of music the pop *ghazal* was already well established in contemporary South Asian pop music. As I will discuss in more detail below, this development is directly related to the small-scale cassette production industry that emerged all over the subcontinent in the 1970s.

The so-called “light classical” *ghazal* and “pop” *ghazal* represent the two most significant approaches to modern *ghazal* singing. The light classical *ghazal* is distinguished by its improvisation and elaboration of the text, while the pop *ghazal* has a precomposed form and is usually performed with a modern band accompanying the singer (MANUEL 1988/1989).

*Ghazal* is the name of a poetic form and a literary genre. Its history goes back to at least seventh century Arabic verse, and by the thirteenth century it was dominating Persian literature in Muslim parts of South and Central Asia. As the *ghazal* spread it was also adapted to other languages such as Pashto and Turkish. By the end of the eighteenth century Urdu *ghazals* had become very popular in India. Although the basic forms of the Persian imagery, metaphors, and formal elements were still present, the Urdu *ghazal* developed its own distinct character, and seemed to capture the imagination of all strands of people irrespective of religious faith (MANUEL 1988/1989, 94). The pop *ghazal* is unquestionably the most popular form today and can be heard blaring out of the sound systems of shops lining local bazaars or performed by a band at a *mahfil* (a semi-public, household performance), while the light classical form is most often performed in what is known as *tarannum*, where it is read or chanted at a *musha'ira*, a public poetry recital (see QURESHI 1969 for a detailed description of such an event). The popularity of the *ghazal* can also be traced to its appropriation by Bollywood films and Indian television serials, where it has provided a respectable symbolic form of intimate romantic and even erotic interaction between characters (SKILLMAN 1986; MANUEL 1988; QURESHI 1990).

From a structural point of view a *ghazal* consists of a rather straightforward meter of rhymed couplets. The poet uses a conventional symbolic and metaphorical vocabulary, and each couplet can have a different theme. The skill is to create linguistically-condensed sentences relating to themes from history, mysticism, philosophy, and making fun of Islamic orthodoxy, celebrating madness or intoxication within its restrictions. The most common theme of the *ghazal*, however, is that of unrequited love (MANUEL 1993, 95).

In modern times, the *ghazal* has always been quick to find itself at home with new forms of mass media. When phonographic records started to be mass-produced in India, it did not take long before *ghazal* recordings had captured most of the emerging market. When the Indian movie industry established itself as the main platform for popular music in the mid-twentieth century, the *ghazal* soon became one of its stock musical formats. As a consequence, its form became even



FIGURE 1. *Zoom*, released in 2005, includes the Balti hit song *Sham Sham* (Your shining name [Sham]). All images reprinted with the permission of the producers.



FIGURE 2. The cover of *Strogi Totee*, released in 2006, features the Balti pop stars Khadim (“The Pang”), Fayaz, and Meena.



FIGURE 3. *Tsarang Hasni's Special*, released in 2006, is the result of an Indo-Pak cross-border collaboration between the poet Hassan Hasni from Skardu and the composer Riyaz Munshi from Kargil.



FIGURE 4. The VCD *Hai-Lay Hrgamo* (Hey Joy), released in 2004, is a collection of pop *ghazal* videos idealizing Balti scenery and dress.

more simplified and set, leaving the more complex themes and improvisational elements behind to become more like the generic catchy Indian *gīt* or song (MANUEL 1993, 106). More recently, the *ghazal* has even established itself on the web. A search on YouTube.com will return several thousands of hits, while a general Google search is likely to return several hundreds of thousand of hits.

When the Internet started to expand across the world in the 1990s, migrants, students, refugees, exiles, and others who for various reasons had left their home countries were among those who were quickest to adopt the new technology to form virtual communities (social networks, online communities, and so on) around cultural issues. In the beginning these groups were often organized as text-based “bulletin boards” or “newsgroups” such as Soc.Cul.Afghanistan, a newsgroup for Afghans described by EDWARDS (1994, 349–51). A similar newsgroup named Soc.Culture.Tibet is moderated from Canada. At that stage of development, Afghans, Tibetans, and others used the Internet with an interest in the discussions of the groups living outside Afghanistan and Tibet, most often in the West. In comparison with the virtual Balti community today, the big difference is that its members are just as often based at home in Skardu or Kargil. Compared with the absence of effective telecommunications networks and the various problems involved in distributing messages, as in the case of the prerevolutionary Iran in the 1970s described by DABASHI (2007), the situation today is very different.

The dislocation mentioned above has been made possible by the more or less global availability of the necessary basic technology and telecommunications today. The simple interface between electronic devices such as computers and mobile phones and telecommunications networks makes the process of texting, recording, and distributing both easy and mobile. For instance, the video recording application included in most mobile phones today has resulted in the posting of an abundance of short videos on the Internet depicting various cultural and political events in Baltistan minutes after they have taken place.<sup>5</sup>

The increased availability and low cost of personal computers, broadband access, and the rise of websites like the aforementioned YouTube, as well as social sites like Facebook, make up the infrastructure of a “mediascape.”<sup>6</sup> This offers new and cheap opportunities for marginalized communities such as the Balti to present themselves through the production, duplication, and distribution of complex repertoires of text, music, and video in a way that contests the postcolonial master narratives of India and Pakistan, as well as the corporate media industry. The electronic technology involved in this process is, comparatively speaking, readily and quickly accessible even in remote geographical areas, and renders eventual attempts by the state and ISPs (internet service providers) to police, censor, and control the flow difficult.

Even in China, notorious for its strict control of the Internet, circumventing censorship is possible, primarily through ingeniously misleading filters or by constantly moving around the Internet, as witnessed by a user:

For every advance in censorship, bloggers find a way around it. We replace banned words with Chinese characters that sound the same when spoken but have a

different meaning when written, or we transliterate them into Roman characters. Recently I came up with another technique: after the authorities blocked one of my entries, I reposted it with the characters aligned vertically instead of horizontally. The filter couldn't recognize the words, but anyone reading them could. Mainly we just keep moving our blogs. We take advantage of proxy servers, and as soon as the government shuts one down, we move to another. And we use the international Adopt a Blog program: bloggers with spare server capacity tag an entry "adoptablog" or "adoptachineseblog" so Chinese people looking for a foreign host can find it.<sup>7</sup>

As long as there is some kind of international Internet connection, state censorship can always be circumvented by technical solutions such as the use of proxy websites (a website from which you can access any other website) and VPN-connections (virtual private networks) to countries with free Internet access or software such as I2P ([www.i2p2.de](http://www.i2p2.de); accessed 14 February 2011) or Psiphon ([psiphon.ca](http://psiphon.ca); accessed 14 February 2011). When posting material on websites like YouTube users can use aliases to disclose their true identity, and data can be posted at so-called "data havens" where they cannot be hacked. An alternative is to carry data across borders on electronic storage devices. It slows down the process but allows for the same cheap global distribution.

In this way footage of incidents such as riots or large scale disasters and accidents, politically radical songs and texts, as well as banned or pirated movies, music, and books can still be distributed, not only via computers but also by mobile phones.

The differences between a previous Balti network that had to rely on personal encounters during pilgrimages or religious studies in the Middle East for communication and exchange of products across the LOC and a borderless Balti online community are obvious. Since commercial broadband access was introduced in Bal-tistan in 2007 the frequency of cross-border contacts between Baltis in India and Pakistan has increased dramatically, bringing movement activists closer together, sharing cultural experiences and political debates almost instantly.

It is not hard to see the production of Balti pop *ghazals* as a continuation of what Manuel terms "cassette culture," a similar technological development but with different means that started in the 1970s when small-scale independent producers began to record and sell compact cassettes with pop versions of regional folk music intended for local audiences. As small local operators they could make a profit on as little as one hundred cassettes sold (MANUEL 1993, 72). For instance, many of the cassettes sold in music shops in the bazaars of Peshawar that contain local music and storytelling have been produced and recorded by the shop owners in small sound studios directly behind the shops (HESTON and NASIR 1989). In their documentation of Pashto music and storytelling in Pakistan's North West Frontier Province, HESTON and NASIR (1989) also mention how performances at *mahfils* and festivals are recorded, copied, and distributed by shops and street sellers. With desktop production, web distribution, and online social networks the artist is able to reach a global audience without any intermediaries nor any external

demands on profit. For instance, the Balti pop *ghazal* composer Riyaz Munshi from Kargil, whom I will return to below, has posted music videos with songs from his album *Sning-i-Shokboo*<sup>8</sup> on YouTube, promoting them through social online networks such as MySpace and Facebook (all three accessed 14 February 2011).

Cassette culture quickly grew to an enormous size, capturing 95 percent of the recorded music market in India. By the end of the 1980s, Indians were buying millions of cassette players every year. MANUEL (1993, 62–63) estimates that in 1991 approximately 217 million cassettes were distributed in India. With the advent of cassette culture, the modern *ghazal* rose to new levels of popularity and began to appear in regional languages like Punjabi, Marathi, Bengali, Pashto, Hindi and, with the developments in Baltistan under discussion here, even in Tibetan.

Cassette culture, however, does not only lead to a revival of regional folk music. It quickly developed a symbolic significance as a cultural expression of politically marginalized communities. It also worked as a vehicle for sociopolitical mobilization as, for example, in the communication between Ayatollah Khomeini and his Iranian followers before the revolution. SREBERNY-MOHAMMADI (1990) shows how a flow of tapes consisting of speeches by Khomeini reached Iran from Iraq through returning Shi'ite pilgrims in the 1960s and 1970s. During his exile in Paris in the late 1970s his speeches were recorded, then transmitted to Iran through phone lines where they were reproduced and available with street vendors in Teheran within a few hours. SREBERNY-MOHAMMADI (1990, 358) calls this “Khomeini’s electronic pulpit, a switched-on minibar.” This somewhat complicated process of distribution was necessitated by the lack of telecommunications networks among ordinary Iranians (DABASHI 2007). Cheap cassettes have also been used to circulate separatist songs in Kashmir, such as the popular “The Call Come From Kashmir” that starts with the line “Allah is great! O warrior of Islam, warrior of God, pick up your sword and come to the battlefield” (MANUEL 1993, 250), and to raise feminist consciousness among Indian women such as the NGO Jagori’s (Awaken, Women) set of five cassettes questioning patriarchy and demanding equal rights (jagori.org; accessed 14 February 2011). MANUEL (1993, 250–56) offers a number of examples from cassettes produced during the communal conflict following the infamous Ayodhya incident in northern India when Hindu and Muslim activists clashed over the destruction of a medieval mosque in 1992.

As MANUEL (1993, 194) suggests in his study of popular music and technology in north India, cassette culture has contributed to the ability of marginalized communities to “affirm, in language, style, and text content, their own social identities on the mass media.”<sup>9</sup> Even if the listener does not understand the political subtext, the music in itself becomes a common object of identification, for example just by being a mass-produced cultural product where songs are written and sung in local language by local artists.

These patterns of an emergent cassette culture can be seen clearly with regard to the Balti pop *ghazals* and Balti *ghazals* in the light classical style. That they are the locally-preferred musical styles is evident both from the lively and vital local

light classical scene in Kargil and Baltistan and the frequent staging of *mushā'iras*, as well as from the commercial success of Balti pop *ghazal* albums.

In Kargil, the *mushā'ira* is often an official and rather highbrow cultural event sponsored by government agencies like the Jammu and Kashmir Academy of Art, Culture, and Languages. Most of the performing poets, but not all of them, are distinguished citizens. Some of them hold high-ranking government jobs. Even though women are present in the audience, the performers are solely men (which is not the case at all with pop *ghazals*). During a typical light classical performance, the *ghazal* is practically recited in dialogue with the audience, whose members can get very emotional by projecting the stories of unrequited love onto their own lives. Some interrupt the poet, anticipating the ending of a couplet's second line or repeating the first line. Masterful turns by the poet are met with loud exclamations of *vā!* (Bravo!). It is not uncommon for the poet to stop the recital between couplets in order to elaborate and explain the content of the *ghazal* to the audience.<sup>10</sup>

The most prominent and prolific contemporary poet in Kargil in the light classical style, and the top act of every *mushā'ira*, is Ustad Sadiq Ali Sadiq, a charismatic Balti man in his sixties. He is also considered to be an authority on Balti oral history. What is more, he is a good example of the modern link between light classical and pop *ghazals*, for he has played an important role as lyricist in the production of vernacular pop *ghazals*. Although young musicians may have the skills to write a catchy song, they often lack literacy in Arabic, Persian, and Urdu and the knowledge of the style and verse meter necessary to pull off a good couplet. To solve this dilemma they collaborate on the lyrics with poets of the light classical style.

In fact, this is very similar to the new music produced by the Tibetan refugees in India, where pop groups turn to older Buddhist lamas literate in classical Tibetan and poetry for lyrics. Tibetan refugees, like the Balti people, speak the language but often do not know it well enough to master its literary form(s). The few that do are often elderly scholars or from the educated nobility. For instance, when studying Tibetan pop music in India, DIEHL (2002) unexpectedly found that some of the lyrics were perfect, formal Tibetan poetry written on commission from the band by religious scholars such as Ngawang Jinpa, a distinguished Drepung *Geshe*, and former abbot of the Buddhist monastery Tharpa Choling in Kalimpong, India.

Sadiq Ali Sadiq has played a similar role for the creative and dynamic Kargili musician and composer Riyaz Munshi who has composed the music to all the pop *ghazal* albums released on cassette in Kargil thus far. His *ghazals* are characterized by a conventional Hindi film/pop sound with driving drumbeats and *laggi* sections between the verses.<sup>11</sup> Riyaz is one of the Balti activists in Kargil and a member of a Balti NGO called the Kargil Social and Cultural Organization (KASCO), founded in 1995.

Starting in 2004, ten albums, a VCD (Video Compact Disc) with Balti pop *ghazal* videos called *Hai-Lay Hrgamo* ("Hey Joy," 2004; see FIGURE 4), and a DVD called *Sning I Shokboo* ("Written in the Heart," 2007) have been released and circulated in India as well as Pakistan. The most commercially successful of

them is the album *Zoom* released in 2005 with the hit song *Sham Sham* (Your shining name [*Sham*]) that sold approximately five thousand copies (see FIGURE 1).<sup>12</sup> Other albums have titles such as *Niyamtsar* (a Balti name for a friend you grow up with and then marry, 2003), *Rgazoom* (“Admiring the Beauty,” 2004), *Sning Tam* (“Speak from the Heart,” 2005), *Chakbu* (“Bunch of Flowers,” 2005), and *Strogi Totee* (“Pigeon of Life”; see FIGURE 2). The albums contain a mix of old and newly written *ghazals* composed by established poets like Sadiq Ali Sadiq. The poetry of Hassan Hasni from Skardu is featured on the 2006 album *Tsarang Hasni’s Special* (see FIGURE 3). There are also a number of songs written by younger poets and musicians from Kargil like Bashir Wafa.

Behind the production and release of the cassettes one does not find a regular commercial production company but a joint venture between KASCO and the Nubra Balti NGO, Society for Knowledge and Responsibilities of Culture, Health, Education, and Nature (Skarchen).<sup>13</sup> The name of the production company for the cassettes is Skarchen Productions and the producer appearing in many of the credits is Ghulam Hussain, who is the director of Skarchen. The VCD, released in 2004, was produced by Gulzar “Kingi” Hussain who is a leading KASCO activist and an influential person in Kargil politics. Three Skarchen and KASCO business subsidiaries called Universal Balti Music Zone, Kargil Vision, and Sarwar Cassette House Kargil hold the rights to the music.

On average, the total production cost of a cassette is about seventy thousand Indian rupees. The cassettes are sold in local bazaars for as little as sixty rupees while the VCD is one hundred rupees, less than two and three dollars respectively. The first productions were indirectly subsidized by the Indian government since both NGOs have been funded primarily by small government grants to assist the PIAs (Project Implementation Agencies) in the Watershed Development Project in India.<sup>14</sup> But after sales started to pick up the profits have been enough to cover the cost of new productions.

The people who mainly carry out the recording and production work do not have any particular relationship with Balti culture or the Baltistan Movement other than a professional one. The songs on the cassettes are recorded in small Indian sound studios in the Darya Ganj quarters located in New Delhi, where Riyaz’s tunes are arranged and orchestrated by an Indian music director. Professional Indian session musicians play the music, while Meena, an Indian playback singer who imitates the Balti lyrics phonetically, sings all of the female vocals.<sup>15</sup> The only exception to this rule are the male vocals which are sung by young Kargili men. The two most popular singers are a mechanical engineer by the name of Feyaz and “The Pang” (nicknamed after his booming voice) Khadim Hussain, a student of economics.

The aforementioned VCD *Hai-Lay Hrgamo* is a series of pop *ghazal* music videos and a good illustration of contemporary Balti poplore. Almost all of the videos have the traditional *ghazal*’s theme of unrequited love and it is clear that one of the purposes of the makers is to educate people about cultural traditions. The video *Noosay Noosay* (“Weep and Weep” by Sadiq Ali Sadiq and Riyaz Munshi),

for instance, includes a sequence referring to a traditional wedding. But the two primary elements chosen to represent Balti culture that recur in all of the videos are dress and nature. In the videos both men and women wear traditional Balti outfits. The film crew chose to leave Kargil town to shoot the videos in the countryside. Most of the scenes are staged in stony fields by a stream, while some of them are set in village surroundings. While the dress is obviously Balti, the choice of the scenic settings is both a case of a cultural romance for nature, where the mountains and rivers as well as peasant life are used as visual expressions of Baltistan's spirit, and an emulation of Bollywood movies where the love scenes are often acted out in scenic surroundings.

For instance, the video *Rjait Pa Mait Yang* ("I Can't Forget," also by Sadiq Ali Sadiq and Riyaz Munshi) shows a Balti couple moving around in a pastoral landscape. The singer, The Pang, is shown in a parallel story, standing by a jeep. At the end of the video he is suddenly surrounded by a group of happy Buddhist monks. It is tempting to attribute to this scene a deeper meaning in the sense that it can be interpreted as intentionally implying that Buddhism is an integral part of Balti culture, but it would most likely be jumping to conclusions. When I asked about this scene, the producers simply stated that the singer, The Pang, had asked to pose with the monks and they had obliged him. Moreover, there is nothing in the lyrics touching on Buddhism specifically, for they are merely romantic, something along the lines of:

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

On the DVD *Sning i Shokboo* mentioned earlier, the Balti content is no longer as explicit in terms of dress as it is on *Hai-Lay Hrgamo*, although the themes of love and nature remain. The performance has become even more influenced by Bollywood stereotypes, and the focus has shifted from promoting Balti culture to the promotion of Kargili culture. For instance, in one of the songs sung by Meena, *Shoksi lay Rgamo* ("Hey you, Come Here" by Riyaz Munshi/Sadiq Ali Sadiq), the producers have chosen to tell the story of the spirit of a woman who has been killed in a car accident and now roams around the spot, appearing for a man who has stopped his SUV to rest for a while. In terms of cultural content the story is meant to reflect a local saying that the spirit of a person who dies with desire in the heart remains on earth. When I inquired about this shift the producers told me that some of the amateur actors from Kargil appearing in the video did not want to promote Balti culture specifically, so the original costume design was changed accordingly.

Balti *ghazals* and music videos such as the ones I have briefly described above are in themselves, irrespective of content, symbolic of local resistance to Islamism.

The fact that they are locally produced strengthens the sense of the “Balti spirit” they wish to convey. The *ghazal*’s feature of public education in Balti culture are played down both for commercial reasons and because of the preferences of the amateur actors appearing, with no remuneration on the set. Looking at the development between *Hai-Lay Hrgamo* in 2004 and *Sning-i-Shokboo* in 2009 it is as if, at least in Kargil, Balti *ghazals* have become more synonymous with a local spirit and resistance that does not necessarily have to include Balti traditions, which seems like a reasonable interpretation of the conditions surrounding the two video productions.

#### THE HIDDEN TRANSCRIPT

The impact of Balti pop *ghazals* fits well with the general pattern of cassette cultures as described by MANUEL (1993), and the way it stimulates sociopolitical mobilization. In this perspective the production and distribution of the Balti pop *ghazals* is a late development in a larger movement among politically marginalized communities in South Asia starting in the 1970s. But what makes the pop *ghazals* so politically significant? Moreover, how can this process be understood? Manuel’s observations about the mobilizing capacity of pop *ghazals* are insightful but he does not really go on to discuss what happens with the music once it is placed in the political context. How does music work in terms of the political interaction between marginalized communities and the hegemonic nation-state?

As is evident in the examples of songs and videos I have related above, neither the lyrics nor the images have any explicit political content. They are basically about Balti love, dress, and nature. Looking at the producers, however, we can clearly see that they are social and political Balti activists, organizing NGOs promoting Balti identity and interests. The pop *ghazal*, in this perspective, is no doubt an integral part of Balti political activism.

In the final part of this article I would like to look at the Balti pop *ghazal* as a subtle vehicle for political dialogue between Balti interests, on the one hand, and of the interests of Islamic and state power elites in India and Pakistan on the other. The analysis takes its cue from James C. SCOTT’s (1990) ideas about the dynamic relationship between what he calls the “public transcripts” and “hidden transcripts” apparent in the interaction between power elites and their subordinates, my argument being that the Balti pop *ghazals*, in their celebration of a Tibetan past and use of Balti (Tibetan) language represent a counter ideology, perhaps a reaction to or even a negation of the master narratives of Islam and the nation-building efforts of the post-Partition states discussed herein.

In the scene described above, the success of Riyaz Munshi’s Balti pop *ghazal* cassettes can be likened to the success of The Nobel’s recorded *mahfil* performances in Chitral, as described by MARSDEN (2005). But where The Nobel’s music intentionally seems to challenge Islamism and openly pokes fun at local religious clerics, Riyaz’s and other Balti composers’ songs are more about love than mockery, and thus charged with an essential rather than an intentional political meaning.

Scott's model starts with the notion that the open interaction between dominating power elites and their subordinates is conditioned by the discourse of the former while there are many things in the discourse of the subordinates that cannot be expressed openly in public for fear of negative consequences. Subordinates can thus only speak openly backstage, out of the elite's range. It is the open interaction between the elite and its subordinates that Scott labels a public transcript, while the subordinates' backstage discourse is labeled a hidden transcript. What makes this model dynamic is the way hidden transcripts are insinuated by the subordinates, in a disguised form, in open, face-to-face interaction. As SCOTT (1990, 157) asserts, a common social space for insinuations of this kind is popular culture where songs, poetry, novels, art, and other expressions often are "sufficiently indirect and garbled" to lend themselves to two readings, "one of which is innocuous" and "provides an avenue of retreat when challenged." The insinuations by the subordinates and the elite's attempt to patrol the hidden transcript can be seen as a subtle form of political dialogue where current power relations are contested. As opposed to direct confrontation, the dialogue takes place in unobtrusive realms of political struggle and in the shape of "infrapolitics," a kind of low profile political resistance (SCOTT 1990, 19).

Looking at the public transcripts of Baltistan and Kargil, they seem to converge in a matrix between religious affiliation to Islam and top-down post-Partition nation-building projects where the Balti people are expected to be either "Indian" or "Pakistani" depending on their whereabouts after the Gilgit rebellion and the subsequent establishment of a line of control (LOC) between the two states. The national border (LOC) emerges as a defining factor that subdues cross-border identities and cultures, thus negating Baltistan's own historic narrative.

There are many similarities but also some differences in the way the Balti community has been treated by their post-Partition masters. As SÖKEFELD (1995) discusses, for the communities of the western Himalayas independence more or less meant a transition from one mode of domination and subalternity to another. With the new masters came new national narratives founded on the contention between India and Pakistan, and between religious faiths, especially in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan with its dual power structure of state and Islamic elites.

The making of various ethnolinguistic communities into Indian and Pakistani nationals attracted the attention of intellectuals, politicians, and religious leaders in the Indian freedom movement and in the creation of distinct Indian and Pakistani nations after Partition in 1947. The advent of Islam as the national ideology of Pakistan is to be found already in the Indian freedom movement at the end of the nineteenth century, in the increasing polarization between Hindu and Muslim interests as well as in the official political recognition of this division as institutionalized, for instance, in the Indian legislative council of 1909. In the following years the conflict between Hindus and Muslims sharpened, often leading to communal violence. It was against this background that Muhammad Ali Jinnah, leader of the Muslim League and later to become Pakistan's first president, developed his "two-nation theory." The theory expounded that the Indian Hindus and Muslims

were two separate nations and two separate civilizations, unable to coexist in one country. As Jaffrelot points out, “Jinnah set out an ethnic concept of the nation, stressing that the Islam of India constituted a separate culture. On the basis of this ‘theory of two nations’ he demanded a separate state” (JAFFRELOT 2004, 13).

In reality, Pakistan neither reflected a homogeneous ethnic (or linguistic) community nor a comprehensive region. It did, in fact, not have much more of a local base. It was a top-down construct fathered by political and intellectual circles among the Indian Muslim elite in order to try and transcend ethnic and regional differences with a nationalism based on religion, a community of Muslims (VERKAAIK 2004, 20–55). Jinnah’s idea of Pakistan as “one nation, one culture, one language” has yet to be realized. Looking back at the history of Pakistan thus far it has been paved with ongoing ethnic and regional conflicts as well as *intra*-Muslim sectarian violence exacerbated by a centralized power structure and domination by the province of the more populous Punjab over remote regions (such as Baltistan and Ghanche), Sunnis over Shias and, finally, Muslims in general over Hindus and Christians (compare with JAFFRELOT 2004, chapters I and IO), who constitute a very small minority.<sup>16</sup>

The Indian nation-building project did not utilize a religious ideology as in Pakistan, but rather employed a secular, territorial, and universal ideology based on the recognition of the individual and of cultural and communal diversity. In 1951 about 85 percent of India’s population was categorized as Hindu but, as JAFFRELOT (1996) comments, despite this, Hindu nationalism actually started to wane after Partition and did not return strongly until the 1980s. In addition, religion was not pushed aggressively by the state (ruled by the Congress party) as a part of Indian nationality. Nevertheless, the same attention was given to the task of nation-building and the creation of national consciousness. In this scenario, Indian Himalayan communities found themselves subjected to similar kinds of coercive integrative policies as implemented in Pakistan.

Promotion of a national language through the educational system, especially in its written form, has been emblematic of the formation of modern nation-states (ANDERSON 1991) and as a means of coercive integration. After Partition, Indian and Pakistani state officials were moved to Baltistan to take charge of local administration and to carry out national policies. Mastery of Urdu (and English) became a prerequisite for government jobs and upward social mobility (JAFFRELOT 2004, chapter 12). In the new educational systems the Balti/Tibetan language was excluded from the syllabus. If Balti words had to be written down, they were generally transliterated into Urdu. Although Balti continues to be the vernacular language, attempts to preserve its Tibetan script have actively been opposed by local power elites (MAGNUSSON 2006; 2011).

Kargil’s Islamic power elite is divided into rival camps. The Jamat Islamia School (ISK), a traditionalist ideology that primarily represents the clerical class, dominates one camp. The other camp is dominated by the Imam Khomeini Memorial Trust (IKMT), which is backed by local entrepreneurs. These two organizations seem superior to local political parties and frequently support candidates for the Kargil

Hill Council and the Indian Parliament (*Lok Sabha*). In 1996, for instance, the support of ISK and IKMT returned Qamar Ali Akhooon to Minister of State for Works in the regional assembly and ensured the reelection of Hassan Khan and Aga Syed Husain to the *Lok Sabha* (“Tough fight ahead for National Conference in Kargil,” *The Hindu*, 10 September 2002). Although they often clash on religious issues (AGGARWAL 2004, 201–202), both organizations also have explicit political ambitions. In my interviews, leaders expressed their desire to win a majority of votes in the Kargil Hill Council in order to advance their ideas concerning Islamic society in Kargil. Both ISK and IKMT are connected to global Shi’ite networks with the highest clerical leadership in Qom, Iran. It can be added that several of the Shi’ite teachers in Kargil and in Baltistan were trained together as scholars in Najaf, Iraq, and that some of the leading Shi’ite teachers in the world are Balti, such as Sheikh Hussain, head of the Shi’ite mosque in Mumbai, and Sheikh Ahmad Khamani who is active in Thailand.<sup>17</sup>

In comparison to Kargil the Islamic power nexus of Baltistan is more complicated, with a national as well as a regional context. The national context is obviously connected with the Pakistani state’s attempts to use Islam as a national ideology in the nation-building project. Various minority groups have been dominated top-down by “colonialism from the inside,” especially after Zia ul Haq’s regime’s alliance with the Sunni sect in an Islamization policy. NASR (2000) argues that the sectarian turn in the political culture of Pakistan is directly related to the proliferation of Islamic seminaries (*madrasabs* and *daru ‘ulum*s) during Zia ul Haq’s regime. For instance, aided by additional funding from countries around the Persian Gulf, the number of *madrasabs* in Punjab increased from 700 in 1975 to 2,463 in 1996 (NASR 2000, 142). In an attempt at educational reform, state funding and government job openings were bargained against changes in the syllabus, and seminar training was given the same official status as school certificates. As a result, the competition between sects increased, especially between Sunni and Shi’ite, owing to a Shi’ite assertiveness in Pakistan following the revolution in Iran.

The new seminaries were turning out presumably less learned graduates (what NASR [2000] calls the “petty *‘ulamā*” and the “new breed of *‘ulamā*”) that both undermined and replaced the older religious clerical establishment. When economic recession hit Pakistan in the early 1990s sectarianism started to form around rural seminars run by the new, Pakistani-trained petty *‘ulamā*.

VERKAAIK (2004) has demonstrated how this sectarianization process has become interwoven with resistance within various Pakistani communities (the Muhajirs being the case of his study) to postcolonial state nationalism (colonialism from inside), thus linking ethnicity and religion in a political culture where differences are acted out in street violence. The petty *‘ulamā* facilitated this development by using the pulpit to deliver politicized discourses in which doctrinal and theological disputes were transformed into communal issues, opening their seminars for the recruitment and training of movement activists (NASR 2000). This can perhaps be described as the violent turn among Muslims in Pakistan.

The Sunni-Shi’ite conflict in Pakistan has created a dual Islamic power elite, something that complicates local politics in Baltistan. On the one hand there is

the joint power of the state and the Sunni sect promoting the Sunni version of Islam as national ideology. Against this domination the local Shi'ite elite and the activists of the Baltistan Movement share a common cause. On the other hand, the local Shi'ite elite does not accept the Baltistan Movement's promotion of a Balti, non-Islamic history including the promotion of the Tibetan language, effectively counteracting it.

Against the public transcript stands the hidden transcript of Baltistan with its roots firmly entrenched in the Tibetan cultural sphere and western Himalayan history, an agenda of a reunited and autonomous Baltistan as well as a reclamation of a distinct Balti identity and Tibetan language (MAGNUSSON 2006; 2011). The historic narrative of the hidden transcript directs its attention to, on the one hand, a pre-Muslim, western Himalayan history related to Tibetan history and culture, and on the other, an idea of an original western Himalayan cultural area where the sub-continent south of the mountains is left out of the context. In general, activists have been careful to keep religious differences away from their agenda, and to emphasize what joins the western Himalayas together in terms of culture and language.

A polarization between Muslims and Buddhists has been at the core of the western Indian Himalayan communities' struggle for self-governance. But it has probably been more of a strategy in the identity politics of these communities in competition for state resources than a matter of religious orthodoxy (compare VAN BEEK 2001; GUTSCHOW 2006). As the works of anthropologists Nicola GRIST (1995) and SRINIVAS (1995) show, religious affiliation is perhaps not a mutually exclusive structure in western Himalayan society; rather, it is the historical integration of Islamic and Buddhist practices that is significant. REICK (1995) and RAMBLE (1990) also suggest that religious belonging has often been a "thin layer" over a multitude of beliefs in remote Himalayan areas such as these, where the grip of institutional religion and its power elites have not been historically strong, or "raw material" in the elaboration of local traditions.

Both in Baltistan and in Kargil activists have been striving for autonomy, or at least self-governance, in their respective nation-states. In terms of dialogue with the central governments this led to the establishment of the Kargil Autonomous Hill Council in 2003 and of the Gilgit Baltistan Assembly in 2009. The hill council model has been used by the Indian government to meet demands for autonomy by a number of communities across the Himalayas under the provision of the so-called Sixth Schedule.<sup>18</sup> But Baltistan is situated in disputed territory that is presently only under the control of Pakistan. The area has been governed top-down by the Federal Minister of Kashmiri Affairs, with the people of Baltistan excluded from general elections. In August 2009 the government of Pakistan issued a so-called Gilgit-Baltistan Empowerment and Self Governance Order where a joint area of Gilgit and Baltistan was given internal autonomy with the same basic structure of government as other provinces in the country.<sup>19</sup> Local activists, however, were not impressed by the order because they hold that Baltistan is, in reality, occupied by Pakistan and thus reject the right of a Pakistani government to make decisions concerning Baltistan altogether.<sup>20</sup>

It is perhaps the growth of a sectarian/ethnic and violent political culture in Pakistan that is the reason why Balti activists in Pakistan have pursued their political objectives more openly in confrontational and sometimes violent ways than activists on the Indian side. That is not to say, however, that the Muslims of Kargil and Nubra have not encountered the same process of politicization. My interviews with *‘ulamā* members in Kargil made it very clear that they had political ambitions to seek politically elected offices.

Although activists in Kargil have been less militant they also promote a united autonomous area for Gilgit, Baltistan, and Ladakh in the western Himalayas before self-governance within the two nation-states, often under the name of Greater Ladakh (an area that excludes Gilgit). A reunited Balistan thus challenges both the present geopolitics of the nation-states in the western Himalayas and the post-Partition master narratives of India and Pakistan.

Public declarations of the hidden transcript have been ardently policed in Pakistan where activists are persecuted and prosecuted, and where organizations and newspapers have been banned. This has been the case for the Balti journalist and activist Mansoor Parwana and the paper *Kargil International*, and his colleague Raja Hussain Khan Maqpon and the paper *K2*. Attempts to include the Balti language in public schools by publishing textbooks has led to open conflicts, having been openly opposed by the power elites. The only successful pro-Balti activity thus far has been the erection of store signs in Tibetan in some local bazaars (MAGNUSSON 2006).

While in Pakistan Balti activists have often pursued a path of open confrontation with the power elite, activists in Kargil have, with success, followed the route of infrapolitics, concentrating on promoting cultural activities like the production of the pop *ghazals* described above and offering voluntary language instruction for Balti school children (MAGNUSSON 2011). Unlike the strategy chosen in Pakistani Baltistan, where activists publicly called on schools to use a textbook in the Tibetan language, Kargil activists started a private English-medium elementary school, the Munshi Habib-Ullah Mission School, at which instruction in the Tibetan language and script was offered only on a voluntary basis.

Being Arabic/Persian poetry and a cherished part of global Islamic culture today, the popularity and performance of *ghazals* even in pop form, seems, in an innocuous reading, to be an expression of Islamic culture and faith. Obviously, what makes the *ghazals* insubordinate is the fact that they are sung in Tibetan thus insinuating a resistance against the hegemony of Islamic culture as well as state-promoted official languages and integrative policies. In the same way, the historical content of the lyrics as well as the imagery of the VCD are, in the public transcript, harmless local folklore, while in the hidden transcript it challenges the public historical master narratives by insinuating an alternative Balti-Tibetan history, thereby making visible the cultural barrier against the modern nation-states' "national cultures," rejecting the current border between India and Pakistan.

SCOTT's (1990) distinction between hidden and public transcripts is an analytical model and as such an abstract categorization of a situation where the categories, in practice, are not as exclusive as the impression the analysis may give. For one thing,

the categorization of individuals as either members of the power elite or activists does not hold up, since there are individuals who are, in fact, both members of the elite *and* Balti activists, thus representing public as well as hidden transcripts. This is, for instance, true in Kargil where there are activists who are working for the government and serve as members of the boards of local Islamic organizations. The scenario there is more of a dialectical relationship between the public and the hidden transcript instead of a polarization of them.

The hidden transcript is also not completely hidden from the powers that be in the sense that it has never been declared in public. On the contrary, the concept of Greater Ladakh and controversies over the inclusion of the Tibetan language in the school syllabi are well known issues across the western Himalayas. One might argue, however, that it is likely that open public declarations are tolerated by those in power as long as they do “not tear the public fabric of hegemony” (SCOTT 1990, 204). In fact, up to this level it might even serve the power elite as it satisfies the subordinates’ sense of dignity, pride, and community enough without rocking the former’s domination, a kind of steam valve effect, if you will, letting the movement blow off some steam. A similar line of explanation is offered by KOROM (2003) in his analysis of the unruly *moharram hosay* ritual in Trinidad. Quoting from MANGRU’s (1993) study of nineteenth-century *tadjah* processions (basically parades with floats carrying model tombs) in British Guiana, Korom describes how the dominating plantocracy allowed the indentured Indian laborers to voice their frustration over the social order in public during the ritual. For a while, this window of opportunity to assert power seemed to satisfy the Indians enough to keep them calm for the rest of the year.

To muster enough force to break the domination of the elite, public declarations must be supported by an extended prehistory where hidden transcripts remain hidden and only insinuated, as SCOTT (1990) argues. It is during this hidden period that members of a community become consciously aware of their identity, culture, and history, gradually building up a sense of discontent over being repressed, humiliated, and denied, thus stirring deeply felt sentiments of community.

SCOTT (1990) is inclined to explain the mechanisms of the public/hidden transcript in terms of social psychology, but can his idea of the power of insinuations of the hidden transcript also fit into a more general sociological theory of social change? In search of such a theory, I want to return to an interesting essay about the dynamics of social change published by the American social theorist Neil SMELSER (1968, 205–209). Smelser argues that causes fall into four different categories:

1. The structural setting of a society (or social unit, as Smelser calls it). Social structures can provide opportunities as well as obstacles to change. How open, for instance, is the public debate, and how receptive is the power elite to the grievances of the subordinate community?
2. The impetus to change. Even if the structural setting is conducive, Smelser argues, society has to be under some kind of pressure that can provide the push towards change.

3. The mobilization of resources necessary for change. If causes falling into categories 1 and 2 are present there is a high probability of some sort of social change, Smelser continues. But the direction of change is determined by what resources are available, for instance, if pressure groups (as Smelser calls them) such as social movement organizations emerge within the subordinate community.
4. The operation of social controls by which Smelser means the strength of resistance to social change in a society, for instance, how hostile and repressive the power elite is towards the subordinate community's grievances.

Looking at the dynamics of causes in a sequential perspective in Smelser's equilibrium model (often called the social strain model), social change starts with a structural setting under pressure. As a short-term response to the pressure, some kind of impetus sets the change in motion into an intermediate stage, a phase of recovery where the resources and direction of the change are influenced by a variety of different factors such as the operation of social controls, and a structural or cultural change may occur as a long-term response to the pressure (SMELSER 1968, 266–68).

If we select Independence and Partition as the initial impetus to change the colonial structure of India, the grievances of the Balti community (and other affected minorities on the margins of the Indian and Pakistani nation-states) arise as a consequence of various developments in the intermediate stage, indicating that post-Partition India is still in recovery from colonialism, and thus that the change from a colonial social structure to a non-colonial social structure, from a single Indian (although heterogeneous) culture to separate Indian and Pakistani (still heterogeneous) cultures has not yet been completed. The surge of social movements in the Himalayas seeking autonomy from the nation-states fits into this larger pattern of social change.

Where does Scott's public/hidden transcript model fit into this context? Theorizing his model, Scott prefers to situate it in social psychological processes, how members of a subordinate community deal with their subaltern status. In the Smelseresque perspective on social change, Scott's model can provide a deeper understanding of what goes on in the intermediate stage of the process. When a structural setting is low on opportunity, resources are hard to come by, so social control is comparatively tight. Insinuations of the hidden transcript then become a mechanism for keeping cultural pride and awareness alive in a community in anticipation of a more conducive environment. Popular culture provides a domain where the hidden transcript can be expressed through Balti pop *ghazals* and music videos, where attempts by the power elite to police Balti activism can be deflected or at least softened by assigning these expressions an innocuous rather than political meaning.

When the hidden transcript is made increasingly public it reflects decreasing social control by the power elite and the increasing availability of new resources and mobilization structures. If development continues along these lines it is not

unlikely that the long-term structural response to Independence and Partition will come to a Balkanization of the western Himalayas.

The result of the colonial and postcolonial period in India and Pakistan is a multiethnic western Himalaya, contained in two nation-states, where officially recognized ethnicity has become a condition for access to state rights and resources and a base for these groups' relations to the state in general. This opportunity structure has fuelled identity politics and ethnic conflicts such as the conflict between the Buddhist and the Muslim communities in Ladakh, and between the Shia and Sunni communities in Pakistan. Considering that the social strain interpretation of social movements like the Baltistan Movement signifies that the transition from colonial society continues, what we see is thus an increasing fragmentation rather than a homogenization of the multiethnic, postcolonial nation-states. This is a recognizable pattern of Balkanization observable both in the dissolution of colonial empires as well as communist states like the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia.<sup>21</sup>

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#### NOTES

1. Jammu and Kashmir were ruled by the Dogra dynasty and established after the Anglo-Sikh wars in the mid nineteenth century. Ladakh Wazarat was established in 1901 and incorporated Skardu (Baltistan), Kargil, and Leh (DANI 2001, 314).

2. The population in Kargil is officially based on a Purig majority, the so-called Purki (about 70 percent), whereas the Balti are a minority. But in practice, most people in Kargil call themselves Arghons, which is a group of people of mixed origin that has not been officially recognized by the Indian state as a "tribe." The name Arghon does not signify ethnicity but is used to refer to children with a Muslim father and a Ladakhi mother who had converted to Islam, but today Arghon families no longer have to meet this requirement. Arghons often have trans-Himalayan family bonds, something that made them comparatively influential in the Himalayan trade economy. As traders they preferred to reside in towns and never threatened the subsistence of the farming communities (DOLFUSS 1995, 42). Local oral history holds that Arghons never developed a cultural tradition, but adopted Balti culture. This is also said to be true about religion, where Balti teachers are considered as leading Shi'ite scholars. As a consequence, present day Kargil is dominated by Balti cultural ideas and traditions.

3. ESPOSITO (1995, 272) defines the Nurbakhshi as a branch of the Islamic Kubrawiyah Sufi order. GLASSÉ (1989, 304) states that the Nurbakhshi became Shi'ite during the Safavid dynasty in Persia (1501–1732). Since their introduction in the area in the early sixteenth century the Nurbakhshi community in Baltistan has managed to survive fairly intact despite various proselytizing movements. Their interesting history is described by REICK (1997).

4. The Muhajir Qaumi Movement, later renamed The Muttehida Qaumi Movement, was founded in 1984 and claims to represent the Muhajir population of Pakistan. Muhajir is a collective label for people who migrated from India to Pakistan at the time of Partition. Most of the migrants came from the eastern part of the Indian state of Punjab and settled in the Pakistani province of Sindh. It was the first political movement in Pakistan that mobilized a community on the grounds of ethnic belonging.

5. For instance, Manzoor Hassan Balghari's website MeraBalghar ([merabalghar.ning.com](http://merabalghar.ning.com)), Akhter's YouTube channel ([www.youtube.com/user/akhter4skd](http://www.youtube.com/user/akhter4skd)), and the Pakistani-based Gilgit Baltistan Cultural Association Facebook group sharing videoclips of local cultural and political events as well as Balti scenery (accessed 14 February 2011).

6. Compare with APPADURAI (1996, 35–40).

7. “Confessions of a dissident”: <http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/13.11/posts.html?pg=4>; issue 13.11, November 2005 (accessed 14 February 2011).

8. Compare with Dick HEBDIGE’s (1987) studies of Caribbean music.

9. Titles of Balti songs, CDs, VCDs, and DVDs mentioned in the text are quoted as they appear in Romanized form on the covers.

10. This is actually the usual procedure at a *mushā‘ira*. See QURESHI 1969, 430; MANUEL 1988/1989, 99.

11. The *laggi* consists of fast tempo music or just drums.

12. The album title is a word play on the vernacular Balti word *zooms* (“companion”), and the English word “zoom” (as in “zoom to success,” in this context). “Sham Sham” is incidentally the only song on any of the albums that mixes Urdu and Balti lyrics.

13. Nubra is a region north of Ladakh comprised of two main valleys. It includes Balti villages in an area annexed by India in the 1971 war with Pakistan.

14. This refers to land and water resource management for sustainable development of natural resources and communal empowerment. It was introduced in Ladakh in 1996 (Government of India, Ministry of Rural Development, Department of Land Resources; [www.dolr.nic.in/fguidelines.htm](http://www.dolr.nic.in/fguidelines.htm) (accessed February 14 2011)).

15. Nevertheless, the cassettes are marketed with Meena on the cover, and she has made a few successful live appearances in Kargil.

16. As my historical argument relies rather heavily on Pakistan’s modern history as described in JAFFRELOT (2004), something must perhaps be mentioned about this source. The book is edited by Christophe Jaffrelot at CNRS (Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique) in Paris who is also the author of chapter 1, dealing with the problems associated with Islamic identity and ethnic tensions before and after the creation of Pakistan. Chapter 10, which outlines the differences within Islam in Pakistan, is written by Aminah Mohammad, also at CNRS, while chapter 11, on Islam and politics, is authored by Marc Gaborieau at EHSS (L’École des hautes études en sciences sociales). Chapter 12 deals exclusively with language and education in Pakistan and is written by Tariq Rahman from the National Institute of Pakistan Studies, Qaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad. My preference for this book is primarily motivated by its perspective on the history of Pakistan as driven by the tension between the top-down construct of the nation and the reality of ethnic conflicts and the failure of the ruling elite to master them. This context captures the background to the current situation for smaller communities like the people of Baltistan well.

17. Najaf in Iraq and Qom in Iran host the largest and most important Shi’ite seminaries and learning centers in the world. The seminary in Qom is estimated to have around fifty thousand students. Most of the influential Shi’ite leaders in the world today were trained in either Najaf or Qom in the 1970s. The cities are also important Shi’ite pilgrimage sites.

18. Indian Constitution, Articles 244(2) and 275(1) concerning the administration of tribal areas.

19. Government of Pakistan: Prime Minister’s Secretariat (Media Office). Highlights of Prime Minister’s press talk on “Gilgit-Baltistan Empowerment and Self-Governance Order—2009” at PM’s Secretariat on 29 August 2009; [www.pid.gov.pk/Prime%20Minister.doc](http://www.pid.gov.pk/Prime%20Minister.doc) (accessed 12 May 2011).

20. Press release by Gilgit Baltistan United Movement, 3 September 2009; [skardu.blogspot.com](http://skardu.blogspot.com) (accessed 14 February 2011).

21. Compare with DE SILVA’s (1994) analysis of conflict resolution in South Asia.

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