The topic of this paper is the development of a nationalist discourse in the Northern Areas of Pakistan. Since late 1947, this area has been administered by the government of Pakistan. In the official Pakistani perspective, the Northern Areas are part of the former Jammu & Kashmir State which had been provisionally divided in the aftermath of the partition of the Sub-continent. Pakistan still claims the whole of Kashmir, including the Indian province Jammu & Kashmir, and because of this claim the Northern Areas were declared a ‘disputed area’ which is not formally part of Pakistan’s state territory and which can be incorporated into this territory only after the Kashmir dispute is finally resolved. From this ‘disputed’ status of the region emanate the special political conditions of the Northern Areas and its inhabitants: it is administered by Pakistan, but the people of the area lack a number of constitutional rights that other Pakistanis enjoy, e.g., the right of access to a High Court and the right to vote for the Pakistani National Assembly.

Viewed from the outside, the Northern Areas and its population appear to be fragmented and very heterogeneous. This heterogeneity has always been celebrated by Western historical, cultural or linguistic accounts about the region: It was divided into many small principalities with mutual relations characterised by a high degree of rivalry. A great number of languages belonging to different linguistic groups are spoken and the people belong to many different ‘races’ (using the British colonialist term), or to different ethnic groups, as it is preferred today.

But since the late 1980s a discourse has emerged in the Northern Areas that celebrates the cultural and historical unity of the region and the shared identity of its people. It identifies the people of the Northern Areas as a nation (qdm). This discourse is developed and practiced mainly by the generation of young men that went to Pakistan for higher education and returned to Gilgit or other places after receiving their college or university degree. As introduction into this discourse, I would like to quote a passage from a booklet by Nawaz Khan Naji written in 1988:

It is a fact that the people of the Northern Areas have been violently dispersed. It is well known that these few regions of Central Asia which comprise Gilgit, Baltistan, Chitral, Diamer, Shinaki Kohistan and Ladakh do form a nation and a political unit on the basis of common territory, civilisation, culture, history and race and descent. Nevertheless, a few people, due to their special interests or their bigotry, declare this country as disputed because they understand it a part of Kashmir, and some others say that a few parts of the country belong to Pathan tribes. It is clearly wrong that the Northern Areas do not possess a common civilisation, culture and history and that they have been put together from many different little pieces. The truth is that Gilgit-Baltistan and the adjoining northern regions do possess a shared civilisation, culture and history. Therefore, just like the other provinces and states of the Subcontinent and of the whole world, they possess a specific national identity. (Nawaz Khan Naji 1988: 7f.)

The nationalist discourse has two objectives. Its first aim is to constitute the nation that is its object. The second objective is to raise a variety of demands for political change directed at the government of Pakistan. The bearers of this discourse are the activists of a number of small political groups and parties like ‘Balawaristan National Front’, founded by Nawaz Khan Naji, ‘Hunza-Nager National Movement’, ‘Bolaristan Democratic Front’, ‘Karakorum National Movement’, ‘Gilgit-Baltistan Jamhuri Mahaz’ and the like.

1. Today it is almost taken for granted that the erstwhile Gilgit Agency which forms part of the Northern Areas, was a part of Jammu and Kashmir State. In fact, this issue was disputed already before 1947 between the government of Kashmir and the British government of India. The British were of the opinion that the principalities Hunza, Nagar, Yasin, Kuh-Ghizer and Yasin as well as Chilas, Darel and Tangir which all were part of the Gilgit Agency, did not belong to Kashmir (Sökefeld 1997a).

2. I am presenting a perspective from Gilgit, the political, administrative and economic centre of the Northern Areas. A view from the next important urban centre, Skardu in Baltistan, would probably present a different state of affairs.

3. The meanings of qdm range from kinship oriented groups to ‘ethnic’ groups and the nation. In the nationalist discourse, qdm stands for the (political) nation. For an analysis of the semantic field of the term, see Sökefeld, forthcoming.

4. Translation of this and the following quotations from Urdu by myself.
In what follows I will present the elements which this discourse employs to constitute the nation, before proceeding to an analysis of the historical conditions of its development and of some aspects of the selectivity of the discourse. Finally, I will discuss some political actions derived from this discourse.

**Elements of a nationalist discourse**

How is it possible to imagine a ‘nation’ of an area that outwardly appears to be characterised by extreme fragmentation and heterogeneity? In presenting the elements which the nationalist discourse of the Northern Areas employs to constitute the nation, I will take the text from which I had quoted the passage above as the point of departure. It is one of the earliest and most elaborate documents of this discourse but it is not unique. In this and similar texts we can discern three elements or strategies to constitute the nation of the Northern Areas:

1) the proposition of a name for the area and the nation;
2) the postulation of a common history and political experience of the people of the area;
3) the postulation of a shared culture including a ‘common’ language.

These elements may be filled with differing contents but they appear in almost every text (and speech) that belongs to this discourse. Nawaz Khan Naji’s text holds a special position in the nationalist discourse in that he discusses these elements explicitly, whereas most other sources just assert, for example, that the nation possesses a common culture. In constituting a nation of the Northern Areas by way of these elements, the nationalist discourse of the region almost presents a textbook example of a nationalist ideology. These three elements are the building blocks of a common identity. They are intended to distinguish the nation clearly from other surrounding countries and nations, especially from Pakistan and Kashmir. In the language of the discourse, the nation is certainly not constructed by the discourse. Rather, the discourse takes pains to present it as an essence of history, possessing considerable historical depth. The elements of the discourse are invoked to prove and confirm its existence.
a) The name

It is a unanimous proposition of the nationalist discourse that the current name of the region, 'Northern Areas' has to be replaced because it does not represent the area properly. The region was named 'Northern Areas' by the administration of Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto in 1973 in the course of administrative reforms that united the formerly separated 'Political Agencies' of Gilgit and Baltistan into a single administrative unit. The name 'Northern Areas' is rejected because it only defines the region in relation to Pakistan, as it is of course the northern area of Pakistan. It simply appears as an appendix of Pakistan without an identity in itself. Other names are suggested that accordingly highlight the peculiarity, the different and shared identity of the region and that designate it in itself. Nawaz Khan Naji's booklet is entitled 'Balawaristan', and this is the name he proposes for the country. Accordingly, he terms the inhabitants of the region, 'Balawar'. These names are derived from Persian 'bala', high, and refer to the mountainous terrain of the area. Balawar are those who live in the heights, in the mountains, and Balawaristan is the country of the heights. These names are inventions by Nawaz Naji and do not appear in any previous source. But Nawaz Naji tries to relate them historically by connecting them to the historical names Boldr and Bol6ristan. According to him, 'Boloristan' is just a lingual corruption of 'Balawar'. Other names proposed for the 'fatherland' in the nationalist discourse are: 'Karakorum' (by the Karakorum National Movement), 'Gilgit-Baltistan' (by the Gilgit-Baltistan Jamhuri Mahaz, Anonymous 1996) or 'Boloristan' (by the Boloristan Democratic Front, Anonymous 1992).

b) A common history and political experience

Nawaz Naji traces the known history of the Balawar nation to the fifth century AD. Contrary to the present, he tells us, the area was free at that time. It consisted of the regions Burushal and Dardistan. Then the Kingdom of Bolöristan which was centred in Baltistan rose to power. That period was the 'golden age' in which the character of the nation was formed because Bolöristan united the whole area, from Chitral to Ladakh and from Shinaki Kohistan to the Karakorum. Thereby a common civilisation, culture and history was created. Three centuries after that unification the area became divided into a considerable number of political units, mostly smaller or larger principalities or kingdoms, but these divisions could not erase the common culture and civilisation and, therefore, the shared nationality. Due to growing rivalry between the principalities, some rulers during the 19th century sought alliance with 'foreign powers', thereby making way for their consequential entrance into the region. These foreign powers were of course Kashmir and the British. The common political experience of the region changed from self-rule to the experience of foreign domination and oppression, which finally resulted in the freedom struggle of 1947. That part of the area which was liberated by the people themselves chose provisional accession to Pakistan. However, Pakistan did not in effect grant the freedom and self-rule which the people had sought. From his short historical overview, Nawaz Khan Naji concludes that for the greater part of its long history the region was politically independent and free (either united or divided). Only for one century had it been ruled by foreign powers. How could a short period of foreign domination destroy its national identity and peculiarity?, he asks.

c) A shared culture

According to conventional understanding, a nation is essentially defined by a shared national culture. Nawaz Khan Naji tells that the fundament for a national culture was laid by the political unification of the region in the times of Bolöristan. As elements of this common culture he identifies music, housing, clothing and language. According to him, all these specific elements are spread in the whole area and they differ remarkably from the cultural elements in the adjacent regions. As particularities of clothing Nawaz Khan Naji specifies the chëgha, a long woollen coat with very long sleeves, and the woollen cap — and both items of clothing show that he imagines the Balawar nation essentially as a male one. The characteristic architectural form of the nation is the local one-room house. This type of house, he tells us, can be found nowhere else. Someone familiar with the linguistic situation of the area will be surprised that also language is mentioned as a cultural commonality of the region. When I discussed the matter with Nawaz Naji, he actually said: 'We all speak the same language'. He then went on to explain that all the different languages spoken in the Northern Areas are similar, or 'the same' in the respect that they are different from the idioms spoken in the surrounding countries — especially, they are different from languages spoken in Kashmir and in Pakistan.

In his text he further specifies that the various languages share a considerable vocabulary and that all the languages are spoken not only in

A history of contested political identities

The nationalist discourse in the Northern Areas is an attempt to introduce a new identity by which all inhabitants of the region could identify themselves. Such a unifying identity that could form a starting point for collective political action was nonexistent before. In order to understand why the construction of this kind of identity became an increasingly perceived necessity since the late 1980s, we have to look at the field of politically relevant identities in the Northern Areas since 1947. The point of departure for my survey is the jang azadi (freedom struggle) in 1947. When the Subcontinent was decolonised in summer 1947, the British colonial administration left the so-called 'Gilgit Agency' to the control of the Maharaja of Kashmir. Already decolonised in summer 1947, the British colonial administration left the so-called 'Gilgit Agency' to the control of the Maharaja of Kashmir. Already during the freedom movement in India, strong sympathy with the projected Muslim state of Pakistan was obvious in Gilgit. After all, the indigenous population of the region consisted entirely of followers of Islam. When after some months of indecision the Hindu Maharaja declared accession of Kashmir to India, a revolt against this move rose in Gilgit on November 1, 1947. A provisional local government was constituted that declared its intent of accession to Pakistan and invited a representative of the government of Pakistan to take over administration in Gilgit. The local paramilitary forces, the Gilgit Scouts, continued the jang azadi and, moving towards the east, temporarily won the control of some regions like Kargil and Dras that today form part of Ladakh.

Jang azadi was started by the local population, both civilians and military personnel, on the basis of a common religious identity with Pakistan (i.e., being Muslim) and with the aim of establishing a political identity, i.e., becoming regular nationals of Pakistan. But this identity was not achieved. Pakistan instead declared the Northern Areas (at that time the Gilgit Agency and Baltistan) a disputed territory. But it was against Kashmir that jang azadi had been started in Gilgit. In 1948, the administration of Azad Kashmir, that is, the south-western area of Jammu & Kashmir State that was separated from Kashmir by another Muslim revolt in autumn 1947, tried to acquire control over the Gilgit Agency because Azad Kashmir claimed to be the legal successor of Jammu and Kashmir State in the so-called 'liberated' areas. But the people of Gilgit successfully resisted this move, and in a treaty of 1949 the government of Azad Kashmir formally transferred the administration of the Gilgit Agency to the government of Pakistan. But still, political identity with Pakistan was not achieved, because Gilgit and Baltistan was given a special status as 'disputed area', with the political discriminations referred to in the introduction (a number of other deprivations have since been abolished). During the 1950s and 1960s a number of young people from the Northern Areas went to Pakistan in order to acquire higher education. They returned with a growing awareness of the special political condition of their home country. They resented especially that most of the higher officers of the administration, including the Political Agent and Resident, were non-locals (mostly Panjábī and Pashtún). Some incidents sharpened the developing antagonism between the local population and the Pakistani administration. For instance in 1969, the local paramilitary force, the Gilgit Scouts, which had been the most important agent of jang azadi, were ordered to fire into a crowd demonstrating against the despotism of a local ruler, the Mir of Nager. A number of people were killed and wounded in this incident.

In the winter of 1970/71 a fully-fledged revolt against the Pakistani administration arose in Gilgit town. The cause of this revolt was relatively trivial. It was due to an insult levelled at the headmistress of a Girls’ School by the wife of the commander of the Gilgit Scouts, whose request to have her daughter moved to the next class had been denied. Both the commander and his wife were Punjabis. Protest against the behaviour of the commander’s wife and the subsequent disinterested reaction of the Political Agent and other high officials resulted in a general strike. After some leaders of the protest had been detained, demonstrators set fire to the police station and stormed the prison. This revolt could only be quelled after paramilitary troops from Pakistan’s North West Frontier Province were transferred to Gilgit. A considerable number of local political leaders that had sided with the protest movement were arrested. In these events, the antagonism between Gilgit and Pakistan, that is, the non-identity of both, became utterly clear.

From the present perspective it is told that in 1970/71 the ‘nation’ (qām) rose against Pakistan. But it is also unclear whether at that time the revolt (which is locally called ‘revolution of Gilgit’) was framed in these terms.7

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7. The movement of 1970/71 was actually guided by an organisation called Tanzm-e millat (‘Organisation of the nation’, millat being the Persian term for nation). The Tanzm-e millat had been founded just a few weeks before the school incident because the first election for the mashwérati council (advisory council) had been announced. That council was projected as an advisory board for the administration but it turned out to be rather...
Anyway, a lasting identity as a political nation in contrast to Pakistan did not result from the revolt.

During the following years, the people of the Northern Areas were preoccupied with a different conflict of identities. The population of the region is completely Muslim, but is divided among different Islamic denominations. In the years just after the ‘revolution of Gilgit’ a militant conflict between Shias and Sunnis developed. Quite a number of people in Gilgit see a connection between the revolt and the subsequent ‘sectarian tensions’. They allege that the Pakistani government had sent sectarian minded ulema into the area in order to create an unrest, thereby diverting attention from the political discontent. That is, people are charging the government with having revived the old colonial strategy of ‘divide and rule’. This charge can hardly be proven (and the tensions were of course always condemned by the government), however, the Shia-Sunni conflict was very effective in preventing the development of an overall political (‘national’) identity in the town and the area. When (since the second half of the 1980s) demands for a reform of the political conditions in the Northern Areas became more frequent, some government officials drew their own connection between the sectarian conflict and the political status of the region: they stated that there can be no reform, before sectarianism was not quelled in the region.

Since the late 1980s a number of developments have resulted in a growing criticism of the government, resulting in the development of a nationalist discourse. In August 1988, a strong force of Sunnis from the Southern districts of the Northern Areas and from adjacent tracts of the North West Frontier Province attacked and virtually destroyed a number of Shia villages. During these days to stop the havoc. Thus, rumours that the government was probably more than one hundred people. The Pakistani police and army, which has many troops in Gilgit and the surrounding areas, did nothing during these days to stop the havoc. Thus, rumours that the government was actually behind the attacks were nourished. Also in the following years, sectarian tensions erupted regularly, causing further deaths. The Government tried to contain the conflict by imposing curfew and prohibition of assembly, transferring paramilitary troops, the Frontier Constabulary (FC) and Chitral Scouts, to Gilgit. But this stationing of troops caused even greater resentment in the local population. FC and Chitral Scouts replaced the local Gilgit Scouts which had been dissolved in 1975. But the FC are Pashtun, and the people of Gilgit have a very strong negative stereotype image of the Pashtun. Effectively, the stationing of ‘foreign’ Pashtun troops in the town was perceived as another step of colonisation of the Northern Areas by Pakistan.

Due to the construction of the Karakorum Highway, exchange and migration between Pakistan and the Northern Areas had increased considerably. More and more young men (and also some women) left their homes in the Northern Areas to study in Pakistan, returning after some years with their degrees only to find no employment. The administration was asked to offer more posts, but instead, for financial reasons, a halt in recruitment was imposed. On the other hand, the payment of non-local officers working in the Northern Areas was increased by 25 percent. Consequently, local employees of the administration staged a number of protests and strikes. The young unemployed degree-holders started to organise themselves and staged demonstrations also in the capital Islamabad. Increasingly, their demands for economic opportunities became mixed-up with political demands. Also Nawaz Khan Naji was a member of the ‘Bérozgar [Unemployed] Action Committee’ and he found a number of supporters for his Báláwaristán National Front there. Other political organisations, like the Karakorum National Movement, had already been formed as student’s organisations in Pakistan.

The nationalist ideas discussed in this context were related to the sectarian conflict and it was suggested that only a reinstated unity of the people could stop the conflict and thus empower the people. A national identity of...
the Northern Areas was proposed, both against the colonising regime of Pakistan and against the fragmented religious identities in the area which were declared a product of Pakistani instigation. It has to be emphasised that all these identities and antagonisms were based on specific interpretations that were themselves contested. There was, and is, no single and shared political perspective of Gilgit or ‘the’ Northern Areas.13

Table 1. Politically relevant identities in Gilgit since 1947

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event/Period</th>
<th>Identity embraced or projected locally</th>
<th>Rejected identity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1947, jang azadi</td>
<td>Islam, Pakistan</td>
<td>J&amp;K State</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1948</td>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>Azad Kashmir</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970/71, revolution of Gilgit</td>
<td>Local identity</td>
<td>Pakistan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Since 1973, sectarianism</td>
<td>Shia vs. Sunni</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Since 1988 nationalist movement</td>
<td>National unity of the NA</td>
<td>Pakistan, Kashmir</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Selectivity and reinterpretation in the nationalist discourse

The nationalist discourse of the Northern Areas presents a particular and selective perspective on the historical and cultural conditions of the region. Selectivity is engendered by the discourse’s intention to create internal homogeneity of the proposed nation and to highlight its difference from the nations that surround it. This is especially obvious in the matter of languages. It is of course simply wrong that the languages of the Northern Areas are all ‘the same’ or even ‘similar’. One of the most important languages of the area, Shina, is certainly more akin to Kashmiri, which is regarded as a ‘foreign’ language, than to the regional idioms Balti or Burushaski. It is revealing that the nationalist discourse remains silent about the language which actually offers a means of communication between the speakers of different local languages. Urdu has effectively become the lingua franca of the Northern Areas, spoken by everybody who had received at least a limited degree of formal education. Urdu is also the medium of the nationalist discourse. All speeches at assemblies of nationalist groups are held in Urdu, and all political pamphlets are printed in that language (with the exception of a few publications in English). I do not know of a single nationalist text published in one of the regional languages. After all, there are no generally accepted systems of writing. Nationalist parties do not take interest in developing such scripts. Also one of the most important Shina-poets and writers, Mohammad Amin Zia, who was much engaged in developing a literary, written Shina, expressed recently his disillusion with this effort and now concentrates on writing in Urdu because only in this language he is able to communicate with a larger audience.

Yet Urdu is now so much equated with Pakistan (it had already been introduced in the area by the Kashmiri administration after it had replaced Persian as the official language in Kashmir in 1889) that it cannot serve as a symbol for unifying the nation of the Northern Areas. The symbolic and the communicative functions of language are completely dissociated in the nationalist discourse. The discourse seems to be rather unconscious of communicative necessities and takes the respective function of Urdu simply for granted. It is the symbolic function of local languages, creating identity and difference, that it values.

The nationalist discourse also displays a very selective and reinterpretive perspective in its presentation of historical data. This becomes especially clear in more recent sources which strongly celebrate the topic of resistance in the history of the Northern Areas. A text published in 1996 tells that the people of the Northern Areas have always stood together in resistance against foreign attackers:

Although, due to their particular geographical conditions, several parts of Gilgit Baltistan have been divided into small independent states, and although the local rulers have often quarrelled among themselves, when during different historical periods Mughul, Kashmiri, Dogra armies and the British tried to conquer this region, the local rulers put aside their quarrels and fought against the foreign enemies and sometimes forced them to retreat. In this manner the local rulers with their nationalist zeal have preserved the historical, geographical, political and cultural identity of the country. (Anonymous 1996: 3f.)

13. For example, there is not only a nationalist discourse against Kashmir in Gilgit but also one pro Kashmir which defines the population of the Northern Areas as part of the Kashmiri nation. This discourse is denominationally bound, its proponents are especially Sunni Kashmiris in Gilgit.
radicalised, and now the party demands the independence of the Northern Areas from Pakistan.17

Within the nationalist discourse, the nation, whether it is called Bālawaristān, Gilgit-Baltistan, or by some other name, is firmly constituted. In the following paragraphs I want to look at the political practices that are related to this discourse, that is, the practices that aim at the empowerment of the nation. It is of course difficult to draw a strict line between discourse and action, but still the two realms cannot be conflated. Simply imagining a nation and spreading that imagination in a discourse, does not make that nation appear on the map of the world, although the imagination of a nation may certainly engender actions which may lead to its political institutionalisation. If we understand representations not as structures that correspond to something ‘out there in reality’ — and that consequentiality can be falsified by that reality — but as processes of ordering, as John Law18 suggests, then a different representation of the Northern Areas in discourse (e.g., as a nation) becomes a necessary (but of course not sufficient) precondition of a political reordering.

The small party Bālawaristān National Front (BNF) and its functionaries were the most committed agents in the Northern Areas that based their political actions on the assumption of a separate nation. In 1992, the party’s leaders voiced for the first time the demand for independence because they had come to the conclusion that the simple claim for democratic rights did not bother the government of Pakistan. That year, the BNF called for a boycott of ‘jeshn-e azadi’, the official celebration (held on November 1 each year), to commemorate the beginning of the revolt of 1947. The BNF together with the Bērōzgār Action Committee instead called for a meeting on November 2, 1992, under the motto: ‘Freedom, but in vain!’ From that occasion on, the BNF was very active in gaining public interest via the media and looking for support from other political groups for the ‘national cause’ of the Northern Areas. In April 1993, the party convened a ‘Gilgit-Baltistan National Conference’ in Gilgit, in which twelve different political groups and parties participated. They demanded the right of self-determination for the
Northern Areas and formed together the 'United Front of the Northern Areas' (Northern Areas Mutahida Mahâz). 19 It was the first time in the history of the Northern Areas, that a considerable number of political groups joined together in their struggle. The new platform was especially remarkable because it united groups and individuals with both strong Shia and Sunni affiliations.

On November 1, 1993, the Northern Areas Mutahida Mahâz (NAMM) commemorated the anniversary of jang azadi in a protest forum which the press called ‘the first large gathering of members of all sects since the sectarian tensions that had occurred in the summer’. On this occasion, the political alliance gave the government of Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto who had taken office in October an ultimatum: if substantial reforms had not been initiated before March 1994, the NAMM would start a powerful protest movement in the whole NA. The demanded reforms failing to materialise, led the NAMM to prepare a large public assembly and demonstration to be held at the end of March 1994 in Gilgit. Overnight, however, strong contingents of Police, Chitral Scouts and Frontier Constabulary cordoned off the area of the intended demonstration and prevented any action. In the following years, demonstrations by the BNF were hindered or stopped by the police. A few times activists were taken into prison, for example in August 1995, when they distributed posters demanding independence.

The NAMM also intended to participate in the elections for the Northern Areas Council (NAC)21 that were scheduled for October 1994. These were the first NAC elections that were held on a party basis. Before the elections, the big Pakistani parties like the Pakistan People’s Party (PPP) warned those party members who were engaged in the NAMM to stop these activities. The independent candidates who belonged to the NAMM could not win a single seat. Therefore the nationalist groups could not gain any foothold in official politics. But the BNF had already opened another front. It tried to win support on the international scene and approached the UN. Four delegates of the BNF and of other groups belonging to the NAMM were invited to the ‘First International Conference on Northern Areas’ organised by the Kashmir International Front in London. 22 However, the delegates from the NA were denied visas by the British Embassy in Islamabad. In June 1996, after clashes between young men and Chitral Scouts in Gilgit, a large delegation of various parties of the Northern Areas approached the UN Commission for India and Pakistan and handed over a memorandum to the Secretary General of the UNO in which they demanded the implementation of the UN resolution of 1948.

The nationalist discourse constructs a nation of the Northern Areas as different from other surrounding nations like, for example, the Pakistani or Kashmiri nations. The nation constituted by discourse is not complemented by a nation institutionalised in a political system. Rather, the parties and groups that participate in the discourse struggle for the political institutionalisation of the nation. Accordingly, we can speak of a nationalist movement Northern Areas was to be indirectly elected by the people. But the reform turned out to be rather cosmetic because the Chief Executive was not interested in delegating his powers.

Conclusion

The nationalist discourse constructs a nation of the Northern Areas as different from other surrounding nations like, for example, the Pakistani or Kashmiri nations. The nation constituted by discourse is not complemented by a nation institutionalised in a political system. Rather, the parties and groups that participate in the discourse struggle for the political institutionalisation of the nation. Accordingly, we can speak of a nationalist movement.

19. In one newspaper article, the conference was even termed ‘Gilgit Baltistan Independence Conference’ (Gilgit-Baltistan xid muxtârî kânîfren), see Xabrên (Urdu daily), April 13, 1993.
20. Besides the BNF, among the participants were: Gilgit Baltistan Jamhûrî Mahâz, Karakorum National Movement, Boloristan Jamhûrî Mahâz, National Democratic Front, and functionaries of the Northern Area's wings of the Pakistan People's Party, Awami National Party, Pakistan Muslim League and Jamaiat Ulema Islam.
21. The Northern Areas Council is an elected body that is the successor of the Mashwûrât Council. It is not a legislative of the Northern Areas but simply a body which can distribute limited funds for infrastructural and developmental projects in the region. Nonetheless, NAC elections are important political events in the region because they are the only elections (besides local body elections), in which the people can cast their votes. The NAC elections of 1991 had caused great unrest and were boycotted by Shias because the Gilgit constituency had been redrawn in such a way that Shias judged it to favour Sunnis. The PPP government in 1994 decided for a reform of the NAC which apparently increased its political competence. The Council was to elect a Deputy Chief Executive who in turn was to be delegated certain competences by the Chief Executive (the governor) of the Northern Areas. Thus, for the first time a high official of the government tried to disturb the London conference. The Secretary General of the party, Shauqat Ali Kashmiri, was abducted by Pakistani security forces in August 1994 and released without any charge only one month later, after the conference had finished.
22. The Kashmir International Front is the international wing of the Jammu and Kashmir People’s National Party, an oppositional party based in Azad Kashmir. The Pakistani government tried to disturb the London conference. The Secretary General of the party, Shauqat Ali Kashmiri, was abducted by Pakistani security forces in August 1994 and released without any charge only one month later, after the conference had finished.
23. For the full text of the letter see The Muslim, June 25, 1996.
in the Northern Areas that constructs a nation and struggles for its empowerment.

The nationalist discourse in the Northern Areas shows that nationalist imaginations can be very creative. They need very little 'objectively' shared elements as basis of a national identity but rather select a few symbols of homogeneity and neglect even strong conditions of heterogeneity. However, the most important fundament of the imagined nation is not a common culture but a shared experience of political disenfranchisement and disempowerment, of subalternity to Pakistan in spite of the glorious history of jang orted National symbols appear rather as secondary, giving proof and basis that both are Islamic.

The nation serves an important function in the struggle for empowerment: It de-legitimises the Pakistani regime in the Northern Areas and therefore legitimises the struggle for self-determination. If nationalism includes the creed that every nation has to be governed by itself,24 then the construction of a nation of the Northern Areas strips the Pakistani nation (that is constructed by the discourse as the other) of any right to determine the affairs of the Northern Areas. Nationalist discourse constructs a collective agent (the nation) that is able to wrestle with Pakistan about the power in the region. It attempts to put an end to the rather unpromising struggle between the government of Pakistan and single local politicians or small political groups.

Islam is the shared fundament of the Pakistani nation. A common identity built on Islam was the cause of jang orted and of the desire of the people of Gilgit to join Pakistan, that is, to become Pakistanis. But from the perspective of the Northern Areas, Islam has become worn out as a symbol of a shared identity with Pakistan. First, in spite of the shared religion, Pakistan did not award full citizenship to the inhabitants of the Northern Areas. People generally do not (yet?) feel as one people, and up until now, only a minority subscribe to the nationalist discourse. But by way of political action and the production of the nationalist discourse, this minority is deeply committed to achieving its ends. Their ideas have already proved to be powerful in that they have been able to build bridges between political activists of antagonistic religious groups, and also because the government of Pakistan has regarded these ideas as a serious provocation.25

**Bibliography**


25. This paper would not have been possible without a great number of people in Gilgit that shared their political thoughts with me. I would like to thank especially Johar Ali Khan, Abdul Hamid Khan, Nawaz Khan Naji and Afsar Jan Vatanyar. Research in the Northern Areas was generously funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft.
Economic Development of Ladakh: Need for a New Strategy

Sonam Dawa

Traditionally, Ladakhi economy was based on subsistence agriculture in the lower areas, animal husbandry especially in the Changthang area, and trade with Tibet, Sinkiang and the plains of India. Barley, peas, wheat, mustard, and fruits like apples and apricots were the main products. The region was self-sufficient with respect to basic food requirements and a substantial quantity of barley was used to purchase salt, wool, meat, etc., from the Tibetan Changpas in a well-regulated barter system of trade organised around specific trade marts in Ladakh as well as Changthang in Tibet. A little rice was imported from Kashmir. The overland route between the plains of India and Sinkiang, a branch of the Silk Route, enabled Ladakhis to earn some cash income by renting their horses, donkeys and yaks as pack animals. International trade involved products such as cotton, silk, brocade, western medicines, and chemical dyes from India, and charas, carpets, felt, silk, etc. from Sinkiang. The cash thus earned was utilised to purchase other basic necessities of life and some luxury goods.

The quality of life was not exactly high. It was a peaceful, though difficult life. The social and economic system, however, ensured that rich and poor shared and cared for each other. By and large people were happy and contented. There was joy in the air especially during the summer months when the people were engaged in agriculture. Even the dreary winter evenings became lively and enjoyable when the whole family sat around a small fire to sing or listen to folktales told by an elder, or engaged in spinning of wool and other activities. It was indeed an idyllic life, in spite of the hardships caused by bitter cold and the absence of luxury of any kind. This was the scenario until the early 1950s.

India started five-year plans for economic development in the 1950s and Ladakh, though a remote area of the country, also started receiving some attention. The first important project to be taken up was the construction of...