CHAPTER 10

Selves and Others:
Representing Multiplicities of Difference
in Gilgit and the Northern Areas of Pakistan[1]

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INTRODUCTION: THE STUDY OF IDENTITIES

The conceptualization of identity and ethnicity has undergone a major change during the last decades. In the human sciences, identity has basically two different meanings, the first of which pertains mainly to psychology and the other to anthropology and other social sciences. In the conventional psychological sense, identity refers primarily to self-identity, the identity of the individual self with itself (e.g. Erikson 1980). In anthropology, in contrast, identity—used for instance in the compound concept of 'ethnic identity'—refers mostly to the identity of an individual with other individuals, that is, to the identity of a group. While the first concept affirms individuality, the peculiarity of the human individual, the second concept tends to negate individuality by stressing those characteristics that an individual supposedly shares with others. In anthropological discourse both meanings of identity are mostly unrelated. A text about 'ethnic' identity does only very rarely refer also to self-identity. But the change in the concept of identity which I want to discuss here engenders a certain (re-)alignment of both meanings.

This change may be indicated by three related terms which together make up a concept of identity: multiplicity, difference, and intersectionality. *Multiplicity* means that identity does not exist in the singular but only as identit*ies*—formed through a plurality of relationships of belonging and otherness. This insight is not entirely new. A hundred years ago, the American psychologist William James wrote that the person 'has as many social selves as there are individuals who recognize him' (James 1890: 294). The postmodern questioning of the unified and universal 'Western'

subject, inherited from Descartes, gave new currency to this insight. It stems from the view that identity or self are not original essences of the human being but rather projects and constructions that are reworked, more or less self-consciously, during the whole life-course of an individual, in a great number of different contexts and in juxtaposition to a multiplicity of others.

In a certain sense the concept of *difference* almost replaced the concept of identity in contemporary discourse (Felski 1997). Difference instead of identity emphasises that identity only exists as an always different identity, distinguishing one person from another person, or one group or category from another one. Difference points to the fact that identity is developed in contrast to others. Whereas *identity* stresses the aspect of being identical with others or with the self, *difference* emphasises the contrast which is the necessary premise for establishing such identity. Both aspects cannot be separated; they are two sides of the same coin. But difference, combined with multiplicity, also challenges identity. If identity is based upon difference from others, the self is not simply 'identical'. It is not a singular unity but a 'differing multiplicity' as it differs differently from different others. The self is a bundle of different possible identifications, particular aspects of which may be put to the fore depending on the specific others against which a particular 'identity' is established.[2]

Intersectionality, finally, points to the fact that the different identities (or, in other words: the various differences) which characterize an individual are not unrelated among themselves. Quite the opposite, the different identities embraced by a person may heavily influence each other—not necessarily in the sense that they are mutually trimmed in order to enable a consistent personality, but rather in the sense that they may entail conflict and antagonism, inconsistency and ambivalence. The aspect of intersectionality of identities is frequently related to Jacques Derrida's concept of *différance* (Derrida 1982). Derrida pointed out that the meaning of signs in an ongoing chain of signification can never be finally fixed but that meaning is always affected or changed by the 'environment' of other related signs and meanings—and changes them too. Differences/identities are signs in such interrelated, or, better, interrelating environments of meaning.

Together, these three aspects of a new conceptualization of identity enable that the psychological (individual-oriented) concept of identity and the social or cultural (group-oriented) concept fuse to an unprecedented extent. Rather than negating individuality, social identities contribute to

the peculiarity of the individual because each single human being is characterized by a specific combination (multiplicity) of identities (differences) that relate to each other in specific and shifting ways (intersectionality).

This conceptualization of identity/identities was developed from debates of feminism and immigrant identities in the West. Identities that were deemed unproblematic before turned out to be highly disputable: feminists discovered that there was no female identity shared by all women, but only identities of women subject to other differences. Women's experiences are marked differently by differences like class, 'race', nation, etc. What before had been supposed to be a common identity of women turned out to be a specific perspective of some women occupying positions of dominance that allowed them to disseminate their particular view as the perspective of women in general (Crosby 1992; Felski 1997). Indeed, the general category 'woman' became highly questionable. Similarly, identities of immigrants in the diasporas of the West were deconstructed into whole ranges of differing subject positions that made general categories debatable (Brah 1996, Rattansi 1994).

In the light of this critique of identity, anthropological studies of ethnicity have to be questioned for their often simplifying perspective. Mostly they foreground *one* identity (the one which is dubbed as 'ethnic') at the expense of others. Sometimes a number of identities are considered which are represented as fitting into an overall order or taxonomy. Such an order effectively eclipses intersectionality. Put into order, identities neither contradict one another nor produce friction among themselves— that is, they are apparently not subject to *différance*.

A MULTIPLICITY OF DIFFERENCE IN GILGIT

Gilgit, a town of approximately 50,000 inhabitants, is the political, administrative and economic centre of the Northern Areas of Pakistan. Since the beginning of the Kashmir dispute, the Northern Areas—earlier called Gilgit–Baltistan—are under the administration of Pakistan, but legally they do not form a part of Pakistan. The centrality of Gilgit town is due to its strategic position at the intersection of valleys in the high mountain area. Having been alternately a centre of power and a target of attacks by other powers, the population of the place has suffered more than one upheaval. It has faced near extinction as well as waves of immigration from different directions. As a consequence, the present population of Gilgit is characterized by a high degree of difference.

While studying discourses and processes of identity in Gilgit, I analysed mainly five 'dimensions of difference'. These were: religion, *qom*,[3] clan, locality and language. Along each of these dimensions a number of different identities can be distinguished. Within the dimension of religion, for instance, there are Shias, Sunnis, and Ismailis. Within the dimension of *qom*, groups and identities like Shin, Yeshkun, Pashtun and Kashmiri can be distinguished. Locality distinguishes Gilgitwale, Hunzawale, Pashtun and many others. My postulation of these five dimensions of difference is only a heuristic simplification. Most of these dimensions encompass a *disorder* of differences rather than ordered systems. Only in two dimensions, religion and language, is the number of encompassed differences finite. There are three relevant religious groups in Gilgit, and fifteen different mother tongues are spoken. The other three dimensions are rather indefinite. The encompassed differences are very numerous because new differences can always be constructed and because the encompassed differences can themselves be organized into (rather disordered) systems. Locality may distinguish people belonging to different neighbourhoods in Gilgit (*het* or *mohalle*), but also people belonging to different valleys (e.g. Hunza, Nager, Gilgit), subregions of valleys (e.g. Shinaki, Hunza, Gujal) or countries and nations (e.g. Pakistani and non-Pakistani). Identity derived from locality is also structured by the simple dichotomy of people of Gilgit versus people from outside. Finally, not all dimensions are mutually exclusive. Thus, Pashtun can be considered as a *qom* as well as an identity derived from a certain area. Similarly, Hunzawale can be understood as an identity derived from a certain locality as well as a qom.[4]

Drawing on Bourdieu's concept of practice (Bourdieu 1977), I have elsewhere analysed the multiplicity of identities in Gilgit as a system of practical logic that is employed to distinguish between kinds of persons according to specific, practical necessities and for particular purposes (Sökefeld 1997a). A major characteristic of this system is its inherent ambivalence. Such a disordered system cannot be turned into a taxonomically ordered system without completely changing its character.

So far I have described the multiplicity of identities that pertains to the level of groups and congregations of people. But multiplicity also characterizes the identities of every individual. Each person draws identities from each of the above-mentioned dimensions of difference as well as from others like gender, age or class. An individual in Gilgit may be, for instance, a Gilgitwala from the village of Barmas, a Shia, a Shin that belongs to the Shalé-lineage and that speaks the Shina language. A second person may share some of these identities, as he or she may be from the same village, but be a Sunni Yeshkun that belongs to the same lineage of Shalé and that also speaks Shina. Another man may have a completely different set of identities, being, e.g. an immigrant from Hunza that belongs to the qom Dhiramiting and to the Ismailia and who speaks Burushaski. It follows from these examples that the question of whether two persons share an identity or are different cannot be answered easily. Most frequently, persons share only *some* identity but differ by some others. They can be '*both* the same *and* different' (Hall 1990: 227, original italics). Every identity/difference places the individual into a specific discursive space. That is, his or her total repertory of identities entails his or her participation in a number of discursive spaces that may effectively be related by ambivalence, conflict and contradiction. Consider two persons, the first being Shia and Yeshkun, the second Sunni and Yeshkun. According to their religious identity they are antagonists because Shias and Sunnis are divided by history of violent sectarian tensions in Gilgit. On the other hand, by their qom identity, both belong to the same group and it is generally maintained that a high degree of solidarity should be practiced within the qom. Considerable ambivalence arises for social actors from this multiplicity of identities (Sökefeld 1997b). Intersectionality of identities here entails that in certain contexts the two actors may play down religious antagonism in order to emphasize qom solidarity, or the other way round. The meaning of these identities is not fixed for the person who embodies them but is a matter of momentary positioning within the total environment of identities/differences. It follows that it is not always clear whether another person is construed as self or as other. There is a multiplicity of selves, also *within* the individual, to be distinguished from a multiplicity of others. Instead of a dichotomy of self versus other, we should speak of multiple dichotomies of selves and others that are not fixed but that structure momentary relations with particular other persons in a specific environment of differences.

This does not mean that all dichotomies of self versus others share the same degree of relevance within the society of Gilgit. Some are certainly more important than others. In what follows I would like to discuss the difference 'Shia–Sunni' which possessed a very high level of importance during the time of research. After that I will show that despite this salience the religious difference is still subject to multiplicity and intersectionality, and I will explore some examples of how the religious difference is exchanged for other differences.

SHIAS AND SUNNIS IN GILGIT:
THE DEVELOPMENT OF ANTAGONISM

The antagonism between Shias and Sunnis is nearly as old as Islam. Still, in Gilgit this difference is said not to have had much significance before the beginning of the 1970s. Accounts of conflict events before 1970 can be heard, but it is generally accepted that only from the early 1970s onwards the difference acquired a salience that effectively divided the town's population into two antagonistic parts.[5] The origin of the dispute in the 1970s is not totally clear, but it seems that some *ulama* (religious scholars) of both sects started at that time to raise the question of whether the members of the other group are really Muslims or not.

Particularly, the special ritual practices of the Shias became a bone of contention between both groups. Most important was the mourning procession on *ashura*, the tenth day of the month of Muharram, in which Shias lament the martyrdom of Imam Hussein and his companions in the battle of Karbala. In Gilgit, the *julus* of *ashura* ended always at the central place of the town, in front of the main Sunni mosque. Here, speeches were delivered to the participants. In the 1960s also many Sunnis would join the procession or assist the Shias who practiced flagellation. They handed them water and pieces of cloth with which the Shias wiped off their blood. On the grounds that the blood-stained cloths that were thrown away defiled the mosque, Sunni leaders demanded in 1972 that the assembly at the end of the *julus* be shifted to another place. But the Shias refused to comply with that demand. Three years later, in 1975, the Shia assembly was shot at from the Sunni mosque. Because of this incident the Sunni *qazi* was arrested. His detention caused great unrest in the Sunni areas of the Indus valley, south of Gilgit, and its side-valleys like Gor, Darel, and Tangir. Sunnis from these regions threatened to attack Gilgit. In the next year the administration demanded that the assembly take place at another location. Again the Shias refused to give up what they considered their habitual right. As a consequence, the *julus* was prohibited for the next two years. Only after that did the Shias concede to move their assembly to another place. Yet the dispute was not solved by this move because now the Sunnis demanded the procession take an entirely different route. A solution that satisfied both opponent parties could not be found and until now Muharram is a time of potential sectarian tension in Gilgit.

The dispute forced the people in Gilgit to increasingly identify themselves either as Sunnis or as Shias. Before, people often repeated, one

did not exactly know always to which sect the other person belonged, and Shias and Sunnis frequently prayed together in the same mosque. What reportedly had been only a nominal difference became important in many realms of social life. Since the beginning of the 1970s, there have been no marriages between Shias and Sunnis, in contrast with earlier times in which intermarriage had not been infrequent. In the 1980s the difference entered politics. In the elections of local bodies the appeal to religious sentiment became the most important strategy for winning support and securing votes. In 1988, tensions culminated in a large-scale massacre when Sunni warriors from Kohistan and the Sunni-majority regions of the Northern Areas attacked Shia villages in the vicinity of Gilgit, killing many people and destroying houses, fields and trees. Between 1988 and 1993 many more people became victims of violent tensions.[6]

In the 1980s, another Shia practice was challenged by the Sunni ulama. On festive occasions like the birthday of the Imam Ali, Shias used to light bonfires called *chiraghan* on the mountain slopes surrounding Gilgit. With fire they write words like 'Allah', 'Mohammad' or 'Ali' on the slopes. Again, some Sunni ulama considered this an 'un-Islamic' practice. For them it defiled the names of God and the Prophet because cloths soaked with kerosene were used to write the names. The Sunni ulama demanded an end to the practice of chiraghan, especially on the slopes above Sunni mosques and religious schools. In February 1990, two young men who had lit chiraghan were shot to death from a Sunni *madrassah* when they climbed down a slope.

In 1991, a bomb was found buried in the Sunni *Eidgah* and Shias were accused of having planned the bombing of the whole Sunni congregation during *Eid* prayer. Shias, in return, alleged that they were victims of a conspiracy that aimed at accusing them of fostering tensions. Several persons were killed later that year and the army started to patrol the bazaar area in Gilgit. In May 1992, the assassination of a Sunni youth leader provoked the killing of at least ten more people in revenge and counter-revenge. Curfew was imposed on Gilgit, but this measure could not prevent similar events from occurring again only six weeks later.

Society in Gilgit became effectively polarized by the Shia–Sunni dichotomy. Families living in neighbourhoods where the opposite sect formed the majority moved to majority areas of their own group. Economic cooperation across religious boundaries declined and even commensality between Shias and Sunnis almost ended—especially when it came to having meals containing meat.[7] The Shia–Sunni dichotomy

became effectively a premise that structured the perception of the social space.

According to Adam Kuper (1977), polarization of identities implies also a de-pluralization of identities. That is, polarized identities supersede almost all non-polarized identities. This happened in Gilgit too. The religious identity became the most important identity in many contexts, and most persons mentioned their religious affiliation when they were asked their most important identity. Still, this did not mean that multiplicity and intersectionality were eliminated. Instead, it could be observed that in certain contexts people explicitly attempted to foreground other identities at the expense of the religious difference. I would like to present three cases of attempts to replace certain differences that occurred in the beginning of 1993. In two of them, religious difference was traded for other identities (qom and nationality), whereas in the third case the religious difference was emphasized at the expense of locality in a struggle over land rights.

QOM VERSUS RELIGION

In the summer of 1992 two periods of acute tensions occurred within six weeks. Almost twenty people were killed. The first period started when a leader of a Sunni youth organization was murdered and the second began with the assassination of a local politician who happened to be Shia and Yeshkun. The authorities tried to control the incidents by imposing curfew. However, even after the shooting had ended and curfew was lifted, people in Gilgit continued to be very anxious. After dusk, the bazaar area, where tensions mostly started, was deserted. People generally avoided entering the bazaar and restricted their movement to the majority areas of their own sect. Months after the last assassination, public employees did not attend their work if their offices happened to be situated in a majority area of the opposite sect. The threat and fear of further tensions was so strong that people felt very uneasy. In a certain way this fear of new tensions, which was strongly lamented, deepened the rift between the sects because people generally held those of the other sect responsible for the situation. Almost every incident in the town was interpreted within the framework of the conflict between Shias and Sunnis. Polarization prevailed even after acute tensions had stopped.

But in the winter of 1992/93 a discourse emerged among Yeshkun in Gilgit which attempted to foreground qom-identity. I learnt that several Yeshkun were busily organizing an assembly of Yeshkun *motobaran* in

Gilgit irrespective of religious affiliation and locality. At the same time, younger Yeshkun, students and recent graduates, talked about the necessity to hold a similar meeting among themselves. There was an urgent sense that sectarian tensions ultimately endangered the 'identity' of Yeshkun. What I label 'identity' here was represented as both a practice and sentiment of solidarity, belonging and unity among Yeshkun as against other qom, especially Shin.[8] The necessity of an assembly of Yeshkun and the threat that religious antagonism posed to the identity of the Yeshkun was explained in two inconsistent ways. The first explanation considered the forging of unity among Yeshkun irrespective of their religious affiliation an important step to overcome sectarian conflict. Some Yeshkun explained that if they solved the religious antagonism among themselves, and if the Shin did the same, the conflict would almost be finished for want of antagonists. Here, the purpose was to solve the religious conflict, and the first step for that aim was to overcome religious difference among the Yeshkun. The second reasoning was very different. It completely subordinated the religious difference to the difference of qom and declared that sectarian tensions were a conspiracy of the Shin against the Yeshkun. The evidence for this, I was told, was that mostly Yeshkun, both Shias and Sunnis, had been the victims of violent incidents. It was alleged that the Shin, the numerically much inferior qom, had successfully broken the strength of the Yeshkun by disseminating sectarian strife. Some Yeshkun who did not accept the strong version of this thesis conceded that the murder of the Shia Yeshkun politician that had sparked the second wave of tensions in the summer of 1992 had been a Shin–Yeshkun issue rather than a Shia–Sunni matter because the victim had been an important leader of the Yeshkun and his alleged murderer was a Shin.

Although not consistent in their diagnosis, both perspectives argued for the necessity of promoting unity among the Yeshkun and considered the call for a qom-assembly a promising step for that purpose. Further, both opinions converged in the assessment that Shin possessed a much greater internal unity than Yeshkun. Many Yeshkun told me that for themselves religion had become much more important than qom, contrary to Shin for whom qom had always taken first place. As an example, my Yeshkun interlocutors told me that in local body elections Shin gave their support always to other Shin, irrespective of their religious affiliation.[9]

I was also told that similar meetings (both of young and of older men) had taken place earlier but I was unable to find out who had actually taken part and what had been the result of these meetings. Some persons who according to others had taken part in such meetings denied their

participation when I inquired about it. All these meetings had been quite clandestine because the Yeshkun did not want to arouse a feeling of threat among the Shin. Further, it seemed that most persons involved were not very eager to talk about these meetings because they obviously contradicted the value of equality and brotherhood among all Muslims, irrespective of descent and similar distinctions. There was no formal organisation of Yeshkun but rather a loose network of men belonging to different places in and around Gilgit, all of them Shina-speakers, who were regarded as important leaders of the qom and who had to take part in such an assembly in order to give it the required vigour.

Some Yeshkun did not only talk about a meeting but were busily engaged in visiting other influential Yeshkun in order to convince them of its necessity. Some of these visits surprised me because they involved very close interaction across the religious divide in spite of the still current strife. For example, a Sunni *lambardar* of a village in one of the Sunni valleys in the south of the Northern Areas stayed for more than a week in the house of a Shia Yeshkun in a purely Shia neighbourhood that had always been a Shia hotbed of sectarianism.[10] From this base he met other Yeshkun in the town in order to get their support for the meeting. In his presence, his host discussed the sectarian issue very frankly with me, although such discussions in the presence of members of the opposite sect were generally avoided in order to prevent emotional exchanges and mutual accusations. Yet the host was a strong advocate of the Shin-conspiracy theory of sectarianism and he articulated the issue within the framework of qom in such a way that his guest did not feel offended.

Still, to organise an assembly of Yeshkun was not an easy matter. I had to leave Gilgit in March 1993 and until then a meeting of Yeshkun had not taken place. First, another period of tensions had seemed imminent[11] and then the beginning of Ramadan intervened. I do not know whether such an assembly took place later. Yet in spite of the fact that the difference of religion seemed to have won over qom in this case, it is clear that both differences and the related issues have to be considered as mutual contexts. No matter whether a qom-assembly of Yeshkun finally took place or not, the issue became pressing for many Yeshkun precisely because of the high degree of religious antagonism. In many contexts, actors drew connections between both differences. For example, one of the motobaran who was very committed to prepare a Yeshkun assembly was at the same time looking for a suitable match for one of his sons. His wife also visited a Shia Shin family in order to ask for the hand of a spouse for her son. The mother of the girl told her: 'I would rather change my religion than give my daughter to a Yeshkun!'[12] Here, too, qom was accorded primacy.

The intersectionality of qom and religion signals a contradiction of ideologies and values. From the point of view of Islam, qom has no positive significance. Islam teaches that all Muslims are brothers and sisters irrespective of ethnicity or any other intervening identity. Some persons in Gilgit therefore explicitly drew the conclusion that in the face of the superior value of religion their belonging to a qom or kinship group was insignificant and that religious affiliation was all that counted. But most persons whom I met admitted the contradiction of values between qom and religion without being able to generally opt for or against one of them. The host of the Sunni lambardar who toured Gilgit in order to win support for a qom assembly put this in the following words: 'Shia or Sunni, this is nonsense. In the Quran there are neither Shias nor Sunnis. And in the last instance also Shin–Yeshkun is nonsense. After all, we are all the children of Adam and Eve.' Yet, this insight did not prevent him from attempting to enhance the importance of qom in the society of Gilgit.

RELIGION VERSUS NATION[13]

The second challenge to religious difference emerged from oppositional politics against the special political status of the Northern Areas. This status results from the entanglement of the Northern Areas in the Kashmir dispute. Since November 1947, the Northern Areas, i.e. the erstwhile Gilgit Agency and Baltistan, are controlled by Pakistan. After an uprising of the local military, the Gilgit Scouts, against the rule of the Maharaja of Kashmir, the local leaders decided to join Pakistan (Sökefeld 1997c). Yet Pakistan did not accept the accession of Gilgit–Baltistan but controlled the area as 'disputed territory', pending the solution of the Kashmir dispute. As a consequence, the region is not a constitutional part of Pakistan and its inhabitants lack a number of constitutional and political rights that Pakistanis enjoy. Many people in Gilgit rejected this political status. In short, they complained that they had opted for Pakistan in 1947 but that Pakistan had not accepted their decision.

In local political discourse the Shia–Sunni conflict is frequently related to this political issue. In 1971, an insurgency against the Pakistani administration occurred in Gilgit that included a general strike, the storming of the police station and breaking of the prison.[14] As it happened, violent sectarian tension started only *after* this upheaval. It is alleged,

therefore, that sectarianism was fanned by the Pakistan government as a divide-and-rule strategy against political mobilization. In the subsequent years people in Gilgit were indeed more preoccupied with sectarian conflict than with a struggle for political change, although voices that demanded political and constitutional rights never died out.

Since the late 1980s, Gilgit witnessed the formation of new opposition against the political status of the area. This opposition was increasingly framed in *nationalist* terms. Local activists postulated a nation of the Northern Areas as different from the Pakistani nation. This difference was represented as being based in history, culture and the unique linguistic and geographical conditions of the Northern Areas (Sökefeld 1997a: 296ff., Sökefeld 1999b). Nationalism was a dual strategy as it emphasised not only the difference between the Northern Areas and Pakistan, denying the right of Pakistan to determine the fate of the area, but also affirmed the 'natural' unity of the people of the Northern Areas as a nation. According to the nationalists, to promote this unity which had been endangered by the disruptive strategy of Pakistan was an objective of primary importance. Sectarianism was considered the greatest threat to national unity.

Yet, in the beginning of the 1990s, opposition to the political status of the Northern Areas was clearly marked by the sectarian divide. There were two political projects. The first one demanded the separation of the political fate of the Northern Areas from the Kashmir dispute, questioning that the former Gilgit Agency had ever been a part of Jammu and Kashmir state in a meaningful sense, and favoured the inclusion of the Northern Areas as a regular fifth province into the state of Pakistan. The other project affirmed the historical and cultural relations with Kashmir and demanded the merger of the Northern Areas with Azad Kashmir, and on the long run, with the whole of Jammu and Kashmir.[15] While the activists that endorsed the first project were mostly Shias and Ismailis, although there were also some Sunni supporters, the second project was favoured exclusively by Sunnis, most of them Kashmiris.[16] The sectarian rationale behind the different projects is obvious: Shias and Ismailis feared becoming an insignificant minority in a predominately Sunni State of Jammu and Kashmir whereas Sunnis feared remaining a minority within a province of the Northern Areas in Pakistan.

The nationalist vision of the Northern Areas evolved from the provincial project. But the nationalists who belonged to the small local parties Karakorum National Movement (KNM) and Balawaristan National Front (BNF) envisaged their project in a way that endeavoured

to accommodate the Sunnis too. They delimited the projected homeland and territory of the nation of the Northern Areas in a way that would guarantee almost numerical equality of Sunnis and Shias within its population.[17]

The BNF organized a conference on the political status of the Northern Areas which took place on 9 April 1993. Most local parties as well as local sections of Pakistani political parties like the Pakistan People's Party and the Pakistan Muslim League participated. The speeches delivered on this occasion were characterized by a high readiness to cooperate in spite of differing political aims. The conference was remarkable for the fact that it brought together also some local politicians that were at the same time important leaders of the Shia and Sunni communities. The participants expressed the view that internal political differences had to be postponed in order to achieve a change in the political status of the Northern Areas and they argued for unity in opposition to the oppressive grip of the Pakistani bureaucracy.[18] Speakers reiterated the allegation that Pakistan promoted sectarianism in the Northern Areas, and called for sectarian harmony. As a result of the conference, the 'United Front of the Northern Areas' (*Shumali Illaqajat Muttahida Mahaz*) was founded as a body in which different political organizations collaborated for a common cause. This committee organized demonstrations, press conferences and other political events during the following years. Some of these activities were repressed by the authorities. Although violent sectarian tensions in which more than twenty persons were killed swept Gilgit again in August 1993, the United Front of the Northern Areas did not break up but continued its activities.

Here I am not interested in the political success or failure of oppositional political groups in Gilgit but in their reframing of the religious issue by projecting a nation of the Northern Areas. The nationalist groups interpreted sectarianism as an instrument of power employed by the Pakistan government in order to maintain control over the Northern Areas. The alleged divide-and-rule strategy was then countered by a new politics of representation which depicted the people of the Northern Areas as a nation that needed to be united and that was different from Pakistan.

This attempt to replace the difference of religion by a difference of nations occurred in a complex web of overlapping discourses. There was no clear and unequivocal demarcation between 'political' and 'religious' discourses in Gilgit. Especially, Shia activists drew a number of connections between both issues by alleging that sectarianism had to be

understood as a disruptive governmental strategy against political
commitment and change, and also by representing the political
discrimination against the Northern Areas as a discrimination against
mainly Shias. The issue was further complicated by the unstable political
situation in Pakistan, characterized by frequent changes of governments
and policies. As a rule of thumb it can be said that any Pakistani national
party exhibited a more sympathetic position towards the Northern Areas
as long as it was in opposition, but that it receded from reform schemes
as soon as it came into government. As a consequence, even members and
activists of Gilgit branches of these national parties participated in
political activities against Pakistani control of the Northern Areas.

Certainly, religious discourse and religious antagonism did not become
completely replaced by nationalist discourse and the emphasis of national
unity. But during the 1990s, Pakistan indeed emerged much clearer as
'the other' of the Northern Areas than ever before.

LOCALITY VERSUS RELIGION

The last case refers to a reverse change of differences: here the attempt
was not to supersede the religious divide by some other difference, but
religious difference became significant in a conflict about village common
lands that arose originally in a framework of locality. This conflict
occurred in Manot (a pseudonym), one of the more peripheral *mohalle* of
Gilgit. Due to legal uncertainty and a great number of intertwined
perspectives the issue is very complicated and can be presented here in an
abridged form only.[19]

Because agriculture in Gilgit depends on irrigation, irrigated land
(*abadi zamin*) is distinguished from unirrigated land. In the past,
unirrigated land was mostly common land of the village (*khalisa-e deh*).
The recognised original inhabitants of a village (*muthulfau*) were entitled
to use this common land for grazing and other purposes, and they could
also take certain portions of it into individual possession. *Khalisa* was
thereby turned into *nautor*. Formerly, the usefulness of khalisa was rather
restricted and therefore only small portions were appropriated as nautor.
In most of the cases this happened only when the irrigation system was
extended so that additional land could be cultivated. But for some decades
land in Gilgit was in much more demand for construction purposes than
for cultivation. The price of land had risen sharply and also unirrigated
khalisa that can be turned into nautor had become very valuable. A
prescribed procedure had to be followed in order to make pieces of khalisa

into nautor. Only muthulfau were entitled for such allotment. Applications
for allotment had to be publicized and they needed the approval of both
the settlement office and the lambardar.

For a number of reasons land in Manot was very much sought after
by newcomers in Gilgit. As it happened, the correct rules of procedure
for the allotment of nautor had rarely been followed. In contrast to
irrigated land, unirrigated khalisa was relatively abundant in Manot. After
the freedom struggle of 1947, khalisa had been allotted as *inam* to non-
muthulfau veterans. Because khalisa was plenty and its usefulness quite
limited, there had been no local complaints against this practice.
Complaints started when during the 1970s and 1980s such effectively
illegal allotment continued and the remaining khalisa dwindled.

In the beginning of the twentieth century, only five families had been
registered as muthulfau in the settlement records of Manot. All of these
were Shias and Yeshkun. At the time of the next settlement, a few more
families were registered, among them a Sunni family that had come from
Chilas and that was accorded all rights of muthulfau. Other families had
given some land in Manot to this Sunni family. One of the original
muthulfau families also converted to Sunni Islam. In the 1990s, muthulfau
had become a small minority of the population of Manot. Most of the
inhabitants were newcomers from Nager, all of whom were Shias, and
from Hunza, who were either Shia or Ismaili.

Over the generations, the Sunni family from Chilas became relatively
rich and powerful. Contrary to the original Shia muthulfau, they were
well-educated. Today, the villages have a dual structure of authority.
Although the lambardar has lost most official functions, he continues to
be a person of high respect. His 'office' is passed hereditarily from father
to son. Since the early 1970s, on the other hand, there are elected
'members' who represent the village in the municipal committee and who
are responsible, among other things, for the development of the mohalle.
They deal with the administration and wield considerable influence. In
some parts of Gilgit, the lambardars have also become members. Not so
in Manot. Here, the lambardar family was uneducated and promised little
in the difficult negotiations with modern administration. Therefore,
members belonged always to influential immigrant families. In 1993, the
office of member had been for two electoral periods with the Chilasi
family.[20]

Until that year, the muthulfau had become more and more incensed
because of the alleged practice of illegal allotment. They pointed out, first,
that people from outside that had no right at all had been allotted nautor,

and second, that certain persons who had some right to nautor had got much more land than they were entitled to. In the beginning of 1993, the muthulfau of Manot, with the exception of the Sunni immigrant/muthulfau of the village,[21] occupied an area of nautor that in their view had been allotted illegally. They tore down the walls surrounding a few plots, planted some trees there and demanded that the land was re-allotted among the villagers of Manot. But the settlement office confirmed that the previous allotment had been correct and prohibited the irrigation of the newly planted trees which consequentially were about to die from drought.

The muthulfau of Manot lacked the means to defend their rights legally. For seeing through a juridical process on the matter of nautor they required much more resources for advocates and bribes than they could afford. Formerly, their issues had been represented to the judiciary as well as to the authorities by members of the Chilas family, but now the villagers accused this family of having collaborated in and gained from illegal allotment. Therefore, they had to seek other alliances. Already before, they had combined with the inhabitants of the neighbouring village of Haban (a pseudonym) which, situated a little further down the slope, shared the water channel with Manot. The muthulfau of Manot described those of Haban, the majority of who were also Shias, as much more shrewd and skilled in the business of modern local politics. In a similar case which had occurred in the early 1980s, the muthulfau of both Haban and Manot had successfully demanded allotment. At that time also the inhabitants of Haban got some of the khalisa of Manot allotted. Now the Shia muthulfau of Manot were also supported by people from Hunza and Nager who had settled in the village. They participated in the occupation of land. It turned out that all supporters who did not possess any original right to nautor in Manot were Shias like the overwhelming majority of the muthulfau. They had been promised a share of nautor in case of success, whereas the Sunni muthulfau were excluded. Also, people of Haban, who offered their assistance again, were denied a share because, as I was told, there was too little land left.

The Shias did not talk openly about the exclusion of the Sunnis. To the contrary, the persons involved preferred not to mention this fact. Yet the Sunni muthulfau accused the Shias of turning the conflict about nautor into a sectarian issue. The Shias denied that the Sunnis were excluded because of a sectarian rationale and explained that their exclusion was due to the fact that the Sunnis were originally people from outside who had taken advantage of the 'real' muthulfau for much too long.

Here, the religious difference became a base for the recruitment of support. According to their own self-assessment, the Shia muthulfau of Manot were not resourceful enough to defend what they considered their right. They had to win others to support their cause, to contribute funds for the planting of trees and for subsequent legal procedure. These others were not ready to offer assistance without return and had to be baited with the promise of a share of khalisa. Yet, as a consequence of promising land to people not entitled to it, the Shia muthulfau lost part of their legitimacy and became accused of sectarian action. A power strategy of the Shia muthulfau, then, was interpreted as sectarianism by the Sunnis of Manot. The events in Manot can be related to the polarization of society in Gilgit due to the Shia–Sunni conflict. In the context of religious polarization religious affiliation was readily available as a base for recruiting support in an originally unrelated issue.

DIFFERENCE, MULTIPLICITY, INTERSECTIONALITY

All the three cases I discussed here dealt with the redefinition of dichotomies of self versus the other and showed that a choice of others was available in Gilgit for contrastingly crafting selves. Conventional approaches to identity which, for instance, singled out ethnicity as the 'most basic identity' which structures social action (Barth 1969) are challenged by this setting. 'Basic' is indeed the whole environment of differences that provides meaningful contexts for a range of different, and at times, contradicting ways of action. This challenge is taken up by desisting from ascribing any specific content to the opposition of self and other. However, this purely formal, structural dichotomy, which supposes a simple binary relation, still predicates a singularity of identity. Such a singularity is refuted by the multiplicity of identities in Gilgit. The presentation of my three cases showed that identities which no doubt are often supposed by actors as being structured by a singular and basic relation/opposition of self versus the other are strongly challenged by other constructions of that opposition. We observe a multiplicity of relations of selves versus others that in many cases assume singularity but that anyway have to take multiplicity and intersectionality into account. Difference, combined with multiplicity and intersectionality challenges and destabilizes identity. Movements of identity politics take efforts to stabilize a particular identity at the expense of others. Differently defined selves and others contradict and threaten each other with erasure. According to Brah (1996: 124), 'collective identity is the process of

signification whereby commonalities of experience around a specific axis of differentiation, say class, caste, or religion, are invested with particular meanings. In this sense, a given collective identity partially erases but also carries traces of other identities. That is to say that a heightened awareness of one *construction* of identity in a given moment always entails a partial erasure of the *memory* or *subjective sense* of internal heterogeneity of a group.'

Even if one difference is supposed to erase another one, traces of the difference-to-erase remain. The foregrounding of qom-identity (being Yeshkun) rather than religious affiliation always reminded of the sectarian divide because it arose precisely in the context of the threat that sectarianism posed to qom. Similarly, the nationalist discourse continually referred to the problem of sectarianism, never stopping to attribute it to nefarious action of the government of Pakistan—that is, to the other in nationalist discourse. By trying to negate the difference of religion through the introduction of the difference of nation, sectarianism was effectively retained *within* that discourse, but its significance was changed from being an essential and violent actuality to being the product of an adverse other.

The nationalism of the Northern Areas can be read as a re-identification and re-construction of an identity/difference that has been eclipsed by Pakistani politics. The alleged production of Shia–Sunni tensions by the government was interpreted as an element of this politics of erasure. Yet it was not the only one. Equally important was that the Northern Areas were deprived of their political agency. The *de facto*—but not *de jure*—inclusion of the Northern Areas into Pakistan implied the area's incapacitation in the political arena which is represented in nationalist discourse as a new colonialism (Sökefeld 2005).

In the political struggle between the Northern Areas and Pakistan the intersectionality of identities/differences becomes most obvious. From the Pakistani perspective, the Northern Areas were 'the other' that had to be accommodated and to come to rest within a shared national identity of Pakistan. But this accommodation could not be realized due to the entanglement of the Northern Areas in the Kashmir dispute. *Différance* is exemplified by the Northern Areas' uneasy and unresolved position as being both part and non-part of Pakistan. At the level of individual political rights this condition is expressed by the inconvenient position of the people of the Northern Areas: Like the people of Pakistan—but unlike the Azad Kashmiris—they were subject to martial law after Ziaul Haq

had assumed power in 1977, but they were denied democratic rights when the rest of the country was liberated from dictatorship in 1988.

From the nationalist point of view, the identity of the Northern Areas was threatened both from within by sectarianism and from the outside by the disempowering politics of Pakistan. The threat of sectarianism from within was certainly more dangerous because it shifted the struggle to another site and effectively denied nationality as a fundamental identity by postulating religious affiliation as being more basic. The attribution of this apparent threat from within to the enemy from outside by declaring Pakistan responsible for sectarianism was an ingenious move that turned the threat to nationality into its affirmation. For what had seemed to be fragmenting the 'national' self of the Northern Areas and thereby to question its actuality turned out to be a disruptive strategy of an other (Pakistan) that was aiming at the national self and affirmed it thereby.

In the case of Manot, finally, an important aspect of the conflict was the question of which difference was to be applied to the issue in order to specify its meaning. Was it a matter of Shias versus Sunnis or of muthulfau versus newcomers? The meaning of the dichotomy of self versus other was decisive for the legitimacy of the contested claims.

The multiplicity of identities/differences in Gilgit is obviously not composed of diverse elements that are either situated on an equal level or that are inserted into an uncontested hierarchy of inclusion and exclusion. Instead, these identities/differences are related by continuous struggle, questioning the legitimacy of other differences or reducing them to a subordinate position. Homi Bhabha (1994) distinguishes *diversity* and *difference* as relations between identities, the first being unproblematic, characterized by clear boundaries and derived from a taken for granted universal frame, while the second is characterized by mutual questioning and challenge, that is, by intersectionality. The multiplicity of identities in Gilgit clearly falls into Bhabha's category of *difference*. There is no solution to the contradiction of identities which is acceptable for all and for all time. Nationality can neither be generally subordinated to religious affiliation, nor the other way round. Persons who derive identities from both conflicting differences have to live with that conflict and ambivalence, perhaps by almost 'compartmentalizing' their life and attributing primary importance to either of the differences in shifting contexts. Also, a staunch nationalist values his religious affiliation more than the presumed nationality when it comes to marriage. The possibility to compartmentalize means that the discourses of different identities intersect only at certain, crucial sites.

While discourse can construct social identity in less ambivalent ways, arguing, for instance, unequivocally for the primacy of the nation, personal identity has to be conceived of as a complex chain of identities in which each one necessarily supplements—and partly erases—another identity. We could conceptualize personal identity as a sequence of appendices that explain, specify, reframe, limit, question and restrict one another. Personal identity is subject to the condition of *différance* in that its final and total meaning is always deferred by the intervention of other differences and their social and political predicaments (Sökefeld 1999a).

This was expressed by Mohammad Ali, a student who was active in oppositional politics and in forging qom-identity among young Yeshkun. He tried to explain to me what he was in the following terms: 'At first I am Pakistani. Then I am Gilgitwala because I have been born in this area. And I am Yeshkun; this is very important because this is my blood. But the most important of all is religion because one has to think about what comes after death. Therefore I am Shia in the first place.' For him, each of his identities comes first although this results in an apparently unfeasible, contradictory totality. I recorded his statement at a time when nationalism in Gilgit had only started to develop and when most oppositional activists still opted for the regular accession of the Northern Areas to Pakistan as a fifth province. In the subsequent years Mohammad Ali's political stance might well have changed to a more radical nationalist position resulting in that his being Gilgitwala effectively replaced and erased his being Pakistani.

CONCLUSION: REPRESENTING MULTIPLICITIES OF IDENTITIES

In this chapter I outlined an approach for the conceptualisation of multiple identities in Gilgit town, framing identity within the three dimensions of difference, multiplicity and intersectionality. In the conclusion I would like to outline some consequences of the present approach.

1. Although Gilgit is a place with particular historical and political conditions that generated a social configuration with a high degree of multiplicity, I am of the opinion that this is neither an extraordinary condition nor that other places are necessarily less characterized by multiplicity. I do not know a single village in the Northern Areas that does not display a considerable multiplicity of intersecting differences derived from descent, migration, locality, language, religious affiliation or

other conditions, and I suppose that the same holds true for other regions of the Himalaya as well. If we extend the discussion to other sources of difference, like gender, age or class, it becomes clear that the multiplicity of differences is not a special but rather a general human condition. Anthropological studies of identity, ethnicity or, in general, oppositions of self versus other accordingly should analyse the intersectionality of multiple identities/differences rather than single out a particular difference at the expense of others. We have to explore and acknowledge a plurality of perspectives in analogy to what Nigel Rapport calls 'epistemic diversity':

> Any attempt to force social life into one or other perspective ends in tautology and serves only to destroy the 'reality' under study. To adopt an eclecticism of narrational style, however, is to free one's account from an obsessional Aristotelian combat between battling singularities. And only in such eclecticism—locating human behaviour in more than one frame of reference at once; locating such (often mutually exclusive) frames of reference in conversation with one another—can one escape the notion that, ultimately, epistemic diversity can and should be 'resolved' in terms of a finite limit of possibility (society; structure) or an ultimately determining and integrating code (God; grammar) (Rapport 1997: 183f.).

2. The emphasis on intersectionality also changes the conceptualization of single identities. If we take into account that different differences relate to one another or, more precisely, are related to one another by the actors that embody them, it becomes impossible to conceptualise identities/differences as essences. When, as in the example of Gilgit, nation and qom are employed to challenge religious difference, or when religious affiliation is used to increase power in a conflict originally defined by locality, we see that identities may be employed consciously as strategies to achieve certain ends. They are part of power games in which actors attempt to level out inequality of power by inverting or reframing differences. Essentialism is a strategy itself. Nation or qom are indeed represented as timeless essences that possess almost fathomless historical depth and that are irrevocably anchored in the core and bottom of every human being. There is even a kind of competition for the greatest 'essentiality' among intersecting differences like religion and qom. Essentialism has to be rejected as an analytic approach but it nevertheless remains a powerful topos in the discourses of identity that we study.

3. Being attentive to the intersectionality of multiple differences directs attention to an aspect of human life that largely remains a blind spot in

much of anthropology: individuality, the unique conditions of each human self (Cohen 1992, 1994). From the approach to identities outlined here follows that it is not sufficient to simply sort individual human beings into a grid of groups or collective identities. Rather than being self-evident, the constitution of groups and categories becomes a problem. Every human being occupies a specific and unique subject position within the multiplicity of intersecting differences. Further, not all individuals invest to the same degree into particular identities (Rattansi 1995). This element of choice was most obvious in the question of national identity because not everybody in Gilgit subscribed to a shared nationality of the area. A similar difference of investment into identities also applies to qom and religion. Accordingly, human beings have to be represented as agents who more or less self-consciously act with the differences at hand within the constraints of a specific historical and political setting.[22]

4. The deconstruction of the dichotomy self/other into a multiplicity of selves and others also has consequences for the great 'meta-dichotomy' that provides the fundament for the anthropological approach: the dichotomy of the anthropologist as self versus his/her objects of study as other—a dichotomy which is still sometimes represented as parallel to the (not less questionable) dichotomy of West versus non-West. Critical works, most importantly Fabian (1983), have shown that this dichotomy, too, is not a given but the outcome of a process of other*ing* (and, conversely, self*ing*) which is actively if often unwittingly put into motion by the anthropological approach. Being attentive to the multiplicity and intersectionality of differences demands the dissolution of this unequivocal and unequal dichotomy into a plurality of relations between the anthropologist (as a subject) and the *subjects* he or she studies that can signify both difference and identity. This perspective is put into practice by female and feminist anthropologists who have access to areas of life that, due to the difference of gender, are mostly closed to male researchers. We are required to not only look out for differences but also for continuities between their lives and ours—continuities that, after all, as Tim Ingold (1993) reminds us, are a necessary precondition for the feasibility of the anthropological project.

GLOSSARY

inam	remuneration
julus	procession
lambardar	village headman
motobaran	respected elders
nautor	'newly broken' land

NOTES

1. This text is a revised version of a paper read at the workshop *Representation of the Self and Representation of the Other in the Himalayas: Space, History, Culture*, Meudon, France, 25–26 September 1998. It is based on fieldwork in Gilgit undertaken from 1991 to 1993.
2. The 'self', too, is a concept with many meanings. In the present context of multiple oppositions of selves and others the self refers more to what I otherwise call 'identity' and not to the 'person' or the 'individual' that embraces and embodies such identities. Relations between both aspects of the self are discussed in Sökefeld 1999a.
3. *Qom* is a very ambiguous term with a number of significances. Here, I use the term for those groups that in the older literature of the area had been referred to as 'castes' or 'tribes' (e.g. in Biddulph 1971). It is generally maintained that the members of such groups are related by kinship but not necessarily by common descent. Sometimes, these groups are also called 'ethnic groups' but because I see no advantage in replacing one ambiguous term by another one I stick to the local term (Sökefeld 1998b).
4. See Sökefeld 1997a: 38ff. for a more complete exploration of such categories and their pitfalls.
5. The Ismailis form a third religious segment in the population of Gilgit town but because they do not take part in the antagonism they are not considered here.
6. For a more complete and detailed history of sectarian conflict in Gilgit see Sökefeld 1997a: 205ff.
7. Muslims are only allowed to eat meat from animals butchered by Muslims. When people in Gilgit refused to consume meat that was provided by butchers of the other sect, their refusal amounted to the tacit conclusion that the others were *kuffir*, i.e. non-Muslims.
8. As a qom, Yeshkun define themselves first of all in opposition to Shin. Shin and Yeshkun are considered the two important autochthonous qom of Gilgit. The relationship between both groups is not devoid of ambiguities and vacillates between strong rivalry and only casual delimitation (Sökefeld 1994). In the discourse considered here, the relation between the qom was envisaged as antagonism.
9. Some Shin told me the same about Yeshkun.
10. In the religious topography of Gilgit, some neighbourhoods were much more prone to getting involved in sectarian clashes than others. The part of the town to which I refer here had invariably been involved.
11. A Sunni mullah had been killed and this murder was instantly framed as a sectarian incident by Sunnis who openly accused Shias of the crime. Shias, in return, accused Sunnis of fanning sectarianism by holding Shias indiscriminately responsible for all such incidents, without any justification. An outbreak of clashes was prevented by

the strong presence of police and military. Later, it turned out that the victim had been killed by his own son-in-law because of some family issue. The atmosphere in Gilgit, however, remained very tense.

12. This strict reply does not mean that there are no marriages between Shin and Yeshkun. Although both groups are mostly described as endogamous in the literature, intermarriages do occur. Yet it is true that such intermarriages are generally regarded much more critically by Shin than by Yeshkun.

13. Although both quasi-kinship groups like Shin and Yeshkun and political nations are locally referred to as qom, I use the English term for the political nation in order to prevent confusion.

14. See Sökefeld 1997a: 284ff.

15. Azad Kashmir was separated from the rest of Jammu and Kashmir in 1947 by a successful uprising of Kashmiri Muslims who were not ready to accept the expected declaration of accession of the state to the Indian Union. Azad Kashmir has its own government and parliament and is officially independent of Pakistan in internal affairs, but in fact Azad Kashmir is completely controlled by and dependent on the government of Pakistan.

16. These Kashmiri of Gilgit are the descendants of migrants from Kashmir that were already settled in the area in the eighteenth century as artisans and peasants. Today, they form a considerable segment of the town's population and occupy one of its most central mohalle, Kashrot. They all speak the Shina language and have to be distinguished from subsequent migrants from Kashmir that came as merchants only after Gilgit was conquered by Sikh and Kashmiri troops.

17. According to this project, a section of the district Kohistan which is inhabited by Sunnis only and which now forms part of the North West Frontier Province was to be included in the territory of the Northern Areas in order to increase the numerical strength of Sunnis.

18. *Khabrain* (Urdu Daily), 13 April 1993.

19. For a more detailed analysis see Sökefeld 1998a.

20. It is quite questionable to label this family still as 'immigrants' and this already points to a significant change of perspective in the conflict.

21. That is, both the descendants of the immigrants from Chilas that had been registered as muthulfau and the family of original muthulfau that had converted to the Sunnah did not take part in this action.

22. I explored this issue in Sökefeld 1999a.