RELIGIOUS SOVEREIGNTY AND TRANSNATIONALISM IN A NATION-STATE

POSTCOLONIAL IDENTITIES IN NORTHERN PAKISTAN

ABSTRACT

This paper examines how the people of Hunza in Pakistan experience multiple claims of sovereignty, including religious claims, and how they respond to these in their everyday lives. The principal focus is on how Shimshalis perceive the role of the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN). I argue that various social and economic development institutions of the AKDN claim both a «soft» (through its NGO network) and a religious (through the figure of the Aga Khan) form of sovereignty over the people by providing them with protection and welfare. By showing how the development institutions of the Aga Khan incorporate supra-national modernist discourse and practice I demonstrate how the analysis of sovereignty must extend beyond the boundaries of the nation-state in order to include networks of NGOs and religious authority, both of which the Shimshali people imbue with sovereign-like status.

Keywords: Development · Northern Pakistan · Ismailism · Marginality · Religious sovereignty

SHAFQAT HUSSAIN

In her critique of studies of resistance in social theory, Sherry Ortner (1995: 173) has argued that anthropologists have often engaged in an ethnographic refusal to study other equally important factors such as religion and internal discord within societies. Ortner argues that religion remains one of the victims of this refusal as very little cultural significance is ascribed to the role of religion in resistance studies. Following on from this I argue that there is a similar refusal to study the role of religion in sovereignty. In this paper I present some partially developed ideas about how we might see the role of religion in claims to sovereignty[1] over people and territories[2].

Ann Stoler (2006) has suggested that we, as scholars, should rethink how we view colonial empires and their political forms. Stoler states that imperial formations have seldom been unproblematic and «clearly bounded polities». She argues, «we can think of them better as scaled genres of rule that produce and count on *different degrees of sovereignty* and gradation of rights» (2006: 128, emphasis added). Ayesha Jalal was arguing in the same vein when she stated that sovereignty of the modern nation-state is not a monolithic or indivisible political construct rather being hybrid and fractured, usually representing a structural continuation from the colonial state (Jalal 1995: 250f.). Conceived in this manner, we can see a similar history of sovereignty emerging in the mountainous region of Hunza in northern Pakistan[3].

Using ethnographic material collected during a fieldwork period of over two years and drawing on my personal experience of working for the Aga Khan Rural Support Program (AKRSP) in the mid-1990s, in this paper I look at how the people of the Hunza region perceive the role and significance of the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) in their daily lives. The AKDN is a cluster of economic, social and cultural development institutions working under the leadership of the Aga Khan, the spir-

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[1] Following Hansen and Stepputat (2006), I see sovereignty as existing outside its conventional locus, the state, to include other entities. As a concept, I describe sovereignty as an ascription of some kind of finality over affairs of individual and social concern to an entity induced by fear, respect and loyalty all at the same time.

[2] I treat religion and politics as separate domains as enunciated by my informants. Indeed this rhetorical enunciation of separation does not withstand empirical scrutiny and remains an additional implicit theme of my paper here.

[3] Martin Sökefeld (2005) has brilliantly shown how the region has remained under multiple claims of sovereignty – from the Chinese, the British and the Kashmir state – which to this day remain unresolved in different ways.

itual and religious head of the Ismaili Muslim community of Hunza. I argue that the various social and economic development institutions of the AKDN claim at once a «soft»[4] (through its NGO network) and a religious (through the figure of the Aga Khan) form of sovereignty over the people by providing them with protection and welfare. I show how the social and welfare institutions of the Aga Khan enfold modernist development discourse and practice, normally associated with a nation-state, in its development program. Most analyses of such development projects tend to frame them in terms of power, domination and resistance using ideas of governmentality and the obfuscation of power. By contrast, in this case the authority and power of the Aga Khan is explicit, visible, and welcomed by the people that it targets. Thus the power of development works through the illumination of its locus, in this case a religious authority. I situate the analysis of sovereignty beyond the boundaries of the nation-state therefore including networks of NGOs and religious authority both of which the local people imbue with sovereign-like status.

THEORIES OF SOVEREIGNTY

In a Weberian sense sovereignty is described «as a political entity's externally recognized right to exercise final authority over all its affairs» (Bierstker and Weber 1996: 12). Using a more constructivist approach Kathleen Sullivan defines sovereignty as «an end effect of exercise of power» (Sullivan 2006: 45). Sullivan regards sovereignty as a form of negotiation in which certain practices, such as jurisdictional control, of the sovereign are never complete and never reach their finality, rather being renewed through performances of everyday state-making. Using the example of the First Nation's efforts to control their resources in British Columbia in Canada, Sullivan shows how they invoke the language of the state, and its associated practices, to challenge the hegemonic claim to sovereignty made by the Canadian state. Others have looked at how global neo-liberal forces of market capitalism are affecting the sovereignty of nation states (Ong 2006).

Moving away from a notion of sovereignty as something inscribed in the concept of state, Hansen and Stepputat (2006: 296f.) have elaborated on two types of sovereignty: legal sovereignty and de facto sovereignty[5]. They describe the former as a legitimate right to govern through the use of law and order. They state that legal sovereignty is «grounded in formal ideologies of rule and legality» (2006: 296) and may not fully explain «how multiple, fragile and contested centers of military might, welfare, and *ethno-religious* and local loyalties claim sovereignty over people and land» (2006: 296, emphasis added). Using Giorgio Agamben's (2005) concept of the *homo sacer* they describe the latter, de facto sovereignty, as the right over life (to protect or kill with impunity). Thus we see how Hansen and Stepputat (2006) give significance to both a religious form of sovereignty and the power of the sovereign to kill as well as protect. Hansen and Stepputat, however, do not discuss further the protective or the religious aspects of sovereignty, focusing instead on the way that various state and non-state actors use violence with impunity as a means of enforcing de facto sovereignty. They argue that through unhindered and unchecked violence that is not based in law and legal institutions, being above and beyond them, individuals and groups, state institutions, and political governments claim sovereignty over people, territories and resources[6].

In this paper, I want to take forward Hansen and Stepputat's idea of de facto sovereignty, focusing on the issue of protection rather than violence, seeing how a non-state, transnational, religious entity might claim sovereignty by providing real and symbolic protection to people through its development and modernizing interventions. There are two sets of literature which are relevant to my argument that I will briefly touch upon here. These are, firstly, the literature on transnational institutions and, secondly, the literature on international development and the effect of both on state sovereignty.

Scholars have debated the effects of global transnational institutions that have a welfare agenda, such as social movements and international development

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[4] Hansen and Stepputat describe the rising influence of transnational corporations and international NGOs, mainly for development, relief and environmental conservation, in many third world countries as a «soft» form of sovereignty (2006: 296).

[5] Hansen and Stepputat (2006) also define natural sovereignty which they regard as something claimed by European colonialists as their privileged domain because they were civilized and had the magical quality called civilization.

[6] Following this line of thinking, and discussing the state particularly, Das and Poole (2004) argue that those areas where states have de facto sovereignty are marginal places where a state acts in its original form. Das and Poole thus argue that margins are placed where the state finds its original violence or nature and where it perpetuates its monopoly over violence, continually re-founding itself.

and conservation organizations, on the sovereignty of nation-states. Various scholars have theorized the effects of globalization generally on the way that established social categories such as culture, geographic location and the nation-state are perceived (Appadurai 1996; Harvey 1999). One of the most intriguing aspects of transnational institutions is the way that they affect the nation-state and the forms of identities that are based on the nation-state unit. Some have argued that the age of the nation-state, with clearly defined sovereignty as its defining feature, might be approaching its political and logical end with transnational institutions establishing de facto sovereignty (Selby 2003; Attfield 2005; Duffy 2007). Others maintain that there is no alternative to the state as the basic unit of political action and understanding and that the choice in the conditions of twenty-first century globalization is between different forms of the state, not between the state and something else (Gupta 1998; Soper 2005; Cooper 2002). By different forms of state they also mean different gradations of the sovereignty of the state.

That development has come to be about progress, improvement and security is captured well in James Scott's *Seeing Like a State* (1998). Scott (1998) has discussed the utopian vision of the state based on ideas of high modernism and how these visions have had disastrous effects. Others have also shown that development, with its emphasis on improvement and empowerment, has become a matter of faith and rhetoric thus often resembling the doctrinal messages of religions (Fisher 1997; Gupta 1998; Li 1999). Building on the inexorable power and attraction of development discourse, Tania Li (1999: 296) argues that it has also become a form of governmentality (Foucault 1991), a modern and rational form of power whose target is both the individual and the society. Li builds on Burchell et al.'s (1991) elaboration of governmentality to argue that development discourse exerts a power that conditions the way in which state and non-state actors, as providers of development, and the people who receive development unquestionably assume that development, based on ideas of liberal economic democracies, is the most rational and ideal social condition.

Li (1999) argues that to think of development as a form of rationality of governance and as a form of power helps us to understand how it works in the hands of a sovereign through a society subjecting itself to development discourse. But thinking of development as a form of governmentality then also points to the insidious nature of power whose locus is diffused in its many «operations» and «technologies». In this paper I look at what happens when this seemingly modern form of power, associated with development work, flows from a central figure of a religious authority whose mere presence illuminates rather than obfuscates the nature of power and where different kinds of significance are ascribed to it resulting in an alternative view of sovereignty.

BRIEF HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF HUNZA

At the time of independence Hunza was a semi-autonomous state of the Gilgit Agency which had in turn been under the administration of the British who had held it under a sixty-year lease from the Kashmir State since 1935. After partition and following a short war over the issue of which nation – India or Pakistan – was the rightful owner of the state of Kashmir, Hunza came under Pakistani administration as a special case. The state of Kashmir was divided between Indian and Pakistani control, with the Pakistani part including the semi-autonomous state of Hunza. Until 1974 Hunza remained a semi-autonomous state within Gilgit Agency which was then being administered by the Pakistani authorities. This arrangement was not very different from the colonial era relationship in which Hunza was ruled by the local ruler but had a British Political Agent who looked after the frontier relationships of Hunza with its neighbours (Sökefeld 2005; Raman 2004).

In 1974 Hunza was brought under the direct administration of the government of Pakistan by the creation of a new administrative unit called the Federally Administered Northern Areas (henceforth NAs) – though not under the same conditions as most areas of the country – and since then its status has continued to be periodically revised. The historical connection of Gilgit Agency with the former state of Kashmir was, and still is, a major sticking point preventing the NAs from achieving fully-fledged provincial status with full political representation. In recent years the people of the NAs have tried to disassociate their fate from the fate of Kashmir, arguing that they have no cultural, ethnic or linguistic relationship with the Kashmiri people and that the final status of the NAs should, therefore, be resolved separately to the solution for Kashmir (Kreutzmann 1995: 218).

The continued failure of the Pakistani state to respond positively to the political demands of the people of the NAs, including Hunza, has spawned an atmosphere of disenchantment and disdain among the people towards

the Pakistani state and politics. Indeed many locals have aptly described their political history as «out of the frying pan into the fire». Apart from the 1960s and 1970s when, under the government of Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, the NAs were promised further political representation, all other periods of Pakistani political control over the region are popularly described as illegitimate and illegal. General Zia ul-Haq, the military ruler who governed Pakistan from 1977 to 1988, is particularly blamed for stoking ethnic and sectarian tensions in the region (Sökefeld 2005: 964) with people claiming that he deliberately acted to keep the people of the NAs from uniting against the illegal domination of the Pakistani government. Between 1960 and the 1970s Pakistan's improving relations with China had seen the construction of the Karakoram Highway (KKH) which, for the first time in history, linked the NAs and Hunza with both north and south via motorized transport[7]. The opening up of the area by road has integrated Hunza into the Pakistani state and opened the area to the interventions of the Aga Khan network of religious, social and economic development institutions – the AKDN[8].

Hunza today is made up of three main ethnic groups – Buroshos, Wakhis and Shinaki – who all speak difference languages. The Buroshos have always been the majority group as well as the most powerful group in Hunza. Traditionally, people have practiced mixed mountain agriculture – pastoralism and crop production. Today, however, they work in many non-farm sectors such as the Pakistani army, tourism, NGOs and private enterprise too. Though the Buroshos still enjoy traditional power, especially in the central valley of Karimabad, Wakhis to the north are climbing the social mobility ladder by taking advantage of opportunities that have become available to them through the abolishment of the semi-autonomous state status of Hunza.

Apart from a handful of villages in central Hunza valley, most people in Hunza are Ismaili Muslims who follow a living and present Imam, the Aga Khan, as their

religious and political leader; they believe him to be the only valid interpreter of the true meaning of Islam[9]. During the reign of the Persian Qajjar dynasty in eighteenth century the ceremonial title of «Aga Khan» was given to the Ismaili Imam of the time and this has continued to date. In the 1840s the first Aga Khan moved to Bombay (Daftary 1990), where the community became established, and in the early twentieth century Aga Khan III, Sir Sultan Mohammad Shah, played a major role in financing the Pakistani movement. He was also the President of the All India Muslim League between 1906 and 1913 (Aziz 1998). The present Imam, Prince Karim Aga Khan, lives in Aiglemont outside Paris. In addition to his role as spiritual leader of the Ismailis he is head of a number of philanthropic institutions, under the umbrella of the AKDN. The present day Ismailis in Hunza were converted to Ismailism from Twelver Shi'ism in the sixteenth century by *Dai'* (Ismaili religious missionaries) sent from Central Asia[10].

ISMAILISM AND THE «TRANSNATION»

Ismailis as a global community are scattered all over the world and do not constitute anything more than a small religious minority group in any state. Despite their scattered nature, however, Ismaili communities are directly linked to a highly centralised and hierarchical structure of religious and non-religious institutions under the direct authority of the living Imam, the Aga Khan.

Ismailism has undergone major changes under the current Imam, Prince Karim, Aga Khan the Fourth, though these changes have built on earlier reforms made by previous Imams. The Imam before this one, Sir Sultan Mohammad Shah, Aga Khan the Third, initiated internal reforms within the colonial context and, alongside other modernist Muslim scholars of the subcontinent such as Mohammad Iqbal and Jamal ud-Din Afghani, emphasized the modernization of Islamic thought. He sought to modern-

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[7] Chad Hains (2004) has argued that the construction of KKH oriented the societies in the Northern Areas of Pakistan towards centres of power and culture to the south. I, however, tentatively argue that the KKH consolidated connections of local societies both with the south and the north. Although not in the context of the KKH Magnus Marsden's (2008) work shows that Chitrali communities in the adjacent region of North West Frontier Province are making cultural contacts with Wakhi and Persian-speaking communities to the north in Badakshan region and beyond.

[8] Of course one of the major changes with the arrival of the road is a rapidly growing tourism sector that links Hunza with the global capitalist economy.

[9] The Imam is, thus, not considered to be the deity or a divinity (as many non-Ismaili Muslims claim, using this as the basis for their condemnation of Ismailis as heretics) but he is the possessor of divine knowledge.

[10] Twelver Shias are orthodox Shias who believe in twelve Imams. Internal social stratification has increased with the arrival of AKDN and state institutions as many ethnic groups vie for power and resources.

ize his followers, without destroying their traditions and identity, by providing financial assistance[11] and organizing them under a hierarchical administrative structure called the council system (Daftary 1990: 523).

Explaining the significance of the council system to me, a member of the Regional Council in Karimabad Hunza told me that «it builds on the basic Islamic principle of volunteerism» (all council work is voluntary). He proudly told me that «both India and Pakistan are governed under a system conceived by the British only 150 years ago, but the spirit of council system based on volunteerism goes back to earlier Islamic history». The council structure initiated by Aga Khan the Third built upon the existing Ismaili institution of *Jamat*, or local congregation worshiping together in a single *Jamat Khana* (house of worship). Each *Jamat* is run by a local *Mukhi* (the social and religious leader of the congregation, as well as the treasurer) and a *Kamari* (assistant to the *Mukhi*, also responsible for acting as an accountant and streamlining the collection of tributes and other dues) (Daftary 1990: 514). Under the changes initiated by Aga Khan the Third, each *Jamat* was organized under a local council, headed by a president. The council was empowered to recommend officers for the local *Jamaat Khanas* and to resolve conflict within the community – acting like local courts (Daftary 1990: 529). The local council, in a system which continues to this day, is the smallest unit of governance looking after a geographically determined *Jamat* or congregation, usually at the village or valley level. Each local council is part of a regional council and many regional councils make up a national or a federal council. The federal council is then linked to the Aga Khan. This nested hierarchy of councils is designed to look after the affairs of the community at different scales, dealing with issues of social change at the different levels. By the 1970s local and regional councils had been formally established in Hunza, replacing the earlier systems of hereditary *Pirs*, who came from the Badkshshan region of Afghanistan and who were not under the direct administrative and doctrinal control of the Aga Khan. There are currently about half a dozen local councils in Hunza represented by one regional council.

The main function of the council system is to deal with the governance of personal and communal responsibilities, marriage, divorce and inheritance, as well as social and economic development, including health and education (Daftary 1990: 525-528). Local councils took over the administration of the *Jamat* meaning that the *Jamat Khana* was no longer simply a house of worship but was also a centre for social and economic activities. The *Mukhi* and *Kamaria* of a *Jamat Khana* have, in theory, a separate link with the Aga Khan for religious activities and the collection of religious taxes (Sa'adullah Beg, personal communication) but rely on the local council for matters that they cannot address themselves, such as dealing with the national government and implementing the modernizing vision of the Aga Khan. The Aga Khan reaches directly down to the *Jamat* through his *farmans*, or edicts, which deal with issues of education, social welfare, economic cooperation and gender roles and balance. These *farmans* are read out on every *Chand Raat*, the once a month nightly gathering on the first of every lunar month of the entire community belonging to a particular *Jamat* in a *Jamat Khana*. Since the Aga Khan does not issue a new *farman* for every *Chand Raat*, that is monthly, each local council or *Jamat* selects from the previously issued *farmans* those that are most suitable for the current social and political conditions. Since Ismailis are scattered all over the world there is no reference to a geographical community, with the general message of the previous and existing Imams to Ismailis all over the world being to become responsible citizens of their particular country of residence[12].

Whereas, on the one hand, the council system streamlined the management of community affairs, politically it concentrated all power and authority pertaining to the religious and financial matters of the Ismaili community in the person of the Aga Khan (Daftary 1990: 526). The council members who I spoke with, however, quickly dispelled the notion of their Imam keeping a panoptical view over the people, describing his authority instead as an authority based on benevolence. For my Ismaili informants it was important to be under the eye of the benevolent spiritual leader; they desired «legibility» through the hierarchical institutional structure of the AKDN. A

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[11] On the event of the Diamond Jubilee of the 48th Imam, Aga Khan the Third, in 1946, the Diamond Jubilee Investment Trust was established, a social development fund which was to be used for the social uplift of Ismaili communities all over the world, especially the poorer communities (Beg 1967: 55).

[12] Qudrat-ullah Beg describes a scene in 1934 when he attended a *Darbar* by Aga Khan the Third in Bombay. There the Aga Khan advised his followers not to associate themselves with any rebellion or conspiracy against the state in which they lived (Beg 1967: 4). He advised that they should cooperate with the state and keep a cordial relationship with it. Similar advice continues down to this day. In 2006 the author read a *Farman* written by the current Aga Khan in which he advised his «spiritual children» to concentrate on improving their social and economic conditions, cooperating with the state.

member of the Hunza Regional Council, belonging to an influential family in Karimabad, told me that with the council system, «the Imam is now directly accessible to his *Jamat* – and so he personally handles and organizes his followers and the *Jamat* can reach and see its Imam». Here we notice how governance acquires a broader meaning in which issues of protection and benevolence are central.

The idea of the power of the Aga Khan being based on protection and benevolence is also reflected in the way Ismailis perceive the role of AKDN development activities in Hunza, these being channelled primarily through the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (AKRSP)[13]. AKRSP is a project of the Aga Khan Foundation (AKF), the wing of the AKDN that deals with social development issues. AKRSP is an integrated rural development programme and aimed from the start to develop social institutions in local communities through which physical and technical inputs could be channelled. To this end communities were required to organize themselves into Village Organizations (VOs) (later Women's Organizations – WOs – were added to ensure the full participation of women), with a basic administrative structure including a president, a manager and general membership. The inputs channelled through the VOs and WOs included skills development in the areas of natural resource management and business development, the provision of improved breeds of livestock and plants and extension services for these, credit and savings facilities and major infrastructural projects, most commonly irrigation channels.

Although AKRSP works in both Ismaili and non-Ismaili communities in the NAs – including Baltistan which has a majority Shia population with almost no Ismailis and Chitral which has a majority Sunni population, though a sizeable Ismaili minority – it has been most well received and is, hence, most active in the Hunza sub-districts which have almost 100% Ismaili populations[14]. One difference is in the way the VO functions; in predominantly Ismaili Hunza the VO structure overlaps considerably with the local *Jamat* and local council structure. It is true that in non-Ismaili areas the VO structure has been to some extent built onto existing local institutions, but the «fit» between the VO and those local institutions is nothing like as neat as in Ismaili communities. In the latter VO matters are often discussed

in the *Jamat Khana* and the local council plays an important role in providing overall guidance and direction to the VO and its activities, especially through the reading and re-reading of *farmans*. It is true that there are also increased tensions within some *Jamats* as different segments of the community try to position themselves so as to take advantage of increasing opportunities and because of conflicting and competing visions of various AKDN institutions. Important as these tensions are they are beyond the scope of this paper. For many Ismailis, at least at the rhetorical level, the religious authority of the Aga Khan remains inseparable from the secular welfare practices of the AKDN.

Ismailis from Hunza and elsewhere consider it their religious as well as social duty to comply with the various AKDN institutions and to work for the success of projects undertaken by these institutions. I worked for AKRSP for three years in the mid-1990s. My colleagues in the regional office in Skardu were both Ismaili and non-Ismaili Muslims belonging to the NAs. For my Ismaili colleagues working for AKRSP had a different significance to that experienced by non-Ismaili staff. While all of the staff – Ismaili and non-Ismaili – were committed to improving the lives of the people of the region, the Ismaili staff members regarded their work for AKRSP as something going beyond its immediate and instrumental dimensions, thus constituting fulfilment of a religious duty. AKRSP was often described by my Ismaili colleagues as an institution of their Imam rather than as an institution of development. Their offices were often adorned with photos of the Aga Khan the Fourth, reminding them (and others) of the central authority that he represented. For my Ismaili colleagues, development and modernization were not only categories of a secular temporal order, they were also infused by the authority of religious leadership; hence their significance went beyond the everyday nature of a job. A disproportionate number of AKRSP foreign employees were *Khoja* Ismailis, mainly from Karachi and Western Europe and Canada, who considered it their religious duty to work for one of the institutions of their Imam.

My Ismaili colleagues attributed the success of AKRSP (which is widely considered to be one of the most successful development projects in the world) not simply to

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[13] Unlike councils, AKRSP is not a volunteer-operated service.

[14] The positive response to AKRSP's interventions in even non-Ismaili communities must be seen in terms of the local discourse of protection in the face of poverty and marginalization from the mainstream development policies and politics of Pakistan. There are also groups in non-Ismaili communities which see AKRSP as a communalist organisation, although it specifically defines itself as a non-communal organisation, that is, one that works without regard for the religious affiliation of those targeted. Some accuse AKRSP of having the hidden agenda of establishing an Ismaili «state within the state».

the generous funding and expertise provided by foreign donors or the dedication and hard work of its staff and local community members. These factors were themselves seen as due to the will and blessings of the Aga Khan.

My Ismaili colleagues often painstakingly explained to me the importance given to economic and social development within Islamic teachings. I detected some anxiety on their part to make a distinction between development as a Western discourse and development as a religious or Islamic discourse. They also regarded development as having a protective and benevolent dimension. They used examples from the Quran to argue that the role of an ideal Islamic authority is to provide protection to its people through institutional action. These assertions were also sometimes clarifications because many of us non-Ismaili workers often joked with our Ismaili colleagues that they had become Europeanized and that their religion had been transformed into a development NGO.

Jonah Steinberg (2006) compares the Ismaili local council development institutions, such as AKRSP, to a state bureaucracy governing the scattered Ismaili nation and providing them with basic social, economic and religious services. Steinberg concludes that the global Ismaili institutional structure is similar to that of a federal government in which the residence of the Aga Khan in Aiglemont, France, is a symbolic administrative capital and the various cities of the world where Ismailis reside are akin to provinces (Steinberg 2006: 20). The monthly *farmans*, issued by the Aga Khan to Ismailis the world over through the local council structure, invoke a feeling of belongingness to an Ismaili transnation (Steinberg 2006: 23). Like a nation-state, Ismailis also have a constitution which provides legitimacy and «legal» recognition for the institutional structure of the council system as a system of governance. Steinberg is not suggesting that the concept of transnation replaces the nation-state; rather, it exists alongside nation-state formations. I largely agree with Steinberg's assertion but in the case of the Ismailis of Hunza I suggest that the uncaring and unresponsive nature of the Pakistani state, and its failure to extend full citizenship rights to the people of Hunza, is central in explaining the attribution by those people of sovereign status to the global Ismaili religious development network.

SOVEREIGNTY OVER RELIGIOUS DOMAIN

My fieldwork was carried out in Shimshal village, a remote village of about 1500 people located in the north-eastern part of Hunza and until 2004 accessible only via a three-day trek over arduous mountain terrain. Shimshalis belong to the Wakhi ethnic group and have historically acted as the herders of the royal flocks of the Mir of Hunza. Since the 1980s Shimshalis have been engaged in efforts to link their village with the KKH by building a road partly financed by AKRSP and the government and partly from their own sources. During my fieldwork in Shimshal village, the Shimshalis finished the twenty-year road project. The road is a precarious fifty-three kilometre dirt track that spans eight wooden suspension bridges. The road winds through the dreary and bleak terrain across the desolate landscape. Since its formal opening in 2004 the road has been subject to many blocks due to flash-floods, mudslides and rock-falls. I had to walk part of the way to Shimshal on many occasions during fieldwork. The road is hardly wide enough for a four-wheel-drive jeep. Throughout the three-hour journey from Passu, the closest village on the KKH to Shimshal, the jeep driver has to avoid the jeep sliding off the cliff on one side and driving off the edge of the road on the other. I once asked Esa Karim, an entrepreneurial Shimshali in his late thirties who had started a private jeep / bus service from Shimshal to the KKH, if he was ever scared of driving on the road. Esa Karin told me, «you know, I am always very scared in the beginning but then I realize that this road is protected by our Imam. All lives on the road are under the protection of our Imam and that is why so far there has been no death on it [which was true]».

Travelling on the road is not the only danger that the Shimshalis have to cope with and about which they invoke the powers of their Imam. The eastern end of the Shimshal valley is bounded by two large glaciers, Khurdapin and Yazghil. About five miles east of the village settlement the Khurdapin glacier (which comes down from the east) meets the Yazghil glacier (which comes down from the south) at right angles. These two glaciers are the Shimshal river's main source of water. In the past the movement of the glaciers resulted in the periodic formation of a glacial lake, which caused a flood each time that it burst. The last such flood occurred in 1963 and resulted in the main settlement, which used to be along the Shimshal river, being washed away. Today all three settlements are located about thirty feet higher than the level of the river, towards the southern edge of the valley.

Once, travelling on the road to Passu with the *Kamaria* of Shimshal, I discussed with him the history of the lake bursts and the floods caused by them and the implications for the future of such a threat. The *Kamaria* told me that in 1974 he went to see the current Imam who had come to visit Karimabad and requested that something should be done

to protect the Shismahi community from these lake bursts. The *Kamaria* said that the Imam made a verbal promise to protect them against this danger. He proudly told me that since then there has been no lake burst and no flood.

These cases illustrate how the figure of the Aga Khan as a sovereign power extends beyond the context and discourse of development to encompass the actual and literal protection of life and property. The power ascribed to the Imam parallels in some ways the powers ascribed previously to the Mir of Hunza who was considered by his subjects to have the power to invoke rain and thus avoid drought. In this way, then, the rational and bureaucratic power of the Imam achieved through his development network transcends its earthly context and acquires a «magical» or mythical dimension. True, the context and nature of that power has changed but its basic elemental form remains the same as a power that protects people from natural and man-made phenomena.

CONCLUSION

In current anthropological literature development has been dealt with within the study of power. Different notions of power – Foucauldian and Weberian – inform how development might be understood. Post-structuralist critiques of development (Escobar 1995; Ferguson 1994) and, in turn, critiques of them (Li 1999; Sivaramakrishnan 2003) have tended to place development within an ideology with the state as the sovereign entity.

Power in these studies is shown to be operating through development as a tool of governmentality and is, as such, invisible at the micro-level, imperceptible to both the implementers and the subjects of development projects (Li 1999). This paper illustrates the obverse case. Development as a tool of power and authority in the Aga Khan Ismaili development network seems to work when the central figure of power, the person of the Aga Khan, is illuminated rather than concealed.

There is a clear connection in this case between the secular and religious motives for development. But affiliation with the Aga Khan Network extends beyond development. Through its institutional structure (which resembles a state structure) and its *farmans*, the AKDN also competes as one of the sovereign powers in the region. This sovereignty, however, does not make sense when seen in terms of competition with the state. Rather, as Steinberg states, it cannot exist without the state. This ascription of sovereignty must be placed within the local discourse expressing a need for protection and welfare, compounded by the unclear legal relationship between the people of Hunza and the Pakistani state. I have shown how the protection and welfare of the people, as one of the objectives of a sovereign power, can go beyond the notion of the state to encompass religious and other forms of authority. Although the case I present in this paper is a unique one, it nonetheless alerts us to the need to avoid engaging in ethnographic refusal by persistently ignoring important cultural forces such as religion and their hybridizations when explaining our discipline.

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AUTHOR

Shafqat Hussain obtained his doctoral degree in Anthropology and Environmental Studies from Yale University in January 2009. He is a laureate of the National Geographic's Emerging Explorers Program (2009) due to his efforts to protect the snow leopard in Pakistan. Prior to starting his doctoral work, he was involved for seven years in development and environmental conservation projects in the Northern Areas of Pakistan. Between 1993 and 1996 Shafqat Hussain was the head of the Monitoring, Evaluation and Research for the Aga Khan Rural Support Program, Baltistan section. For his dissertation he carried out fieldwork in the remote village of Shimshal, located in the north-eastern corner of Hunza, looking at the historical marginality of the region and its relationships with various power centres.

Anthropology and Environmental Studies, Yale University
shafqat.hussain@yale.edu